

CONVERGING BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE: COMPULSION OR OPPORTUNITY?

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For a reminder, in our call, we wrote:

“Today, the necessity of taking joint action in the face of global challenges could not be more evident, yet the political economy is tacitly propagating and pressing for increased specialisation as a key to progress. The idea of converging bodies of knowledge cries for theoretical and practical support. The insights art and design education can provide might be instrumental here, as the conflicts underlying the separation between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ sciences have been played out – in vitro – within their fields of expertise, between design and art. What then are the challenges and potentials of art and design education in integrating different modes of knowledge production? How can the often-opposing interests and assumptions of a variety of stakeholders be reflected through the diverging insights of design and art practitioners? How to address wicked problems, and propose new – whether feasible or utopian – ways of convergence?”

The urgency of the call stemmed on the one hand from the anxieties felt globally in the current multicrisis, and on the other, from the situation all of us – practitioners, theoreticians, researchers or educators of art and design – experience firsthand daily, since the introduction of a market-driven focus in higher education, potentially undermining the breadth and depth of creative and intellectual exploration. The neoliberal pursuit of knowledge production creates its unavoidable pressures for immediate impact and siloed approaches, however, it can also present opportunities for art and design to engage in co-creative, trans- and interdisciplinary collaborations with other domains within and outside of academia, capitalising on the holistic nature of creativity that makes art and design an ideal means of outreach and communication towards society.

Surprisingly, our track ended up competing for the highest number of abstracts for papers, workshops, slide decks and posters received, summing far over 100, from the most divergent research and educational backgrounds. This obviously created a difficult situation for the selection as most of the proposals, among which highly valuable ones, had to be declined or redirected to other tracks where they seemed to fit more properly, to remain within the limits established for the conference. In the end, three workshops, two posters, and a total of 24 paper and slide deck presentations were accepted. Considering shared themes and possible synergies, we configured the presentations into 6 sections that all went by a specific title.

Section 1. Self-reflexivity in Art and Design Education focused on the persona of the artist/designer (practitioners or students) and examined subjects spanning from agnotology, that is, the role of doubt and ignorance in education and design conversations through feminist epistemologies and the application of the concept of situatedness to the exploration of the designer's values and internal processes in critical design methodologies.

Section 2. New Disciplinary Domains and Frontiers: The three scholarly articles and a comprehensive slide presentation of this section presented bold endeavours to introduce new models, metaphors and practices in art and design education covering various areas of research, from endosymbiosis to ancestral practices and to the role of human and non-human agents, challenging the preliminaries of traditional design.

Section 3. Design Education for Children and Young Adults considered practical contributions to social innovation of design as a powerful pedagogical means of empowerment. The case studies presented in this section provided examples of how to improve early childhood development, address educational and material poverty, and facilitate therapies for children with disabilities through design methodologies, using participatory design, rapid prototyping, AI technology, or coding.

Section 4. Inside the Academia The contributions examined the curricula of a variety of HEI from specific points of view and proposed changes to conform them to the new market and societal circumstances. Besides presenting the current collaborative effort FAST UK ('Future Art School trends') by British educators, student collectives and third-sector partners, particular attention was paid to the development of the soft skills of design students under innovative concepts as Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), the Creative Thinking Style Index (CTSI) enhancing student's creative and collaborative skills, as well as the role of signature pedagogies.

Section 5. Case Studies: Practice-Based Teaching and Industrial Design discussed practices, new methodologies and models from the fields of industrial design with a perspective of potential applicability in "real life" situations. These included accounts on creativity enhancing practices for product design students, inclusive approaches to fashion design, the questions of 'material agency' in book design, as well as an innovative university mentorship and trainee program facilitating students' integration in the job market.

Section 6. Transformative Practices listed contributions with a stronger interest in introducing new pedagogical approaches, with references to the experiential turn in knowledge production and the role performative design can play in it; the transformative power of immersive storytelling design; practices directly addressing the climate crisis and the decolonial issues; as well as the case study of an international workshop where the exploration of the transformation of a specific urban milieu was at stake.

Due to their special relevance to the overall theme of the Conference, Section 1 and 2 were invited to the main Auditorium of MOME, while the others were presented in the convivial atmosphere provided by the Space Experiments Lab, facilitating more in-person discussions. We would like to thank all our contributors for their engagement, intriguing accounts and highly professional presentations, in the hope that their experience was as positive as ours as organizers and members of the audience.

P / REFERENCES OF DESIGN

This contribution was presented at Cumulus Budapest 2024: P/References of Design conference, hosted by the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design Budapest, Hungary between May 15-17, 2024.

Conference Website

cumulusbudapest2024.mome.hu

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