Rich Gold's Plenitude, Kenya Hara's Designing Design and More: Books Received & Noted

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To cite this article: Anne-Marie Willis (2007) Rich Gold's Plenitude, Kenya Hara's Designing Design and More: Books Received & Noted, Design Philosophy Papers, 5:3, 169-170

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.2752/144871307X13966292017711

Published online: 29 Apr 2015.

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REVIEW

Rich Gold’s *Plenitude*, Kenya Hara’s *Designing Design* and More

Books Received & Noted

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A book very much in the same vein as Bruce Stirling’s *Shaping Things*. Which is to say, highly personal, hip, smartarse, sometimes witty, often arrogant, occasionally insightful – another ‘one person’s take on design’. Like Stirling, Gold was not afraid to draw a big picture – to make massive generalisations and create absolutists categories, which, within the confines of the adopted rhetoric, can be quite persuasive.

Where Stirling is not a designer, characterising himself as a design fan, Rich Gold was a designer (he died suddenly at age 53 and this MIT edition of his writings was published posthumously). He was more: claiming also to
wear the hats of artist, scientist and engineer (yes, including cartoon
drawings of himself in the hats). In fact Gold had been in the thick
of some of some of the most problematic (from a sustainment point
of view) areas of design – games and toys. So one of the valuable
things about his criticism is that it’s from an insider’s position.

He was very ambivalent about design, both loving the
opportunities it offers for creativity and hating much of what it turns
out. He saw clearly designers’ implication in the creation of our
world of stuff – of too much stuff, of superfluous stuff that promises
enriched experiences as it stuffs up the world. This he names ‘The
Plenitude’ and devotes half of the book to considering what we
should do about it – presented as cute drawings and provocatively
simplistic solutions (e.g… “Pass a law: you can make only 5 new
things in your lifetime”).

So … what does Rich Gold say that’s new? Does he have
anything to offer to The Sustainment? Or is his book (and life’s work)
just a trite cop-out? Maybe the answer can be found by bringing
Gold’s version of The Plenitude together with early Chinese thinker
Zhuangzi’s case for the relinquishment of ‘plenitude’, as discussed
in Jullien’s Vital Nourishment reviewed by Tony Fry in this issue.
Perhaps we’ll keep this collision for a future issue.

Matthew Frederick, 101 Things I Learned in Architecture School,

A compilation of illustrated sound bites of architectural
commonsense that range from cliché, to pretension, to useful
prompts about design process and presentation. Refreshingly, it
positions hand-drawing as an essential architectural skill.

Gregory Caicco (editor), Architecture, Ethics, and the Personhood
pages.

Described as “a compendium of new work in the field of
phenomenology, hermeneutics, and the built environment” – we’ll
be reviewing this in a forthcoming issue.

Kenya Hara, Designing Design Lars Muller Publishers, Baden,

Works, ideas, words, concepts, projects, provocations,
reflections and more, by prominent Japanese art director, Kenya
Hara. All lavishly illustrated, with high quality print production. To
be reviewed.