Introduction to DRS 50th Anniversary Conference Special Section

This Special Section of *Design Studies* features ten papers from the 50th anniversary conference of the Design Research Society, held in Brighton in June 2016 [1]. Some papers appear in this Volume and some appear in the following Volume. The conference was the largest DRS conference to date with 650 people from 35 countries attending. 500 papers were submitted with 240 accepted for presentation and publication in the proceedings [2].

The papers in this Special Section are revised from papers that received the highest rating from the double-blind conference peer-review process. They have been chosen to represent the multiplicity of strands, themes, and approaches that were present at the conference [3].

Clive Dilnot begins the Special Section with a viewpoint paper, giving a personal reflection on what the Design Research Society has achieved in its 50 years of existence, particularly the idea that the Society has enabled the intellectual framing and exploration of design. The subsequent papers illustrate Dilnot's thesis very well.

Mok & Hyysalo's paper looks at energy transitions in the built environment, using the single case of a University building to show how, in trying to improve sustainable performance, different systems of value come into play. They present a framework to illustrate how values that are potentially in conflict can be integrated in effective and long-term solutions. Connecting with Mok & Hyysalo's case study, Chan takes a more philosophical approach in dealing with ethical issues related to design in the anthropocene (the proposed current epoch in which human activity has impacted geological and ecological systems). Although Chan's paper also touches on issues of sustainability, he goes much wider, usefully drawing together different approaches to design ethics and arguing that ethicists have an important role to play design projects.

Mayer & Landehr take a more traditional experimental approach in looking at how product typicality affects consumer's aesthetic preferences in the area of car design. Their studies reveal how objective measures can predict subjective assessments and thus be used to predict consumer responses to particular designs more accurately.

Studies of design thinking beyond what are thought of as traditional design disciplines are increasingly popular and Umney & Lloyd's paper on framing processes in political debate is a good example of this. The authors use transcripts from the UK parliament to show how the process of producing legislation can be thought of as a process of design.

Fittingly for a 50th Anniversary conference, there was a strong historical thread of papers with several papers looking back at influential figures in design research. In their paper Beck & Chiapello consider the legacy of Donald Schön by looking at the citation patterns of his work for recent DRS conferences. Whilst Schön is regularly cited, the authors note that citations are often made without any serious engagement with Schön's ideas.

Many papers at the conference brought a more critical and speculative approach, framing research questions and practices in ways other than what some see as more traditional, evidence-based approaches to research. These are papers that argue for a particular position or approach to understanding design or practice and a good example of this is the paper of Pschetz & Bastian that looks at how the concept of time can be understood in what they term 'Temporal Design'. The authors describe a series of interventions, designed to challenge perceptions of time, particularly in social environments. Their work suggests that 'designers can have a key role in unlocking the hegemonic narratives that restrict cultural understandings of time'.

The papers in this Special Section point to new roles for designers, as well as new areas of design. They demonstrate that the field of design research is fast developing and maturing, yet continues to question fundamental assumptions and influence new practices. For many years we have heard that design research is a new field, still finding its feet, but the papers in this Special Section, and the definition and extent of the themes for the 2016 DRS conference demonstrate precisely the opposite. In Fifty years we have built a strong and diverse research field that is widely applicable, broadly inclusive and, in 2018, more relevant than ever.

We look forward to DRS2018 in Limerick, Ireland and of course to the next 50 years

of design research.

Peter Lloyd

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Vice Chair of the Design Research Society

General Chair of DRS2016

References

- [1] A fuller account of the context, design, and content of the 50th Anniversary DRS conference can be found in: Lloyd, P. (2017) From Design Methods to Future-Focused Thinking: 50 years of design research, *Design Studies*, 48, A1-A8.
- [2] Lloyd, P., Bohemia, E. (eds.) (2016) *Design+Research+Society - Future-Focused Thinking: Proceedings of DRS2016*, 28-30th June, Brighton, UK, DRS Publications.
- [3] To see all papers and themes please visit the conference website at www.drs2016.org.