

## **TWENTY TWO YEARS OF PLURALISTIC DISCOURSE::**

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### **Introduction**

Editing and producing Design Issues has been a deeply satisfying experience. Much of the satisfaction comes from watching the maturation of design discourse over the past two decades. Fundamental questions about the nature of design, designerly ways of knowing as well as acting, the role of designers, and the multiple ways through which design is woven into the very fabric of life in the modern world have been debated in the pages of the journal. Inherent in the challenge to fully recognize the complexity of design and render it legible and accessible to others is the necessity to position this recognition within a humanistic framework. Rather than posited as abstract universal entities adequately knowable in physiological and ergonomic terms, Design Issues has consistently argued the necessity to appreciate human beings as unique individuals and as communities sharing distinct forms of cultural, ethnic or other group identities and experiences.

No assessment of twenty-two years of design discourse can avoid the growing recognition and consideration of the effects of globalization. The phenomenon of globalization has provoked many cultural commentators to lament the loss of diversity due to the "commodification" and "homogenization" of experience in the contemporary world. Critics have pointed to the darker side of globalization: exploitation of labor, environmental degradation, and the rise of economic and political forces that seems to escape regulation and democratic control. While it would be naïve to deny the excesses of globalization, it would be a mistake to forget an essential truth that has animated everyone involved with Design Issues all these years. At its finest, design is an affirmation of life. To design—to create, to improve, to preserve, to care for the world and all its inhabitants—is an act grounded in a fundamental commitment to life and a belief in the importance of the future.

Design Issues is committed to advancing design knowledge and promoting design discourse. This commitment, demonstrated page after page, issue after issue, volume after volume for twenty two years, to bringing pluralistic discussions of design history, theory and criticism together in one place (which, due to the enduring and globe-spanning power of the printed word, means this one place is literally everywhere) remains the bedrock upon which Design Issues is built.

## **Present at the Creation: UIC**

Design Issues was born in the fall of 1982 in the School of Art and Design at the University of Illinois, Chicago (UIC). Two of its five progenitors were artists, two were industrial designers, and one was a design historian. The two artists, Martin Hurtig and Leon Bellin, had graduated from the Institute of Design, not during the period when László Moholy-Nagy was there but a few years later. Nonetheless they had imbibed the traces of Moholy's ambition to create a philosophic discourse for design and to cut across the different media in order to address fundamental questions about vision.

Martin Hurtig was a painter of stark geometric forms and also the director of the UIC School of Art and Design; Leon Bellin preferred to paint luscious nudes, whose sensuous flesh recalled the paintings of Rubens. Sy Steiner and Larry Salomon were both professors of industrial design but Salomon was also a sculptor. Victor Margolin, the only one of the group who did not make things, was a design historian, who had just received his Ph.D. He happened to write his dissertation on the graphic design of László Moholy-Nagy, El Lissitzky, and Alexander Rodchenko. So the Moholy connection was quite strong among the journal's founders, even though it was never acknowledged.

The intention of the founders was to create a journal that dealt broadly with design, both current as well as from the past. Leon Bellin, who had a polemical nature, proposed the name Design Issues because he believed it would represent a commitment to controversy and debate. None of the founders envisioned a journal that would simply document and record. All intended a publication that would provoke.

Victor Margolin was the Editor for the first three years. After that, decisions were made by an editorial board that began with the original editors and gradually expanded to include other colleagues, both from UIC and elsewhere. During the years that the journal remained within the UIC School of Art and Design, all the work was done by members of the design faculty. Tad Takano, who, like Hurtig and Bellin, had been a student at the Institute of Design, was the designer and created the covers for the first three years, a series of photographic manipulations that certainly owed their origins to the abstract photographs and photograms of Moholy-Nagy. Other faculty members and a few graduate students did the promotion, built up the subscriber base, assisted with editorial tasks, and helped with the design production. Later, prominent designers like Arthur Paul, Ivan Chermayeff, and Massimo Vignelli were invited to contribute covers and they did. Before the journal left UIC, John Greiner, a member of the graphic design faculty, took over the designer's job and created a series of covers himself, while also changing the journal's typographic style and layout.

The founders never envisioned Design Issues as a strict academic journal with all contributions in a scholarly format. Their intention was to mix research with polemics, visual spreads with informal essays, book reviews with original documents. They wanted the journal's audience to include both scholars and designers but, given the backgrounds of the founders, the aim of reaching designers was high on the list. Consequently Design Issues adopted an extremely broad definition of argument and has remained open to many voices.

For example, the editors wanted to keep alive the manifesto tradition of the European avant-garde and sought to publish contemporary manifestos wherever they could find them. Thanks to Gillo Dorfles, a member of the international advisory board and one of Italy's leading philosophers of aesthetics, the editors published the Scientific Program of the 1983 ICSID Congress in the inaugural issue and this led to a series of other manifestoes such as the Guzzini Memorandum, the Declaration of the Central European Design Conference, and the Munich Design Charter.

It is difficult to recall exactly how the articles in the early issues were acquired. From the beginning, the founders committed the journal to an internationalist position and were willing to publish translations of articles in languages other than English that had been previously published elsewhere or that had never been published, along with new articles written in English. Margolin was interested in an article that laid out the historiography and methodology of design history and through John Heskett, a British colleague in the Design History Society, he found Clive Dilnot, who wrote the now classic two-part article "The State of Design History," which appeared in the first two issues. Also in the first issue was Dieter Rams's "Omit the Unimportant," which originated as a polemic against Memphis furniture at the 1983 ICSID Congress in Milan and became, through its publication in the journal, a defense of modernist minimalism, which is still widely referred to.

Beginning with two issues a year, it was not too difficult for the editors to find enough material for the journal. Besides the articles and occasional documents, they also published book reviews. Within several years, *Design Issues* had published articles from Italy, France, Hungary, Poland, Japan, England, Canada, and Germany. In the early issues, the editors used professional translators but later John Cullars, a UIC librarian with a doctorate in comparative literature, translated articles from French, Spanish, German, Italian, and Russian. The editors also began to publish important historic documents as well as contemporary manifestos.

In the third issue, Vol. 2 No. 1, Richard Buchanan, now one of the three co-editors, made his first contribution to the journal, "Declaration by Design: Rhetoric, Argument, and Demonstration in Design Practice." With a Ph.D. in Philosophy and Rhetoric from the University of Chicago, Buchanan was working in research and development at UIC and was also teaching in the English Department. Margolin met him when seeking money to fund the first issue of the journal. Buchanan, who had studied with the philosopher Richard McKeon at the University of Chicago, was already accustomed to thinking about rhetoric outside the classical box, and took up Margolin's challenge to write an article on the rhetoric of design. At the time his article was published, Buchanan became a member of the journal staff as a consulting editor. With Vol. 3 No. 2, Dennis Doordan, also a current co-editor, who had joined Margolin in the Art History Department at UIC, where he taught architectural history, also became a member of the editorial board and the journal staff began to take on a more scholarly cast. Doordan and Margolin had met several years earlier when they both participated in one of the first panels on design history at the College Art Association meeting in Toronto in February 1984. Previously Doordan had organized an exhibition of work by the architect William Lescaze, who produced some of the first corporate design for CBS.

Margolin remained the Editor until the end of Vol. 3. Several years later, he edited an anthology of articles from that period which was published in 1989 by the University of Chicago Press as *Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism*. As a transition from a single editor to an editorial board with one member coordinating each issue, the editors published a special double issue (Vol. 4 Nos. 1–2), "Designing the Immaterial Society," which was guest edited by the Italian sociologist Marco Diani, who was then teaching at Northwestern University. Diani stretched the journal's intellectual boundaries. His authors were mostly French and Italian sociologists and their articles had a distinct postmodern cast. With Vol. 5 No. 2, the editors invited Diani to join the editorial board and this added yet another disciplinary perspective to their deliberations.

On a trip to England where he attended a conference of the Design History Society, Margolin had a discussion with his British colleague John Heskett about the lack of publications on the history of design in Asia and the Pacific. This led the editors to invite Heskett to guest edit a second special issue (Vol. 6 No. 1), though the journal's first devoted to a particular geographic region. "Design in Asia and Australia" introduced yet another group of writers to the journal including Rajeshwari Ghose and Shou Zhi Wang, from Hong Kong and China respectively, as well as Tony Fry from Australia.

About a year later, Heskett moved to Chicago to teach at the Institute of Design and he joined the editorial board at that time, adding another design historian to the mix. However, Heskett was as active in the area of design policy and management as he was in the field of design history. The expansion of the editorial board to eight members with the new balance weighted towards scholars rather than practitioners or professors of art or design practice, began to create some tensions although these were never evident in the journal's contents, which continued to adhere to the original editorial vision. Nonetheless, the larger number of people contributing to the discussions and the diversity of their backgrounds made the choices of acceptable articles more intense.

Bellin coordinated another special issue (Vol. 7 No. 1) on Design Education, a subject on whose importance all the editors agreed. The issue was the journal's first foray into this field and it began a continued commitment to design education as a theme. Though no further special issues on the topic resulted, the editors have seen an increase in the number of submissions on the subject in recent years. By coincidence, the lead article in the special issue was by the French scholar, Alain Findeli, who wrote an historical account of the philosophical and methodological foundations of Moholy-Nagy's design pedagogy in Chicago. The article was based on Findeli's French Ph.D. dissertation, which analyzed more thoroughly than anyone else has done Moholy's Chicago tenure at the New Bauhaus, School of Design, and Institute of Design between

1937 and 1946. Subsequently Findeli published other articles in *Design Issues* that addressed issues of design philosophy and pedagogy.

The UIC School of Art and Design continued to publish *Design Issues* until the end of Vol. 9 in 1993. Throughout its tenure at UIC, the journal was sustained by a combination of outside revenue and funds from the School of Art and Design and the UIC Chancellor, Jim Stukel. When the Chancellor reported that he would no longer be able to support the journal, it became necessary to find another home for it. By this time, Richard Buchanan had left UIC and after serving as a visiting professor at Carnegie-Mellon University, he became the director of the CMU design department whose name under his leadership was changed to the School of Design.

Buchanan was able to allocate funds from his budget to support the editorial costs of producing the journal, which included hiring a managing editor. The MIT Press agreed to become the journal's publisher. Doordan, who had moved to the School of Architecture at the University of Notre Dame, and Margolin, who remained at UIC, became the co-editors of the journal along with Buchanan and have continued in this role for the past ten years.

### **The CMU Years**

There was no change of editorial policy and no break in publishing continuity with the move to Carnegie Mellon. One reason for the smooth transition was the work of Diane Stadelmeier, the new managing editor, and Karen Moyer, the journal's new designer. A faculty member in Carnegie Mellon's Department of Design, Moyer directed a significant typographic redesign of the journal. Its dimensions remained the same as did the wide gutter for footnotes. But there was a new font selection and many subtle changes in layout that greatly improved readability. Readers saw other changes as well. The journal was now published three times a year, reflecting increased submissions of articles and a wider subscription base. A new Editorial Board was created, and the Advisory Board was reconstituted. A wider range of designers contributed covers, beginning with the notable "tattooed man" cover by Rick Landesberg. Other designers included Philip Burton, Martin Solomon, Lucille Tenazas, Uwe Loesch, Joan Dobkin, Laurie Haycock Makela, James Victore, Jan van Toorn, Michael Bierut, Karen Moyer, Ken Hiebert, Dan Boyarski, Olga Zivov, Garland Kirkpatrick, Jorge Frascara, Tom Strong, Katherine McCoy, Hanno Ehses, Jose L. Gimenez, Shariar Sarmast, Robert Massin, Chris Vermaas, Mark Mentzer, and Eddy Yu.

Another reason for the smooth transition to Carnegie Mellon was the shared vision of the three editors, expressed in the statement of editorial policy in the first issue of Volume 10 and republished in Volume 17, No. 1, when *Design Issues* expanded to become a quarterly journal. The journal would be a forum for thoughtful discussion of design, achieved through a mixture of history, criticism, and theory and a strong commitment to pluralism. This was a commitment the editors agree on, despite the fact that they held quite different intellectual, philosophical, and disciplinary perspectives on design. However, there was a subtle shift in the journal, reflecting the development of design thinking and research that characterized the 1990's. If the Chicago years represented the youthful beginning of the journal, the Carnegie Mellon years represented a confident development of earlier themes and an introduction of new themes—or old themes in new form. For example, Ezio Manzini's "Design, Environment and Social Quality" introduced environmental and ecological issues as well as social responsibility in the work of product designers. Gunnar Swanson and Gui Bonsiepe focused attention on a reconstruction of graphic design education—Swanson, in particular, discussed the place of design education in a university environment and the need to consider liberal education as a powerful influence on future practice. And Alain Findeli, with "Ethics, Aesthetics, and Design," brought forward the formal discussion of ethics in design. Taken together, these authors effectively widened the space for discussion of design and the designer's social responsibility.

Along with social responsibility, we also find articles that began to place products and the practice of designing in a wider social context, overcoming an earlier tendency in design writing to treat products in formal isolation. Indeed, design studies, itself, became a subject of controversy, as in the special theme issue (Vol. 11, No. 1) that began as a discussion of design history and quickly broadened into a debate about the nature of design studies. The debate presented in this special issue—primarily among scholars

from the United Kingdom and the United States—illustrated as well as any example the principled commitment of the journal to pluralism in the exploration of problems and issues.

While individual articles remained the central focus of the journal, special theme issues played a somewhat larger role than in the past. One reason for this was the development of the design community itself, with more participants and new focusing questions and concerns. This is evident in a variety of special issues published since 1993: "Designing the Modern Experience, 1885-1945" (Vol. 13, No. 1), edited by Dennis Doordan; "A Critical Condition: Design and Its Criticism" (Vol. 13, No. 2), guest edited by Nigel Whiteley; "Design Research" (Vol. 15, No. 2), guest edited by Alain Findeli; "Rethinking Design" (Vol. 17, No. 1), guest edited by Jorge Frascara; and "Design in Hong Kong" (Vol. 19, No. 3), guest edited by Hazel Clark. In 1995 two more anthologies of articles drawn from the journal were published by MIT Press: *The Idea of Design* edited by Victor Margolin and Richard Buchanan and *Design History*, edited by Dennis Doordan. In introductory essays for each volume the editors contextualized the anthologized material in terms of the evolving nature of design studies. Like Margolin's earlier anthology *Design Discourse*, these anthologies quickly became standard texts in university design and design studies courses.

The widening of the design community in this period was also reflected in the journal. There has been a progressive expansion of subject matter to address new design practices. For example, there have been articles on planning, scenario building, action research, and, generally, the use of social science methodologies in design practice and in design research. There have also been articles on a wider range of design products. For example, the journal has published discussions of environmental graphics, computers, hypertexts, web interfaces, information design, interactive media, service systems, interiors, and environments such as aquaria, the latter being discussed in Dennis Doordan's article, "Simulated Seas" (Vol. 11, No. 2). The journal has also sought to bring into design discussion articles about design in parts of the world where little has been previously documented. Articles on design in China, Mexico, Turkey, Indonesia, and Russia are examples. And the journal has also included writers from other disciplines where the discussion of design is growing—for example, the philosopher Albert Borgmann, who works in the area of the history and philosophy of technology.

*Design Issues* continued to publish articles that profiled individual designers and their work—for example, David Ryan on Enzo Mari, David Gartman on Harley Earl and the birth of styling at General Motors, Laetitia Wolff's interview with Robert Massin, and Claire Badaracco's discussion of George Salter's book jacket design. But these articles were balanced with a wide array of contextual studies, so that individual accomplishment found its natural place among the many causes of design.

In this period, *Design Issues* also sponsored, along with the Department of Industrial, Interior and Visual Communication at The Ohio State University and the School of Design at Carnegie Mellon University—the first international conference on doctoral education in design. Known as the "Ohio Conference," because it was held on the campus of the Ohio State University in Columbus, this meeting proved to be the beginning of a series of bi-annual international conferences convened in Europe and Asia. It is consistent with the vision of the journal that these conferences have provided a forum for pluralistic discussion around the issues of design and design research confronting a new generation of designers and design scholars.

In general, *Design Issues* has tried to be a forum for diverse views on the nature and practice of design. Instead of advancing a single view on design, the journal has sought to be a neutral ground for thoughtful discussion from any perspective. It remains open to discussions of people and personalities, natural and social forces, the disciplines and processes of design and design studies, and the values and moral purposes that are the ultimate ground of design.

Recently, the journal has added a fourth editor, Bruce Brown, Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Architecture at Brighton University in England. Trained as a graphic designer, Bruce brings a concern for the enlightenment of practitioners as well as for raising issues that concern the entire community of designers, design researchers and design users. Now in its twenty second year, *Design Issues* looks forward to playing a role in the continued development of that community.