Critical
Critical Design   by   World   ?   Critical   by   Critical   ?
Collaboration   by   ?   Human   by   Social   ?
Discourses   ?   Politics   ?

                               World   ?   World   Critical   ?
Collaboration   Design Culture   Critical Object
Speculative   by   Social
                                                           World   by   Discourses
Critical Design   ?   by
Design Culture   ?   ?
                         Critical   Social   by   ?
Critical   by   Social   by
                          by   Critical
Critical   ?   Social   by
                         Critical   ?
                                               ?   Politics   by   ?
Social   ?

World   Critical   Critical   Critical Design
Critical   Critical Design   Critical   ?
                         by   by
Discourses   Social   Critical   by
Critical   ?   Critical   by
Design Culture   Critical
Critical Design   by   Critical   by   ?
Speculative   Human   Critical   Critical Design   ?
                                               ?   Critical   ?
                                                                                 by   World   ?
                                                                                                                    ?
Appendix
                                               ?   Critical
                                               ?
                                                     Social   Human   ?
                                               ?
                                                                                                                    ?
Human   by   ?
                                                                              by   ?
Design Culture   Critical
Human   ?   Human   ?
                                               ?   Critical   by
                         by   Critical   by   Social
                         by   Critical Design   by
Discourses
Design Culture   by   Design Culture   Critical
Critical   Human   Collaboration   by   Social
                         by   Critical

by
Design Culture
Understanding   Human
by
by   Critical   by
Human   by   Human   Social   Design Culture
Understanding   ?   World
by   ?
Design Culture   Critical   Critical Design
Critical   ?   Design Culture   Speculative
Critical   by   Social   Critical Design
Critical   ?   Critical
Collaboration   ?

?   by
World   Critical   Human   ?
by   ?   by   ?
Critical   ?   Speculative Design   ?
by   Human   Speculative Design
Design Culture   ?   World
Critical   by   Discourses   ?

Social
Speculative   ?   Human
Critical   ?   ?
by   Collaboration   Social   by
Critical
Critical Design   Critical   ?   Critical
Discourses   Speculative
Human   ?
Critical   by   Critical   ?   Design Culture   ?
Critical   by
by   Collaboration   Discourses   by
Human   by   Understanding
Human   by   ?
by
Human   ?
Critical   by   ?
?   Design Culture   ?
by   Human
Critical   Speculative   Social   ?
?
Human

by   Critical   Critical Design   ?
by   Critical   ?   Social   Critical Object   ?
by   Human   Discourses   World   ?
Critical
Critical   Discourses   Social   by
World   Human
Discourses   ?   Discourses   Critical
Critical
Social   World

Critical by design?

The book's design

as SF figures

Marius Förster &
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Typography, especially in books, first and foremost ought to be functional, even invisible in the sense that it does not stand between the content and the reader. But indeed, as much as language itself is not neutral, its representation/visualization is deeply embedded in social, political, and technical histories. Consequently, the elements that editorial design is concerned with, such as typography and layout, configure discursive spaces that negotiate their situatedness and demand for reflection. «Embodied criticality»[1] (Rogoff 2006) is *taking place* in readers' hands or their screens, as much as during (and before) the design process. Criticality *lives out* as a continuation through which thinking, doing, and materialization cannot be understood separately. To render our thoughts tangible, we[2] make use of Haraway's SF figures (Haraway 2016). It is an ambiguous concept that describes a three-fold simultaneity: methods and practices, the things (as assemblages) in view, and their constituting processes. SF as an abbreviation brings together science fact, string figures, speculative fabulations, and so forth to show their interdependencies and familiarities. It takes metaphors seriously for the constitution of realities: the fiction of facts and the truth of speculations – not to unknot them but to get involved with the vastness of relations and relating as a practice to proceed. SF as an open-ended list of terms or wordplays invites its continuation – so do we playfully join in. For us, it is an approach to think thoughts or to design design, a practice of «worlding» by questioning modern design principles and deconstruct normalized knowledge. SF figures demonstrate the multi-perspectivity that is needed to deal with the present through critical design practices. Not bothering the reader with every detail of the various layers of practical and conceptual decisions regarding this publication's design: we want to shed some light on the typographical approach and the concept of the cover and section pages. The graphic concept viewed through the lens of SF figures tunes in with the criticality of the publication's authors and aims to make the topic's ambiguities and its materialization tangible.

1   «[C]riticality is not to find an answer but rather to access a different mode of inhibition. … it is a form of ontology that is being advocated, a ‹living things out› which has a hugely transformative power as opposed to pronouncing on them» (Rogoff 2006).

2   We see it as a privilege to work for a cause we consider relevant and, beyond the graphic «duties,» having the opportunity to reflect on our work and theorize our thoughts. We are aware of the privilege to have time to work on these issues – and as «white» Europeans, easy access to those discourses in the first place. Furthermore, it is our economic situation that seems to allow extra effort regardless of the connected payment. Referring to J. K. Gibson-Graham, economies are understood as a whole support system consisting of diverse practices and values beyond monetary values exclusively.

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«Shape Frictions» becomes a design princi-
ple for the typographic concept of the book. It matters which letter-
shapes shape words that shape knowledge – and which knowledge
shapes letter shapes. Consequently, it is the situatedness of the letter
shape that determined our design process. We aim to translate the
volume's posture into a typographic polyrhythm that clashes various
socio-technical histories and ambitions, but at the same time does
not follow an aspiration of completeness. Readability remains part of
the equation, which makes it a subtle endeavor. But it is precisely
that subtlety that is intriguing because it demands to reflect on the
surface – possibly conceptualized as infrastructure – mingling func-
tional, technical, and cultural dimensions. Following the question of
what knowledge and perspective a font carries, we selected four
typefaces sharing similarities and contradictions alike. The extract of
fonts results from various discussions with companioned colleagues
and is informed by our everyday practice rather than acting as a
historical review.

       The text is set with a version of Metafont. It is a programming
language for parametric font designs developed by Donald E. Knuth
in the 1980s. Knuth originally invented Metafont to improve the typog-
raphy of his publications: taking advantage of computer technology
to raise printing results that lack certain qualities during the transition
from metal type to phototype (Galson 2018). Rather than defining
the outline of the letter shape, Metafont follows the logic of the stroke
that constructs a character. That means the font is determined by
the customizable features of letter strokes – like choosing between
different pen shapes and hand expressions to draw a letter. Knuth,
a notable figure of the early digital computer age and its mindset,
aimed at an entirely mathematical definition of Latin type forms – to
create a programming language allowing everyone to design their
personal typeface. He failed to translate typography into a universal
mathematical playbook, as his system shows the limits for providing
a diverse variety of font design possibilities and lacks the granularity
implied by trained font designers. Nonetheless, Knuth created a
unique and powerful font universe that since 2012 is easily accessible
via the webpage metaflop, thanks to Alexis Reigel and Marco Müller.[3]

       For the references, Noto Sans is applied. The team around
«Noto» is chasing another form of universalism. Initially released in
2013 by Google, the font aims to include every character from every
written language. Yet unfinished, this is only possible based on
the underlying logic of the font format; more precisely, it is software
itself. The Open Type format utilizing Unicode set the basis for it in

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the late 1990s. Not mainly technical issues, but the normalizing Western computer culture is the reason for still-limited language support and range of available fonts. Especially if one is looking for context-specific fonts comprised of more than one language system, it can be disappointing. Noto is taking an important step and reveals technical limitations along the way. As much as it unites languages, it masks their idiosyncrasies. To hedge all languages in a «harmonious look and feel»[4] follows modernist claims: a one-dimensional worldview trifles with the sensitive space between a plurality of identities and a common ground.

Quite the contrary, the font Serifbabe, designed by Charlotte Rohde and released in 2020 is, at its core, a celebration of character. Serifbabe is applied for the titles and the page numbers of the publication. By utilizing variable font features, Rohde questions aesthetic norms of perfectionism, balance, and harmony. Much more, her font design can be read as a «psychogram,» a way of expressing personal narratives and, in her words, as an «extension of the body.»[5] This way, she explicitly frames a non-universal design position by incorporating a feminist perspective into her work.

A similar mindset is followed by Authentic Sans (2015), a font designed by Christina Janus and Desmond Wong. The Authentic Sans is used for the footnotes of this publication. Referencing CJK (Chinese/Japanese/Korean) fonts, which often include «anonymous»[6] Latin glyph sets, the designers humorously utilize their aesthetic to comment on Helvetica/Arial normalization. «The typeface aims to subvert the Eurocentric standards of typographic quality and refinement.»[7] The design of Authentic Sans critically reflects on and redefines the knowledge embedded in Western and universal font designs.

Authentic Sans, Metafont, and Noto are open source typefaces that bring together quite heterogeneous incentives towards opposing paid license models. Authentic Sans seems to be a critical contribution to typographic discourse and, like Metafont, is an effort to provide access to and democratize technological utilization. Noto is backed by Google. At first glimpse, there is nothing to complain about when a globally acting company is supporting a collective effort to improve computer-based literacy. But well-known companies like Google are actively enmeshed in «neoliberal» dynamics that

4   Google Noto Fonts, https://www.google.com/get/noto.

5   Studio Charlotte Rohde, https://www.charlotterohde.de/about.

6   The word «anonymous» is equivocally pointing to the intention of how the font is used, mainly to fill the gaps for Latin language on webpages using CJK fonts, and for the font designers (sometimes even the font names), which in the case of LiHei Pro and VL Gothic are not found easily and are not equally represented. See also «It has no name, that I can find. It lives in the latin part of the default Japanese font used in my browsers» (https://thatfont.slechte.info).

7   AUTHENTIC Sans, https://www.authentic.website/sans.html.

contradict, even deride, ambitions towards social and ecological equality and sus- tainability. Furthermore, critical and political strategies and ambitions are easily taken over by neoliberal mechanisms and therefore neutralized or limited in their transformative power. Simultaneously, «we» hinge on and relish the convenience of «our» technologies – even more during the pandemic – and are nested in socio-economic dependencies that are hard to grasp and transformed.

Embroiling the selected typography in a dialogue is our com- mentary as graphic designers: confronting ourselves with the com- plexities and contradictions of these troubled times, knowing all too well that the letters' shapes do not «change the world.» But by shifting our attention away from all-too-modernist design beliefs, we aim to multiply our sensitivity towards the world and contribute with infectious Shape Frictions – aware of our own limited (European) perspective. It is still a confined juxtaposition of fonts that needs to be extended and diversified.

Layout as script frictions

We «stay with the trouble» (Haraway 2016) of SF practices and com- plement the design concept with a further figure: «Script Friction.» Framing the publication's layout as a feminist, discursive space with its accompanied frictions, we are particularly interested in what is and is not said. The cover and the section pages play with and emphasize the constraints of the project. How does the layout hint at the incompleteness of the discourse: the snapshot or «congealed act»[8] (Viveiros de Castro 2015: 80) that a publication is obliged to be? An awareness of the situatedness of the publication's discourse is expressed through a coltish analysis of the chapters' key terms. Inspired by Metafont's automation approach, a script – developed in collaboration with the Belgian programmer Jef Van den broeck – creates areas of tension where the publication's most common terms appear in new relations and meanings. Based on their probability, those terms are spread randomly throughout the page, sorted into columns with various amounts of empty lines. This way, neither a horizontal nor vertical order is prevalent. The cover and the pages between sections utilize the script, whereby the latter is based on an analysis of keywords contributed by chapters within one section. The scripted combinations of titles allegorize an accompanying con- stant expansion and development of the discourse at the one hand. On the other hand, they question the ubiquitous terminology of «critique» by (re)placements of words, describing and representing

8   «Material embodiment of an immaterial intention» (own translation).

the publication's take on the critical design discourse.[9] Additionally, intentional gaps are used as invitations for possible new narratives and speculative titles. They point to the non-represented and not yet articulated voices in the publication. Trying to make those reflections tangible and even more explicit seems to be essential for an inclusive design approach.

9 This gamble with the titles follows the design principle already used for the visual design of the 2018 conference «Critical by Design? Potentials and Limitations of Materialized Critique,» conceptualized and designed by Moritz Greiner-Petter and Meike Hardt.

The script design follows the ambition to create awareness of the situatedness of (designerly) knowledge and the conflict between its aspirations and disciplinary thresholds. Combining analysis (counting words) and randomness induce equivocations and, therefore, ongoingness: making explicit, visually, what is at stake and at the same time reaching out to what stays invisible. The letter shapes and their stories are accompanied by the situatedness of knowledge manifested in the book and the graphic design that presents it. It matters what knowledge produces knowledge and what design designs design.

The SF design for this publication is a play of thought and making to question how we look at and work with design. Dialogue and constant negotiations defined the process – a certain way of togetherness we enjoyed as the core of our decision-making. Moreover, there was a process of unlearning involved while designing the publication. Even though we did not neglect usability standards, we aimed to contradict common design approaches like «less is more,» keeping specific hierarchical orders, etc. By doing so, we questioned our personal aesthetic habits.

Critical perspectives demand time and engagement with current social, political and technical discourses and beyond. These ambitions are often opposed to commercial day-to-day (design) realities and connected to privileged positions. Thus, following the idea of «staying with the trouble,» we confront ourselves with the difficulties of unlearning and awareness creation of how knowledge is produced and established through design processes and decision making. There might be some distance between our SF design and Post-Human and Anthropocene discourses negotiating new ontologies. But very directly, the related feminist perspectives teach us about paying attention to neglected sensitivities.

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