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The Design Journal and the meaning of design

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The Design Journal and the Meaning of Design

This issue marks the 20th year of the Design Journal. As you can imagine, it is quite a milestone, and one that is worth celebrating!

It has been quite a journey. Founded by Professor Rachel Cooper OBE and Professor Jack Ingram, the journal was originally published by Gower. Initially, each volume consisted of three issues per year and from the start it covered a wide variety of research issues. The editorial introduction to the initial trial issue published in 1997 stated:

"When we say 'design', we mean: the design disciplines covering products, places and communication (i.e. graphic design, information design, product and industrial design, fashion and textiles, interior design and designer/maker issues), design management (design strategy, design policy, marketing and design, design and manufacturing, innovation), design theory (design methods, psychology and design, creativity and design), eco and environmental design, gender issues in design. We anticipate these topics will be addressed from an educational, historical, technological or practical perspective." (Cooper, 1997)

Quickly building a strong following, the journal (then published by Ashgate [which took over Gower] in 2001) moved to the academic publishers Berg in 2008, and increased its output to four issues per year in 2011. Berg became part of the Bloomsbury group, and the journal was published under that imprint from 2013 until 2015 when it moved to Routledge (part of the Taylor & Francis group). In response to growing demand, and the expansion of design research to include new developments adding to the already long list cited above, the journal is now published six times a year and continues to provide a forum for design scholars, professionals, educators and managers worldwide. As well as moving to an online submission system, we have introduced online publishing prior to print to ensure scholars' work is seen as soon as is possible. The latest developments include the ability to add online any additional content (to cover video-/timebased media, etc.) and the scope to print certain elements of the Journal in colour where required.

To celebrate this anniversary, we thought it would be interesting to revisit some of the very early papers that were published in the Journal, and ask the authors to reflect and comment on what was said then, on the changes that have occurred in design over the last two decades, and how they might comment differently now given those changes. These papers will appear in issues through the year, interspersed with commissioned pieces by influential design critics and practitioners reflecting on the same changes. The first of these, quite fittingly, is by Rachel Cooper.

The other papers in this issue demonstrate quite clearly the continuing breadth of relevance of design to different groups of stakeholders described above. They cover a wide range of issues and directly address design as it relates to individual users and consumers, design as a strategic tool for corporations and

organizations, design at a national/state policy level, and the relevance of design at a global level in ensuring a sustainable future.

Two closely related papers (by the same group of researchers) address the meaning of design at very personal levels. The first of these, by Paavilainen, Ahde-Deal and Koskinen concerns the ways in which people relate to designed objects in the home environment. Building on the well-known and hugely influential work of Csikszentmihalyi and Roschberg-Halton, Bourdieu and others, a longtitudinal qualitative research study in Helsinki (as the authors note, a very 'design-savvy' community) was used to explore the 'meaning of design in life as it is lived'. They conclude that this does indeed look very different to design at the point of production and dissemination. As they note, 'production is only one phase in the life cycle of a design object. From the standpoint of a man on the street, it is not even the most relevant phase'. This observation leads the authors to call for a perspective to address the bias towards production that they have observed in current literature. The second paper, led by Ahde-Deal, uses a series of personal interviews with women to discuss how certain items of jewellery transcend the usual aspects of display to become a constituent part of their self-identity. Again situating the designed object in everyday life, the stories elicited during the research reveal the social processes at play in the act of turning items of jewellery into totemic objects, 'power jewellery' and valued heirlooms as they move from the point of purchase to the core self. Objects, the authors state, may 'grow larger than life and achieve something akin to transcendence' and the message to designers is not to overlook this potential.

Two further, yet quite different papers also explore the personal meaning of objects. The paper by Timur Ogut describes the creation of 'The Museum of Innocence' by Orhan Pamuk, used as a central strand of his novel of the same name. The placing of these everyday objects in this context raises a number of semiotic questions about the nature of the objects and their role as signifiers, as although the objects themselves are 'real', the museum is a construct of the author and so is a 'fake' context, which results in a 'game of signification'. In stark contrast, Sylleros, de la Cuadra and Cádiz explore the object in a very real context of design validation. The authors describe in depth a process to measure the level of interaction quality a product, service or other object has as an indication of its ability to provide user satisfaction – the object's validity. Through drawing on academic work in the human sciences on the biology of cognition, the authors discuss the problematic of objectivity – that what the observer perceives is constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by the observer, and therefore is constantly modified – a process that extends to the meanings that we project onto the objects with which we interact. The subjective quality of this interaction is the source of satisfaction.

Moving from design as it relates to the individual to design as it relates to corporations and organizations, Nam's paper looks at ways of managing corporate design functions through effective design leadership activities. Recognizing that Asian culture has different design management practices from European culture, his study limits its frame of reference to the organizational conditions to achieve quality design among South Korean and Japanese

manufacturers. He notes that the organizational structure of the design function within a corporation affects the role that design plays and has a significant impact on the influence of design decisions and interdepartmental coordination.

Regarding design at a national or state level, Whicher and Walters note that while design features in the majority of European Members State's innovation policies, there are often gaps at regional levels. Their research attempts to provide support for the development of effective policies for design to fill these gaps. Their approach, 'Design Innovation Ecosystems', transposes established innovation theory into the design domain. As an exemplar of transferring academic research into industry, the workshops exploring these issues were run with individuals involved in design sector knowledge exchange programmes. These design policy workshops aimed to identify opportunities for shared learning and the transfer of good practice between two regions – Wales and Scotland. The authors conclude that the co-design process of mapping the Design Innovation Ecosystem in these regions enabled stakeholders to identify ways in which design might play an effective role and to generate new ideas 'for and from policymakers'.

Sustainability is, of course, an issue of global concern, and design is playing an important role trying to educate and persuade users to adopt more sustainable practices of consumption in their daily lives. Coskun and Erbug's paper describes their research into more effective ways of achieving this complex transformation through more clearly and accurately profiling different types of consumer. By developing User Orientation Maps, a large sample of users was revealed to consist of a number of different groups of people, each of which had different levels of concern about and held different attitudes towards sustainability as an important issue. The authors propose that each of these groups may require different encouragements and different rewards in order to engage them in behavioural change. The use of User Orientation Maps helps designers to understand and visualize this user diversity and therefore should be of significant help in developing Design for Sustainable Behaviour.

The issue concludes with Clive Edwards' useful review of Form and Structure in Interior Architecture by Graeme Booker and Sally Stone, a book he describes as a valuable and accessible introduction for students of interior architecture.

Reference

Cooper, R. (1997). 'Design research comes of age'. The Design Journal, 0(1), 1.