

# Introduction

This issue of *Design Issues* opens with a discussion on design activism and the politics of designerly interventions. In this Sarah Fox, Catherine Lim, Tad Hirsch, and Daniela K. Rosner highlight designers' collective responsibility to a broad range of stakeholders, to the need of shifting alignments when designing across changing time scales, and, to the flexibility that is required to shift form and content when a change in either social, political, or institutional circumstances occurs. Throughout this discussion they argue that, if designers wish to go beyond the fulfilment of social needs or market pressures, to incite social or political change, then an understanding of the wider power structures their work may advance or entrench is essential. In particular, the authors expose how designers' perceived status is instrumental in refiguring the status quo. Their discussion is located within a long rooted history of scholarship. This casts reality as living inside rather than outside an observing subject and, so, has spread across several fields including anthropology and sociology as well as feminist conceptions of reflexivity in design.

*Made in Patriarchy II: Researching (or Re-Searching) Women and Design* Cheryl Buckley revisits Part I (first published in *Design Issues* 3, no. 2 [1986]) to ask if the same questions are still relevant today, or, whether our preoccupations and needs have fundamentally changed. When first published more than 30 years ago *Made in Patriarchy* helped to advance critical debate about the importance of feminist politics in questioning the role of design. This, inevitably, came under scrutiny as feminists began to look at all areas of women's lives to assert that the "personal is political." Buckley points out that the title for both parts of her article ("Made" in patriarchy, not "Designed" in patriarchy) is also an attempt to question the ideologically loaded terminology of design. Accordingly she addresses four areas: third-wave feminism and the complexities of identity politics; what we mean by design and designer and its role in the making of ordinary, everyday, things; local and global scale whereby the domestic and intimate are at the periphery of designers' interests, and; the distortions caused by an over reliance on over-arching narratives of the past—especially accounting for women. Buckley suggests that, unlike gender, the question of women's relationship to design has now slipped to the margins of scholarship and research.

Much current public and political debate is concerned with the twin saviours of innovation and interdisciplinarity. Often—so the argument goes—if we are to solve some of the major challenges facing society then this will not happen through past forms of incremental development derived from the knowledge silos of isolated disciplines. Our solutions to major social problems will need the kinds of radical innovation made possible by co-operation and partnership between a range of disciplines working in consort. Moreover, design, as a discipline with no subject, is increasingly considered to be the fundamental agent of interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary, thinking. In his article *How Transdisciplinary is Design?* Jonathan Lewis answers this question through an analysis using citation networks. Through this he concludes that “the professional and academic design community would do well to spend less time talking about what makes design unique and valuable and instead to spend more time talking about how design can seamlessly integrate with the strengths of other disciplines.”

Such a revolution—to the way in which we conduct our lives or relate to the natural environment—has long been predicted through a convergence of the digital and fiber sciences. In their article, *Revolutionary Textiles: A Philosophical Inquiry on Electronic and Reactive Textiles*, Tincuta Heinzl and Juan Hinestroza observe that electronic and reactive textiles promise to bring wide-ranging changes to the ways we dress and communicate, and from the ways we sense and are sensed to the ways we build and use textiles as substrates for new applications. They go on to suggest, however, that such predictions are still a revolution in the waiting since electronic textiles and wearable technologies, despite multiple research efforts, have not yet made an entrance into our everyday lives. They go on to conclude that “electronic and reactive textiles’ ubiquity—or rather, their promise of ubiquity—allows us to posit that textiles (in transformation) offer an exemplary case study for the present state of design as a discipline, forcing us to revisit design’s approaches and to address issues ranging from science and technology, to ethical and aesthetic ones.”

In recent years use of the term “participatory” has accrued a diversity of meanings and interpretations when, essentially, it is critical to the relationship between design and politics. Originally intended to represent a “social democratic belief” that workers should be involved in decisions relating to their working environment “participation” is often now used, for example, to promote consumerist ideas of user innovation or the design of novelty products. In their article entitled *Politics of Participation in Design Research: Learning from Participatory Art* Thomas Markussen and Eva Knutz set out to restore the socially engaged practices originally associated with participatory design—through this undemocratic forces and structures will be made visible through the design process itself.

Without returning to “good old” participatory design practices they emphasize, instead, the *politics* of participation. More specifically they argue “design-driven approaches to participation in some cases might be preferred over user-driven approaches and even can enhance forms of democracy for users whose views would otherwise be repressed. Not all people are able to participate. And designers need, in some incidences, to consider whether it is ethically responsible to let people participate. We always need to ask *what* participation is good for, *who* should participate, and when.”

In his article *The Emergence of Chinese-Influenced Design as an International Automotive Design Language* Brendan Donnelly observes that China’s historically lax attitude toward intellectual property—an attitude that once filled markets with plagiarized designs and foreign imitations—has now given way to the growing confidence of a younger generation of automobile designers using Chinese aesthetics to create a unique design language. One such designer, Peter Horbury (working in his Shanghai studio), explains that ever since the days of the Spice and Silk Routes, international markets have desired the exotic products of China. Accordingly, his forms “look as if they were not drawn with a marker but with a calligraphy brush.” In one such instance influence of Chinese architecture can be seen in the design of an instrument panel—its curved shape being inspired by an ancient bridge in Hangzhou called the Broken Bridge. Horbury describes it this way: “The bridge is in stories of legend. It is very typically Chinese, with a long, long, very soft curve that goes down and out...It’s a unique shape.” This example, alongside many others, causes Donnelly to conclude that a new generation of automobile designers in China have created an authentic language that explores China’s unique cultural heritage.

The influence of the Staatliches Bauhaus, on the practices and teaching of art and design and on technical innovation, continues to resound a century after its 1919 foundation in Weimar, by German architect Walter Gropius. The Bauhaus operated in Germany for fourteen years and, to mark the centenary of its foundation, the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, mounted a landmark exhibition entitled *Netherlands ⇄ Bauhaus - Pioneers of a New World*, as reviewed in this issue by Chamutal Leket. With almost 800 objects on display the exhibition was accompanied by a 308-page catalog edited by Mienke Simon Thomas and design historian Yvonne Brentjens, and translated into Dutch and English. The exhibition underlined the argument that Dutch artists and architects were exceedingly fruitful in spreading and gradually changing concepts and systems at the Bauhaus. In other words, Dutch teachers and students shaped the Bauhaus and its legacy.

From October 11, 2018 to January 27, 2019, the Tate Modern in London mounted a major retrospective of Anni Albers’ weaving and fiber art accompanied by a catalog published in association with

Yale University Press. In her review of these works Larissa Nowicki emphasizes the relationship between art and life in the work of Albers. After registering at the Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany, in 1922, Albers fled the Hitler regime which would have considered her Jewish despite being baptized Protestant. This led to a journey in Northern America through Black Mountain College, then to the ruins of South American civilizations and finally settling in Connecticut where she and Josef Albers made their home. This exhibition and its associated publication demonstrate Albers' influence as a pioneer of twentieth century modernism. Of this Nowicki observes "Anni Albers's work certainly continues to inform practitioners of all disciplines today. Nearly 100 years after she enrolled at the Bauhaus, we find ourselves hanging in the balance between two eras—the material and the digital. New technologies are encroaching on our lives daily, absorbing the material elements of our lived experiences and transmitting them as invisible data to invisible clouds."

Hannah Pivo reviews *African American Designers in Chicago: Art, Commerce and the Politics of Race* (Chicago Cultural Center, October 27, 2018–March 3, 2019). Of this she writes that the documents, images, and products on display "provide a vivid portrait of nearly a century of design history, largely overlooked until recent years." She goes on to add they "illustrate the argument that design exists at the crossroads of creative and economic interests and is thus a potent site for political engagement and a battleground for racial equality." This exhibition demonstrates that, rather than being a peripheral strand of design history, black designers have long served a central role in shaping Chicago's industrial, political, and creative communities.

This issue concludes with Justin Powell's book review of *Designing Disability: Symbols, Space and Society* by Elizabeth Guffey.

Bruce Brown  
Richard Buchanan  
Carl DiSalvo  
Dennis Doordan  
Kipum Lee  
Victor Margolin  
Ramia Mazé

#### Errata

Some footers in the previous issue (Volume 35, Number 4 Autumn 2019) were erroneously identified as "Volume 35, Number 3 Summer 2019."