Transition Design

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EDITORIAL

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This issue of *Design Philosophy Papers* focuses on Transition Design, with a selection of papers from a Symposium of the same name held at the School of Design, Carnegie Mellon University in March 2015. The papers are of two kinds, and have been divided accordingly. First are Briefings provided to the invited participants, second are the participants' Responses. The context of the Symposium was the introduction of Transition Design into undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral curricula, including a PhD in the subject.

The briefings

First is 'Transition Design Provocation' by Terry Irwin, Cameron Tonkinwise, and Gideon Kossoff which puts forward the rationale for TD and locates it in relation to already existing discourses on the need for change toward sustainability by design. The paper argues for a more systematic approach, based upon long-term visions and the building of a framework to address four inter-related aspects: vision; theories of change; mindset/posture of the designer; and new ways of designing. This framework gathers a range of transdisciplinary knowledge, including: systems and complexity theory, social ecology, social practice theory, and change management from organization theory. It advocates globally-connected place-based approaches, the amplification of grassroots initiatives, and designing for varying horizons of time and levels of scale.

The next paper by Arturo Escobar was not written specifically for the TD Symposium, but was included in the Briefings because it demonstrates a parallel project grappling with the need for significant change; this from a different perspective and circumstances, yet identifying commonality in difference in the desire for transition. Naming *Transiciones* 'as a space for the study and advancement of transitions towards a world in which many worlds fit,' Escobar identifies the 'One-World world' as the key problem.

> … the idea that we all live in a single world … largely conceived of from the perspective of the Euro-American historical experience and exported to many world regions over the past few hundred years through colonialism, development, and globalization.

He asks, 'Can this ongoing occupation be redressed, shifted, and rearticulated towards a pluriversal condition, that is, as the effective possibility of many worlds at a planetary scale?'

For Gideon Kossoff, the transition that needs to occur is a shift from the current situation whereby industrial capitalism, in the way in which it provides for 'needs,' undermines localized self-determination and diversity by creating a 'globalized but fragmented homogeneity.' He argues that this situation can be better understood 'by applying the insights of whole systems science and philosophical holism to human affairs' paying particular attention to relations between parts and wholes.

The responses

Damian White digs into the historical roots of some of the key assumptions underlying TD. He indicates the limitations of Systems Theory and Complexity Theory for dealing with the nature of the social order and especially with issues of power. He identifies problems with the idea

of authenticity, and wonders where work and employment fits in the Transition discourse and whether there are lessons to be learned from failed radical design movements.

All the respondents acknowledge the depth, difficulty, and necessity of transitioning to a different kind of economy; they vary in their estimation of the extent to which design is able to contribute to this. Carl DiSalvo argues for transition as a practice, one aspect of which is design – thus 'designing for transition' is the issue, not the discipline-focused type of question such as: 'What is Transition Design?'

Ezio Manzini states 'Design in the transition phase is not a discipline. The transition phase is a context in which design is embedded.' He makes useful distinctions between three different kinds of designing: diffuse design, expert design, and co-design, as well as between three possible emergent Regimes for the remainder of the twenty-first century.

Dennis Doordan makes the point that the system-transformative ambitions of TD could get in the way of education institutions' role of preparing design students for employment in the existing economy, unsustainable as it might be. Coming from the opposite direction as it were, Anne-Marie Willis's paper wonders whether institutionalized education is the most promising launching pad for a deep, thorough-going redirection of design and what design brings into being. Peter Scupelli is concerned with the politics of change of desired transitions, as well as with what kind of business models have the possibility of futuring rather than defuturing.

The final paper, 'Design for Transitions – from and to what?' by Cameron Tonkinwise was written a month after the Symposium, as a restatement and refinement of the rationale of TD. This is based upon critique of previous attempts such as Sustainable Design, Eco-Efficiency, and Social Design. TD is 'design directed at structural, long-term sociocultural change', i.e. system-level change, but this does not mean policy-making or strategic planning; rather, TD 'aims to bring design's human-scale artifact-interaction focus to the transformation of everyday practices needed to enable structural transitions to more sustainable economies.'

Damian White makes the point that radical design discourse lacks critical reflection, favoring 'friction-free win-win stories.' This issue of DPP, and DPP in general, refuses that kind of glibness. We hope that this issue will encourage a conversation about whether or not a new kind of designing is needed to help address the complex societal and environmental issues of the twenty-first century. If it is, we hope to have begun to frame the discussion in a useful way.

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