CRITICAL DESIGN – WHAT IF?

I am in Manhattan at Bard Graduate Center, celebrating its twentieth anniversary, its explorations of decorative arts, design history and material culture in research, pedagogy, exhibition and curatorial practice [Link]. Like any good celebration we're looking forward as well as back. This morning was about imagining the future of museum and gallery exhibition. This afternoon was dedicated to how we see the future of research. [Link]

Paola Antonelli, Senior Curator, Architecture and Design and Director of Research and Development at The Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) [Link] spoke about the way a museum exhibition can provoke discussion by taking us through some of the exhibitions she has curated. She showed us a new experiment – *Design and Violence* –

We are inviting experts from fields as diverse as science, philosophy, literature, music, film, journalism, and politics to respond to selected design objects and spark a conversation with all readers. Pairing the critical thinkers we most admire with

examples of challenging design work, we intend to present case studies that will spark discussion and bring the relationship between design and violence to center stage for designers and the people they serve—all of us. [Link]

Recent exhibitions at MOMA have explored design themes under titles like like "*Born out of necessity*" – design as problem making as well as problem solving.

Born out of necessity – the 2012 exhibition at MOMA curated by Paola Antonelli and Kate Carmody questioning the premise that (industrial) design is about problem solving [Link]

Paola connects such an effort with her enthusiasm for

critical design – designers and their objects asking the question

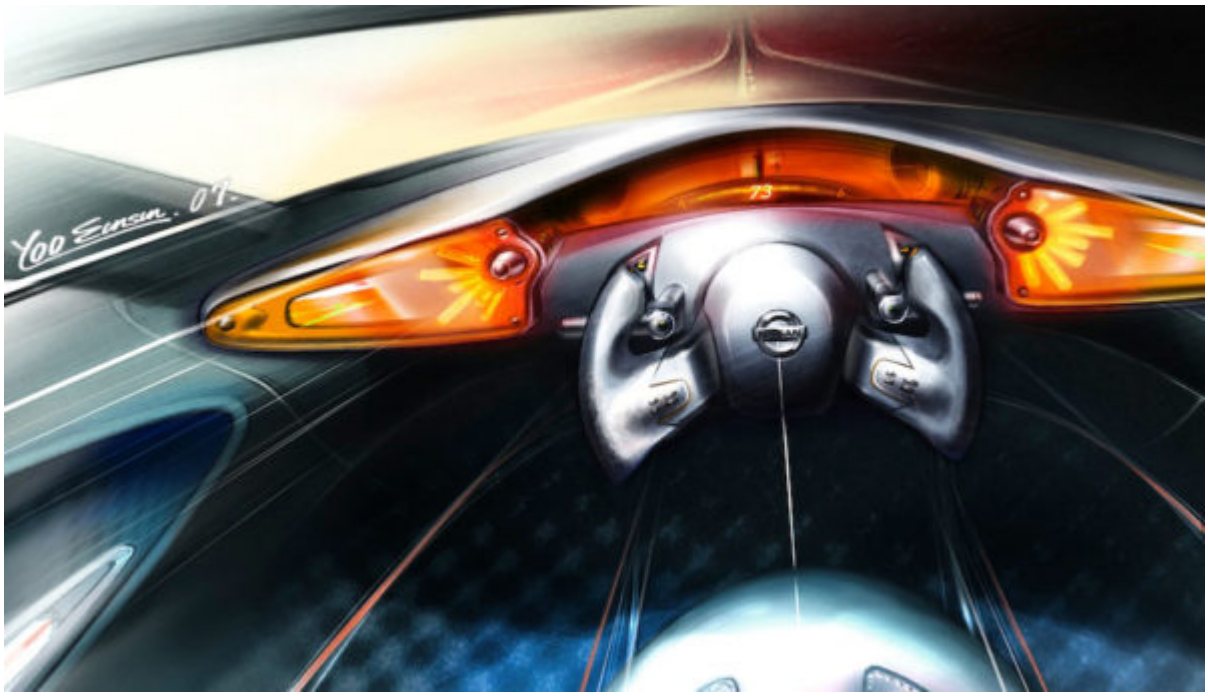
“What if …?”

The term includes just the kind of things we’re doing in the Design Columns at Museum Boijmans van Beuningen [Link]

And it doesn’t include just studio design pieces.

critical design – the concept car

Just yesterday I was talking with Masato Inoue of Nissan about his extraordinary concept cars. Cars that will never be made but may change the future of the automobile because of the questions they pose. The Mixim said – What if a car offered an exhilarating experience of speed that did not necessarily involve going fast? – by running live video footage across the whole width of the dashboard from low-mounted front-facing cameras.



Nissan Mixim – concept car 2007

The point of our Design Column at Museum Boijmans van Beuningen is to provoke and engage. To follow the traditional principles of *critique* – to inquire into the possible conditions of design and its objects.

Things are unstable, multivalent, subtle, irreducible to word and image. Working

with this inherent multiplicity of things, their refusal to be reduced to simple statements, their capacity to inspire response and conversation, their connecting power, as tools and modes of communication, makes for a powerful rhetoric, where we can explore matters of complex human concern such as creativity, power, violence. This was a point very well made today by Garry Hagberg and Ivan Gaskell. And it involves the museum – a **third space** where such conversations can occur – as I argued recently – [Link]

And what are the **tactics** of critical design, of the critical design museum?

- intervention and interruption – interrupt a conventional exhibition – Banksy does this [Link], and not just in museums. Elsewhere I have connected such a tactic with Brecht's epic theatre [Link] [Link] [Link] – interrupting complacency
- thematics – mount an exhibition that is not about genre, artist, period or region, but takes up a theme like violence
- actualities – mount an exhibition that offers comment on something in current concern – such as our Design Column about data [Link]
- contexts – explore relationships, juxtapositions and connections (design and violence; design and data)
- site specifics – use the characteristics of architecture and space, treating the gallery, or whatever is the location of the exhibition, as an integral component of the exhibition

The merging of object, event, and site can make of the museum (without walls) – *gesamptkunstwerk* – a total-work-of-art [Link]

Paola Antonelli at Bard Graduate Center today – 8 November 2013