

Connectivity and creativity in times of conflict



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Welcome to the Cumulus Antwerp 2023 conference proceedings!

Since the beginning of our academic journey, a plaque was solemnly hanging in the teacher's lounge, proudly displaying Antwerp's affiliation with the esteemed Cumulus Association since 2011. Back then, our aspirations were limited to scholarly pursuits, with our primary focus on advancing research through design as a promising scientific avenue. How times have changed!

In the present era, we find ourselves grappling with a host of pressing issues that demand our attention. The looming climate crisis, coupled with global economic and political instability, escalating living costs, social injustices, and the prevalence of isolation, have collectively questioned the very essence and value of design and art. Our society is persistently confronted with conflicts, contradictions, and an ever-evolving perspective, shaped by the non-neutral influence of technology and organizations.

In the face of these challenges, however, we have the opportunity to nurture a more positive perspective. By recognizing the changing landscape, we can see it as an impetus for innovation and positive transformation. As designers and artists, we have the unique ability to navigate this complexity, using our creative skills to address and mitigate problems. Through broader thinking and an inclusive approach, we can redefine the role of design and art and contribute to a more resilient, harmonious, and interconnected society. The Faculty of Design Sciences of the University of Antwerp, in close collaboration with the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, hosted the Cumulus three-day conference in Antwerp from April 12-15, 2023. With a legacy of struggle, the city of Antwerp represents an economic and cultural hive of activity. The current situation, led to the definition of the overall theme of Cumulus Antwerp: **Connectivity and creativity in times of conflict**. Concepts from avant-garde to conformism fashion, product design and new media have flourished in Antwerp. In this tradition, we invited the Cumulus community, designers, artists, and educators to investigate how culture and creative industry can offer resilience, consolation, and innovation models on human scale. We believe that these proceedings will be a valuable resource for anyone interested in exploring how design and creativity can contribute to building a more sustainable, equitable, and connected world. It will act as a worthy addition to the plaque we once found.

As a community of educators, researchers, and practitioners, the Cumulus Association envisions a world where creativity and design are instrumental in shaping a sustainable future. In this context, the four conference themes of Nature positive/Design for transformation, Digital futures/Hybrid reality, Handle with care/Inclusivity, and METHOD/ART align with the association's vision, and address how design can impact and harness the power of connectivity and creativity to promote positive change. Each theme addressed how design and creative industries can offer resilience, consolation, and innovative models on a human scale, and how our research and education in design can highlight novel directions.

The **Nature Positive/Design for Transformation** track at the Cumulus Conference presented thought-provoking questions on the role of design in the face of sustainability challenges. The programme included five workshops, visual papers, and posters. Eight themes were identified to guide the paper sessions, and keynote Leen Gorissen was invited to talk about Natural Intelligence (NI) – Towards Nature Positive Design and bio-inspired innovation.

Design methodology and design education were two prominent themes. Designers explored new approaches to addressing complex challenges and embraced transdisciplinary collaboration. Design Materialisation explored the future of material selection, while Biophilic Approaches integrated living organisms into design processes. The Eco-Social Transitions theme connected systems thinking and co-creation with leadership and business. Fashion Innovations addressed sustainable design thinking, indigenous textiles and changing unsustainable lifestyles. The intersection of people-centred design and urban planning was explored in Urban Design and Citizen Inclusion, which highlighted the importance of sustainable transport and meeting residents' basic needs. The democratisation of design and the potential of digitisation were discussed in sessions on Do-it-Yourself studies and Design & Digitisation, respectively. These sessions showed the transformative power of design in creating regenerative social paradigms.

Overall, the papers emphasised the need for nature-positive choices in design and highlighted the collective responsibility of designers as agents of change. In this track, a best paper award was granted to **Erminia D'Itria** (Politecnico di Milano) for the article *"Fashion design matter: the role of design in guiding a sustainable transformation in Europe"*.

Digital futures/Hybrid reality explored the intersection of design and technology. This theme discussed how we can use technology to create better designs and more immersive experiences. We heard from experts in the field of virtual and augmented reality, including the keynote of Guy Van Wymeersch from Barco, who reflected on Creative leadership in innovation in a technology company and how to stay relevant in a faster-moving world. We also contrasted this with the talk of Professor Bert De Munck, who talked about the reinventions of craft: A historical view on the usefulness of craftsmanship.

Generative AI systems such as ChatGPT and Dall-E have ushered in a new era of fear and hope and redefined the role of designers. This transformation requires a critical mindset, innovative passion, and skills to turn digital capabilities into valuable tools.

The intersection of craft and digital immersive technologies explored hybrid workflows and production processes for augmented textile artefacts and fashion-tech products. Research by design publications addressed the integration of technology in music-making, enriched and accessible museums, and the role of technology in enhancing learning experiences. Design for and with extended reality explored immersive technologies, creativity, and materiality, offering new perspectives on ceramic creation and storytelling in virtual environments. Design for and with digital fabrication highlighted design methods and collaboration in additive manufacturing, looking at the impact of automation and new materials. Urban-scale digital analysed the relationship between technology and urban spaces, highlighting the need to rethink traditional urban planning and design for flexible and adaptable environments. Technology-driven design education integrated AI and virtual reality into design education, emphasising collaboration and the changing role of designers. Digital fashion examined sustainable fashion, the role of digital technology and the evolution of fashion in the metaverse, exploring innovative shopping experiences and deconstructing materiality. In this track, a best paper award was granted to **Diego Trujillo-Pisanty, Heriberto Olguín-Simon, Nicolás Spitalier-Tron, Paola Ferrari-Garcia, Jordi Fragozo-Terreros, Alejandro Lobo-Barrera, Ximena Peña-Rios, Patricio Pous-Piereson, Fabiola Toledo-Galindo, Julio Torres-Cazares** and **Roberto Cabezas-Hernandez** (CENTRO, Mexico City, Mexico) for the article *"Metaphysical instruments: prototypes for hybrid and live music-making"*.

Handle with Care/Inclusivity is a track linking Inclusive Design, Design for Health and Well-being and Cultural Heritage. The conference was kicked off with the keynote of Dirk Geldof, who positioned Antwerp as a superdiverse majority-minority city and expressed the importance of diverse-sensitive design. Scientific contributions addressed challenges related to care in design and care for cultural heritage, merging insights from different fields. 'Care in design' focused on bi- or omnidirectional interactions with attention to reciprocity between humans, non-humans, and technology. Design for/as communication explored the reciprocal connection between design and communication, using digital tools and design toolkits for sensitive issues. Design for Diverse Users examined the importance of gender and

specific groups, aiming at more inclusive design processes and outcomes. The Care (full) spaces section analysed the role of the built environment from urban, architectural, and interior design perspectives. Co-creating care (full) designs involves involving end users, empowering unheard groups, and promoting (self-) acceptance. The section on 'Caring for heritage and conservation' took an integrated approach and explored how heritage can guide transformation and adaptation to global challenges. Inclusive Approaches to Intangible Cultural Heritage proposed design strategies to activate heritage and promote diversity and inclusion. Sustaining Traditional Crafts and Techniques focused on preserving cultural heritage objects and techniques. The Adaptation of the Built Environment component explored climate change and adaptive reuse. The Participation and Role of Communities section analysed digital solutions, participation in times of war and the role of communities in disasters. These sections provided insights and strategies to transform heritage in response to current and future global challenges. In this track, a best paper award was granted to **Silje Alberthe Kamille Friis & Annegrete Mølhave** (Royal Danish Academy, Denmark) for the article *"Artful care for self and others in daily design practice"*.

METHOD/ART explored the role of methodology in artistic practice and research, addressing how artists can use their unique perspectives to create innovative and impactful work. During crises, art processes emerge to address critical conditions, from the collapse of local social systems to global ecological catastrophes. Overcoming old conventions and the illusion of control is essential in times of conflict and requires new capacities for artistic engagement and co-action. Art (and design) has the capacity to absorb and reflect our value systems, making them powerful agents of transformation. We took the opportunity to congratulate the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp on their 360-year existence, and for their invaluable contribution to the creative landscape of the city.

Over the past days we have been fortunate to experience a truly enriching event, re-connecting and forging new ties with participants from all over the world. After a long period of absence due to the pandemic, the opportunity to network face-to-face during this conference has proved hugely rewarding. The physical networking opportunities provided by the conference will undoubtedly foster new collaborations and connections. We hope that the ideas presented at the conference will continue to inspire, influence, and spark discussions and collaborations in the design community for years to come. Moreover, we hope that the ripple effect of this conference extends far beyond the immediate participants. As attendees return to their respective communities, armed with newfound inspiration and fresh perspectives, they themselves will become catalysts for change and progress. The insights gained and connections forged here will inevitably spread and spark discussions, collaborations and synergies that will enrich the design landscape on a global scale.

Warmest regards from the Cumulus Antwerp team, we look forward to continuing our creative journey together.

Acknowledgments

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