Introduction

The idea that making can be a form of knowledge is not new. But as other fields begin to explore making-as-research, there is renewed interest in the idea. As the guest editors of this special issue note in their introduction, research through design is a decades-old practice. And yet we still struggle with the formalities of research through design. In particular, we struggle with developing processes and formats to share and sustain the knowledge that is made through making. This may be because objects do not circulate through the world in the same way that text does. Or it may be because the knowledge that comes through making—that is embodied in and expressed through objects—is somehow different and we have yet to invent effective means of communicating that knowledge.

This special issue captures yet another experiment in the ongoing efforts to develop the practices of research through design: the 2015 Research Through Design (RtD) conference, held in Cambridge, England. One notable aspect of the papers selected for this special issue is that they reflect upon the formats and knowledge outcomes of the conference itself. In doing so, they call attention to how the documentation and dissemination of knowledge through making is a design problem.

This design problem is not limited to design research. Increasingly, other fields are also exploring making-as-research and, in the process, encountering similar issues of how to share and sustain that knowledge. One example is the field Science and Technology Studies. The Society for the Social Studies of Science annual conference now hosts a "Making and Doing" track, which features projects that involve various kinds of material production as a component of the scholarship. In this track one might encounter new tools for citizen science or visualizations of scientific controversies. Another example is the field of Digital Humanities and its ongoing exploration of digital media as means for humanistic inquiry, ranging from computational topic modeling of poetry to 3-D printing of historical artifacts. Investigations of the processes and formats of making-as-research become all the more important as diverse fields take up these activities.

One question that design research can address is what it means to make "well." Anyone can make something; but what does it mean to make something well—particularly in the context of research? This is not simply a matter of aesthetics, though aesthetics are a component of making well. This is a matter of design judgment—a matter of informed reasoning and appraisal. On one hand, design research should be suited to this task because judgment is fundamental to design scholarship. On the other hand, so many of the criteria for assessment are bound to restrictive perspectives on functionality and desirability, which are often rooted in market orientations rather than the habits or principles of inquiry. The challenge is to develop an appreciative approach to making-as-research that is generative and critical—at one and the same time.

Some examples of such approaches are appearing in hybrid practices such as Critical Making and Design Anthropology. Others are emerging from perspectives on practice-led research in art and craft. No single conference or special issue, or for that matter, no single journal or field is going to figure out, once and for all, how to share and sustain the knowledge that is made through making. Design scholarship can and should contribute to the crucial question of what it means to make well in the context of research. It is also a question that requires a multiplicity of perspectives to address the idea of bringing design together with other fields so as to collectively discover and articulate the relevant characteristics of making as inquiry. Approaches that privilege one set of criteria over another should be viewed with caution. What's needed is methodological pluralism: diversity in systems of thought and technique that provide the opportunity for creativity in scholarship. Within the pages of *Design Issues* we strive to make space for such methodological pluralism and to report on the ongoing experiments of design research. This special issue is another set of voices brought to that conversation.

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