

Social Distancing

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Social Distancing

As I write this editorial, we are in a global state of emergency due to the Coronavirus, and the future remains uncertain. By the time you read this, it may have subsided as fast as it arrived and be consigned to history. More likely, it will still be a serious issue that we are in the throes of dealing with, or possibly it will be worse than at the time of writing with still no sign of a vaccine in sight. No matter the state of play, it will obviously have had a massive impact on us emotionally, socially and economically.

The most amazing thing about this pandemic was the speed at which all our lives changed. Rulebooks were torn up, financial restrictions thrown out of the window, and liberties and freedoms that we all took for granted disappeared overnight. Supermarkets stripped bare of essential items; communal events, concerts and festivals cancelled; cafés, pubs and restaurants forced to either close or adopt new practices of take-away provision; and social etiquette transformed as people stopped shaking hands, hugging, or even standing too close to each other. Schools and nurseries closed; teaching moved online; people urged not to travel and visit relatives; and wherever possible to work from home.

It is not clear how quickly or even if we will ever return to exactly how things were, and which elements of our changed practices might become 'the new normal'. After working from home for extended periods of time, the need to commute so far and so often may well be called into question. Face to face meetings might come to be seen as an outdated anachronism, as long-standing online alternatives finally become readily accepted. Temporary hacks adopted by retailers and doctor's surgeries, such as taped zones on floors to maintain social distances, might or might not disappear, but perhaps our altered behaviours in such places may remain. Potentially, there are myriad ways in which design may be called on to redesign services, interiors, products, transport and online communications to take our changed social behaviours into account.

Design is often seen as an agent of future change, and this is a view which has particular resonance now with the situation we are in. As usual we have a varied collection of articles in this issue, many concerned with dealing with future change in some way. And as usual, you will be able to make a series of connections as you read through them.

In 'Generative Product Design Futures', Dean and Loy assess the impact on the design profession of the latest industrial Revolution, 'Industry 4.0', noting it will surely be as disruptive as the first Industrial Revolution. Despite the technologies involved becoming more and more commonplace, and a range

of impacts already starting to take place, the authors note that by and large, product design is still being taught along the lines it has been since the mid nineteenth century—a situation that potentially runs the risk of product design becoming irrelevant. The authors argue that the introduction of CAD and additive manufacturing is now such that 3 D computer modelling is moving from being about documentation at the end points of the design process to being central to the design development process itself. Yet the potential for rethinking the future roles for students of product design are not being fully explored. Various project pieces are discussed to provide a range of examples of how varied these future roles might be within Industry 4.0—outside of the strictures of the factories of today.

Another article examining potential developments in design education is Du, Ji and Hu's article 'How to Cooperate in Collaborative Design', which explores how teams of designers at different experience levels interact with each other, and the processes through which they turn thought into activities. As might be expected, the study revealed that teams of recent and novice designers did not communicate or collaborate as well as teams consisting of experienced experts, but closer analysis of the different behaviours involved provides the groundwork for design educators to better teach and prepare students for more collaborative design work in the future.

Güneş' article 'Extracting Online Product Review Patterns and Causes' looks at the potential role of online product reviews as a way of providing detailed feedback on product design solutions and in helping product designers to better understand users and their needs. The range of different formats of online product reviews, though, makes them difficult and very time consuming to structure and analyse. Automated systems that use text mining and complex algorithms can bridge the gap here, and ultimately become cost-effective when the number of reviews analysed is high enough. The author proposes a pattern recognition method for designers to extract and make sense of online product review information, demonstrated through a case study of candidate patterns arising in reviews of a cordless electric kettle.

The article 'Exploratory Design Research for the Blind and Visually Impaired Visitor in Exhibitions' by Chen and Chou points out that despite recent developments in interactive and multimedia technologies, research into the particular requirements of blind and visually impaired people with respect to visiting museums and galleries have still not been sufficiently researched. This study focusses on this specific problem in a Taiwanese context. A literature review identified a number of questions which were then used as the basis of focus group interviews. Coding and analysis of the answers led to a series of design suggestions to improve the situation.

We are all aware of the potential for the technologies surrounding the Internet of Things to challenge individual privacy and freedom. 'Made-up Rubbish', an article by Jacobs et al., reports on a research study that employed design

fictions as part of a participatory design process to inform the transparency and governance of Internet of Things technologies installed in public spaces. The use of design fiction world-building based on real community issues (such as waste collection) more easily allowed citizen participants to imagine the implications of possible future scenarios, and proved to be a valuable method in which the community could be empowered in the deployment of Internet of Things ecosystems.

The article 'Finding New Perspectives through Theme Investigation' by van Leeuwen et al. addresses the subject of tackling complex challenges through the process of 'reframing' in order to look at the relevant issues from a different perspective and in doing so, potentially find new and original solutions. The authors propose that by getting a deeper understanding of the different human themes that underlie wicked problems, designers might more easily gain the necessary insights to reframe the original problem. The team of researchers evaluated a series of co-design projects, one of which is presented as a case study of theme investigation, and a list of best practices for the process is presented.

A couple of PhD Study Reports draw this issue to a close. Lee's study report 'Olfactory Sense as an Object of Design Practice' examines the use of a sense of smell to create an emotional experience between users and smart devices. Lee notes the predominance of a lack of user engagement with certain smart objects after an initial period of involved usage, and her study explores potential routes to add perceived value to using these artefacts involving the use of Artificial Intelligence chatbots and aromas.

Cinovics' PhD study report 'Can Tableware Design Change Eating Habits and Encourage Weight Reduction?' asks if design can be employed to change eating habits and so improve wellbeing. The author proposes that tableware such as dining plates might be designed to look and feel as if they are holding more food than they actually are, and so reduce eaters' portion sizes. Early experiments have not proved conclusive, but a series of further experiments is underway.