

# Introduction

Is there one book that we should recommend for every student to read as they begin advanced study in design? If there is, a prime candidate may not be a book in design. It would be *After the Fact*, the autobiography of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz.<sup>1</sup> The book is a personal history of experiences, struggles, and growth, well suited to the beginning student who faces similar challenges and surprises on the way to mastery and understanding. But it is also a book with deep reflections on the transformation of the social sciences and the emergence of anthropology as a discipline within a field of study. For the design student, the book should raise questions about the transformation of design itself from a professional practice to a cluster of disciplines to a new liberal art of technological culture to a field of study and knowledge. Has design, in fact, become a field of study within which there are related disciplines of practice supported by substantial theory, criticism, and history?

Put aside questions about whether the academic world recognizes design as a field of study. By and large, the academic world remains locked in a set of old categories, a canonized list of disciplines and fields of knowledge inherited from the past that are divided between theory and practice, with little place for production and making. That world does not recognize in design more than a craft or a method of practice or a professional pathway to employment. Only a few institutions recognize that in addition to fields of theory and practice there is now an emergent field of production or productive science, a field of study focused on the world we make and how we make it. In the blurring world of academic disciplines, it is difficult to perceive or even imagine design as an emergent feature of culture that increasingly stands on its own foundations of knowledge. Yet, that field is coming into being through a growing body of creative practices, critical literature, and formal reflections. As the philosopher John Dewey argued at the beginning of the twentieth century, our knowledge of the world is no longer by nature and metaphysical essences but rather by art—the art of experimentation and experience.<sup>2</sup> One could argue that design is at the center of that art.

The signature feature of *Design Issues* is a commitment to pluralism in the field of design and to the importance of history, theory, and criticism that supports the concrete practices of designers. In the essays that follow in this issue of the journal, we

---

1 Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

2 John Dewey, "By Nature and By Art," in *Philosophy of Education: Problems of Men* (1946; rpt. Totowa, New Jersey: Littlefield Adams, 1958), 286–300.

see the expanse of design, the diversity of inquiries, and the level of reflection that distinguishes a field of knowledge and action.

This issue begins with two articles that provide substantive discussions of important ideas and at the same time open the way for further research in new directions. The first article is by Brian Dixon, "Experiments in Experience: Towards an Alignment of Research through Design and John Dewey's Pragmatism." Dixon explores Dewey's philosophy of experience and its influence in design through a variety of significant authors, including the well-known Donald Schön and scholars such as Ralph Sleeper and Larry Hickman, as well as design theorists such as Klaus Krippendorff and Roberto Verganti. He then draws the connection between Dewey's theory of inquiry and the advance of design research, noting the significant connection of this theory to design practice. This article opens a pathway to further investigation of the importance of the philosophy of pragmatism for design. The next article by Silvia Gasparotto, "Open Source, Collaboration, and Access: A Critical Analysis of 'Openness' in the Design Field," explores a concept that has emerged in design with diverse meanings, reflecting a pluralism of perspectives and different implications. She discusses both the strengths and limitations of open source and open design, and, as with Dixon, she offers a starting point for further research through an explanation of the meanings of the term and through a bibliography of references that may guide other researchers who find the theme of "openness" promising.

The next article by Line Hjorth Christensen, "Curating the Poster: An Environmental Approach," explores how the context of posters leads to a curatorial project. She refers to this as the "contextual turn" in poster studies, contrasting with older strategies in exhibition design and museology. While the argument is initially built around a case study—an exhibition at the Danish Poster Museum, "*Spot On! British Posters from the Interwar Years*"—the theme of this article is really the application of an ecological view to design. Readers will know that *Design Issues* seldom publishes case studies unless they serve a broader argument, such as Christensen's. The discussion of the importance of "real-world context" and how environmental issues may be transmitted to museums makes this an interesting and useful article, with references to the "ecological" view of design formulated by the German semiotician Martin Krampen. This is a wide-reaching article that reminds us that products of all kinds are the distinguishing exemplars of the field. In addition to exploring an important concept, this article includes an extensive bibliography that provides a guide for further research.

Part of the history of design is the story of those who write the history of design. Clive Dilnot and Lilián Sánchez-Moreno present Part Two of a 1981 interview with design historian John Heskett,

author of his widely-read book *Industrial Design*. Part One of this interview was presented in the previous issue of *Design Issues* (35:1). In this part, Dilnot and Sánchez-Moreno give a valuable introduction that characterizes many of the central issues at the time of Heskett's book. Their discussion helps to frame the content and significance of the interview for an understanding of how design history is written and how design historians, through their diverse philosophical or intellectual perspectives, explore the complexity of design in particular historical circumstances. Beginning students sometimes read historical accounts of design such as Heskett's in the belief that dates and events are what a history is about. With time and experience, they come to realize that the important content is found in the themes and connections that characterize a span of historical time, revealing the threads of social practice, whether in the profession of design, in business and industry, or in the communities and institutions that surround design.

The next two articles, different in subject matter and approach, nonetheless explore a similar theme of design and strategy. Melissa Plourde Khoury introduces us to an unusual subject, album covers in Lebanon. The article is "Parody and Contextualization in Lebanese Album Covers," and the design issue that widens our access to this subject is the role of parody as a communication strategy within the context of Lebanese social and political life. In this case, the strategy serves to establish identity in a complex environment. Khoury discusses the uses of parody in a variety of album covers, describing the intent and constraints that designers faced as a challenge. Another perspective on design strategy, this time for economic development, is presented in the next article. In "Success to Decay: Design and Economy from Self-Management to Free Enterprise Model," Iva Kostešić and Fedja Vukić discuss the use of design as a strategic tool for the economic development of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, with its constituent states of Croatia and Slovenia. They discuss the concept of design in those constituent states, with attention to economic factors and the development of industrial design. They also discuss the absence of design in the former Yugoslavia and its relationship to the demise of the social system of that country.

This issue includes two reflections. The occasionally published "Reflections" section contains short essays that express a perspective on a theme that the editors regard as having general interest to the design community. The first reflection is an essay by Jorge Frascara, who writes about Tomás Maldonado, a well-known and influential design educator and theorist who passed away on November 26, 2018. Frascara presents a portrait of the man and an overview of his work that everyone in the design community will find illuminating. Among issues that were addressed in

Maldonado's work, we note the treatment of the close relationship between theory and practice—a central pillar of the field of design. The second reflection is an essay by Fred Collopy on systems thinking and design thinking. While it is the policy of *Design Issues* to publish only original work, this essay is a rare exception that the editors believe is well justified. This essay is a reprint of the originally published essay at *Fast Company Magazine* in 2009. While it reflects the tenor of design ten years ago, more importantly it addresses an issue that is of current importance in the development of design and design thinking, as well as in the relationship between systems thinking and design thinking. The essay is perhaps provocative but it is certainly timely today, given the growing literature on design thinking. We offer both reflections for their thoughtful consideration of issues that remain lively in contemporary discourse.

This issue also includes a Visual Essay by Danne Ojeda on “One and Three Books’ Unfold,” with participants Angeline Lee, Su Lynn Goh, Valerie Chua, Shuhui Goh, Beverly Goh, Ashley Chen, Liying Chan, and Joanne Quek. The subject is a curatorial project analyzing the relationship between the book as a concept and the book as an object of communication. This essay is comprised of images and commentary.

We conclude this issue with an unusual set of book reviews. The recent publication of *Design: Critical and Primary Sources* by Bloomsbury, edited by Daniel Huppertz, is an important addition to resources for students and researchers as well as general readers. The book is published in four volumes, and we have elected to review each volume separately but to present all four reviews together. The reviewers are Dennis Doordan, Teal Triggs, David Brody, and Ramia Mazé.

The frame of reference changes over time in the field of design, with earlier authors and issues sometimes transformed with new authors and new issues. But there is continuity in the exploration of design, demonstrating the threads of thought and action that bind together the design community across time and across countries and continents. *Design Issues* seeks to support that continuity as well as the transformations that make design an exciting field of study and practice.

Bruce Brown  
Richard Buchanan  
Carl DiSalvo  
Dennis Doordan  
Kipum Lee  
Victor Margolin  
Ramia Mazé