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“Redesigning Design Education - the Next Bauhaus?”

A contextual discussion document for a new Design Praxis

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About the Authors

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Robert Young is Director for Design Research at the University of Northumbria at Newcastle. He joined the University in 1984 as an Associate Lecturer and has since acted as course leader for the B.A. (Hons.) Design for Industry course. He completed his PhD in 1989, concerning the review of complex interactive system design methods. He has developed the research policy of the School of Design over a period of ten years, and was instrumental in setting up the Centre for Design Research. His current work includes research in the fields of; action research methods, design futures; integrated design approaches to healthcare, design practice and management of interaction design projects.

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A graduate in Industrial Design, Andrea worked as a Design Consultant on consumer products, CD-ROM, Web and Interface Design. This design work has been featured in: 'Design for Success', 'Design Week', 'Revolution', 'The Telegraph' and 'Product Design' Oxford University Press. In 1995 she set up a PhD looking at advanced Graphical User Interface in Virtual Reality with BT Interaction Futures at Martlesham Heath, Ipswich. She is currently a Senior Lecturer at the University of Northumbria where she teaches on the B.A. (Hons.) Design for Industry as well as running the innovative course 'Contemporary Influences on Design'. She is responsible for organising the School of Design's Annual Conference, which has a prestigious history of key speakers including Jonathan Ive of Apple Computers. As a representative of British Design Education she has been invited to speak on behalf of the British Council and the DTI running workshops in both Hong Kong and Vietnam.

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Sean is a co-founder of Nowhere Limited. He has spent over a decade advising both public and private sector organisations on how to see, connect and catalyse new value and creative opportunities. He was Design and Communications Director at the British Design Council as well as founder of the industrial design company Octo Design. Sean has written, lectured and broadcast on design, creativity, innovation and business in the UK, Europe, North and South America.

Introduction

This paper is a product of a research project conducted as a partnership between the Centre for Design Research at the University of Northumbria at Newcastle, UK and the Nowhere Foundation. The project deeply questions the orthodoxy of design education in terms of its capacity to prepare students of design for the broader challenges implied by the evolving context of economic, social and environmental change.

The paper is essentially an exhortation to design education. It focuses on the changing role of design as an integral part of the global market system. It reveals changes already underway, as well as those afoot, which will transform society and the design profession, regardless of whether design education responds to its threats and opportunities. The paper considers the consequences of embracing such changes. It introduces a new approach to the framing of the context of design and its role within society. It concludes by suggesting the formation of a 'Design Praxium'¹ as a catalyst to identify vital insights into the future of design education and to foster meaningful design.

New design needs new designers

The Design Praxium envisions a new kind of design school to address design issues implied by the evolving context, one that hopefully will be as pioneering today as the Bauhaus was in the 1930s in terms of its radical approach and impact on design, industry and society. But what are the obstacles to achieving a new vision of design and a new kind of design education to support this vision?

There is an irony to design. The activity of creating the new is stuck in an out of date orthodoxy. How is it that we can produce so many wonderful looking artefacts yet utterly fail to create real connection, peace, harmony, balance with each other and the world we stand on?

- We can design glossy brochures, yet struggle to really communicate.

- We can design fabulous offices, but not happy workers.
- We produce startling advertising yet bulimic youngsters
- We can design sexy cars, yet choke in the rush hour and
- Create amazing things for the world, seemingly at the cost of the world.

Many now agree design is in turmoil and Designers today are unconsciously part of the problem.

Design education

Design education seems particularly stuck in its orthodoxy. Our ability to design design, and design design education seems limited.

Of course, design's current role is primarily in the service of business and it's pursuit of profit! – But there are many questions that we can ask as educationalists that our colleagues in design practice find very difficult to raise:

- What is the shape of the world business asks us to design?
- What will it take to move above or beyond the hegemony that industry has on the role of the designer within society?
- What do we mean by success in design?
- Why might we need a new breed of creative professional to respond to a more holistic view of success?
- What will they design?
- What are the forces or context driving the need?

A review of the current context in which design operates

The prevailing socio-economic paradigm

As mentioned above, this paper focuses on a brief review of the socio-economic context in which design operates and that shapes the nature of its work considerably. From the appearance of industrial design during the nineteenth century, through to post-modern visions of a plural society, the context for design has been changing.

The prevailing ideological framework of the industrialised world has been based on a modern view, as Harvey notes: "Generally perceived as positivistic, techno centric, and rationalistic, universal modernism has been identified with the belief in linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders, and the standardisation of knowledge and production."² This kind of thinking formed the basis of the Bauhaus in 1919. Key design slogans of this era included 'truth to materials', 'the house a machine for living', and 'form follows function'. The basis was scientific where 'function' in design was abstracted from broader human experience and could be tackled logically in terms of a rational analysis of the problem. This rational approach was seen throughout society to be the driving ideological framework.

The primary western economic paradigm of the modern age has been a capitalist one. This has provided the excess wealth necessary to support society. This society is characterised by its relationship with technology as a driving force for innovation and profit. This industrialisation has occurred in a number of professions including agriculture and healthcare.

Within design, products have changed in response to the broader socio-economic context. Whereas in the modernist market the Ford 'model T' car was 'any colour as long as it's black' and 'pushed' to a vast pool of potential consumers. In contrast, post-industrial markets are highly saturated and therefore result in rapid product differentiation to maintain sales.

Consequently we find a new tribalism, where markets are increasingly niche orientated, driven by consumer 'connoisseurs' who are 'pulling' the market with specific demands. Designs are no longer seen as being functionally driven, technological achievements, but rather as eclectic generators of ritual or sensation.³ The new design mantras include, 'form follows fiction', 'form follows fun' and 'form follows emotion' such as those expressed by designers at Alessi in Italy, IDEO in America and Frog design in Germany.

Yet it has long been recognised that for capitalism to survive it must fundamentally maintain markets to keep up demand for production. It is well known that the main threat to capitalism lies in the saturation of consumer needs and therefore to counteract such an event a “policy of intensive innovation and renewal of products”⁴ has occurred.

However, the location of the majority of the new markets is cost driven, following consumers with spending power rather than responding to basic human needs. So instead of turning to real social problems, industry has remained consumer focused and has intensified product innovation and differentiation to create new markets within ones that are rapidly becoming saturated.

The resulting markets have involved the industrial designer as a stylist responding to niche markets with lifestyle products. This so called ‘experience’ or knowledge economy sells meaning, rather than object, in the form of brand experience. This manufactured ‘brandscape’ distances consumers from the issues and poses a number of dangers for a society trying to come to terms with its environmental impact and construction of a sustainable approach to the future.

As the Indonesian writer Y.B. Mangunwijaya noted; “You might not see things yet on the surface, but underground, it’s already on fire.”⁵ The double standards are evident when waste is no longer an issue once it has been buried or ‘hidden’. For example street rubbish is seen as un-environmental and ‘bad’, yet as soon as it is covered with turf the issue is considered resolved.

What are the costs of globalisation?

With intensification of competition, companies are responding to macroeconomics by cost cutting, downsizing and becoming more flexible. The result we have seen, known as ‘new growth’ or ‘new international economic order’, is a shift in the geographical ethics. Sending heavy industry abroad where they can pollute the land of developing countries. As Jean-

Pierre Dupuy puts it, by “spoiling their landscapes, deadening their workers and disrupting their time and space.”⁶ Such moves in the name of globalisation have been brought about by the deregulation of the global labour markets, where Vietnamese workers can be employed for a fraction of the cost of a western counterpart. A consequence is the driving down of prices for consumers at the expense of the producers. As Bruges notes: “Between 1980 and 1997 commodity prices dropped: Sugar down 73%, Coffee down 64%, Cocoa down 58%, Rubber down 52%, rice down 51%, cotton down 43%, tea down 36%, copper down 30%.”⁷ Such economic benefits are restricted to a narrow group of consumers when, “20% of people living in the rich countries consume 86% of the worlds resources.”⁸ The Philippines, Mexico, China, Vietnam, Indonesia and others form 'export processing zones' or free-trade zones where companies such as Nike, Gap and IBM can focus their manufacture.⁹ In such environments there has also been a shift in the distribution of profits as Klein notes:

"Companies that were traditionally satisfied with a 100 percent mark-up between the cost of factory production and their retail price have been scouring the globe for factories that can make their products so inexpensively that the mark-up is closer to 400 percent."¹⁰

This move of industrial production leaves the 'developed world' with the growth of 'immaterial'¹¹ productions which don't pollute and which are suited to decentralised locations.

Similarly, a rise in disillusionment has occurred, as in a cultural sense, societies are recognising that the consequences of technological progress are not all positive, as Robson notes: "The achievements of natural science (prototypically physics and chemistry) in Western society are undoubtedly spectacular, even though not universally regarded as beneficial."¹² Examples include inherent consequences of Atomic Power and the misuse of Antibiotics.

These elements amongst others have led to the fragmentation of the globe culturally, ideologically and economically. The underlying assumption that the

future will always be incrementally 'better' has been brought into question. Global capitalism may have resulted in the elimination of much hardship in the developed parts of the world, yet it has also created much waste. Within this society planned obsolescence¹³, with the goal of maintaining markets, has reduced the perceived usefulness of products from years to months, with 40% of vacuum cleaners and 60% of stereos still working when they are thrown away. It was estimated in 1980, for example, that eleven billion dollars was paid every year by American drivers because of changes in automobile models.¹⁴ What is also notable is the relationship Design has with such a society. As Abraham Moles puts it, "the function of design must of necessity follow the development of industrial society, in other words, respond to its latent needs."¹⁵ One can therefore ask the question, are you an industrial designer or a landfill designer?

It is now widely acknowledged that this system must come to terms with its contradictions if it is to have a future. As Arthus-Bertrand notes: "Indefinite growth in a finite world is impossible."¹⁶ The question therefore remains as to whether the designer can provide meaningful solutions to some of the important socio-cultural issues that society faces.

The infatuation with tangible solutions!

Currently, Designers value the tangible and physical and rely on them heavily to convey design intent. However, this viewpoint is limited when everything is considered in terms of the tangible. A clear example occurs when designers cannot, or will not, recommend a client to not produce an object as an outcome of designing even if this is the best solution. This focus means that Design does not take account of the broader context within which it operates. This is myopic as it encourages designers to focus all of their attention on the tangible, aesthetic, elements, disregarding the wider implications. We advocate that design requires a capacity to understand and advocate an appreciation of and responsibilities for the broader systems and context underlying the problem structure. In this sense, we are not suggesting that current industrial design does a bad job. It does a good job in relation to the original context in which our Bauhaus predecessors operated, however, this

context has changed and so must at least part of our education system and our design practice as well. Presently, we can't see the wood for the trees? But to truly see requires perspective.

Developing a better perspective

Given the nature of problems within the context, how do we go about developing our perspective? How can we go about re-designing design education? Design's foundations were mainly created by the Bauhaus pioneers. Their bold 'out-of-orthodoxy' thinking created the base for design education today. However, the social, economic context in which they operated is totally outdated and inappropriate today. As we have discussed, critical environmental challenges and the powerful forces of globalisation, demand that we pick up the ultimate design challenge to design design itself.

Its time to move on! But in moving on we need to become mindful of the way we can unconsciously see the world. Every society ever known rests on some largely tacit, basic set of assumptions about which we are, what kind of universe we live in and what is ultimately important to us.

We can begin to appreciate something of our current context by taking a look at previous worldviews of thinking, for instance, those originating in Western civilisations as depicted by Henryk Skolimowski, which shows that the industrial era that we now live in could be called 'Mechanos'. This was preceded by:

- Mythos – The ancient Greeks of Homer's time saw the visible presences of gods in the stories of their lives.
- Logos – At the transition from the 6th century to the 5th century BC, Greek Logos appeared, which was a new form of understanding based on a view of the universe as being coherent and harmonious.
- Theos – Out of the ruins of the Roman Empire a new worldview emerged, pre-ordained by the monotheistic Judaeo/Christian God.
- Mechanos – was a new view of the universe based on a clock-like metaphor, moving according to rational and deterministic scientific laws.

The telling feature of mechanos was the movement to detach thinking based on ethics and values from those of rationality, logic and science. It could be argued that there are also many other dysfunctions attributable to this Western legacy of worldview thinking, which we bear the legacy of today.

We have had about 500 years now of mechanos. How are we doing?

Many commentators would say, not that well. Some of the crises that feature regularly in the newspapers suggest that mechanos is struggling to create the kind of world we would want our great grandchildren to inhabit. Yet the positive aspect is the quest seeking a new depth to the universe, and a believe system that is moving beyond a (Newtonian) mechanistic way of being and living.

If we really look at the changes happening in the world at this time, created and influenced by living within the 'mechanos' world-view, we can see that a more-of-the-same way of viewing the world, and indeed, design, will not create a wealthy and healthy future. Design has so much more to offer in shaping the world than glossy shops full of wonderful trinkets.

If we return to the original questions posed, and in consideration of just some of the constellation of problems that our societies face, perhaps our responses ought to run along these lines:

What do we mean by success in design?

Perhaps we could say that a new idea of success would be: design that operates with full awareness of context, honouring a world we would want for our children. We could use the Native American definition of longevity that takes into account not just our succeeding generation but a total of seven generations. This would mean two new challenges for design, greater awareness and holism in meeting real needs, and longevity and sustainability in practice.

Why do we need a new breed of creative professional?

The obvious response would be to design a better context, not just better products and artefacts, and to rise to the challenges of designing better schools, better democracies and better ways of living.

What will they design, and what are the forces or context driving the need?

They will have to 'design' the ideology, policy, process and meaning, as well as the things that then flow from these.

Beyond 'Mechanos'

Following in the footsteps of Skolimowski, a bold step would be to suggest that the next world-view should be based upon an attempt to unify the split which has previously appeared in civilisations as a result of mechanos: to reconnect value and logic in our approach to the perception and design of our world. This would require a new paradigm of education or learning to prepare the designer or 'new creative professional' for the context of their practice.

Perhaps we can refer to such a new paradigm of learning and practice for the designer as 'Integro'¹⁷. A tentative worldview suggested following the consideration of the contextual study in this research, meaning integrity and integration, implying; human-centeredness, sustainability, inclusivity and equity, holism and appreciation. The authors have noted a strong correlation of the principles of 'Integro' with those of 'Oullim'¹⁸, held up by the ICSID Education Seminar organising committee as being pertinent to the future of design education.

However, if we look at the role of design within society it can be seen to follow these three levels of activity, which also represent different states of consciousness on the part of the designer (see figure 1).

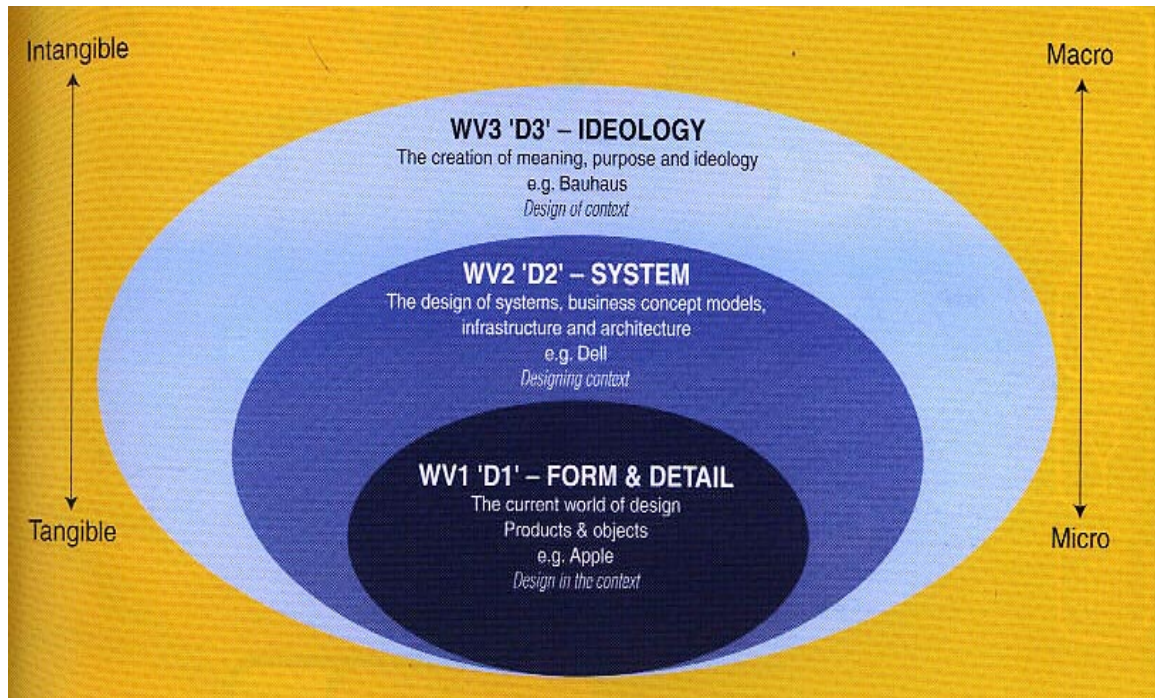


Figure 1

D1 - is where design is really still at, based on our inheritance of values from the Bauhaus. It is concerned with form and detail, as personified by designs such as the Apple I-Mac. It is design in the context.

D2 - is systems design, taking greater account of human factors and the surrounding environmental issues of the product, but nevertheless, designing the infrastructure of the context of operation of our world, for instance Dell computers and the associated business process systems.

D3 - is the co-creation of influential policy in the spirit and energy of the Bauhaus, but is the design of the context itself.

These states are mapped out in two dimensions and their relationship can also be set against two sliding scales: from a macro worldview at *D3* down to a micro world-view at *D1*. Conversely, they also move from the tangible and physical at *D1* to the intangible and metaphysical at *D3*.

We need to move from just designing at the level of form and detail (*D1*) to design at the level of ideology and policy (*D3*). We are not advocating that

every designer will want to or would be able to work at the level of D3. The complexity of practice at each of these levels implies different knowledge and expertise. Although practice at D1 has previously celebrated the work of the gifted design individual, D3 is likely to promote the role of the designer within a co-creative team of disciplines.

The future challenge and the role of design education

So is design education equipping us with designers who will unquestioningly feed the current orthodoxy, or with designers who will help us create a new, better context? Will design remain in the domain of the 'art school' trained designer, or will communities of people learn to co-create better systems, infrastructures and ideologies? Critically will design step into its full potential and become a way and a means for social, cultural and economic innovation?

As the UK think tank, Demos, pointed out in, 'It's Democracy, Stupid'¹⁹. "Our schools and universities retain basic structures which are centuries old"..."The ability to connect new ideas and radical aspirations with practical, concrete outcomes calls for far-reaching processes of learning and transformation in all areas of organisational life". This captures the challenge that design education faces. It's time to tap into the pioneering creative spirit of the founders of the Bauhaus and take a radical new look at the requirements of design education. It is for this reason that the authors of this paper are proposing the creation of a new form of design practice and have coined the term 'Design Praxium' in order to help differentiate its aims and methods from those of existing forms of practice.

The Design Praxium seeks to fulfil a need for a new type of design practice. It is not intended to deny the existence of, or to obviate the existing paradigm of design education, but this is obviously not sufficient in itself to prepare students of design for all of the design problems to be found in society. The Design Praxium is a bold initiative to deepen the educational experience available, to create a new generation of designers that are able to design beyond the current context, shaping new contexts.

Conclusion

The predominant economic paradigm of the modern age has been capitalism with its associated world-view. However, it is acknowledged that this system must come to terms with its' contradictions if it is to survive. Currently, the design profession focuses on the tangible elements of design, disregarding their role within the wider social context, i.e., D1 and D2 rather than D3. The new challenge for design will be in integrating the material aspects of designing within the immaterial challenges of context and beyond – to re-design the context itself.

The designer's engagement with both intangible and tangible levels of designing requires new understanding modes of investigation and new methods of assessment. The virtue of this challenge will be in re-aligning the designer's values, to broaden the remit of design to move beyond our immediate sphere of influence and address our sphere of concern (see Figure 2). No longer will the end point have to be a tangible product if that is no longer appropriate. We advocate the need for a strong approach in educational leadership to contend with these issues.

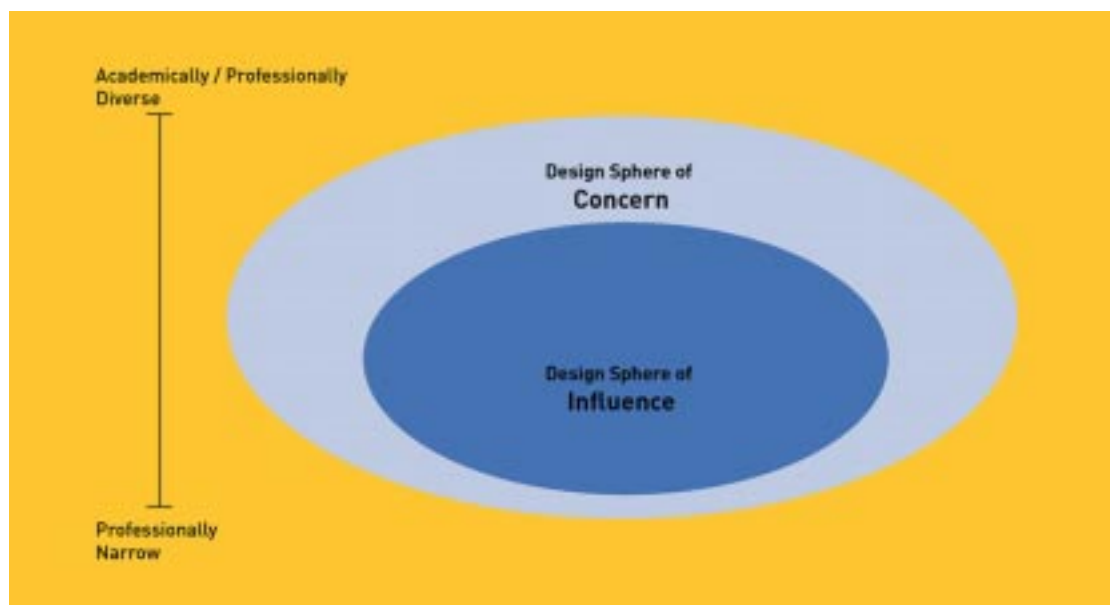


Figure 2

This paper has been presented as a challenging 'exhortation' to designers,

educationalists and students at the inaugural ICSID Education Seminar, about the potential future opportunity for design and its process of education within society. In keeping with this tone, it is perhaps appropriate to end on a rather poetic note. The authors contend that the resolution of a more considerate approach for design lies in its propensity for holistic and inclusive thinking, to embrace and facilitate the integration of knowledge and understanding from other disciplines²⁰. Academia has not yet reached a point in its development where an integrated approach to the development and application of knowledge occurs. In this sense:

“All the flowers of tomorrow are in the seeds of today”²¹.

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¹ Praxium / 'præksieum' - refers to a new form of praxis. Design Praxis – Practicing the new art of design. Praxium is a new word created to support a new ideology for the future of design.

² Ed. PRECIS 6 (1987) quoted in HARVEY.D. The Condition of Postmodernity, Blackwell:USA, 1990, p.9

³ Branzi A. The Hot House, p143

⁴ Dupuy, J. The myths of information, p6

⁵ Klein, N. No Logo, Flamingo Press, 2001,

⁶ J.Dupuy, The myths of information, p6

⁷ Bruges. J, The Little Earth Book, Alastair Sawday Publishing, 2000, p86

⁸ Bruges. J, The Little Earth Book, Alastair Sawday Publishing, 2000, p34

⁹ Klein, N. No Logo, Flamingo Press, 2001, p203

¹⁰ Ortega, In Sam we Trust, 342, quoted from Klein, N. No Logo, Flamingo Press, 2001, p197

¹¹ A.Moles, Design Issues, Design and Immateriality, p25

¹² Robson, C. Real World Research. A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers. Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999, p57

¹³ Packard.v. The Waste makers

¹⁴ F.M. Fischer, The costs of the Automobile, p433-51

¹⁵ V.Margolin, Design Discourse - Essay by A.Moles, p77

¹⁶ Arthus-Bertrand, The Earth From the air, Thames and Hudson, p289

¹⁷ Integro - Analysis of Latin Grammar using the stem: integr and the ending: are. Integrasco -ere [to break out afresh]. integratio -onis f. [renewing]. integritas -atis f. [unimpaired condition, soundness, health; uprightness, integrity]; of style, [purity, correctness]. integro -are [to make whole, heal, refresh; to renew, begin afresh]. All of these derivations we suggest are pertinent to a new world-view. Characteristically for design, integro, looks forward rather than backwards as Skolimowski has done.

¹⁸ Oullim The harmonisation of opposing values based on acknowledgement and acceptance.

¹⁹ It's Democracy Stupid – an agenda for self-government¹⁹, Article by Demos, published by Demos, 2001

²⁰ The authors have already conducted a mapping exercise, sponsored by the UK Design Council, of existing initiatives, deemed to influence the future direction of design thinking. This is being followed up by an explorative study to correlate the core constructs underpinning the development of knowledge across different disciplines.

²¹ Anonymous saying, originating from the Phillipines