

rethinking the concept of design

Design as an object and as a practice is in transition. The **design** object has **transformed** from **tangible**, material products to include more **elusive** creations such as strategies and interactions. likewise design practice has changed. Designers are no longer sole contributors to the process of designing, they participate in interdisciplinary communities of practice.

The **concept** of design has **expanded** and is expanding still. Design theory does not shy away from a broad notion of design; even so, the expansion may be stretching the concept **too far?** Perhaps draining design of meaning and leaving the concept empty?

It is my contention, that the present condition of design is **reminiscent of the condition of modernist sculpture** as described by the art historian Rosalind Krauss in her famed 1979 essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field".

after modernism

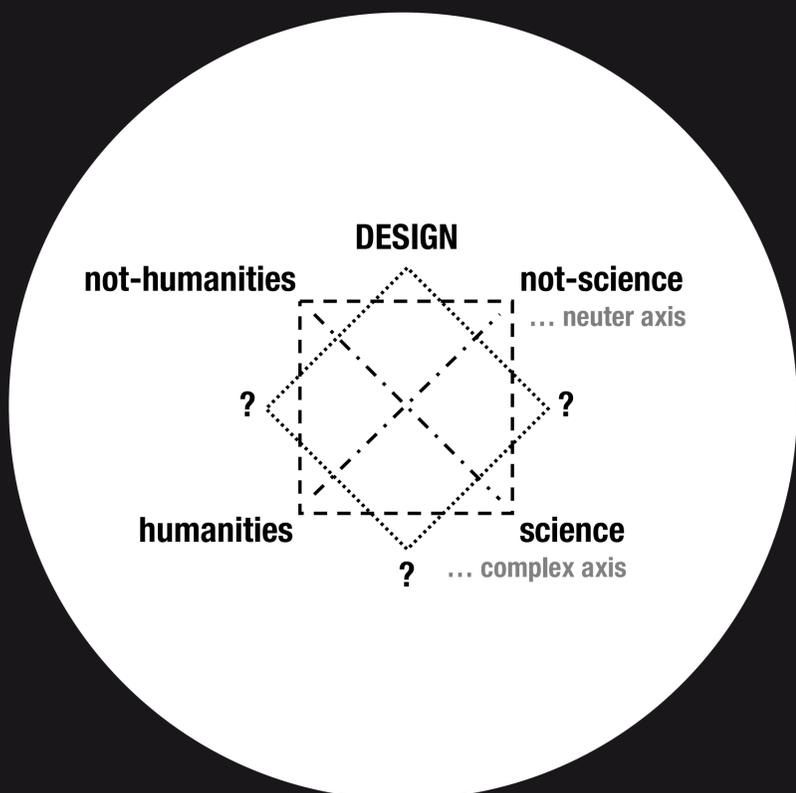
In **late 20th century**, sculpture as a concept had transformed to such an extent that it had become impossible to refer to sculpture in other terms than negations – as not-landscape, not-architecture.

Sculpture then was **everything** – and **nothing**. Krauss speaks of a historical **rupture in the logic** of sculpture, and to conceptualize a new postmodern logic, she called for a **rethinking of sculpture** as a dynamic field; elastic, yet finite, it should be viewed as an expanded set of related positions to spatially occupy and explore.

I call for a **similar rethinking** of the concept of **design**. In "Whatever became of Design Methodology?" and "The Three Rs", two essays from the first issue of Design Studies also from 1979, the design theorist Bruce Archer describes design as one of three **fields of knowledge** – the others being science and humanities. Archer presents an understanding of **dynamic connectivity** parallel to Krauss.

Combining the two diagrams from Krauss and Archer, **I propose** that the perspective of **design in an expanded field** is both necessary and fruitful to understand what design objects and design practices are – and are not – after modernism.

expanded field



diagrams combined



contact information