

Introduction

Recent numbers of *Design Issues* have served to highlight the enriching effects of cultural perspectives and traditions on the already complex, and expanding, field of design research. They have also brought into sharper focus the range of research methodologies, epistemologies, and vocabularies that parallel established approaches in North America and Europe or are in the process of emerging. The richness of these cultural approaches also helps to highlight the balance that designer's must find between, for example, the universal and the individual or between freedom and order. Elizabeth Coleman's paper identifies this challenge as the stuff of design—a challenge to design those systems in which people and power can be organized to sustain the optimal dynamic between freedom and order in human affairs. This also helps to bring a sharper focus to the increasing role that design will play in the evolution of systems and ways of thinking that help to govern the conduct of institutions or human affairs.

Jan van Toorn's reflections on European modernist graphic design practice focuses on the discipline's social, cultural, and democratic responsibility. His debate opens through a comparison of Jan Tschicold's "aesthetic universalism" alongside El Lissitzky's "social dynamics of form" to argue that the former's universal formalism is no longer an option for citizen's who will now experience the "symbolic violence . . . and information economy of [a] planetary market." van Toorn's caution against efforts to evolve such a monumental worldwide aesthetic are just as readily applicable to issues of design research and methodology where the experience of local contexts will have equal weight to the development of universal standards. D. J. Huppertz's paper on the recovery and relocation of Jean Prouvé's Maison Tropicale from a French colonial city in Africa to its display in New York, London, and Paris helps to illustrate how the meanings and understandings we attach to artifacts can be unbalanced by their cultural context. The display of Prouvé's modular house in Europe and North America lauded its industrial modernist design whilst obscuring its parallel existence as a colonial object designed for life in the local conditions of French Africa.

The relationship of designed things to users' experiences of them continues to be a leitmotif colored by national and cultural approaches. François Nsenga's paper on the SIP system for design research provides a valuable record of this experiment at the Centre Beaubourg in Paris. In order to provide the general public and expert groups with comprehensive information on artifacts

manufactured in France (as well as imports circulating on the French market) SIP set out to collect empirical data on the perceived relationships between artifacts and their users. This research was firmly based on a rationalist model of use attributes rather than the meaning-driven choices sometimes made by consumers on a more irrational basis. In “Wrapped Attention” Stuart Walker explores the potential for industrial products to sustain meaningful relationships with their users through a sense of personal attachment that will endure through time. Using the mobile phone as a case study he argues that the opportunity to build personal attachments between inanimate electronic devices and their users will in turn enhance the sustainability of our environment by reducing product redundancy and, hence, recycling. Peter Kroes, in the second of his papers on the “Theories of technical functions” illustrates why the difficulty in representing functional properties in highly technical industrial artifacts is as much a consequence of their users intentions as it is of their technical/structural properties.

Isil Oygur and Nancy Blossom use eight case studies drawn from Turkey’s emerging economy to examine the design of user experiences through products and services. A significant conclusion of their work demonstrates the difficulty in trying to apply Western-orientated user research methods in the Turkish context. Alongside this Joaquin T. Iduarte and Martha P. Zarza have examined the design management practices of twenty Mexican SMEs to identify the opportunity to build a capacity for new product development alongside the supply of design services. Rosan Chow and Wolfgang Jonas go on to argue that the traditional research method of first studying user responses in order to then evolve design solutions is limited to relatively determined and contained contexts. They argue that, because many user contexts are now highly undetermined, there is a greater need to develop new methods of projective design competence that are able to conceive and synthesise future systems, situations or artifacts.

Many of the articles in this number of *Design Issues* convey a profound sense of the contribution that design can make to the conduct of human affairs in, what many perceive to be, a critical moment in our history. The articles also expose limitations in design thinking and its approaches as we seek to address these major challenges. Indeed, it is through the ongoing conversations that we seek to stimulate in the pages of *Design Issues* that these understandings will be built across the many cultures of our community and the systems/institutions that derive their very strength and authority from design in all its forms and applications.

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