



3rd International
Conference on
Design Theory and
Criticism

Design and the
Challenges of
Contemporary
Times

29-30 September
2023
Warszawa

Pałac Czapskich
Krakowskie
Przedmieście 5

Conference theme

In recent years, emotions have officially become the main driving force behind human choices. We say "officially," because in principle we have always been emotional, but in some situations rationality has managed to gain the upper hand. Political elections are one such space. With the "populist turn," emotions have supplanted reason as the foundation of the electorate's decisions. Perhaps this was a result of the great economic crisis of 2007, the causes for which are still being sought by scholars and market researchers. To the popular mind, Bronisław Malinowski was right in believing that economics was closest to magic. One way or another, the crisis has shaken the seemingly rational foundations of our world: trust in capital. Perhaps the current shift towards emotion-based politics is a consequence of this shake-up. It may also be that in a world of information overload, fluidity, and perpetual change, emotions have become the equivalent of "truth." This is made all the more complicated by the fact that they can quite easily be controlled.

Emotions are the subject of many books, conferences and discussions. Their role and importance are in constant change. The conference program aims to show different perspectives on emotions: psychological, sociological, neurobiological, historical, philosophical, and of course the design perspective. Like other spheres of creativity (fine arts, literature, theater, film), design is inextricably linked to emotions. In this conference, we want to open discussion on the following topics: rationality and emotions, emotional relationships with things, emotion-based design, the emotional value of objects, emotions and mental health, emotions in new technologies and the development of artificial intelligence, etc.

The Programme Board asked Dr Karina Marusinska and Dr Paula Quinon for their views on the conference theme. Below we quote excerpts from their contributions.

Dr Karina Marusinska

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In her 2018 Nobel speech, Olga Tokarczuk encouraged other authors to find ways to describe a fluid reality that presented us with ever-changing challenges. In doing so, she postulated demonstrating tenderness - "the constant finding of similarities." Emotions are a language that allow us to communicate across the globe. They are a mirror - they speak about our boundaries and values, they show what is important to us. Common education is not conducive to recognising, naming, and expressing emotions, while our culture and social norms dictate that they should be kept in check.

Meanwhile, in the media, on Internet forums, in public debates and politics, and in the streets during numerous protests, we increasingly often observe how emotions come to the fore and prevail over reason. There is no doubt that there is a serious global crisis of empathy. This choice of conference theme is a show of concern for the state of society, and even more broadly, the planet. In today's world, care - with its close ties to emotions - may become one of the most significant categories in art and design practice.

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Dr Paula Quinon

Emotionality, which remained in the private sphere for long periods, leaving the public sphere to reason, regularly breaks through into consciousness, where it is appropriated, rationalised, and used not only to explain human behavior, but also to manage this behavior in individuals and social groups.

Emotionality quite often comes to the fore in the historical process, acting as a sort of counterbalance to periods of rationality and confidence in scientific progress. However, the specific characteristics of this process and the role of emotions seem to be different each time. In the last few years, we have witnessed what the authors of this year's Fair Design project call the "populist turn," characterised by the fact that "emotions are taking over the role of reason as the foundation of the electorate's decisions."

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An electorate that is primarily political, but also an “electorate” involved in consumer decisions that affect the market structure. Dr Paula Quinon, who also turns our attention to new technologies, writes that research into how emotions are programmed in artificial intelligence is one of the most frequently addressed topics in robotics and cybernetics research. The most important questions here concern the structure of robot emotions: Do we want to implement human emotions in robots, or is it better to implement emotions that will play the same roles as human emotions, but are specific to AI?

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In 2015, the Faculty of Design of Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw started to organize a series of conferences dedicated to the theory and criticism of design in terms of its functioning in the quickly changing social, cultural, economic and other circumstances. The conference is intended to serve as a forum for discussions which could stretch beyond the professional designer circles. Such opinion exchange, ongoing in the world for quite some time now, is an opportunity for design theoreticians and practitioners to better understand the objectives, methods and strategy of designing both today, and in the nearest future. The notion of design is ever more often perceived in terms of a “design culture”, and for that reason the discussions have come to involve a whole range of specialists from other disciplines, such as philosophy, sociology, economics, or anthropology of culture.

In Poland, however, such debate is still virtually non-existent, and the opinion exchange platform is limited to publications in academic and professional press, as well as popular weeklies or dailies. These texts are rarely exposed to a differing reflection or solid criticism, hence they do not provoke any genuine intellectual exchange, nor do they help shape a complex set of opinions on the state of the design today.

In light of the above, the series of FAIR DESIGN conferences, dedicated to design theory and criticism, could trigger a debate on defining or applying research tools for the description and analysis of the changes taking place in contemporary design.

We hope that such meetings could help in the opinion exchange among theoreticians representing different disciplines and design practitioners. We expect the theoreticians to provide us with a description of the state of contemporary society from the viewpoint of the humanities and social sciences (including those dealing with design theory), while from the practitioners we expect to share with us their thoughts on their own experiences of designing in the unstable world of today.

We invite to the conference both design professionals, as well as people representing the art world, philosophers, anthropologists, or economists. We would expect our guests to share with us their thoughts on the quickly changing relations in culture, politics, the society and – obviously – in design. The papers are delivered in Polish and English (with simultaneous interpretation).

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