Sheffield Hallam University

All in a day's work

ATKINSON, Paul <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6633-7242>

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

https://shura.shu.ac.uk/21135/

Citation:

All in a Day's Work

Back in the dim, dark, distant past when I first trained as a designer, the requirements of the job, though involved and detailed, were presented as manifestly straightforward. One had a role to play as an important member of a team, acting as a catalyst between different factions such as research, marketing and production, but that role was at least defined – albeit loosely. The responsibilities of the designer had fairly clear start and end points where one would become involved in a project and where one would hand over to others.

Since those far off days the number of factions involved in such teams has grown enormously, the designer's role has expanded exponentially and the designer's responsibility has seemingly been extended beyond all recognition. Designers now regularly interact with all kinds of specialists, ranging from psychologists to sociologists and from engineers to web developers, and not least the users of the end product. Starting perhaps with the green agenda, designers began to take responsibility for the ecological impact of the materials they specified in response to design briefs. Then, being concerned with production assembly was one thing – but what about disassembly and recycling? – Design the product lifecycle. What about the nature of the interaction between product and user? – Design the experience. How does it fit into the infrastructure? – Design the service. Multidisciplinarity is now an expectation rather than an exception.

In the introduction to their polemic 'An A–Z of Contemporary Design', Rodgers and Bremner justify the requirement for a new critique by noting this shift in the focus of design to encompass a broader remit than merely the 'feeding of capitalism'. As more and more aspects of the whole process of design from production through consumption to disposal are laid at the feet of the designer, the shifting boundaries of design threaten to turn the discipline into a panacea for all the world's ills. This perspective lies behind the majority of entries in the A–Z, from 'A is for Alterplinarity' to 'Z is for Zzz …' – the inevitable exhaustion experienced from attempting to address environmental, social, economic and spiritual crises. In between lies a diverse range of problems design is now expected to tackle.

Also recognizing the expanding remit of design from a 'trade activity' to a 'liberal art of technological culture', White and van Koten adopted an action research approach to facilitate knowledge exchange between community groups, local authorities and academics. Using climate change as a focus, 'Co-Designing for Sustainability: Strategizing Community Carbon Emission Reduction through Socio-Ecological Innovation' demonstrates the strategic role of design in 'transcending the constraints of the current consumerist paradigm to co-create a better future'.

Similarly concerned with the transcending of the consumerist paradigm, Tamminen and Moilanen's paper 'Possibility-Driven Spins in the Open Design Community' explores the impact of the seemingly obvious observation that much of the motivation of the people involved in Open Design is not to solve problems per se, or to contribute more consumer products to a world already awash, but

to participate in the activity of design as an end in itself – as a means of creating self-identity and feeling good about themselves. Possibility-Driven Design is an approach with a positive bent, associated with 'well-being and what makes us happy' as opposed to one focusing merely on the removal of problems. An examination of the practices of the Open Design community within the context of Possibility-Driven Design provides many examples that might usefully be employed in commercial industry for the benefit of all.

Also concerned with applying academic theory to commercial industry, Wilkinson, Walters and Evans discuss the expansion of design research, in which, they cite, 'The market driven era is finally giving way to the people-centred era.' In 'Creating and Testing a Model-Driven Framework for Accessible User-Centric Design', they discuss user-centred design as a necessarily multidisciplinary practice and use case studies of user-centred product development (highchairs, pushchairs and wheelchairs) to develop a framework to apply the process in a commercial environment. They also note the extension of the notion of 'usefulness' by companies in their aspirations to create emotional links between the product and the user.

An alternative framework, which also includes multidisciplinary groups working together in a participatory design process, is posited by Escobar-Tello in 'A Design Framework to Build Sustainable Societies: Using Happiness as Leverage'. Her 'Design for Happiness Framework' similarly takes into account a 'wider scope of concerns which are influencing the current transition of the discipline beyond strict industrial and economic boundaries' in order to deliver design solutions that take wellbeing and happiness into account in order to contribute to a more socially sustainable society. 'Design for Happiness', she writes, 'considers and embodies the key fundamentals needed to bridge the social gap in design.'

The mechanics of knowledge exchange are also examined by Davis, Docherty and Dowling in 'Design Thinking and Innovation: Synthesizing Concepts of Knowledge Co-Creation in Spaces of Professional Development'. In particular, the paper examines 'Ba' – the 'ideal spaces' where knowledge creation occurs, and where that knowledge moves from being tacit to explicit. An action research case study in conjunction with Social Services scrutinized co-creation methods in the origination of Ba spaces and developing them into interactive environments. Design Thinking emerged as a crucial enabler in both the formation and operation of such Ba spaces.

As with the practice of Design itself, Design Studies as a discipline has widened its remit to include the analysis of amateur design activity and its creations. Maldini's paper 'Attachment, Durability and the Environmental Impact of Digital DIY' takes Digital DIY as its focus – the creation of objects by their own users through the means of 3D design software and direct digital manufacturing. Using ethnographic research methods, Maldini takes the sustainability agenda as her driver and tests the extent to which the 'enhanced agency of users', and their 'autonomy from manufacturers' is manifested in the increased longevity of DIY objects. Do self-designed objects that are digitally produced necessarily instill

greater emotional attachment? Due to the particular process of production employed here, Maldini thinks not. Digital DIY products, she argues, can be too easily replaceable to hold the same cherished value of the irreplaceable heirloom.

Armstrong, Niinimäki and Lang are similarly concerned with emotional attachment to goods – in this case as a means to slow down the fashion cycle to a more sustainable pace. In 'Towards Design Recipes to Curb the Clothing Carbohydrate Binge', the authors employ the metaphor of the human metabolic system, and conclude that a 'healthier' diet could be achieved by replacing the 'short-term highs' of fashion consumption with more meaningful attributes such as memory and emotional attachment.

Finally, as an example of multidisciplinarity in action, this issue appropriately concludes with Dan Wolstenholme's book review of 'Service Design: From Insight to Implementation' by Andy Polaine, Lavrans Lovlie and Ben Reason, which describes not only the practice of Service Design, but the 'philosophy and thinking' of the field.