Sheffield Hallam University

Root and Branch

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

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Well, here we are again at the start of a new year, and the first of another volume of the Design Journal, now in its 23rd year. The cycle of growth continues. When founding editor Rachel Cooper started this journal, she often wrote in her editorials about the wide spread of subject matter that was submitted and appeared within its pages. This variety has continued ever since, and in fact has grown as design research has established roots, branched out to address new areas, and where it has blossomed into a mature discipline. Yet, despite this diversity of content, Rachel found there were often single themes appearing—strands that could weave issues together as a whole. Similarly, I have also on occasion found those single strands that can link each article to the next. It doesn't happen all the time, yet while there is no single thread connecting all of the articles in this issue, it would be rare indeed for there to be no connections at all to be made. This is certainly the case here, as a number of different themes emerge, each shared between pairs of articles.

Firstly, a theme of 'developing cultures'—cultures of research and practice. Corazzo, Harland, Honnor and Rigley's article, 'The Challenges for Graphic Design in Establishing an Academic Research Culture' takes as its starting point the criticism levelled by the 2014 Research Excellence Framework, which found 'the intellectual and theoretical underpinning of graphic and communication design…to be generically weak'. To test the validity of this statement keyword searches were made to assess those outputs in the 2014 exercise that were graphic design submissions. Analysis of those submissions did reveal a general absence of research questions and a lack of awareness of contemporary discourse in the field. The findings were used as the basis of focus groups at Graphic Design Educators' Conferences to gather a range of views on the context of poor performance in graphic design research. The emerging themes were coded to provide five categories of views responding to the criticisms against the discipline. The authors accept that graphic design is yet to establish an academic research culture in the UK, and numerous recommendations are made for academics and institutions to consider in strengthening the research standing of the discipline.

Kraff's article, 'A Critical Exploration of Agonistic Participatory Design' also addresses developing cultures, beginning by questioning the extent to which projects claiming to be collaborative and democratic actually have their agendas determined by designers, researchers and project leaders, and so undermine meaningful participation. Projects, she says, need to be open to collaborative renegotiation, especially in community based projects. In an 'agonistic democracy' approach, the pluralistic views of all stakeholders

involved are taken into account, with a view to positive outcomes arising from the perhaps inevitable conflicts. Agonistic democracy, then, is a political form of design that reveals inherent power structures and issues of inequality. The article uses a case study of a design project in a Kenyan fishing village to develop local tourism. Finding that while the approach was a desirable method of engaging people, the different abilities and attitudes towards engaging in discussing sensitive issues in different cultures needs to be taken into account.

The second theme addresses 'different types of practice and thinking'. Sun's article 'Toward a New Agenda for Service Design Research' reviews the research on one type of practice—service design—over the last 20 years to assess the state of the field as it stands and suggest new areas of research for the future. The author's aim is to raise awareness of how service design is perceived across different disciplines, and provide a typological overview of the research available. Collating the research showed a massive increase in service design articles over the last decade, highlighting the timeliness of the review. A 3 × 3 framework was developed to analyse the types of knowledge created against their epistemological positions. The available research was then analysed to locate the knowledge in one of the nine classifications in the framework. The completed analysis indicates that the existing research is dominated by practice-oriented and phenomenological studies and lacking in systematic enquiries leading to theory building. In short, in order to advance the autonomy of the discipline, future research enquiries in the discipline need to be 'about' service design, not 'through' service design.

Hall's article, 'Design Thinking: Governing Inter-domain Thinking for Tackling the Anthropocene', explores how different cultures and modes of thinking could be brought to bear on perhaps the most important issue of our time. Hall traces the development of thinking 'domains' back to 1959 and C.P. Snow's controversial assertion of the separation between the sciences and the arts and humanities as two different cultures, and his proposal of a 'third culture' that might act as a bridge between the two. The same trajectory was developed further in 1978 by Bruce Archer, with his proposed description of this third culture as 'design thinking': a proposal, Hall demonstrates, that is still being debated and argued about today. Hall goes on to discuss knowledge as a prerequisite for governance, and reflects that the severe social problems raised by the industrial revolution were in many cases new problems that could not be solved merely by applying the learning from past experiences. In order to govern, new forms of thinking (in this case scientific thinking) were required. Following this train of thought, the age of the Anthropocene similarly requires new ways of thinking in order to address the wicked problems we are now encountering. Such a new mode of thinking will need to be collaborative and inter-domain. Because of its very nature, design thinking as a third culture can and should be a part of that collaboration.

The third theme explores practices of everyday life. In Woodcock and Tovey's article, 'Designing Whole Journey, Multimodal Transport Provision', the authors argue that in the case of transport research, the mix of disciplines and numerous stakeholders involved result in the voice of the user being lost. The article reports on a research project to address this issue, by developing a 'whole journey passenger experience measurement instrument'. By using key performance indicators to thoroughly assess the whole of a journey from start to end, deficiencies in any part of the journey can be identified as a target for future investment. Testing the measurement instrument with thousands of users undertaking their daily journeys across numerous cities in different countries highlighted the complex nature of the problems involved when different organizations are responsible for different parts of a journey. However, available technology and suitable design input were seen to be able to resolve the issues fairly easily, if a holistic, integrated approach is taken and a user-centred mindset is adopted.

Similarly, Rose, Alexander and Grassi's article, 'Ethnographic Documentary as a Translator of Architecture and Urban Research' examines the role of video as a research method in architecture, design and the humanities. The case study involved an intensive, short intercultural project where Australian architecture students produced documentaries about the lived spaces of an Italian city. The video ethnographic approach enabled the students to be immersed in the daily lives of the citizens they were documenting, and combined with poetic documentary techniques, afforded the production of high quality, informative and engaging films. At the same time, the documentaries provided a means for citizens to engage in urban discourse and highlighted current practices and potential futures for the city.

The final theme is storytelling. Celikoglu, Krippendorff and Ogut's article 'Inviting Ethnographic Conversations to inspire Design' looks at how informal discussions with users can be utilized to inform the design process. The theory is that 'stories make meaning', and that such narratives are important in understanding how people behave. Building on Krippendorff's notion of 'discursively informed design', the researchers collated user narratives from previous ethnographic research projects on issues of health, and structured them into different themes within a single document, and then asked designers to consider the stories as a stimulus for the design of a product or service that would address the issues raised. This was followed by conversations with the designers involved to find out how the stories had generated design ideas. Qualitative content analysis of those discussions provided a coding of categories of narrative substance and their design implications. The findings indicate that designers used certain categories of narrative content to gain new perspectives, define criteria, improve existing designs and to develop new ideas.

The title of Li's PhD study report, 'The Design of a System to Support Storytelling Between Older Adults Living in a Nursing Home and Their

Children', really says it all. It tackles the issue of social isolation experienced by many older people using a research-through-design method, co-developing interactive products that facilitate discussions between care home residents and between residents and their children, providing benefits for each.

This issue closes with a book review by Chris Goldie of 'Flow: Interior, Landscape and Architecture in the Era of Liquid Modernity', edited by Penny Sparke et al. Goldie finds the book to be a 'stimulating collection of essays…permeated with many different 'ideas and themes', providing 'a considerable resource for thinking about architecture and landscape'.