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Let's Take a Walk: finding time to think, grow and flourish

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Let's Take a Walk: finding time to think, grow and flourish

Louise Valentine

The world of design is filled with a multitude of meanings and associations, many of which are familiar and others, which are less so. In times of remarkable change - which this decade is - it is not unusual for the most familiar of concepts and subjects to become fields of uncertainty, where the transitions from one space and place to another, challenge the basic confidences and trust we have unquestioningly relied upon. In these times, the ability to create space to enable clear thinking arguably becomes more important than ever. Here, while things are vague, there is an opportunity to metaphorically and-or literally 'take a walk'; to find quality time to free the mind from its daily constraints and give genuine or sufficient volumes of space to enable new ideas to percolate. In this open issue, there are five papers, all of which are investigating the future of design – education, management and research – looking at ways to cultivate an environment in which design can continue to grow and flourish, take responsibility for leading new areas and make responsible decisions across the emerging processes. They offer further detail as to how design is broadening its range of subjects, skills and activities, and in doing so, how it is extending where its relevance and impact can be understood. In part, the challenge of this issue is to linger longer on some the arguments and implications being posited and, find time (more often) to 'take a walk'.

This issue opens with 'Self-grown Fashion from Bacterial Cellulose: A Paradigm Shift Design Approach in Fashion Creation' by Frankie M.C. Ng and Phoebe Wen Wang. It seeks to contribute to an international dialogue for fundamental change in textile design thinking, by focusing on how transformation can be supported through the development of a new material. The new paradigm for textile design to which the paper refers is one where there is greater consideration given to the ethical dimensions of designing, and in particular to the hazards of petroleum resource depletion and environmental contamination. The study aims to systematically explore how we conceive, design and technically produce fashion in the future where materials and clothing can be grown seamlessly from natural renewable resources. The study designed and created self-grown fashion (SGF) from bacterial

cellulose where the cellulose from green tea was identified (from a range of possibilities) as the most desirable. The research proposes a new model for evaluating textile production, such as cost effectiveness, environmental impact, labour friendliness, and biodegradability. While the paper ignites an interest in how the (potentially) new material will be used, its focus is how to contribute to a methodical exploration of the incubation phase of new materials for seamless 3 Dimensional fashion creations. It concentrates on how SGF materials can be manipulated to achieve new material properties and how the production of fashion materials in the future will be processed. In closing the paper shares the areas in which the new material could be further researched and developed, and how it could positively contribute to lessening the damaging effect textile manufacturing and production has on the environment.

The conversation then moves from an investigation by design researchers on future materials for textiles to a study by social scientists on the future of design process thinking. 'Radical Innovation by Theoretical Abstraction: A Challenge for the User-Centred Designer' by Mikael Wahlström, Hannu Karvonen, Leena Norros, Jussi Jokinen and Hanna Koskinen offers the lens' of Social Psychology, Cognitive Science and the Arts to explore the creation of radical design. In this paper a user-centred approach to design innovation is viewed as a strength and a weakness. The authors suggest that social science disciplines can positively contribute to design by going beyond the norm (where the norm is providing understanding of users' needs, experiences and desire), and challenging standard expectations by offering social science theories that can be applied as design frames and principles. In essence they argue there is a missed opportunity that needs to be further explored when it comes to methods and mindsets for radical innovation. Case study of a user-experience-orientated ship bridge design project is used to exemplify the argument and its reasoning. While the paper does not attempt to offer processes that would provide radical design, it does elaborate on concepts deemed to be beneficial for professional designers applying different kinds of social, psychological or cognitive theories in tandem with their design field study findings. In the latter part of the paper, Nigel Cross' work on design thinking is readily referred to, and the discussion closes with

the need for further empirical work to be undertaken to understand the degree to which this conceptual work might allow for radical innovation in practice.

In a potentially 'first of its kind' in the UK for design programmes, 'The Influence of Work Placement on the Academic Achievement of Undergraduate Design Students' by Fabrizio Ceschin, Ryszard Radowski and Lande Vere investigates the impact of work placement in enhancing the academic performance of undergraduate design students. It carries out a literature review and undertakes a statistical analysis on a population sample of design students, suggesting inconsistency and a discrepancy between the value of work placements for increased employability and for higher academic achievements. The results suggest that for higher and lower achievers the placement experience enables students to achieve on average a greater final year mark and a greater improvement from the second to the final year. They also suggest these grade gains were of a similar magnitude irrespective of the students' overall academic standing, and that the work placement experience gives students a particular advantage in the final year project and in the modules characterized by design-focused assessment. The paper is, of its own admission, a starting point from which to begin reflecting on the correlation between placement and academic achievement, and to engage with other researchers. It concludes by discussing the limitations of the study, highlighting directions for future research.

Moving on from a focus on design education, the following article takes us into design management. The paper, 'What Drives Socially Responsible Design in Organizations? Empirical Evidence from South Korea' by Yoori Koo and Rachel Cooper, details an empirical study investigating designers' underlying motivations for socially responsible decision-making within an organization. The overall aim of this research is to suggest a conceptual framework for SRD that considers two major dimensions that affect SRD decision-making within an organizational context. The study discovers a pragmatic link between the level of designers' awareness of corporate social responsibility (CSR)-related issues, the degree of firms' design management capacities and their perceived performance in terms of socially responsible design (SRD) in organizations. Given the

(argued) paucity of discussion of the role and effect of design management capacity on translating the principles of CSR into manufactured goods as well as potential services, this is where and how the design management study contributes to design and organizational knowledge. In part it is argued that any corporation's commitment to SRD will centre on the attitudes of its corporate designers (or design managers), and the addition of CSR policies in an organization would provide a formal reminder that the needs of stakeholder constituents and the activities of new product development must be considered consistently at each stage. The research suggests an advance in the theory of SRD through their proposed 'Two Dimensional Model of SRD Decision-Making'. In closing, the paper discusses through its findings why developing socially responsible products and services has become crucial in dealing with the sustainability challenges faced by organizations and society. Its findings also suggest new role(s) for designers and design managers in organizations and the indirect implications for the future of design, design management education and design leadership.

The final paper in this issue looks at the matter of research excellence and the role of journal rankings. A notoriously contentious subject, Neil Mansfield's paper, 'Ranking of Design Journals based on Results of the UK Research Excellence Framework: Using REF as Referee' attends to the reality that academic journals are a fundamental medium for the dissemination of design research. (The REF outputs were submitted to reflect what UK institutions consider their best research based on 'originality, significance and rigour'). His paper uses the open data from the UK Research Excellence Framework 2014 as a judgement of quality to show where UK academic institutions consider the 'best' design research is published. The paper offers a critical analysis of where and how REF2014 assists in the ranking of academic design journals, while also acknowledging where both the analysis and method is less helpful when assessing excellence. This study in itself is a suggestion of an alternative approach to assessing excellence and ascertaining where journals are positioned in terms of quality. The paper provides details which are not often unearthed, for example, 'across the whole Art and Design submission there were articles from 864 different journal titles...Of the 30 most popular journals, only eight were listed in the JCR Impact Factor list and only one in the top five'. It offers an analysis of the data generated by REF2014 as a way

of developing meaningful frames of reference when it comes to measuring quality. In the exposition and analysis of such details, and through a critique of metrics as a tool for determining levels of performance and-or excellence, a suggestion of how decisions and conversations will be guided in the future is offered.