

Program

One - day international
design research symposium

Practicing Theory or: Did Practice Kill Theory?

– 25.11.2011

HEAD - University of Art and Design Geneva
Auditorium, Bd James Fazy 15, CH-1201 Geneva
Registration before 15.11.2011
at constance.delamadeleine@hesge.ch
Admission: CHF 20.- to be paid cash on the
spot

The Swiss Design Network 2011 Symposium Practicing Theory aims at understanding what are the real theoretical contexts of designers practicing design research, how these theoretical backgrounds are formed, explored and broaden, and what use is made of them in the everyday practice of a research project in design. Not only will we seek to understand where from designers think, but also in what directions their research could possibly push the activity of thinking. At the end of each Paper presentation session, a round table will mix design researchers and theoreticians from various related disciplines, in order to discuss more deeply the interconnections of design research and theory.

Program

9.15-9.45
Registration

9.45 - 10.00
Welcome and introduction

Jean-Pierre Greff, Director, HEAD - University Geneva of art and design, Lysianne Lécho Hirt, Martin Wiedmer, Swiss Design Network

10.00 - 10.20
Exploring through design. A case study on practice-based research into gender aspects in communication.

Gesche JOOST, University of the Arts, Berlin, D
This paper shares experiences from a practice-based design research project, questioning the applications and limitations of theories. The case presented deals with gender aspects in mobile communication. Aims of the project were to gain knowledge on gender-specific requirements for mobile services and to create ideas and concepts. A comparison between the theoretical assumptions made at the beginning of the project, and the understandings gained at the end forms the core of the reflection. As a more general issue, the paper discusses the value of "research through design" and critically investigates the limitations of participation.

10.20 - 10.40
Use of a trend study as design research framework.

Juliette SALLIN, HEAD University of Art and Design Geneva, CH
In this practice-based design research project new fabric aesthetics and new functional textiles are enhanced by the digital alteration of parameters in a 3D simulation. Sociological, philosophical or physiological aspects that are usually found in fashion theory cannot provide the right input for a project in which the outlook into the future of one specific field is the most important factor. A trend study is currently being used in the project and the paper discusses the relevance of such a "theoretical" background. Scenarios for the next 2 to 5 years have been elaborated and an image-based framework developed in order to provide enough inspiration and leave enough space for interpretation. The paper shows how a fashion trend study ideally serves the intuition of the designer-researcher.

10.40 - 11.00
Does research-based knowledge stand a chance in practice?

Inge Mette KIRKEBY, Aalborg Universitet, DK
A common distinction in design separates theory from practice, but in design research the general assumption is that design also draws heavily on a component of theoretical thinking and stresses that theory and analysis are closely interrelated. The project challenges these assumptions by examining what kinds of knowledge practising architects make use of, and how research can produce knowledge that feeds into actual practice. The project methodology is based on qualitative interviews and the results show that designers make very little references to research and research results. Paradoxically, a thorough interest in theoretical thinking is emphasised, and architects insist on the importance of working analytically. The paper suggests that a common pivot for design research and design practice could be found in the use of analytical tools and focuses on the potentials of Bent Flyvbjerg's phronetic research model.

11.00 - 11.20
Putting Semantic theory into practice.

Chris BROWN, Nottingham Trent University, UK
In the mid-1980s, the theory of product semantics looked beyond the merely functional aspects of an object and considered its social, symbolic and historical qualities as well as the psychological and sensual aspects of the interactions. Although very popular, products semantics failed to translate their ambitious linguistically based theory into practicable methods for use in the day-to-day design process. This produced massive frustration with the concept and eventually led to its rejection. Based on his own PhD study (1999) the author introduced Master level graphic design students to the concept of design semantics through a practical workshop method. The paper shares his pedagogic experiences as a design educator and examines how this 'hands on' approach helps developing a positive awareness of design semantics. The paper argues for better information of practitioners about the value of such design theory.

11.20-11.35
Drinks

11.35 - 12.30
Round table 1

With Alain Findeli, Pietro Morandi

12.30 - 14.15
Lunch

14.15 - 14.35
[Game mechanics] & [Phenomena in cognitive and social psychology]: experiments in emotional design for communication.

Margherita PILLAN, Politecnico di Milano, I
The paper comes from a research group developing new tools for design that are based on results in cognitive sciences, perceptions studies and social psychology. It focuses on an experimental design methodology for game design, involving concepts such as cognitive dissonance, halo effect, realistic conflict theory and bystander effect. The paper describes how chosen psychological phenomena were translated into five games and how players that tested them at the end of the workshop evaluated them.

14.35 - 14.55
Making theory come alive through practice-based design research.

Christensen Poul RIND, Kolding School of Design, DK
The overall aim of this paper is to demonstrate how practice-based design research is able to challenge and push the development of some background assumptions underlying emotion theories. A computer game environment for paediatric patients age 4-6 is used in the project. Observation of children playing led to imagining a concept of "fictional emotions". This concept helps understand new layers of user experiences, which have not been addressed in design research. The paper provides a more general explanation of the dialectics between theory construction and practice-based research.

14.55 - 15.15
Practice-led iconic research. The meaning of images and the process of their generation.

Michael RENNER, HGK Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst, Basel, CH
"Iconic Turn" describes the cultural shift from language to images caused by massive digitalization. The ongoing research program *eikones* involved the practice of design from the beginning and focuses on gaining scientific knowledge through a practice-led approach employing the process of image generation. The aim is to produce practice-led iconic criticism and establish a foundation for a practice-oriented iconic research methodology. Theoretical aspects of cognitive sciences are confronted with the creation of images in the context of generative design, and concepts of "creatio ex nihilo" and of "figuration" are critically discussed. A second research avenue explores the category of ornamental images and specific questions are approached through the systematic generation of visual constellations.

15.15 - 15.30
Drinks

15.30 - 16.30
Round table 2
With Nicolas Nova

16.30 - 16.45
Farewell