The Concept Of The Design Discipline

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Abstract

In their previous work, the authors have demonstrated that the discipline of design has been superseded by a condition where conventionally set design disciplines have dissolved.¹²³ In this age where design is typified by fluid, evolving patterns of practice that regularly traverse, transcend and transfigure historical disciplinary and conceptual boundaries, the authors have argued that globalization and the proliferation of the digital has resulted in connections that are no longer 'amid,' cannot be measured 'across,' nor encompass a 'whole' system. In short, this 'disciplinary turn' has generated an 'other' dimension—an alternative disciplinarity.⁴ Moreover, this reliance on the 'exhausted' historic disciplines has become obsolete as the boundaries of our understanding have been superseded by a boundless space/time that we call 'alterplinary.'⁵ The fragmentation of distinct disciplines has shifted creative practice from being 'discipline-based' to 'issue- or project-based.'⁶ Consequently, this paper presents a manifesto for the future design discipline that emphasizes disposing carefully of what you know, teaching what you do not know whilst always taking design seriously, protecting us from what we want, objecting to sustaining everything, designing without reproach, ensuring that objects are invisible but designed with care and within history whilst exploring design as an *idea* rather than an *ideal*.

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1 Rodgers, P.A. & Bremner, C. "Alterplinary—'Alternative Disciplinarity,' in Future Art and Design Research Pursuits." *Studies in Material Thinking*, 6 (2011).

2 Rodgers, P.A. & Bremner, C. "Exhausting Discipline: Undisciplined and Irresponsible Design." *Architecture and Culture*, 1.1 (2013): pgs. 138-158.

3 Ibid.

4 Rodgers, P.A. & Bremner, C. "Alterplinary—'Alternative Disciplinarity,' in Future Art and Design Research Pursuits." *Studies in Material Thinking*, 6 (2011).

5 Rodgers, P.A. & Bremner, C. "Exhausting Discipline: Undisciplined and Irresponsible Design." *Architecture and Culture*, 1.1 (2013): pgs. 138-158.

6 Heppell, S. "RSA Lectures: Stephen Heppell: Learning 2016," *RSA Lectures*, 30 June, 2006. Online. Available at: <http://www.teachers.tv/video/4957> (Accessed December 22, 2010).

The Concept Of The Design Discipline

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Introduction

Since the 1950s, the adoption and application of the word *design* has been expanding continuously both in type and remit, and now extends from the design of objects and spaces that we use daily to cities, landscapes, nations, cultures, bodies, genes, political systems, and the way we produce food, to the way we travel, build cars and clone sheep.⁷ The reach of design has expanded way beyond Ernesto Rogers' description from "...from the Spoon to the City" ("*...dalla cucchiaino alla città*")⁸ to the way we formulate business and, more recently, think.⁹ With accelerated design activity anticipated well into the 21st century, it is clear that an increasing number of researchers and practitioners across a diverse range of creative and other disciplines routinely regard their methods as rooted in design practice or are using methods, techniques and approaches that could be considered "*designerly*."¹⁰ It is equally clear that design is expanding its disciplinary, conceptual, theoretical, and methodological frameworks to encompass ever-wider disciplines, activities and practice. As a result, design is either copious and being smeared as a viscous layer over the problems of the world, or what we call design is being stretched into an impermeable film expanding to keep in capital and consumption.

The boundaries of what were once recognized as discrete design disciplines such as product, graphic, textile, and fashion design have been and continue to dissolve.¹¹ Key amongst these changes is the realization that an indeterminacy of professional boundaries now exists, and fluid patterns of employment within and between traditional design disciplines is commonplace. Moreover, many modern day design pursuits have a core of designerly activity

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Latour, B. "A Cautious Prometheus? A Few Steps Toward a Philosophy of Design (With Special Attention to Peter Sloterdijk)." In *Proceedings of the 2008 Annual International Conference of the Design History Society*, edited by F. Hackne, J. Glynne & V. Minto, pgs. 2-10, 2008.

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Sudjic, D. *The Language of Things: Understanding the World of Desirable Objects*. New York, NY, USA: W.W. Norton, 2009.

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Kimbell, L. "Rethinking Design Thinking: Part I." *Design and Culture*, 3.3 (2011): pgs. 285-306.

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Cross, N. *Designerly Ways of Knowing*. London, UK: Springer, 2006.

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Rodgers, P.A. "Design Now." In *Perimeters, Boundaries and Borders*, edited by J. Marshall, pgs. 8-11.

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Schouwenberg, L. and Jongerius, H. Hella Jongerius. London, UK: Phaidon Press Ltd., 2003.

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Bouroullec, R. & Bouroullec, E. Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec. London, UK: Phaidon Press Ltd., 2003.

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van Hinte, E., ed. 1:1 Marti Guixe. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: 010 Publishers, 2002.

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Myerson, J. IDEO: Masters of Innovation. London, UK: Laurence King Publishing, 2005.

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West, D. "A New Generation." ICON, 43 (2007): pgs. 56-64.

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Rodgers, P.A. & Bremner, C. "Alterplinary—'Alternative Disciplinarity,' in Future Art and Design Research Pursuits." Studies in Material Thinking, 6 (2011).

backed by other subject specialist areas such as fine art, engineering, anthropology, computer science and business. The edges between product design and service design, for example, continue to be increasingly fuzzy. Mobile phone companies now offer more than a mere physical artefact (*i.e.* a phone), rather, they now regularly offer users the opportunities to subscribe to their services comprised of music and video downloads, among many others. Similarly, the work of design companies and designers such as Hella Jongerius, ¹² Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec, ¹³ Marti Guixe ¹⁴ and IDEO ¹⁵ now all regularly transcend historical disciplinary frameworks such as interior design, fine art, product design, and graphic design.

Thus, design today is characterized by fluid, evolving patterns of practice that regularly traverse, transcend and transfigure disciplinary and conceptual boundaries. This mutability means that design research, education, and practice is continually evolving. Tony Dunne, Professor of Interaction Design at the Royal College of Art, London, states: "*New hybrids of design are emerging. People don't fit in neat categories; they're a mixture of artists, engineers, designers, thinkers.*" ¹⁶

This paper posits that the terrain of design practice, education, and research, and its subsequent points of inquiry, are continuing to shift and extend well beyond the boundaries of the (single) discipline. That is, the discipline that was once recognized and acknowledged as design, which was born of the split of idea from manufacture, now has little to do with manufacture and a single idea. Now the idea of design includes multiple disciplinary perspectives (*i.e.* multidisciplinary) to cross-disciplinary pursuits, to the get-together of interdisciplinarity to the bricolage of transdisciplinarity and now beyond—to alter-disciplinarity, where globalization and the explosion of digital possibilities has resulted in connections that are no longer 'in the middle of...', cannot be measured 'across,' nor encompass an 'entire system.' As such, the digital has generated an 'other' dimension, so we might now need to consider 'alter-disciplinarity' or 'undisciplinarity' as the most effective approach in the research required for a future of design.

An Alternative Disciplinary ('Alterplinary') Future Manifesto

As a way forward for the discipline of design, the authors propose an 'alterplinary' manifesto (a portmanteau of 'alternative' and 'disciplinary'). Alterplinary is the condition contemporary design finds itself in. ¹⁷ The fluid, evolving muddle

of practice that regularly cross, exceed and alter historical disciplinary and conceptual boundaries has resulted in research, education, and practice that is constantly shifting, creating, contesting and negotiating new terrains of opportunities and re-shaping the boundaries of design. This “other” dimension ¹⁸ or, as we propose, an “alternative disciplinarity”—an “alterplinary” that does not rely on historic disciplines of design as the boundaries of our understanding has been superseded. The digital has modified the models of design thought and action, and, as a result, research and practice should transform from a convention domesticated by the academy to a reaction to globalization that is yet to be disciplined.

This Is The ‘Alterplinary’ Manifesto:

01 **Dispose Carefully of What You Know**

All design thought and action should emanate from a point of not knowing. Socrates, the Greek philosopher, is attributed to have said that: “*The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.*” This resonates well with Kenya Hara’s notion of “*Exformation*”, where he makes clear that *Exformation* doesn’t mean making known, but understanding how little we know. ¹⁹ If we can recognize that we know so little, a method for finding out how little we know will become clear to us as well. Kenya Hara believes that comprehension and recognition of the unknown is a necessary for the beginning of any design project. *Exformation* should be considered the direct opposite to the familiar, meaning exploration of the unknown. Hara emphasizes how our lives are full of wonders and the unknown, and how, as a race, we need to constantly wake up and consider new perspectives. He believes that “*known*” and “*understood*” are both horrible concepts, which usually means that your works (designs) have nothing new to offer the world. Alternatively, to succeed, Kenya Hara suggests, one has to look for the unknown consciously. The concept of “*not knowing*” is increasingly being acknowledged as a critical skill to tackle the complex problems we face in contemporary societies. That is, we should not fear heading uncomfortably toward the unknown. Rather, by developing a relationship with “*not knowing*,” we may discover new ways of designing, living, working and thriving in our modern world. Not knowing can be an exciting proposition where we are no longer

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Bourriaud, N. *Altermodern*. London, UK: Tate Publishing, 2009.

¹⁹

Hara, K. *Designing Design*. Zurich, Switzerland: Lars Muller Verlag, 2007.

limited by what we already know, which allows for richer possibilities and more varied wisdom to prosper.²⁰

02 Teach What You Don't Know

When confronted with the problem of teaching a language he did not speak, the eighteenth century educationalist Joseph Jacotot discovered it was possible to teach what you don't know. In Jacques Ranciere's reprise of Jacotot's relevance in his book, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, he reminds us that everyone is taught to forget that we all possess the ability to learn.²¹ For almost a century design has been taught from the perspective of the Bauhaus, which relied on pedagogy that forgot the machine had already made the idea into an image of itself, setting design education on a path resulting in imitation and derivation (rather than invention or innovation), which remain the prevalent models today. Design has evolved to require a completely different logic from that which is informing its current learning models, where so many degree programs are guided by professionally licensed trajectories that are more germane to history than the possible future scenarios we now need to envisage to live in a rapidly changing world. Similar to Jacotot's experiences, Therese Huston's book, *"Teaching What You Don't Know,"* provides clear evidence that teaching outside of one's area of competence is typically the norm in the U.S. academy.²² Rather than viewing this as a weakness, however, Huston suggests that teaching what you don't know may have certain advantages. Huston argues that novice tutors tend to show more empathy and have more realistic estimations of the time it takes new learners to complete tasks. Expert tutors, on the other hand, often expect more than new learners can handle. It is also suggested that novice tutors can better envision the steps that a beginner will take, what kinds of mistakes he or she will make, and which steps he or she may have to repeat. Furthermore, novice tutors are more likely than expert tutors to relate difficult concepts to everyday life, and to make use of common knowledge to facilitate this (*i.e.*, to relate these concepts to things that the learner likely already knows). Given the perilous state design currently finds itself in, teaching what we don't know may herald a refreshing alternative to design's historical preoccupation with the modern project.

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D'Souza, S. & Renner, D. *Not Knowing*. London, UK: Lid Publishing, 2014.

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Ranciere, J. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. California, CA, USA: Stanford University Press, 1991.

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Huston, T. *Teaching What You Don't Know*. Harvard, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 2012.

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Warman, M. "Dieter Rams: Apple has Achieved Something I Never Did," *The Telegraph*, 7 June, 2011. Online. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/apple/8555503/Dieter-Rams-Apple-has-achieved-something-I-never-did.html> (Accessed 11 March 2014).

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Rams, D. et al. "The Munich Design Charter." *Design Issues*, 8.1 (1991): pgs. 74-77.

03

Take Design Seriously

One could be forgiven for forgetting this, however. We are told by Donald A. Norman (and others) in the Epilogue to his book *Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things* that we are all designers, yet arguably one of the greatest designers of all time, Dieter Rams, has stated that he is "...troubled by the devaluing of the word design" and that he finds himself "...now being somewhat embarrassed to be called a designer."²³ To combat the devalued meaning, Dieter Rams suggests treating the discipline of design seriously, understanding that design "...is not simply an adjective to place in front of a product's name to somehow artificially enhance its value." As a signatory to the "The Munich Design Charter," published in *Design Issues* in 1991, Rams knows design's responsibilities in all parts of contemporary life all too well. Rams knows that design must concern itself with "...economy as well as ecology, with traffic and communication, with products and services, with technology and innovation, with culture and civilization, with sociological, psychological, medical, physical, environmental, and political issues, and with all forms of social organization." It is unfortunate and depressing that, now, 25 years later, Rams needs to remind us again "...that design is a serious profession, and for our future welfare we need to take the profession of design seriously...."²⁴ Recently, however, there is some evidence to suggest that design is being taken more seriously by both those who practice and teach it and by at least some portions of the societies that it affects and, in turn, affect it. In the UK, for example, the British government now appears to understand that design can make a significant difference in major infrastructure projects. Sadie Morgan, co-founder of the London architecture firm dRMM, effectively became one of the most powerful figures in British architecture recently when she was named as the only creative on the British government's National Infrastructure Commission. (This group will advise the UK government on how to distribute £100 billion of investment over the next five years.) She holds this post in addition to her appointment as Chair of the design panel for HS2, a high-speed rail link that is currently the UK's biggest infrastructure project. Morgan believes these appointments signify a clear message that they—those that constitute the government of the UK—are starting to take design seriously, and that Britain's government is beginning

to recognize that design can actually make a crucial difference in the positive evolution of the UK.²⁵

04 Protect Us From What We Want

A new strategy for design is required that reconnects design with its historic project—to imagine change. Design must re-engage with the eternal scenario conjured by the unavoidable question *what kind of world do we want?* A question also known historically as the basis of the modern project—a project whose result we have always known, but whose every thought and action still requires the application of infinite care and the assumption of great responsibility. The result is, of course, the creation of the totally artificial world, and it is from this prospect that design needs to protect itself in light of its contract with capital that is fueling the manufacture of a world no one wants (unless, of course, you want everything at the expense of everything). So what do we, as design researchers, educators, and practitioners want? Recent catastrophic events and unanticipated consequences of our current modes of living, such as the global financial meltdown of 2008–09, have left many around the world feeling very anxious about the future. This has led to a general lack of confidence in our collective ability to act for the collective good. This collective anxiety is rooted in the idea that we seem not to have developed a coherent vision of a desirable future and, worse still, doubt our ability to bring it about. Perhaps we need to look back to a time period over 40 years ago when Bruce Archer (eminent Professor of Design at the Royal College of Art, London) informed a UK government sponsored conference about design education that it was his “...*sincere conviction that a massive broadening and deepening of design education is overwhelmingly the most urgent need for the survival, as well as the happiness, of mankind.*”²⁶ Archer made these claims in 1973 against a background of globally widespread economic difficulties, environmental crises, and social uncertainties not too dissimilar from today’s situation. Archer spoke of the four great crises facing mankind, which are just as recognizable today as they were in 1973: (i) the crisis of overpopulation, (ii) the crisis of pollution, (iii) the crisis of depletion of natural resources, and (iv) the crisis of control. Today, the disappointment and alienation that many people experience in contemporary society

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Winston, A. “UK Government is Starting to take Design Seriously.” Dezeen (blog). 19 November, 2015. Available at: <http://www.dezeen.com/2015/11/19/uk-government-starting-take-design-seriously-interview-sadie-morgan-drmm-national-infrastructure-comission-hs2-rail/> (Accessed 2 September 2016).

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Archer, B., Baynes, K. & Roberts, P. *A Framework for Design and Design Education: A Reader Containing Key Papers from the 1970s and 80s.* Wellesbourne, UK: Design and Technology Association, 2005.

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Meadows, D.H., Meadows, D.L.,
Randers, J. & Behrens III., W.W.
Limits to Growth. New York, NY,
USA: Universe Books, 1972.

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Zalasiewicz, J. et al., "Are We Now
Living in the Anthropocene?" *GSA
Today*, 18.2 (2008): pgs. 4-8.

29

Corcoran, P.L., Moore, C.J. & Jaz-
vac, K. "An anthropogenic marker
horizon in the future rock record."
GSA Today, 24.6 (2014): pgs. 4-8.

revolves around their insecurities about the future. Clearly, it is time for design to deliver coherent visions of desirable futures that address our dissatisfaction, our unhappiness, and our isolation, and bring those visions about.

05

Object to Sustaining Everything

Rather than trying to channel all design thought and action through the unsustainable framework of sustainability, it is clear that we have yet to design any viable response to the shift from rural to urban living occurring around the world. On a day in 2007, it is generally accepted that the population of our planet shifted from predominantly rural to predominantly urban living, and that by mid-century, 75% of the world's population will live in cities. 60% of humanity will live in urban slums by this time. Well before the UN produced this prediction, and around the time of the discovery of limits to growth articulated in the 1972 book *The Limits to Growth* by the Club of Rome,²⁷ the fields of design had begun to rally around the notion of the need for more effective stewardship of the planet. That is, there was concerted advocacy for the infinite possibilities of design to be balanced by the infinite responsibilities of designing. It is very clear that design latched on to the infinite possibilities portion of this principle, but shrugged off the responsibilities. That ill-considered course of action cleared the path for championing *sustainability*, so very quickly, rather than *stewardship* by those who were seeking to change the world. Sustainability was dumped on everyone, and, for much longer than the designers of this ruse imagined, the whole world was made responsible for sustaining unsustainable ways of procuring, living, making and distributing. Having finally seen through this subterfuge, those in the know—some of whom are designers and design educators—are now regrouping their collective efforts under the banner of the word *resilience*. As a reaction to a wide variety of planetary crises, resilience is more riddle than reprieve. It is a riddle because it is hard to imagine an elastic planet bouncing back from its current evolutionary path being forced onto a new one by the steady advance of the Anthropocene.²⁸ This is our planet's current geologic era that is marked in the geologic record by the recent discovery of plastiglomerate, or plastic rock.²⁹ Sadly, the staunchest adherents to the project

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Fry, T. "Design: On the Question of The Imperative." *Design and Culture*, 7.3 (2015): pgs. 417-422.

31

Moos, M.A. *Marshall McLuhan Essays: Media Research Technology, Art, Communication*. London, UK: Routledge, 1997: p. 78.

of sustainability appear to reside in design schools, whose curricula have been appropriately recycled into socially and politically palatable constructs and have now all been rendered in shades of worthy grey. Design should reject sustainability and instead concentrate on what we might need to do to recover from being together on such a populous planet in such unprecedented proximity staring at a growing number of quickly evolving anthropocentric crises.

06

Design Without Reproach

Design's raison d'être is to disrupt, contest, invent, direct, coordinate, respond, provoke and project. As such, contemporary design projects require undisciplined and irresponsible designers who are capable of purposely blurring social, economic and political distinctions, and who are able to shift methods from being 'discipline-based' to 'issue- or project-based.' These designers will be most effectively placed to make connections that generate new methods, and to identify 'other' dimensions of design research, activity and thought that are needed for the complex, interdependent societal issues we now face. Tony Fry, in his critical analysis of contemporary design education, proposes significant redirection in the education of designers. Fry claims that one of the key problems of conventional forms of design education is that it is bound up in its professional practices, processes, and political ideology. This has led to a rupture, Fry proposes, that is now evident in many forms of design education, research, and practice globally, between what designers have long been educated to design and what now needs to be designed instead to create the kind of world that will sustain our life on this planet into the future.³⁰

07

Objects are Invisible

In answer to an interview question posed to him in 1968, 'Will there ever be silence?', Marshall McLuhan replied "*Objects are unobservable. Only relationships between objects are observable.*"³¹ Mass consumer of information that he was, McLuhan was paraphrasing the discovery of uncertainty caused by the operation of observational practices in quantum mechanics (that would lead to the reluctant realization that matter has memory). Of the countless aphorisms from McLuhan, this one seems to have been largely overlooked, and should have been

used to warn design that all the effort and energy it has put into the production of stuff failed to take into account that it was invisible as a process, as a causal factor or agent. Not long after McLuhan's puzzling interview, Gregory Bateson published *Towards an Ecology of the Mind*, in which he wrote that ecology was a way of looking at the relationships between the "messages and pathways outside the body."³² The discovery by design much later of the user and their relational experience to that which has been designed probably should be heralded here, but it coincided with the substitution of objects by services, and the mistaken notion that with each design iteration, the world will be designed to be used in better and better ways. However, placing the user at the center of the design process tends to characterize him or her as one of the "problems" that design must "solve." Despite the lack of any evidence that the world is getting better, design still considers that it can formulate and operate its processes to manipulate the user into the ideal circumstances for using, which shares some of the lingering characteristics of marketing, wherein the primary goal is to manipulate a given consumer into consuming. In this sense, usability is essential to generate both profit and pleasure, and, in this vein, the service industry has been trying to maximize pleasure to increase its profits. As a willing proxy, design was conscripted to condition consumers to use services, but now it is time for design to service the deteriorating conditions on the one planet we share. However, as a framework for design thought and action, and as a notion lending legitimacy to design outcomes, usability runs into another major problem: it doesn't account for fashion. The world of fashion is certainly the most volatile battleground for the contest between the different projects of the user and designer. The phenomenon of fashion points to new possibilities for the notion of usability, wherein people might now have to craft their own personalized and customized world.³³

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Bateson, G. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. New York, NY, USA: Ballantine Books, 1972.

33

Bremner, C. "Usability." In *Design Dictionary: Perspectives on Design Terminology*, edited by T. Marshall & M. Erlhoff, pgs. 425-428. Basel, Switzerland: Birkhauser, 2008.

08

Design with Care

With the failure of the structural mega-programs of the twentieth century, there is a need to transgress frigid technological perfection into genial ecological possibilities, and this has to be done with *care*. In this context, care refers to designing with the macro and micro social, technological, economic, environmental and political effects

National Institute on Aging. Global Health and Aging, Washington D.C., USA: National Institute on Aging and National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011.

of design decision-making well in mind. Because we now operate in a globalized state of culture, design needs to seek new territories to offset the relentless uniformity derived from our current cycle of mass culture/consumption. As defined here, care cannot follow trends that become out-dated after a short time, and therefore reflects a profound evolution in our vision and perception of the world and our way of inhabiting it. Because our universe has become a territory, all dimensions of which may be traveled both in time and space, it is only with care that design can make contributions towards the maintenance of a stable environment and sensible material situation worldwide. Further, design needs to take as much care as possible as it evolves its educational and professional practices because it can now only try to make sense from journeying through a chaotic and undisciplined ecology layered with non-essentials. It must be stressed that care is not a service product designed primarily to be served. Like design, the purpose of care is to affect the way we live. In our increasingly population-aging world, within which we are about to cross a demographic landmark of huge social and economic importance—the proportion of the global population aged 65 years and over is set to outnumber the population of children under five years of age for the first time—how we design and care for unprecedented numbers of pensioners and retirees will bring with it huge challenges for policy-makers, designers, healthcare providers, and families.³⁴ There will be more than 1 billion people living in the world who will have effectively aged out of its workforce by 2040. With care, however, design can play a major role in transforming how health and social care looks and feels for many of these people. Working collaboratively, designers, together with clinical directors, health and social care experts, families, and others will co-develop high quality care that is focused around meeting the needs and desires of individuals and that puts them in control of their own care. As both the proportion of older people and the length of life increase throughout the world, arguably design's greatest purpose will be to ensure we are cared for in ways that maintain longer periods of good health, along with a sustained sense of well-being, and extended periods of meaningful social engagement and productivity. Design's major incentive in the decades ahead, then,

is to develop and establish physical and social infrastructures that will foster better health and well-being in older age.

09 Design Within History

Perhaps design needs an alternative history. Not a counter-cultural version of a history of design, but another way to present what most designers avoid contemplating—the past. That is, for most designers, design has no history; it is enacted in the permanent present, and if in some way they are reminded of its history, most designers cannot see any future in this past. Design has never been connected to its broader, more deeply defined temporal dimensions. Time, from the point of view of design, is now. Design has even failed to come to grips with its one means to control time: posing the question “what next?,” or, more precisely, “what-might-become?” Viewed in this way, the history of design is captured in several time loops, all of which are concurrent. To locate the history of design in the *simple present*, it is necessary to look at the origins of design in the way it is understood/ misunderstood as a product of the split of idea from manufacture. It is from this split that design willingly assumed the responsibility of communicating the *idea* to manufacture, but also failed to critically observe or attempt to deeply understand the workings of the machinery of manufacture, and in so doing turned the idea into an image of itself that had no need for design. In the commonplace history of design, the most familiar time period is the *simple past*, where design was given the project of producing competitive advantages in the market which, constrained by the machine, led to imitation (rather than ideas), fuelling the now globalized cycle of production and consumption. Underlying this cycle of produce/consume was an almost unshakable faith in material progress that resulted in Foucault’s maxim “*We know what we do but do not know what we do does.*”³⁵ This is further supported by the *past perfect* that describes the history of design framed by one investment. This investment is rooted in our faith in technological progress, the technological progress that made all our imaginings *and* the technological progress we imagine will fix all that fails to meet our needs or desires in the future. There is also the *present perfect*, where digital flows make it possible to reconnect ideas to manufacture and manufacturing processes, but that in fact

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Foucault, M. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. New York, NY, USA: Pantheon Books, 1971: p. 187.

turns everyone into a producer of nothing and a consumer of many things, services and experiences. Additionally, there is the *simple future*, where the digital production of nothing crafts new producers, and ideas are reduced to derivatives of what we already know and are comfortable with. The main issue in all of this is that imitation is built into the digital system of production on a number of levels. On one level, software imitates conceptual thought. On another level, and probably because of the former level, software enables the endless digital reproduction of the same ‘thing.’ On yet another level, and because of our use of software to imitate conceptual thought and enable endless digital reproduction, the endless digital circulation of derivations is encouraged. In the *future perfect*, a future is still framed by one investment—faith in technological progress, but, in this case, it is a digitally networked progress. In order to imagine a viable future, it has now become necessary to navigate the competing time frames of the digital cataloguing of the past and the digital reproduction of the future. Finally, there is the problem of the *future in the past*, or the history/theory of design (i.e. something we will look at sometime in the future), or the core problem of design’s carelessness with its history in leaving us with but one problem to solve—the contest between being and becoming.

10 Design: Idea versus Ideal

Because of its media definition, the very idea of design invites pursuit of the ideal—once an action in pursuit of representation, now a representation in pursuit of better (or just more) representation. Additionally, educational enhancement has laid the path to the realization of the ideal designer—a course of exercises to build job-winning capability. Enhancement was developed around the regime of organization and has become classically scientific. The regime is now so successful that it is imitated ubiquitously—now visible everywhere making hamburgers, athletes, and lots of other stuff. Therefore, the idea that design produced the imitation of both the regime (once designed it is imitated by almost every school) and the designer (almost every graduate emerges from his or her course of study with the same capabilities). The imitation is now the ideal, and the media transmit this creation—the ideal is vaunted by a daily regime of web

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Rodgers, P.A. & Bremner, C.
 "Exhausting Discipline: Undisciplined and Irresponsible Design."
Architecture and Culture, 1.1
 (2013): pgs. 138-158.

37

Ibid.

magazines enhancing their own design capabilities. Therefore, design no longer needs an idea, giving rise to a question vexing all dimensions of design—if the ideal (a representation) no longer needs an idea (what needs to be done), can design (serial digital reproductivity) produce an idea of design? An answer requires knowing what to look for, and perhaps we shouldn't look at the means of enhancement (talent identification and education), or enhancing the means (augmented digital representation), which both pursue the ideal. If we look from outside the regime, then the ideal designer is playing to a skeptical public ("Nothing seems to be getting better...") with little trust in the idea of design (especially since everyone knows what needs to be done). So without an idea of design, the ideal (an imitation of design) is now a fragile media invention with no moral reference. Further, now that the idea of the discipline of design doesn't seem to exist, and its ideal exists on an *other* playing field defined by the media—an alternative playing field playing an alterplinary discipline.³⁶ The net result is the ideal has no feel for the idea, and the idea has no effect on the ideal. If we accept this scenario, we have to ask whether we still participate in the idea of design?

Conclusions

We have argued that the discipline of design has been superseded by a condition where the conventionally defined design disciplines have been dispersed. Moreover, this reliance on the 'exhausted' historic disciplines as the boundary of our understanding has been superseded by an unlimited expanse that we call '*alterplinary*.'³⁷ As a consequence, this paper presents a manifesto for a future design discipline where the emphasis is on understanding how little we know and recognizing that the unknown is a necessary condition for the beginning of any project. That is, as design researchers and educators, we should focus on what we do not know and move away from current models of design education that largely result in imitation and derivation as the norm, whilst also reminding ourselves that design must be taken seriously at all times. This seriousness is inherent in the new strategy we require for design. A strategy that reconnects design with its historic project—to imagine change and to answer the unavoidable question—what kind of world do we really want to live in? Contentiously, perhaps, we also propose that we need to object to sustaining everything. Design would be better off rejecting sustainability and

concentrating on finding ways of us being together on such a populous planet in such unprecedented proximity staring at many other major crises. As such, design now needs to disrupt, contest, invent, direct, coordinate, respond, provoke and project. The complex and interdependent issues we face today need undisciplined and irresponsible designers who act in productively irresponsible ways. With that stated, we must also endeavor to design with care and remember that, like design, the purpose of care is to affect positively the way we live. Finally, designers need to confront what most of them avoid—the past—and also accept that if design no longer needs an idea, should design still participate in the idea of design?

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