

# Introduction

In a rich and complex world full of cultural diversity and social conflict, design often gives the essential interface between human conditions and purposeful actions.

In reminding us of Gui Bonsiepe's observation that "Design is a basic activity whose capillary ramifications penetrate every human activity," Fernando Secomandi and Dirk Snelders extend the notion of a technological interface into the design of intangibles such as services. Expanding on Bonsiepe's description of the interface as a tool connected to purposeful action, they suggest that designers "might be able to learn as much from the hairdresser as from the cabinet maker." So, they propose four user-interface relations—embodiment relations, hermeneutical relations, alterity relations, background relations—that embrace a great expanse of users' experiential possibilities through designed interfaces.

Describing the plywood splints produced by Charles and Ray Eames for the US Navy in 1942, Victor Margolin points to an interface designed to better connect wartime amputees with their purposeful acts of walking as well as the direct human consequences brought by massive efforts to produce weapons of war. Through this, he illustrates how these conditions of aggressive conflict were to stimulate companies to collaborate rather than compete, innovate rather than repeat, and, see resources pooled rather than dispersed in ways that peacetime conditions have yet to do. Margolin also highlights designers' growing awareness of people as an essential interface between machines and actions along with the automation of complex scenarios. This theme is further developed by David Mindell in his account of Harold Hazen's 1941 memorandum to the Rockefeller Foundation's Division of the Natural Sciences in which Hazen addressed the limits and dynamics of a human interface saying this approach made "the human being in this capacity nothing more nor less than a robot which, as a matter of fact, is exactly what he is or should be."

In design activism, Thomas Markussen describes a disruptive interface between aesthetics and politics, between consensus and dissensus. In describing political dissensus as a reordering of power between two or more groups, he characterizes aesthetic dissensus, not as the realization of utopias through violent acts, riots or revolutions, but as the non-violent unsettling of social interfaces that restrict our everyday actions and behaviors. This he develops through examples of disruptive interventions designed to help people reshape the public spaces in which their communities and

identities are shaped. So his framework for urban design activism shows how artifacts can promote social change through altering the conditions of urban experience.

The great cultural divide that exists between alphabetic characters linked to sounds and those that are linked to ideas or images is explored by Ory Bartal in his survey of Japanese typographic poster design. Focusing on the essentially visual nature of Japanese ideograms, he describes a multi-layered system of meaning that is made possible through the combination of two semiotic systems (text and image)—often the underlying meanings created by this union having a power beyond any direct connection to the product in hand. Maria Mackinney-Valentin proposes that the seemingly chaotic nature of fashion trends, and their radically high frequency, can be better understood through the concept of an underlying interface—a rhizome—that perpetually prolongs itself by cultivating, from the middle, new trends to connect disparate elements that will reach out to explore fresh territory.

Murat Bengisu and Füsün Erdoğanlar Bengisu explore the elements that shaped 19th century Beykoz Glassware in Turkey. With the immense influx of low-cost European products, end of the Ottoman Empire, rise of the Turkish Republic and adoption of the Latin alphabet, the production of Beykoz Glassware eventually came to an end when the last factory closed in 1858. The surviving examples of original Beykoz Glassware give us an interface back to the abandoned culture of an earlier period.

Gökhan Ersan reviews two books that discuss episodes in Greek design history and alternative histories of Scandinavian design. In stressing the intertwining of design with Greek national history, in *Fragile Innovation*, Artemis Yagou explores both the limited success of Greek products and Greece's economy in the global marketplace. By contrast, the illustrious reputation of Scandinavian design is explored through a series of essays edited by Kjetil Fallan in *Scandinavian Design: Alternative Histories*. In response to current global challenges, both these books set out to reconsider critical positions and convictions that have prevailed in the humanities throughout the last three decades. In the words of Yagou, they are contributions to "an emerging global design history, which acknowledges peripheral layers, and explores connections with powerful centres" so helping us to better interface with an increasingly interconnected world.

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