Introduction

Mortality is a universal, indeed an inescapable, phenomenon. Initially it may seem Mortality in Design is an odd subject for a special issue of *Design Issues*. Mortality involves endings while design is so often about beginnings: making new products or introducing new ways of doing things. There is an optimism in beginnings, an optimism inherent to the activity of designing that is typically missing when we contemplate endings. What does it mean to probe the role of design in confronting our mortality? After all, to engage with the impermanence of human existence is a challenge that goes far beyond simple definitions of design as problem solving or treatments of design processes as useful strategies for promoting innovation. The contributors to this special issue offer a provocative set of answers to this question. The guest editors Connor Graham, Wally Smith, Wendy Moncur, and Elise van den Hoven provide a useful overview of this discussion in their introduction. They identify five themes that serve the reader as avenues into the discussion of Mortality in Design: *materializing*, *translating*, *preserving*, *remembering*, and *continuing*. Disconnect these key words from the concept of mortality and they still serve as useful descriptions that capture subtle variations on efforts to answer the question *what is it to design?*

Nurturing humanistic reflection about design has long been an important goal for *Design Issues*. Among other things this special issue devoted to Mortality in Design demonstrates the capacity of design to support deep thought about fundamental aspects of the human experience. It is useful to pause for a moment and reflect on how design actually promotes deep thought and what form design reflection assumes. In their introduction the guest editors point to a distinctive aspect of design discourse as it engages the theme of Mortality in Design, something they identify as a *design imaginary* which they describe as the imaginative creation and deliberate construction of enduring artifacts and meaningful spaces: tools for thinking and acting. One finds parallel discussions of something similar to this *design imaginary* in the work of people like Arjun Appadurai and Donald Norman. Imagination in this context is conceived not as the intimate and intensely personal life of the

mind that unfolds within individuals; rather, it is a shared collective and social ability to speculate about what is needed, possible, and desirable. It is the ability of designers to support, enhance, and celebrate such a collective imaginary that interests the editors of this journal. We are committed to ensuring that *Design Issues* provides the kind of intellectual space which the design community needs not only to report on what designers have done but to imagine what design could be.

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