

# Reviews for Digital Craft theory

## Frans Evers- The academy of the senses

This excerpt from the book the Academy of senses by Frank Evers is an introduction to what is synesthesia and in which terms you can best describe it, as well as what is a synesthetes (the person that has synesthesia).

Evers describes the most common experiences of people that claim to have synesthesia where they visualise music, smell flavour or even smell the shifting of temperatures. Their experience is a different connection on how our senses react or interact with our surroundings. For example a day of the week can be a coloured shape, a number can be another image associated to a color, a music piece can be a series of colours that are put on canvas according to the synesthetes personal experience and interaction with that piece.

The book contains a fair amount of statistics and quotes from people that describe their personal unique way of experiencing and encountering various phenomena through their senses from the very beginning. Though I understand the reason those “testimonies” have been placed there it feels to me like Evers needs to include those from the very introduction of the book in order to convince the reader that this way of perceiving senses is something real. It happened to Jerry, Christine, Carmen and all these fellows that are quotes with their first names, like they are our someone we know, an ordinary person with extraordinary way of sensing things.

Then of course there are references for those who are interested to dive in to the early life of a synesthetes and how and why these people develop this way of perceiving certain external stimuli. In my opinion the book could have less testimonies in the beginning to become convincing. I would rather prefer a text that derives from those unique experiences that lies between reality and fiction. For the rest of us that way of seeing or hearing things is unheard of therefore it lies in the line between truth and lie. For that reason exactly I believe a piece of painted/heard/tasted poetry would make it much more convincing and interesting.

As expressed in the book of Evers these are common experiences of people that have synesthesia, unlike me and many other people that experience senses in a completely ordinary way. Meaning we hear music instead of seeing music as coloured moving strings. Fascinating as that sounds I wonder at the same time how frustrating could that be? How can someone with this charisma or let's say unique way of experiencing senses can share that with his surroundings if they have a completely different experience. Is that making the people with synesthesia feeling that they can not communicate that with the rest of the people? Is it easier to be surrounded by people like you? With the same way of “seeing” things?

## **Donna Haraway- Tentacular thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene**

The introduction of Donna Haraway in our practice seems to be completely unnecessary but also because how can you describe Haraway and her work? In plain English I personally find it very unlikely. For the record Haraway is a distinguished Professor in the history department at the university of California and the author of several books, with her breakthrough to the public “ A cyborg manifesto”. Several years after that Haraway wants to speak about the Chthulucene, her need to stay with the trouble and how according to her it is essential to invent new narratives and ways of telling stories.

As an attempt to unpack the unique writing and new way of storytelling by Haraway and specifically of this piece from her book *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*, I will try to review the three most essential parts of it, the Anthropocene, the Capitalocene and the Chthulucene.

The Anthropocene is placed in a geological era in the history of earth where the human activities have altered its physiology and shapes its progress. By crossing multiple boundaries especially in the 18th century, according to Paul Crutzen the use of fossil energy such as gas, oil and coal changed the shape of our society and disrupted the atmospheric composition. Haraway highlights how this word to describe this epoch has been picked up by multiple researchers, artists to portray the aftermath of the human fossil evolution.

That brings us to the Capitalocene which according to Haraway is the result of our need to extract every possible energy asset we can from the earth and generate as much capital as possible, chronologically exactly where we are now. The age of profit and reusable energy. Since earth hasn't much more to offer our capital is getting generated or to be more accurate, re-generated from the minimum sources left.

Last we come to the Chthulucene, a parallel universe or speculative era where humans are not the dominant creatures but all sorts of critters and combinations of humans/ animals are possible. The evolution has come and we managed that by seeing and experiencing this alternative life that exists somewhere between a broken mirror.

This of course is my way of interpreting this vast text that reeks of Donna Haraway speculative fabulosa and her completely unique way of seeing humans and their progress. It is imperative indeed to understand how capitalism and human greed shaped earth, societies and life as we know it. The Chthulucene is a utopian era where we were not too late to act and change and by changing our ways we managed to go an epoch further instead of facing our extinction. I could say this message could have been given in a more simple way so that it could reach a bigger audience but then again it wouldn't be Donna Haraway, would it?

## Mark Ratto- Critical Making

Mark Ratto is a scholar at the university of Toronto and the Bell University. Ratto in 2007 had the need to create his own practice since at that time he felt that there was nothing close to describe what the connections between society and systems, That term/practice is critical making which as Ratto claims derives from the practice of critical things in combination with craftsmanship, thus critical making.

Ratto uses the same reasoning as Haraway on how people approach the process of thinking as a linguistic practice, something we do by sitting down, quiet on our chair. Same goes to being critical. Most people perceive it as a linguistic activity where as Ratto want to reverse those theories/opinions with his practice of critical making. He is also very eager to separate himself and this practice from the makers movement and classifies the practice as a creative innovative scholars practice whereas the makers movement according to his has the tendency to promote work that is merely focused in to technology and its toolsets therefore its sanitising several connections of a design and focuses merely on the technical aspects. Ratto gives an example on that to Hertz of a critical maker Natalie Jermijenko who created an artwork that portrayed the relations between genetics and environment but if her work according to him was presented under the spectrum of the makers movement those elements would be erased and they would mostly focus on the technical part of how she managed to clone the threes in her artwork.

Further on the interview Ratto is elaborating on critical making and the personal need for this practice to be developed through the years, and how it could perhaps have things in common with surrealistic movements like Fluxus or situationism and how this practice is more about the deeper need of making without focusing on the technical or technological parts but more in a scholars way of thinking. Seeing the deeper meaning of a design by analysing it's connotations and relations to the topic that it addresses. For example opening a device doesn't necessarily make you understand it's functionality better according to Ratto because then we will be focusing more in the mediation of technology rather than in the real functionality of a device.

Examples more like that can be found all over the interview since Ratto is trying to separate his practice such as how many technological attributes should someone know? Personally I find this rather weird since there is no scale of ten kilos knowledge. This approach of Ratto sounds to me like someone is trying to tell me, you need to have three kilos of knowledge in Arduino, five of python and a pinch of creativity to succeed in audiovisual critical making for example. For me there is no argument of whether critical making is a practice. Anybody can invent a term that they feel that describes their activity more accurate. Naturally these excessive process of persuasion on how to see "the right way" in this case in the makers/design field, that I personally find it unnecessary. But then again you can't be preaching in the agora without using persuasion. I think Ratto's own unique practice that stands out serves exactly that. It's the main element in his recipe of persuasion. He has something most people don't and that's his very own practice.

## Reflections

Through out the time of this course we covered the ground on the power of information from the science of cybernetics to the other side where the message therefore the information are shaped by the medium. I don't think enumerating the authors main arguments or punch lines is helpful to my reflection since you already are aware of what we we did all this time nor I believe the nature of this course was for us to memorise them and say something like "oh yeah I know what critical making is". For me this course felt more like 101: how to recognise persuasion and not fall for it. Yet I wonder how can you make your point without being persuasive? How to create that subtle inception? Maybe going to someones dreams and plant that as an idea doesn't seem that bad to me right now, cause today everyone is being critical, therefore persuasive at the same time. When for example I am being critical on an article I am trying to prove my point with argumentation on why I agree or don't agree with the author. That right there is the core of persuasion. Solid argumentation that convinces the people to agree with your point of view.

In a parallel universe where money don't make the world go round maybe artists shouldn't have to be persuasive in order to promote their work. Maybe the artwork itself could be substantial and the reason for it to exist would be to generate a conversation. Right would be more than one answer and people would agree to disagree. This could be my Haraway moment where speculation is a must and all alternative narratives are understandable but unfortunately our societies have been build in order to unify people. There is a meaning and that's unified. Black is black and we all have to agree on that. There is a a group of people that works their way to decode those mechanisms. We cal those philosophers or artists or con men. Embrace the non sense, there is no meaning but we really can't live without one.

