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To cite this article: Anne-Marie Willis & Tony Fry (2003) Design Time and Design Education, Design Philosophy Papers, 1:5, 205-208

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2752/144871303X13965299302433>



Published online: 29 Apr 2015.



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EDITORIAL

Design Time and Design Education

Anne-Marie Willis

Welcome to this larger-than-usual issue (no 5) of *Design Philosophy Papers*. We present 3 papers on the designated theme of *design-time* (more on this below), as well as 4 papers debating the topic of design education.

The latter was sparked by a submission by Ken Friedman on how design education should respond to the demands of the knowledge economy and the *modus operandi* of the university. Respondents were invited, resulting in four quite different versions of what the challenges for universities, design and learning, actually are. For Hazel Clark they centre on multi-cultural student populations, enablement of ethical choice and what an understanding of design can offer to non-designers. Gregory Ulmer likewise suggests a wider role for design education, arguing that design practice is more attuned to the needs of 'electracy' as opposed to the apparatus of literacy which the university has traditionally served. For Tony Fry also, the university is out of step, not so much with contemporary circumstances (to which it now just capitulates), but with a sufficient understanding of the inherent contradictions of its own history and how these

linger on today, limiting the ability of intellectuals (to say nothing of designers) to intervene in that which they find so troubling.

Crumbling institutions, globalising techno-cultures, diminishing capacities for critical thought, expanding production and mounting ecological damage ... what are educators to do? The implications of the analyses offered by Friedman, Clark, Ulmer and Fry are provocative and unsettling in different ways, but also glimpse new possibilities. We invite others to take up and develop these, or to take issue with what's been presented. Contributions will be published in future Hot Debate(s) (deadline for next issue is 5 December).

Also in this issue, are detailed briefs for the Urbocentrism and Design Ethics themes for 2004. Proposals for paper are still open.

The need for design philosophy to engage the relation between design and time comes from the imperative of better understanding the actual agency of 'the designed' in time. The term 'design-time' refers to the ability of design to create or negate the time of things. Know it or not, designers and their designing always ride a line between the ephemeral and the eternal – the decisionism of design not only goes to the life of things (and the more commercially restricted notion of an expected design life) but directly connects to the way in which what has been designed can give time or take it away. The designed thus contributes to creating or negating futures.

This opens up a thinking of all things being in a process of becoming or departing, but at very different rates. Thus everything has its own embodied time. Thinking 'design-time' opens up ways of seeing things in process (their formation and deformation, their movement and direction, their constructive or destructive being). Design-time provides a way of reflecting upon every object as movement, flow, event, and performance. Seeing things in time invites a plural vision of the thing's multiplicity of moments.

As the world we inhabit becomes ever more designed (and time, as future, is negated as the domain of the unsustainable grows) it becomes ever more urgent to grasp and then direct how to give time to those things that sustain (be this an 'eternity of the one' or constant 'return of the same') or take it away from the unsustainable. Certainly we have to learn how to comprehend the difference between positing things with a design life (the delimitation of their use-value) from the actual ontological condition of their location in design time. Design life, as an economic designation, may have almost no connection with the actual material life potential of some thing in contrast to the way design-time can prefigure finitude – the giving of a life-time.¹

Time is neither reducible to mere measurement and quantitative definition nor to a single philosophical idea.

Thinking time, change and becoming were all present in the west's first thinking – Pre-Socratic thought. From this moment the

question of the nature of time has remained on the philosophical agenda. The east likewise has thought time from its earliest thinking. In the case of the Chinese Confucian tradition, time was refused as linearity, and viewed historically as a cyclical 'return of the same'.

Over the history of philosophy, philosophers who have contemplated time have variously understood it as a medium (in common with space) in which things occur, as temporal becoming, as a continuity and as discrete, absolute, relative and relational. Listing the thinkers of time would equate with listing most major, and many minor, philosophers across the entire global history of philosophy. Within the canon of modern thought, time was a concern of thinking that was present at that crucial division of knowledge when science and philosophy split from each other (with Newtonian physics being the wedge).

The contributors to this issue have taken on time in unexpected ways. John Wood's paper begins from the basis that there is no universal time, except that which western civilisation invented, and progressively imposed upon the rest of the world. Clock time is a striking example of a non-relational system; its independence from all other materiality and events, functioning to regulate everything else around it, has made it an extremely rigid, but enormously powerful designing force of the modern world. Despite its arbitrariness (why 24 hours in the day and not some other number? why sixty minutes in an hour?) clock time structures experience, and is taken as 'objective reality', as it regulates economic, cultural and social life at every level. It's inscribed in bodies that wake to the sound of alarm clocks, the timetables that run institutions, the measurements of productive throughput that mark targets for workers, the use-by dates on products, the senses of anticipation, excitement, dread or panic felt as the clock moves towards a scheduled event – the end of the school day, a deadline approaching, a plane to catch ... This and so much more has been designed by clock time. The design challenge then, for Wood, is how a different way of measuring time could be designed, one that is relational, synergistic and more akin and attuned to the time of biological systems.

Like John Wood, architect Francesco Spanedda, is critical of the instrumentalisation of time. But he also considers time as an under-explored dimension, which while it has figured in a few twentieth century architectural and urban design projects, begs to be addressed in more complex ways by design professions still dominated by linear and spatial thinking.

Wolfgang Jonas, thinking as a systems theorist and drawing on the work of Niklas Luhmann, identifies an unavoidable structural feature of the relation between design and time – which is that design is always about projecting something into a 'future', which can never be fully known, despite all the research that might inform what gets designed. Multiple effects ripple and reverberate in time, into the future – or to bring the remarks above into

play – shape, delimit or extend particular futures. Design, therefore, argues Jonas, is best understood as a practice of ‘not knowing’, the paradox being, that we need to know more about not knowing. From an uncompromisingly post-humanist position, a schematic account of cultural evolution as development in time corresponding roughly to broad historical epochs, is then presented. ‘The human’ is erased and reconfigured as incidental residue of system-elements comprising communications, consciousnesses, bodies and artefacts. Jonas’ account stretches to futures that are being prefigured today, in which design has a disturbing prominence as “bodies [become] subjects and media of design, just as products and services were in the past”.

As with all the themes explored in each issue of DPP, the aim is to put forward material that opens up particular philosophical explorations of design. The differences between the contributions in this issue not only demonstrate the richness of the topic but its openness to further elaboration. Rather than being the last word, they are the reverse, marking a starting point upon which to build. Design-time in common with other topics covered by DPP, will require revisiting in the future.

Anne-Marie Willis and Tony Fry

Note

1. An architectural example comes to mind – a few years ago, the State Office Block, a public building in Sydney, was demolished to create a prime site to build a Renzo Piano signature building. The building was perfectly sound and had decades of serviceable life ahead of it, but a major reason used to legitimise its demolition was that it had too many piers, at too short centres, to make it a viable contemporary office building. Yet what does one find when one walks into most clear span large office spaces? Answer – a honeycomb of small artificially-lit spaces created with panelling systems. The adaptable reuse of a building can occur with minimal structural change coupled with a good deal of modification to work culture.