

# Introduction

Life is precious. The tragic events of September 11th provided us with a painful reminder of this simple truth. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon also raise a number of important issues about design. First, they highlighted the potent symbolic value that objects can attain within our increasingly global culture. Second, the attack made clear how vulnerable designed objects are when placed in situations for which they were not intended. Third, the attack points out how central design is in establishing and challenging conditions of security. In the immediate aftermath of the attack, security concerns will, no doubt, figure prominently in discussions of design. In the long term, however, it is designers' ability to nurture and celebrate the dignity of all life that holds out the best hope for a better future.

We raise these points to confirm the journal's belief that design issues are embedded in social situations where one might least expect to find them. In his introduction to Daniel Defoe's *An Essay on Projects*, which we are publishing in this issue, Tomás Maldonado notes that we live in a "projecting age," as Defoe called his own time more than three hundred years earlier. Maldonado sees Defoe, who is known to many primarily as the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, as someone who can help the world develop a new sense of "Honest Projects."

The term is well suited to characterize the articles in this issue, all of which deal in one way or another with the struggle to characterize design as a socially meaningful activity. Sulfikar Amir takes up this concern on a national level in his article on the development of modern industrial design policies and practice in Indonesia. He notes how government officials as well as educators moved from a situation where design was little understood either as an activity that was valuable for economic development or one whose educational demands were not simply based on prior models from the arts or crafts. Amir shows how closely intertwined national economic objectives were with the need to develop an industrial design profession in Indonesia and he points out some of the difficulties in achieving that goal.

Cal Swann relates action research to the striving of many design professionals and educators to move beyond design's original applied arts tradition. He recognizes that the design process is one of action, yet he acknowledges that this process must be made visible and known to others. Swan advocates the adoption of practices from action research as a way of doing this, particularly project

documentation and the development of more sophisticated case studies. This, according to him, will help make design activity more understandable to researchers as well as to the general public.

Carl Francis DiSalvo, like Swann, is also concerned with the question of knowledge. His focus is on the internet and how the experience of navigating a web site can convert information to knowledge through a process which he calls “the meaningful interaction with and action upon this information.” DiSalvo uses several case studies; the Smithsonian Institution’s exhibition *Revealing Things* and a component of the Guggenheim CyberAtlas Project called “I-Life.” In a way that would support Cal Swann’s call for more case study documentation, DiSalvo analyzes aspects of the above projects to build his argument that we have spent too much energy on disseminating information and not enough on designing conditions for interacting meaningfully with it.

DiSalvo’s emphasis on experience as an important ground for knowledge echoes, albeit indirectly, Jerry Kathman’s claim that a new conception of branding is crucial in order to mark an important shift in focus by some manufacturers from the characteristics of the product to its role in a user’s life. It means going beyond the design of an appealing package to a more complex way of engaging the consumer with the product on offer, particularly in situations where the user has the option to contribute to the final form of the product itself as in the cases, for example, of some cosmetics and automobiles.

The concept of “Honest Projects” intersects with gender issues in Rebecca Houze’s article on how designers and design educators in early twentieth-century Vienna drew on the feminine identity of modern interior design. The innate talent for home decoration that women were said to possess also provided new opportunities for women designers. The exhibiting group *Wiener Kunst im Hause*, half of whose members were women, was one example which, in fact, influenced the showroom design and projects of the better known Wiener Werkstätte.

It is a coincidence that the theme of this issue’s cover and interior graphic spreads is the heart, a symbol of love. Designer Hanno Ehses has drawn from his extensive collection of heart images to show us how varied its use can be. Despite some ironic uses, the presence of so many hearts in this issue is a strong impetus for the entire *Design Issues* staff to express its hopes for eventual peace and justice in the world.

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