

Introduction

Understanding, rather than simply marking the conclusion of a process of inquiry, is often the initial stage of the next step in the search for knowledge. Now that we know X (whatever X might be), what is it that we actually know? What questions does understanding provoke as well as answer? Hence, one of the standard features of good scholarship is a sub-section in an article or report labeled something like *Further Topics for Discussion*, or *Next Steps* or simply, *Implications*. This issue is rich with implications and provocations. Mahyar Arefi deploys the concept of consilience to explain how seemingly unrelated strands of knowledge converge to provide intellectual coherence for the discipline of urban design. Katja Thoring, Roland Mueller, Pieter Desmet, and Petra Badke-Schaub report on their effort to develop, in their words: "... a unified model of design knowledge that merges traditional knowledge management with the peculiarities of design knowledge. Peter Gall Krogh and Ilpo Koskinen examine the chain of thinking and doing that leads from original project briefs to final designs through their discussion of four different epistemological traditions. Citing the work of the philosopher Anne-Françoise Schmid, the authors argue it is impossible to frame design practice within a single epistemological tradition. "We hope [the authors write] to expand tolerance in design research and to diminish practices and perspectives that police what is right and what is wrong" Peter Phillips and Anima Abbas-Nazari review *My Naturewatch*, a program designed to foster public engagement with nature through DIY technologies. The successes and failures they describe offer insights into design efforts aimed at promoting "active engagement" in local community settings. Seminal achievements in data visualization between 1847 and 1876 are at the center of Ellen Mazur Thomson's account developments in nineteenth century color printing. Jeremy Myerson contributes an insightful review of Jennifer Kaufmann-Buhler's book *Open Plan: A Design History of the American Office*. This issue also includes a visual essay and cover design by Anamarija Korolji and Leo Tai. *Post-Atmosphere* explores the relationship between organisms and environments and deconstructs the relationship between outer surfaces and inner structures through an act of surreal imagination: a digital exhibition staged on an extraterrestrial world.

Unlike a themed special issue, the articles collected in this issue stand alone; each possesses its own merits and makes its own distinctive contribution to different facets of design knowledge and practice. Yet when concepts like “consilience,” “unified models,” and “contextual epistemology” are brought together, as they are here, they produce an intellectual resonance worth noting. Increasingly, design scholars—although their subjects, methods, and conclusions vary greatly—share a similar insight. They caution us that old models of understanding, based on traditional disciplinary frameworks, are no longer adequate to the task of articulating a legible and useful portrait of complexity. This does not mean that the quest for a comprehensive, unified model of knowledge capable of shaping our understanding of design is futile. It does mean that the way we understand what will constitute a unified model of design knowledge, a model that can accommodate a diversity of perspectives and experiences, is evolving in light of new scholarship. To the extent that the design community is able to explain what it is we know and how we know it, and more importantly, to suggest how what we know offers important insights into how to understand and intervene in complex natural and human-directed systems, it is equipped to make significant contributions to the wellbeing of diverse communities. As it has since its inception, *Design Issues* remains committed to providing a forum for this effort.

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