

MORE-THAN-HUMAN FUTURES

Reframing design knowledge provotyping for human-non-human ecologies

CONCEPT

The Summer School refers to the acknowledged idea of design moving away from the positivist vision that tends to assimilate it stricto sensu to the Sciences. On the contrary, starting from the contribution of Donald Schön's, it embraces the concept of design being able to produce an original body of knowledge through an "epistemology of praxis".

In particular, it aims at exploring the changing "forms" of design knowledge within the shift from being produced mainly by professional designers (or practitioners) by reflecting on their "design practices", to being codified by design scholars/researchers (or academic researchers) through formal "design research practices". This last process, followed by the establishment of formal design teaching and research in universities, has a relatively recent history in comparison to many other disciplines. Therefore design research practices and methodologies are often sourced from other better formalized disciplinary contexts, such as Social Sciences, Humanities, Engineering and Economics. Moreover, it often resulted in codifying formal design research outcomes in textual knowledge, for example PhD thesis, essays, journal articles.

Without denying the epistemological importance of textual knowledge in any discipline, the Summer School embraces the challenge of exploring the potentialities of design research practice to produce original, generalizable and codified knowledge in forms that are not exclusively textual.

Within this vision, the Summer School is intended as "reflection" on the design research process itself and aimed at enhancing the capacity of PhD students to design their design research process as an original path, specific to their knowledge domain.

In particular, the visual dimension of "representing design knowledge" is a fundamental component of the course, aimed at training PhD students to translate their analytical attitudes into the ability of synthesizing problems, processes and concepts into tangible and "visible" signs and symbols.

Therefore, the main focus of the Summer School is providing students with the access to distinctive cognitive models through the exposure to other disciplinary areas, such as art, sciences, architecture, etc., characterized by experimental research processes and the capacity of codifying knowledge in non-textual forms.

Today's social, political and environmental emergencies require specific efforts in terms of thinking/acting in designing practices to produce knowledge.

The Summer School wants to explore what might be defined as human-non-human ecologies as relational agencies that shape transformed ways of living creating a renewed sense of a shared world and new modes of knowledge production. An opening talk and four keynote speeches will open the exploration of the topic offering the perspectives of scholars from different disciplines who will trigger the reflection.

The pandemic has struck our usual way to think (about) the future and this may be an occasion to better understand the huge potential of design anticipation and speculative futures as a methodological tool to convey concepts and information in reframing design knowledge boundaries.

In particular, the school will be a theoretical and pragmatic occasion to "provotype" futures. First depicted by Preben Mogensen (1992) in his essay "Towards a provotyping approach in systems development", provotyping consists in the action of provoking by actually trying out the situations in which the problem emerges, or better "provoking through concrete experience". The technique has been borrowed from several fields of application, from user studies (Boer, 2011) to Foresight (Pistorius, 2012), and more recently also by design professionals (Kerspersen @design frictions).

The school will be an inquiry based on Research through Design (RtD) and especially on the speculative and critical practices which could explore future transformations through the lenses of theory and practice, given also the contributions coming from other disciplines. In particular, the aim is to discuss new ideas of design research that move away from an exclusive, positivist vision that tends to assimilate it stricto sensu to a conventional scientific approach.

The School proposes an exploration of new epistemologies and praxis as inspirational methodological opportunities to develop an innovative RtD inquiry. In fact, it aims to explore the potentialities of an inquiry which could be meaningful for an inclusive design practice which can produce original, tacit/explicit, future-oriented knowledge in complex forms, languages, assemblages that are not exclusively textual.

Therefore, the School embraces the (digital and collaborative) studio format within the doctoral didactic path and it wants to sustain doctoral students' capabilities in applying their competencies and expertise (and the research tools typical of their disciplinary context) to foster the investigation of how the provotyped futures might cross their own research theme and process considered as an assemblage of epistemological, experimental and cognitive models and a codification of non-textual knowledge and practices (defining their accountability and comparability with other disciplinary approaches characterized by Research through Design processes).

The School includes stimulating lectures and (digital) collaborative activities where students, organized in small groups, will have the opportunity to integrate, through a peer-to-peer exploration and discussion, the insight provided by the Keynotes and Guest Speakers and a collective + individual exercise.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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- Pistorius, H. (2012). The learning individual in the process of participative foresight.

APPROACH & PROCESS

From a methodological point of view, the School will propose a virtual classroom educational approach. This approach aims to enable open knowledge dynamics, through practices of peer-to-peer exchange and sharing. Part of the goal is to rethink the educator's role, which should not be intended anymore as a "master" (in the classical sense), but rather as a "mentor": a guide into the intricate art of heuristics. This approach is particularly relevant today, as the quantity of knowledge exceeds the individual capability of mastering it and therefore a critical attitude becomes a necessary tool to address complexity.

The School will deal with critical discourse involving several layers:

- *The reflection on which epistemologies and ontologies might open new perspectives for future(s) where human and non-human agencies are in relation and build a shared sense of the world;*
- *An intellectual exploration which discusses through experiences, protagonists, ideas the connections between human-non-human ecologies and the contribution of the disciplinary perspective;*
- *A collective reimagination of systems, as always dynamic and transitional, rather than static and fixed, as is often assumed;*
- *Peer-to-peer dialogues on what might be defined as future oriented transition;*
- *A speculative, pragmatic exercise applied to some chosen areas of investigation (TBC);*
- *A week-long, reflective project asking each participants to imagine how these new provotyping tools can be woven directly into their PhD process*
- *A final delayed discussion with the sum up of a team exploration and a collective reflection on the futures proposed by the different teams with the identification of trajectories for further exploration and development.*

DISCIPLINARY AREAS INVOLVED

Design, Design Anticipation, Futures, Philosophy, Sociology, Hard Sciences, Computer Science, Data Science

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FRAMEWORK

The Summer School is further enriching the collaboration between a network of 6 PhD programmes in Design, spanning Northern and Southern Europe and the USA, and currently collaborating within the [DoCS4Design - Doctoral Courses System for Design](#) research project, co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union.

Also, the 2021 edition will host a collaboration with [FUEL4Design - Future Education and Literacy for Designers](#) research project, co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union and the School will open with the Keynote Event "DESIS Philosophy Talk #7.3 The Politics of Nature: Designing as Speculative Ethics". The [DESIS Philosophy Talks](#) are an initiative of Ezio Manzini & Virginia Tassinari of the [DESIS Network - Design for social innovation and sustainability](#), aiming to nurture the dialogue between design & philosophy and between practice & theory.

THE DESIGN PHD PROGRAMME - POLITECNICO DI MILANO

Established in 1990, the current PhD programme in Design aims to develop competences and skills to carry out high quality research in design as a specific field of enquiry. The Politecnico di Milano was one of the first universities in Italy to establish a School of Doctoral Programmes in 2001 with a view to coordinating, assessing and monitoring the single doctorate programmes. The Design Programme is the only one - among 19 Polimi doctoral programmes - entirely devoted to the design discipline with 60 candidates in design in a 3-year programme.

The Programme aims at educating researchers who will contribute original knowledge to the field of design by tackling the problems and identifying the potential of contemporary society.

Their contribution may be brought to bear in:

- creating designs, visions, and proposals (research through design);
- developing tools and methods for putting these into practice (research for design);
- developing critical analysis of design and its application domain (research on design).

The Programme proposes different methodologies of research, promotes the attitude to collaborate, and offers opportunities in universities and research centres, enterprises and public corporate bodies. Other fields partially covered are Science and Philosophy, Language Theory, Sociology of Cultural Processes and Communication, History of Art, Science and Technology of Materials, Industrial Engineering, Operations Research, Computer Science.

The Programme is going through a structural transformation in the last years, due to the profound changes in the context and status of the discipline, and to the increasingly heterogeneous pool of candidates with a growing international component. This transformation is concerning recruitment processes, highly qualified teaching, investment in research infrastructures and resources (for doctoral or postdoctoral scholarships, research grants, visiting professors, student assignments, etc.), and in strengthening national and international networks.

MORE INFORMATION

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