

# Introduction

Debates concerning the nature and essence of design continue to stimulate our insights into this elusive but most fundamental of concepts—in all of its rich dimensions. From the earliest periods of humanism, through the industrial age to a new post-digital era, design has gradually moved from the shadows of our consciousness to enlighten all aspects of what it now means to be human. It is at the core of our experience in the world. Whereas it may be tempting to assume that earlier approaches to design are abandoned, as new ways of re-thinking them emerge, experience tells us this is not always so. Just like different approaches to the design of human momentum, the earlier forms of transportation often continue to co-exist alongside their successors—yet, new life has to be breathed into these earlier forms if they are to survive and constitute a rich ecology of ways and means.

Indeed, the conversation about design, past and present, has never been so intense and sophisticated as at present. As we have reshaped some earlier concepts of design (e.g., it being simply the means to provide the tools needed to achieve our ambitions) the debate has intensified. In a post-digital era that now offers all of the tools needed to make most anything we want, the pressing dilemma is no longer to think how we can make something, but to ask ourselves what it is we want to achieve in a complex and fragile world. The imagination needed to address this fundamental proposition requires a capacity for broad understandings—inside which the specialist needs of professions will be nested. Here the wisdom of a humanist education, and what it means to be human in a social and environmental context, returns to infuse the debate on design.

In this context, and within the pages of *Design Issues*, we seek to embrace the complexity and variety of design's rich ecology in the knowledge that it will always sustain a focus on what it means to be human in contemporary life. In this issue the conversation opens with a debate on human-centered design. In his introduction to "Design Discourse for Organization Design: Foundations of Human-Centered Design," Rodrigo Magalhaes quotes Karl Weick's statement, "We [organisation design thinkers] now function as a discipline of critics who lower confidence, rather than a discipline of designers who raise confidence." He responds to this challenge with the aim to re-establish the design discipline as a

foundation of organization design. In so doing, Magalhaes distinguishes between earlier perceptions of design as “structure” or “configuration” and a more action-oriented interpretation in which design is not determined, nor constrained, by the environment. In this context, design is neither reactive nor self-serving but a proactive service that can help to shape and create new environments in which human beings will behave. Magalhaes admits that progress towards this aim has been slow with design still being dominated by strictly rational engineering-like approaches at the expense of human-centered considerations that emphasize action and transformational change.

Following, Hannah Drayson continues the conversation through a discourse in medical science where human perception and human experience are a priori. In “Design(ing) and the Placebo Effect—A Productive Idea,” she highlights the beneficial effects that people can experience from seemingly inert medicines. Here a placebo is a “sham” treatment given to someone in such a way that it creates within them the impression of having been real and effective. The long association of placebo with “sham” tactics has tended to stereotype its application in design as a form of deception. By way of illustration Drayson cites the illusion of control that people have experienced when using non-functioning buttons on a Manhattan pedestrian crossing. She then goes on to cite Dunne and Raby’s *Placebo Project* in which “sham” design interventions are situated in domestic environments to test the degree to which they stimulate psychological comforts and feelings of well-being. Drayson then goes on to discuss the legal and ethical issues raised by the design of direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription drugs where the appearance, color, and shape of generic tablets mimic brand-name drugs. Placebo responses such as these are often tied to the associated narratives and cultural references that stimulate human imagination and, hence, its subsequent effects. Drayson concludes that whereas “placebo” effects remain synonymous with deception and illusion there is nonetheless a sense that the placebo concept in design is sufficiently powerful and influential to be worthy of greater serious attention.

In “Basel to Boston: An Itinerary for Modernist Typography in America” Robert Weisenberger and Elizabeth Resnick chart the influential role that MIT played from the 1950’s onward in embedding quality design principles within the lifeblood of a large and complex U.S. organization. Within this they further tease out the social and cultural networks connecting people and ideas in this landmark project. The story begins with György Kepes, the Hungarian-born painter, photographer, designer, educator, and art

theorist. Kepes (who was a former colleague of fellow-Hungarian and Bauhaus Master, László Moholy-Nagy) had been teaching, since 1945, visual design in MIT's department of architecture. It was on Kepes' recommendation that MIT became the first American university to centralize the design of all its publications and employ Muriel Cooper as MIT's first resident designer. In 1958 MIT then was inspired to establish a visiting program for designers from Europe; among these visiting scholars was Thérèse Moll. She had studied in the Basel School of Design under two of the great standard bearers of Swiss typography, Emile Ruder and Armin Hoffman. Having also worked with Karl Gerstner and at Studio Boggeri in Milan, Moll brought to MIT a strong sense of European design. Weisenberger and Resnick go on to chart this heightened awareness of European design and its evolution within the design of MIT publications until the decline of modernism and emergence of post-modernist ideas in the early 1970's. This article encapsulates design in a period just before the advent of desktop computers when it was conditioned by the demands of letterpress technology and inspired by the optimism of European émigrés, who saw modernism as bringing even more order to a world that was gradually emerging from the chaos of war.

In "The Mundane and Strategic Work in Collaborative Design" Virve Miettinen and Sampsa Hyysalo discuss the systematic involvement of citizens in design and development activities. Their article focuses on the processes of participative planning that informed the design of the new Helsinki Central Library project. In particular, their article recognizes both the broader strategic planning needed to realize such a project, as well as the mundane work essential to its support. In the latter case, they took account of a variety of actions that included, for example, arranging space for workshops and seeking out participants. Overall, they draw attention to the ways in which such seemingly mundane activities permeate the overall outcomes of collaborative design and play an important role in its outcomes—just as the far loftier concerns of democracy, equality, values, social structures, gender, methodologies, and so on have tended to be the focus of academic research in collaborative design. In this paper, Miettinen and Hyysalo examine the relationships between, and the effects of, the mundane and strategic work of collaborative design in real-life projects through designer retrospectives.

In all corners of the world, the transition from script culture (manuscript) to the mass production of text from movable type (book) set in motion a social revolution that remained unparalleled until the advent of digital communication. Both of these revolutions

fundamentally changed the ways in which societies educated themselves and transmitted both knowledge and culture through time and space. Whereas Guttenberg's Latin alphabet, with its 26 soldiers of lead, lent itself to mechanical reproduction, those cultures with more complex scripts took longer to embrace the mass production of text from movable letterforms. In "Ottoman Foundations of Turkish Typography: A Field Theory Approach" Özlem Özkal observes that it was 266 years after Guttenberg's invention of printing from movable type that Ibrahim Muteferrika used letterpress technology to print in Turkey. Özkal goes on to identify the main characters in Turkish typographic development and the tensions that continued to exist through the translation of traditional script forms into typographic elements suitable for mass reproduction. In doing this, he asserts that although the 1928 script reform marks an abrupt change in the typographic history of Turkey this is not the starting point for typographic formation that can be traced back to the Ottoman period.

In "Care and Capacities of Human-Centered Design" Ian Hargraves points out that, for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, designers thought of themselves as having subject matter experience, but that this conception had shifted significantly during the last forty years. Design, in large measure, no longer understands itself through the classes of artifacts it produces. Instead, he goes on to say, "design commonly conceives of itself and promotes itself as a general approach for innovative change—as having no subject matter that is properly its own." In this context Hargraves reflects upon the role of design in health care through examples such as Kaiser Permanente (California's largest healthcare provider)—that for over a decade has maintained a design group, and the Mayo Clinic where a small experiment in embedding design research led to the creation of an organization-wide *Centre for Innovation*. Alongside this Hargraves discusses some new principles for design with a recognition that when principles enter the conversation, they tend to be reduced to expressions of what design can do, rather than becoming full-bodied encounters with what it is to hold people as mattering. Here he quotes Richard Buchanan, "it is fundamentally an affirmation of human dignity. It is an ongoing search for what can be done to support the dignity of human beings as they act out their lives in varied social, economic, political and cultural circumstances."

In "Designing for Participation: Dignity and Autonomy of Service" Miso Kim asks, "What might be a humanistic framework of service that could provide guidance for designers to explore the rich relationships that constitute a service?" In framing this

question, Kim cites the phenomenon that whereas people will forgive bad artifacts rather easily, they will rarely forget a bad service experience. When sharing these stories people mostly describe the indignity felt through a bad service as if it were a personal insult. Ordinary as it may be, service indignity can accumulate little by little in everyday lives, becoming an expected reality and source of stress in society. Kim goes on to consider what the principle of dignity might be and concludes that it is intimately tied to autonomy—the ability of a person to act in accordance with their free will rather than external pressure. Kim traces the origins of this approach back to the Renaissance foundations of humanism through the work of, for example, Pico della Mirandola. So dignity rests in an autonomy of choice—the freedom to create and change oneself. In this respect, Kim then moves on to consider current service design characteristics where the frameworks attempt to control people rather than support their capacity for autonomous action. In response to this, Kim describes an alternative framework for service design that is participative and layered. In conclusion, Kim observes that, though these layers coexist interdependently, designers need to consider them together as a holistic experience. Without this, the risk is that an understanding of people’s autonomy will be limited and, consequently, their dignity undermined.

Finally, this issue of *Design Issues* concludes with four book reviews: Marta Anguera’s review of *Enric Hugueta: 60 Years of the History of Catalan Graphic Design*; Ksenija Berk’s review of a book on design in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, *Design for a New World*; Rachel Hunnicutt’s review of *Building Bacardi: Architecture, Art & Identity*, and; Kate Nelischer’s review of *Canada: Modern Architectures in History*. Together these books survey design: from the twentieth century during periods of massive change to the political configuration of Europe, to the shifting of identities, to the emergence of green movements and sustainable values, and to the role of design in helping form national and corporate identities.

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