

THE POWER OF A HOPEFUL IF

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ABSTRACT

Design is today both challenged and recruited by societies in transformation. The designer is called upon as an agent of change for example when 'design thinking' is championed as a language of innovation that can encompass controversy without harnessing traditional lines of conflict. Some respond positively to this call by engaging design methods to complex societal problems. Others are reluctant to give up the privileges of traditional design to define the aesthetics of the everyday.

Whatever the position taken by the professional designer, design has shifted status over the recent decades from being a set of well-known genres of aesthetic expression guided by established programs to becoming an open field of inquiry in which weak and volatile programs have to be pursued through open modes of experimentation.

In this presentation, the legacy of conventional design is called into question by revisiting some of the programmatic turns that has marked the history of contemporary design. It is argued that design is genuinely propositional but also that what to propose and how to propose has always been more guided by a programmatic attitude than by a particular kind of craftsmanship. This said, it is however also suggested that design is defined by methodologies rather than by a certain set of values or beliefs. Drawing on parallels to recent developments within the field of anthropology it is argued that contemporary design is constituted by the collaborative encounter with others and that the outcome of this encounter is the production of a hopeful 'if' in which the stabilities of the well-known are transformed into contingent potentialities.

BIOGRAPHY

Thomas Binder is Professor in codesign at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Schools of Architecture, Design and Conservation and he holds a Ph.D. in Science and Technology Studies. He is part of the co-design research center, CODE engaging open design collaborations and participatory design in the context of design anthropology, interaction design and social innovation. His research includes contributions to methods and tools for experimental design research and open innovation processes with a particular emphasis on participation and learning. He has been contributing to several books such as (Re-)searching the Digital Bauhaus (Springer, 2008), Rehearsing the Future (Danish Design School Press, 2010), Design Research through Practice (Morgan Kaufman, 2011), Design Things (The MIT Press, 2011) and Design Anthropological Futures (Bloomsbury, 2016). He has been chairing the Participatory Design Conference in 2002, the Nordic Design Research Conference in 2005 and the Design Anthropological Futures Conference in 2015.

