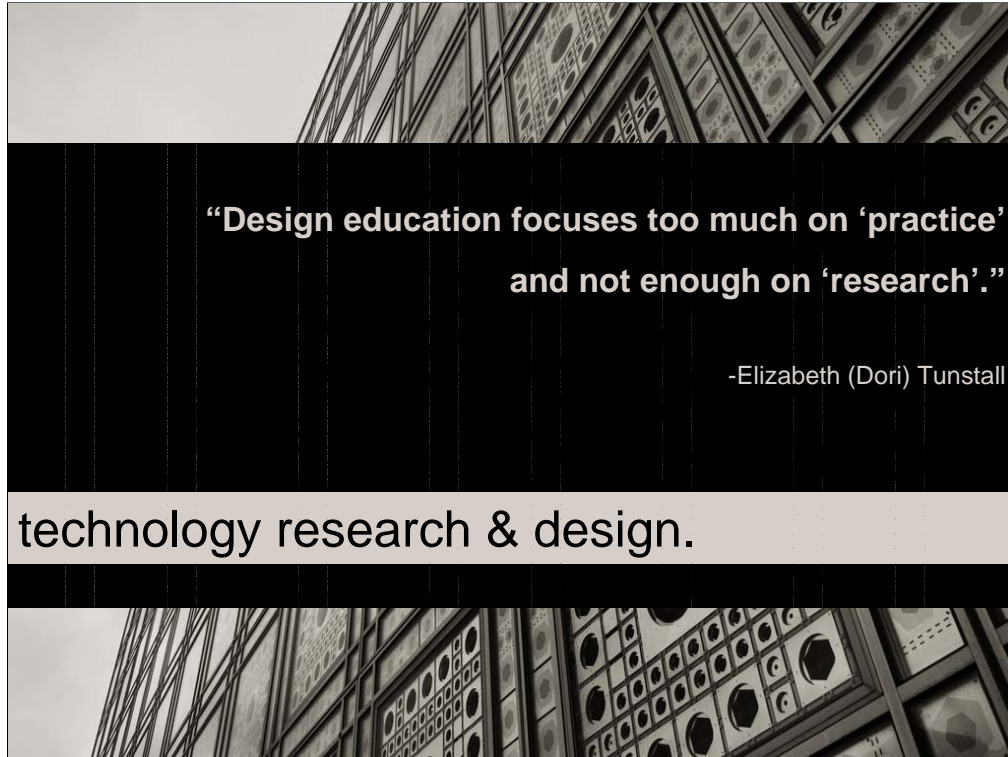




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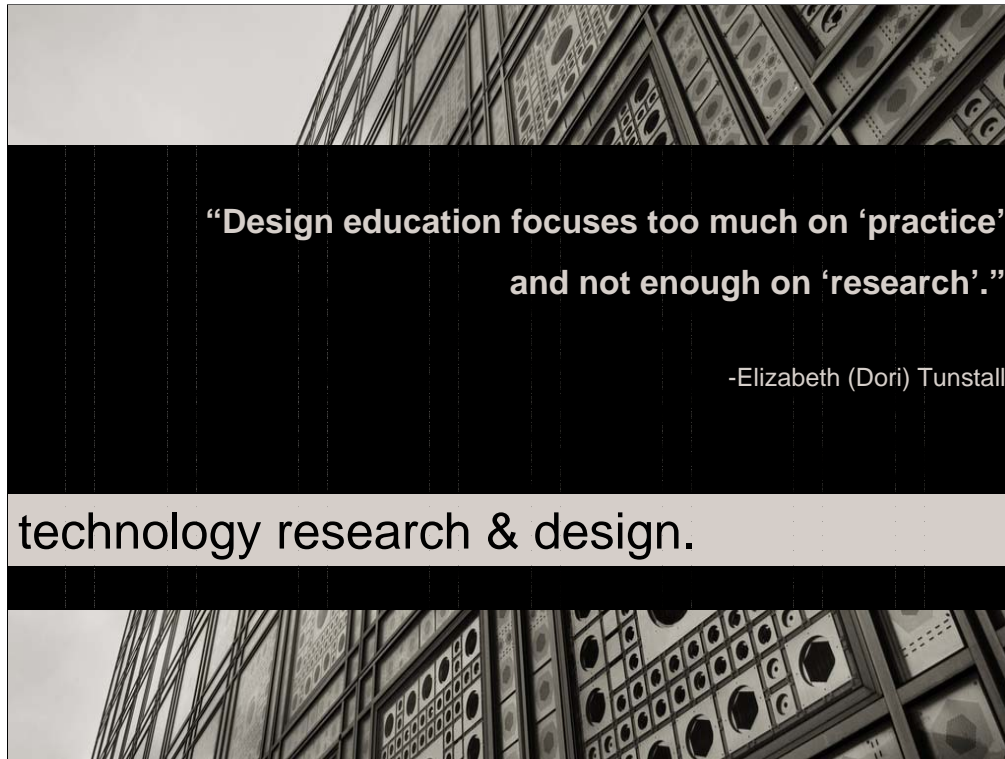


Good morning and thank you very much for inviting me to introduce the *Circuit of Life: Examining the Impact of Technology on Human Social Development and Interaction* session.

My name is Anne Galloway and I'm a social anthropologist who works in the areas of science, technology and design culture and practice. This means that I'm particularly interested in how technoscientific knowledge and objects are created and mobilised. It means that I try to understand how collaboration and conflict work between artists, designers, engineers, scientists, academics, businesses, industries, governments, publics, etc. And it means that I'm interested in the different interests, values, politics and ethics that encounter each other in these objects, practices and situations.

So now I'd like to start with the notion that there are no neutral objects or objective (in the sense as separate from social) technologies. We know that all objects are shaped by the values, interests, assumptions, expectations, contexts etc. of both designers or creators *and* the people who acquire and use them. In return, all of these people are shaped by these objects too.

So *how* you do your work as a designer becomes particularly important. It makes possible, and impossible, a variety of relations between yourselves and the worlds in which you live. In other words, it shapes all of us and our surroundings.



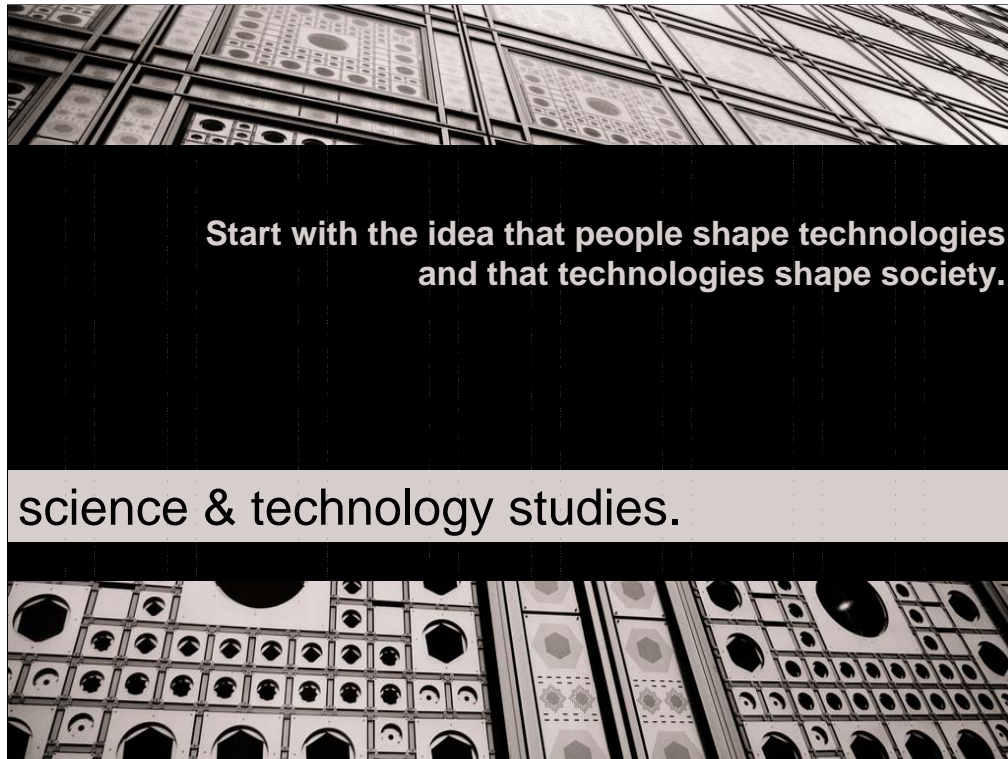
Notes cont.

This brings me to the provocative statement you see here by University of Illinois-Chicago design anthropologist Dori Tunstall.

Now we know that design has historically focussed on doing and making things, and this emphasis on "practice" has often been contrasted with thinking and talking and writing about things. But before I go any further I'd like to suggest that all research is a kind of practice, and design practitioners have always engaged in research. In that sense, I think that Tunstall has created a false opposition. In fact, designers and social researchers share one important commonality: we both create new knowledge, new relations and new objects through our practices.

However, it does remain that while qualitative understandings and problem generation are often considered relevant and valuable to design, they are rarely granted the same status or privileges as concrete problem-solving, direct action and material production. And I'd like to suggest that these activities are not mutually exclusive, nor in competition with each other. In other words, you don't have to give up one for another, and you are free to move iteratively between them. In fact, that's pretty much what we're always doing anyway.

And so today I'd like to speak briefly about technology research and design from a social and cultural perspective, and begin to look at what might constitute a critical design research practice.



**Start with the idea that people shape technologies
and that technologies shape society.**

science & technology studies.

First, I'd like to be clear about how I understand relations between people and objects and what that means for technological and social change.

In social and cultural studies of science and technology, it's understood that people and objects are mutually constitutive.

But it's not enough to say that people shape the world with technology or that technology shapes society, so I start rather than end with this point. The challenge is to really understand how all this works - how all these things are related, and how these relations are maintained and changed.

Working on the assumption that technological and social change co-evolve, and often in non-linear and unpredictable ways, I understand that technologies (things and products) construct and configure users (uses, needs and expectations) just as much as users (uses, needs and expectations) configure and construct technologies (things and products).

I'm talking about an exchange here: sometimes symmetrical and sometimes asymmetrical, but an exchange nonetheless.



Social studies of science and technology have also described sociality as being “object-oriented.” In other words, I understand that people interact with and through objects.

Since I used to work as an archaeologist, I’ll use archaeology as an example: Archaeologists are tasked with reconstructing past social and cultural lives. And they can often do this quite effectively and convincingly despite the fact that all they have to work with are material remains.

Shifting to the realm of your everyday lives, imagine just how much your weekly garbage and recycling reveals about your own preferences and habits, and how much we can understand about broader social and cultural values by looking just at the packaging we throw away.

In any case, I try to better understand how a variety of techno-scientific devices, or material objects, are mobilised (or put into play) in our everyday social interactions – and here’s the important bit - to *create, maintain or change particular social relations*.



**And finally, consider agency – or the ability to act –
as something within the domain of both
humans and non-humans.**

science & technology studies.

Knowing that we relate to each other and the world around us through our things, and that our things affect how we relate to each other, allows me to focus on the idea of agency, or the ability to act in the world - to, as I just described, create, maintain or change particular social relations.

But we're accustomed to thinking that only people have agency – it's considered to be part of what makes humans different and special - and Western cultural norms tend to hold that if objects have agency it requires some act of anthropomorphism, or fantastic attribution of human characteristics to inanimate objects.

But what if agency isn't something we *give* to materials and objects, and is instead something that things *always already* have?

Social studies of science and technology argue that the ability to shape and be shaped by each other – to act in the world - is at the heart of social and material interactions, and so our challenge is to give things as much attention – and credit - as people.

In practice, this means that I do not privilege the social (as does most user-centred design) or the material (as does most science and engineering), but rather that I privilege the complex and dynamic relations between the two.



**It's all about becoming accountable to, and for,
the actions we take and the things we make.**

sts meets design research.

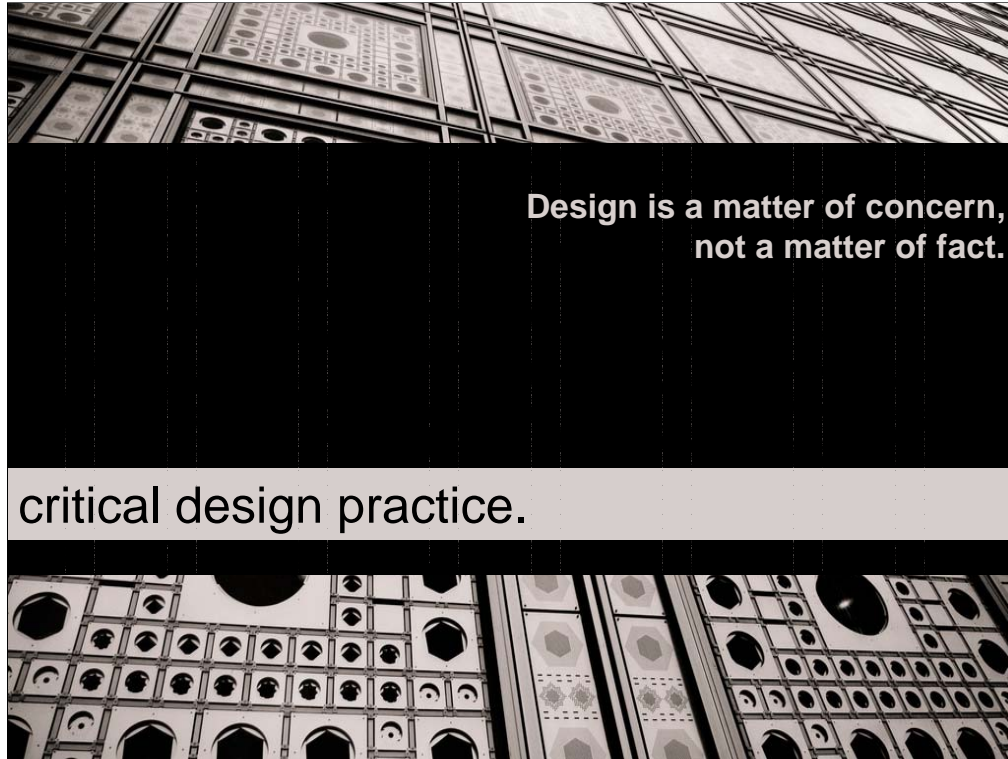
So what would it mean to apply the ideas I've just briefly discussed to the practice of design research?

First of all, we can apply them 'internally' as ways to understand our own values and practices, and 'externally' to understand the values and practices of others.

In other words, I believe that our common methods require actively shifting back-and-forth between the two, and in this sense, critical design research should always be reflexive.

But the primary objective in this two-fold, iterative process is to focus on social and material relations in ways that encourage us to be accountable to, and for, the actions we take and the things we make.

In this way we become responsible not only for ourselves but for others as well, and arguably that lies at the heart of social and cultural interaction as **belonging** in and to the world.



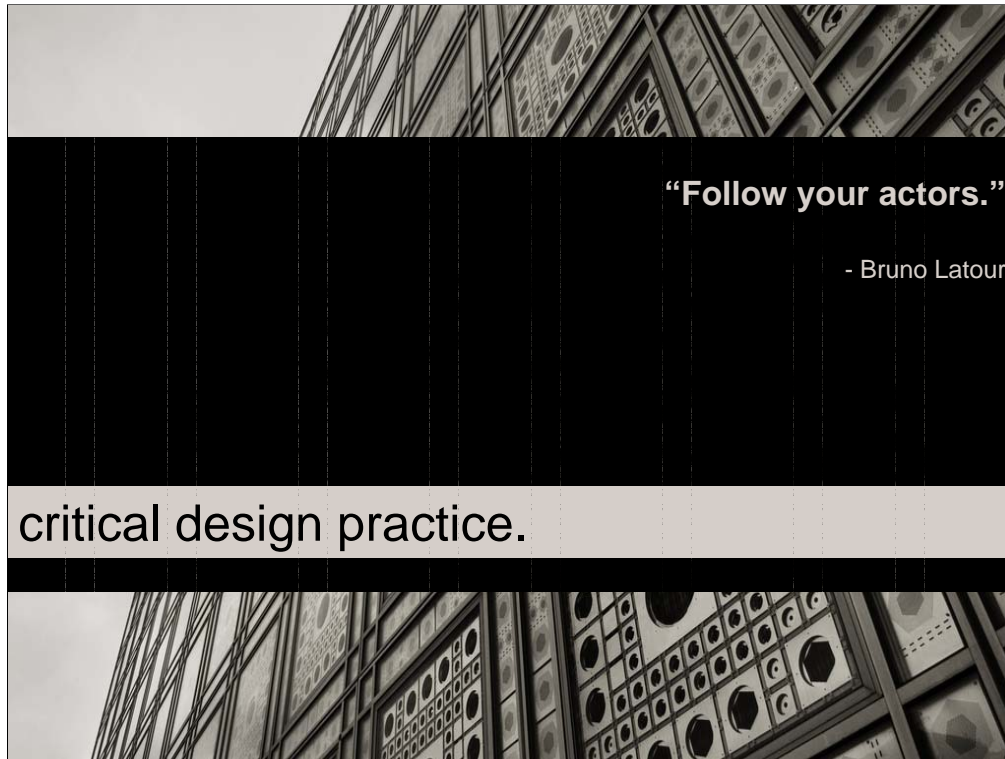
So this matter of accountability is also directly related to aesthetics and ethics – another two things researchers and designers both attend to.

Not to be confused with morals, ethics can refer to *ethos* - or the characteristic spirit and sentiment of a people. This relativist or bottom-up, rather than absolutist or top-down, approach to social conduct is related to the idea of coming together around matters of concern rather than matters of fact. Aesthetics - not in the sense of art but in the perception and declaration of the good and beautiful - also arise from ethics, and can also be understood as matters of concern rather than matters of fact.

We know that ethical action and aesthetic experience are always already productively combined in social and cultural life, but “ethics alone is insufficient to make changes or guide actions. It is a content that requires a form – an aesthetics . . . Aesthetics alone is equally insufficient, for it leads to an aestheticized politics of manipulation and of form alone without content.” (Shields, Rob. 2002. “Social Science as a Design Profession: New Visions and Relationships.” In Design and the Social Sciences: Making Connections, edited by J. Frascara, pp. 201-206. London: Routledge.)

It’s my belief that this combination of highly situated or contextual ethics and aesthetics allows for greater critical manoeuvrability, and that’s something that can benefit all designers and researchers. Since facts tend to end debates, and concerns tend to open them up, our greatest chance for critical intervention arises in our engagement of shared concerns - even if that means we can’t solve a problem.

I believe that research practice – and all practitioners - stand to benefit from not being allowed to ignore each other, or to judge away questions that they believe are outside their realm of practice. And so in my work I suggest that the real challenge here is to be accountable to, and for, precisely those interests and concerns that differ from our own.



So how can we get at these ethics and aesthetics, at these matters of concern?

My own work is largely guided by what is called actor-network theory, although it's worth pointing out that this is more methodology than theory.

If the subjects and objects of our studies include everything that has the capacity to affect change – to act in the world - then we can look not only to individual and institutional assumptions, decisions, actions, inactions, etc., but also to things as diverse as reading notes, theories, critiques, proposals, briefs, probes, scripts, observations, interventions, sketches, maps, audio, video, text, user profiles, use scenarios, models, prototypes etc.

By following the production and use of these things – Latour's actors - we have the opportunity to better understand the values and interests at hand, and that directly contributes to our ability to make better informed decisions at each step in our processes.

As I said at the very beginning, it is *how* you and I do our work that matters here. It matters what questions we ask *and* don't ask. It matters who has a voice *and* who is silent. It matters who and what we include *and* exclude.

These are choices we make and they have real effects in terms of who we, and others, can be - and what we, and they, can do.

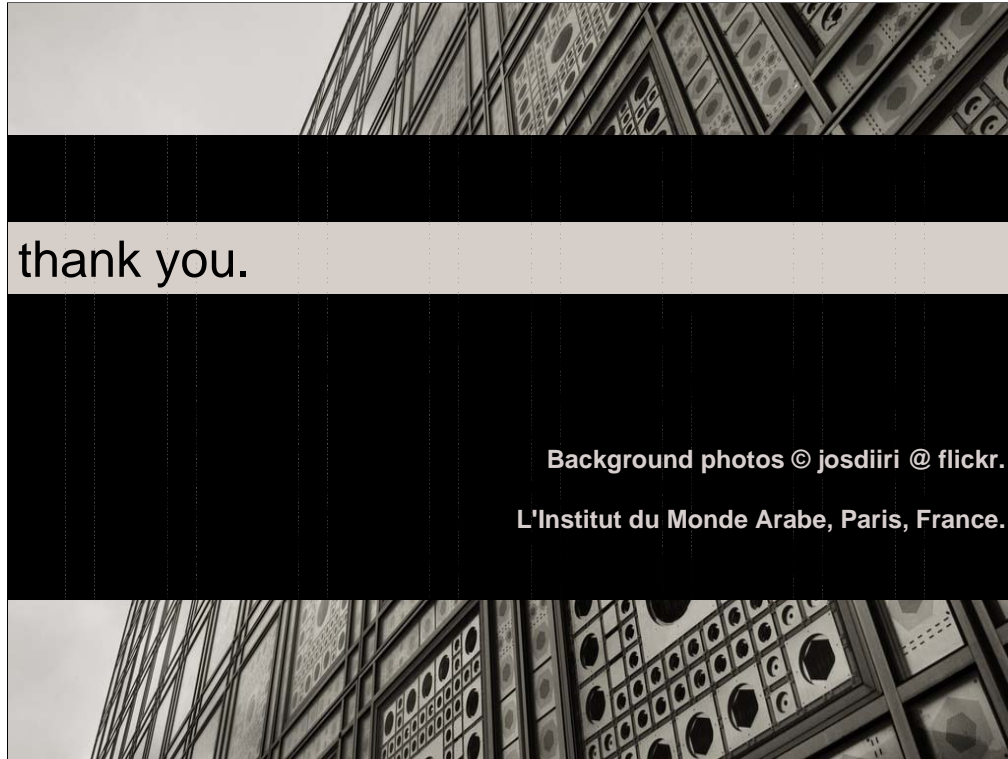


The quote here is actually the title of a book edited by Architecture for Humanity on architectural responses to humanitarian crises, but I think the sentiment can be productively stretched to include any creative practice, and it is the point with which I'd like to close.

In deciding what constitutes good or beautiful design, we are effectively arranging relations between people, places, things and ideas. This means that with each new creation we arrange and re-arrange different risks and responsibilities - and in creating new objects, not only do we create new relations or hybrids, but we shape each of the constituent players.

Put another way, we are engaged in creating possibilities and impossibilities. This suggests that there is a lot at stake, and that our challenge is serious, so I urge us not to take our responsibilities lightly, but also not to overestimate what we alone can accomplish with our designs and devices.

By systematically conducting critical research and using it to iteratively shape the design of a product, we have the opportunity to define and redefine what is good and beautiful in this world. And since the best researchers and designers are also witnesses rather than mere observers of the human condition, the opportunity and challenge that awaits us now is how well we can answer to values and interests that we may not share – and design products like we actually give a damn about people and the world in which we live.



Thank you again, and questions and comments are always welcome.

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To learn more about Anne's research, please see: <http://www.purselipsquarejaw.org/papers.html>

To learn more about the architecture at L'Institut du Monde Arabe and the relationship between culture and the built environment, please see:

http://www.imarabe.org/ang/perm/ima/batiment_main.html