

POST MODERNITY: DESIGN EDUCATION CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This paper details the exploration undertaken by the authors in their desire to promote a design culture, acceptable to colleagues, enriching for students, sustainable by the university and able to educate students who will be readily accepted by the creative and commercial design needs of the European and Global markets. It is prompted by two questions, one the philosophical i.e. what do our students, in 2008, want? The second question is geographical and structural i.e. as we move to new or refurbished accommodation, what do we, the academic community, desire as a teaching environment? Academics in positions of influence relative to product design learning and teaching are often themselves the products of the era of mass production and the 'industrialised west', yet the culture now is of a 'post industrial society'; the 'global economy'; the 'consumer culture' the shift from production to consumption. It appears currently, too many of us, that time and space have been compacted and the "spatial aspects of 'post-modernity' have become as significant as the temporal aspects of modernity" [Featherstone et al 1995]. As production has fallen within the European Union the task of increased production for increased consumer demand has fallen to the developing countries of the Pacific Rim and China, however it is global modernisation that they are experiencing, although, relative to change, they are "not the initiators" [Friedman et al 1995]. It is suggested that within Europe the change to a service based commerce and consumer society has lead to a popular and political increase in the awareness of 'creativity' and 'design' and of the creative choices consumers make [Miller D; Du Gay et al 1996]. However, it also appears that the design activity is now physically divorced from commerce and production, design offices and studios are no longer sited adjacent to production areas, as in the industrialised era, now "the mythical, typical designer's studio comes in all shapes, locations and sizes" [Abrams, R 2007].

Keywords: Design Culture, Design Philosophy, Curriculum, Consumption

1 INTRODUCTION

Design, the activity, is now classified as a profession and by some as an aspiring academic subject. Students in ever increasing number apply to universities to study design in its many elements, particularly Product Design. They are driven by the buzz words of 'entrepreneurial-ship' 'creativity' and the 'global market' delivered in an often rigid framework of A-Level study including 'sustainable design' and 'green design'. The authors in their turn attempt to deliver an academic programme of study, at honours level, in 'Product Design' searching for a subject philosophy that is meaningful for the students to inherit, both study modes, undergraduate and 'A' level apparently driven by

the growth in the creative industries. 'Few professions in the industrialised world have grown in terms of economic presence and cultural impact as much as design has in the past two decades' [Julier, G 2008]. Trying to encapsulate this growth and give it validity in academic terms and credibility in employability terms is the challenge we face.

2 DESIGN CULTURE: AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

Design has matured throughout the last forty years to become a prime profession with the industrialised countries. Prior to this design was understated and an element, even peripheral to manufacturing and industrial activities underpinned by science e.g. engineering, architecture etc. Issigonis, as is well known, and his team were engineers and titled design draughtsmen. The main players in design were process engineers, whose academic studies relied on mathematics, material science and physics, they were titled 'press tool designers', 'jig and tool designers', 'production engineers' and 'mould tool designers'. The product designers with their form and aesthetics were the 'bit players'. The tool designer was part of the twentieth century 'Fordism' found in the UK and Europe in the large conglomerate engineering institutions. Gone now are the process engineers and large scale 'Fordism' replaced by 'Post Fordism, the post modern consumer culture, that is more a social system, replacing the modern producer culture, leading to a decentring of work in Western Europe' [Rosen 2002]. Design as an activity has undergone a fundamental change, even revolution, during this period, moving from a problem solving activity, underpinned by engineering in its broadest sense, to a problem processing activity. This change, dramatic to designer engineers, moved design from multi-disciplinary to interdisciplinary, and in so doing changed the design influence from the process engineer to the product designer. A typical design consultancy will bring together 'materials, manufacturing, software and futures specialists' [Julier, G; Hollington et al, 2008], to design artefacts, spaces or imagery, but are prepared to cross the boundaries into structures, processes, graphics and interiors.

Can design culture be defined in acceptable academic terms to enable its recognition as an academic subject? It is argued that a design culture given via curriculum content to the students can itself be divided into discrete areas of study, underpinned by elements of scholarly activity taken from various disciplines which are themselves accepted as academic e.g. ergonomics – anthropometrics – anthropology. This is similar to the stance taken with many subjects and in simple terms one can ask when did experimentation in laboratories transform itself into a pure academic science i.e. physics? The engineering subjects, mechanical, electrical and civil, have always had 'design' as the theme permeating their programmes, but it usually accounts for a quarter only of the course content, applied theory mainly mathematics or physics accounting for the rest and to academia giving these disciplines their credibility. It therefore may be necessary to regard design culture as several components, which when brought together form a holistic academic subject in its own right. Clearly a design culture can be demonstrated through the realised and visual artefact and therefore can be evidenced through communication of sight, as Koh states 'design culture is located in communication: but is also something that is all around' [Koh 2004]. Julier [2008] expands this to all of society putting forward the argument that design culture also expresses an attitude, a value and a desire to improve things. This sentiment could be taken as both an aim of a programme of study in 'product design' and a desirable attribute for students to enter university with and when enhanced graduate with. The design culture must also possess a methodology or process, the actions of which have been influenced by contextual forces. These forces may be economic, social, political

etc. the study of which as an underpinning component of design, bring it academic recognition. This methodology can be enlarged to include materials, business, technology and secondary methodologies e.g. of research. This enlarged methodology if operating from the centre of a design organisation, the 'problem processing activity' would and has, become in industry and commerce, the agent of change. This change is often manifested through design that is 'sustainable', 'inclusive', 'ethical' and 'green' i.e. 'responsible design'. This is a fundamental leap from the methodologies of the 1980s encapsulated in the process put forward by Pugh, figure 1[1991]. This now seems, to take the designers expression '2D', the new design culture must take the '2D' and enhance to '3D' by accepting design is contemporary, influenced by global discourse, beliefs, infrastructures and inclusion. If that is the case the newly formed and delivered curriculum would be much different from that practised currently.

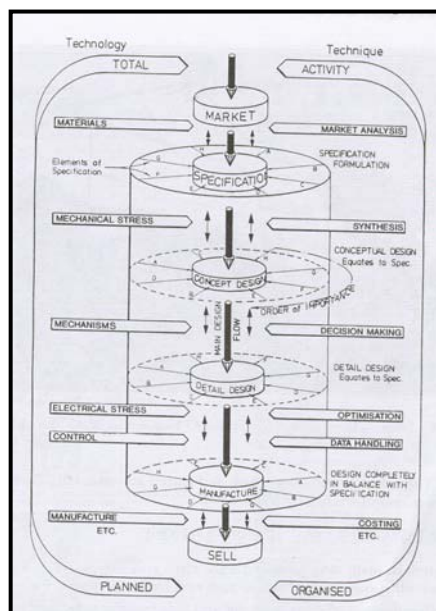


Figure 1 Pugh's Total Design Activity

3 DESIGN CULTURE: THE NEW CURRICULUM

It follows that the new curriculum would not be driven from the same influences as is currently accepted. Programmes at present are driven by the premise that 1) we presume that which the employer wants, 2) that which the student wants and so often 3) that which we can deliver. We set learning outcomes that we inherited from our own experiences which often means the majority of the study to take place in studios and CAD resource rooms and workshops, the main activity being the design and realisation of artefacts. However, it can be argued that if the design activity has indeed undergone a revolution, and has become a 'problem processing activity' we should not only analyse the artefact but also its environment and relationship with the wider world. Julier [2008] states it succinctly, 'in order to develop an understanding of the conditions that form designed artefacts, but also how those artefacts themselves come to bear on these activities, their relationship with a triangulation of the activities of designers, production and consumption requires investigation.' Here then, we propose, is the basis of a new curriculum, developed from a design philosophy, which incorporates the study of the

object in context, the methodologies of design and research, and is itself an agent of change.

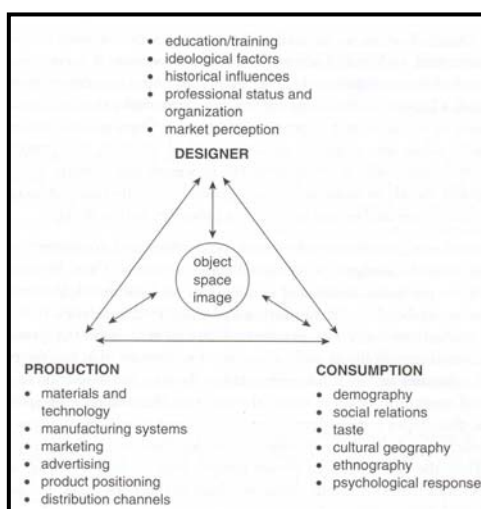


Figure 2 Domain of Design Culture [Julier, 2008]

Julier, G [2008] suggests a domain of design culture, Figure 2, that the authors believe could, with development, lead to a new 'programme map' with design culture at its centre, which would equip students wishing to practice design with the correct academic platform with which to analyse, compare and contrast their activities. This would lead to a proposal as set out in Table 1.

Table 1 Proposed Curriculum

Module	Profession	Manufacture	Marketing	Realisation
Credit point rating	30	30	30	30
Year 1	Ideology	Technology	Psychology	Images
Year 2	History	Materials	Sociology	Spatial
Year 3	Placement industrial/commercial			
Year 4	Innovation	Design realisation and written discourse		

This programme of study would rely on each subject area delivering on a common theme, informing each other in a dynamic cycle of development, stemming from their analysis and evaluation of the 'theme'. However, one must immediately guard against the temptation to lay an impinging infrastructure on such a programme, too many programmes of academic study have been stifled by the perceived need to 'tick boxes' for apparent quality audit purposes, the 'ossification systems of universities' [Smith, M, 2005].

4 DESIGN CULTURE: NEW CURRICULUM DELIVERY

The question to turn to now is, how will this new programme be delivered and where? The current content of the programmes has to be enhanced so that skills and facts explicit in the various discipline areas become explicit during the creation of an artefact.

The programme must emphasise critical and problem solving ability, promote autonomous learning and the freedom to negotiate one's learning requirements. The programme would be 'thematic' driven by a form of project or extended work. It is argued such a programme with a recognisable design culture could be developed as described by Table 1. The advantage is that the programme assumes transparency, enabling an eclectic programme team to acknowledge and be aware of that which is being taught by their peers. The consequence should be everyone involved and the relationship of one part of the syllabus to another would have clarity to all, as argued by Jenkins, A [1996]. The result of the thematic approach is 'themed project work' for assessment and students who experience a contextually based education which provides an unequivocal *raison d'être* for all they do. It is envisaged that the staff experience a more enjoyable teaching climate through this, as colleagues share the planning, implementation and assessment of the themes, the result of which should be artefacts of or within object, space or imagery. Where would such activity and delivery take place is the second consideration. The design of the learning space should be the epitome of the philosophy of the proposed design culture, that is responsible, inclusive, the agent for progressive change. It should inspire in all the need to educate or be educated, it should motivate, as Mark Hayden, Chief Executive of the 'Learning and Skills Council' stated 'I believe passionately that when I walk through the door of a place of learning, you should feel proud, uplifted, motivated...that should be our intent'. [JISC 2007]. It is generally accepted that 'the classroom' lecturer based delivery has been the dominant style throughout the twentieth century, change is happening, mainly in schools but we have to adapt to this change and challenge, for non stimulating environments lead inevitably to non motivated students. The JISC spaces study [Designing Spaces for Effective Learning 2007] relative to the influence of technology on learning space identified two drivers, namely pedagogic and operational. The authors have argued a case for a new academic programme of study themed to produce artefacts ready for the market; they argue that the two drivers must be as interlinked as the three defined areas of proposed academic study. The need for social interaction and cultural exchange is paramount, eclectic programmes should share space, enabling the exchange of ideas, beliefs and ethics. The authors firmly believe that the exchange of thought between students and staff around the coffee table, in balance with academic study, is as important to learning and development as any other situation.

5 DESIGN CULTURE: CONCLUSION

What then is to be the philosophical design culture and the shape and style of the design studio that embraces this change, accepts we no longer produce, takes account of consumer identities and accepts concepts such as "champions of innovation" and "early adopters" as used by the business studies educators when referring to customers with "needs" [Bailetti and Guild 1991]? Students fresh from sixth form colleges talk of sustainable design, ideas underpinned by their ever widening curriculum experienced within the scholastic domain. Does this lead to a design culture where the discussion is not form or function influenced by art, design and science, in turn fashioned by social and political whim but paradoxically social and political thinking influencing function and form at the whim of art, design and science? What environment could this renewed culture flourish in if design and designers are to stay influential and independent is open to question. However, this paradigm may be challenged by design academia, offering genuine responsible design, instead of politically driven sustainable design, underpinned by rigorous critical evaluation and appraisal of our subject, debated in environments that

incubate creativity, leaving designers to educate designers and be the major influence on form and function as applied to products. The culture of design we wish to pass to our students through academic study and practical engagement is based on our heritage but filtered by philosophical discourse to allow for progressive and expansive change ready for the future. We accept that social attitudes e.g. sustainability issues, and technology e.g. CAD and Robotics, have and will change rapidly the accepted culture of the peoples of Europe, however such future beliefs, ideas, values and knowledge although different will meld readily with the proposed philosophy of the programme and subject team. Our students will, through their studies and practise encapsulate their 'times' activities and ideas, in so doing define their culture, their philosophy, their individual beliefs, values and ethics. As Scotus wrote 'any object is only identified by means of its attributes or qualities' [100 Essential Thinkers, 2004], let it be so for our students, staff and realised designs. In conclusion then the authors propose the following philosophy for the programme:

Responsible design enhances the well being of society, benefits the economy, contributes significantly to the synergy of art and science and enables through its integrated study the pursuit of scholarly activity. As such the breadth and depth of academic studies integrated with the acquisition of eclectic skills, provides the practising designer with a bedrock of knowledge, from which to lead a purposeful and meaningful life.

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