

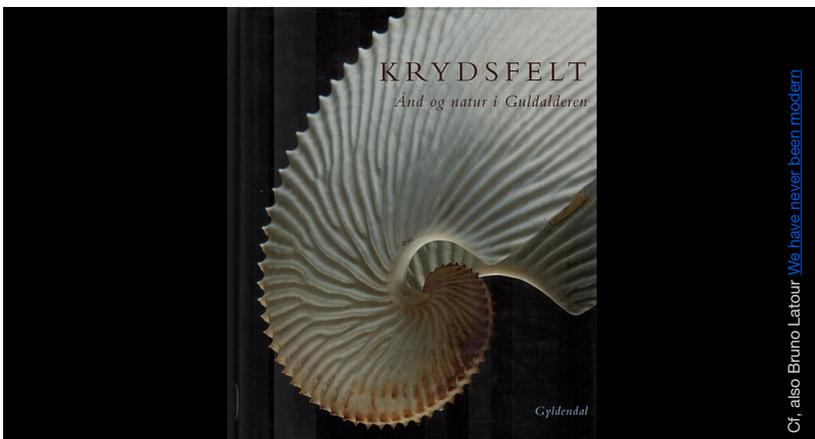


Gowen's (fashion shop) Norman Potter — 1960-63

What are the possible connections between arguing for design as a general school subject, and arguing for design as a professional education (incorporating research and reflection in theoretical practices, at a university level, into its vocational content)? What is the importance of our historical legacy?

The idea of always seeking the 'resident principles' and 'finding them in the job' ([Norman Potter](#)) is one way of describing what design *does*. In the age of *computers* this vocational orientation of designers have been paralleled by subjects in academic research: such as [fractal geometry](#) and [complexity](#).

Today, the cross-fertilisation between measurements (*formatting*) and part-whole relations (*mereology*) are part of mainstream cultural practices among whoever owns a *computer*. But we are blind to the legacy of the *romantic era* when metrics and mereology were conjoined in *art*, *math* and *science*.

Cf. also Bruno Latour [We have never been modern](#)

If the computer has removed us from industrial production this tendency has manifested itself in *three* ways: **1)** a definitive drop in the use of ready-made industrial standard formats; **2)** the highjacking of industrial equipment for artistic production; **3)** a tremendous increase in *rare soil* utilities.

The 3 points link the widespread uses of *digital technology* and *-screens*. They *remove* the contradiction between computing *and* making: activities that now have risen to a global cultural scale. However, we are spending a lot of time daily on working with *size/proportion* on our computer screens.

Getting these right can involve considerable *time* spent on *adding* and *removing*. Which is typically done as we *record* and *replay* whatever we work on. Managing *contingencies*—determining part/whole relationships that *do the job*, and therefore *will do*—determine our daily work-operations.

We should take stock of the fact that such possibilities *did not* exist—at the current scale and frequency—*before* the advent of the computer. Oddly this tendency coincides with constraining/eliminating art-subjects from our general education. Indicating that we do not take stock of what we are doing.

What differs from art-curricula in the past—at the general school level—is that all the formatting choices now are *metric* (as long as they are done on a computer; either on the tool-tip, drop-down menus or bespoke styles). So, we are closer than ever to 'measuring everything' as in the *romantic era*.

At the same time, as mentioned above, we are constantly working with *composition*: the part-whole relationship and its study (mereology), is an *other* legacy from the *romantic era*. A *third* component of this legacy emerges with the idea of *self-criticality*: complexity establishing its own measure.

Self-criticality determines—crossed a certain threshold—the alternation between *self-similarity* and *self-organisation*, whatever the project, *till it computes*. That is, what characterises complex systems in *nature* are presently emerging in our own way of working. A *third nature* emerging.

In the *anthropocene* it is important that we take stock of this tendency: the current metric idea—no matter the unit—emerged in the *romantic era*. It moved from measurements relative to the human (often the *king's*) body, to measurements relative to *natural* phenomena (e.g. the *earth-circumference*).

If we move beyond the use of metrics in making inventories available resources—an age-old function—to pursue the idea of nature setting the scale of measurement (cf, the atomic clock), acting *with* rather than against nature, the idea of *self-criticality* can make sense as a *design-principle*.

The ledger/log remains my prime focus here: but any design-project with research and reflection incorporated will do, because the come-and-go between *record* (self-organisation) and *replay* (self-similarity) are of consequence, at the same level as *adding* and *removing* (self-criticality).