

## Editorial

### Design, designers and design professions in a digital world

By Lone Malmberg

We are all surrounded by designed items. Items that are intended to make our lives more comfortable, more pleasant, and more beautiful. But what is design today? And what is the designer profession today? And what is the role of the designer in the so-called digital age? These are questions which all of us who are engaged in education of designers must ask ourselves. The picture is blurred. Until recently we had strong traditions in to different areas, like graphic design, industrial design, fashion design etc. These traditions have defined content, professions, and roles quite explicitly. In the postmodern society we experience how traditions and limits dissolve, and how new media and digital technology transform former design processes into new ways of working and constituting design.

No single 'authorised' definition on design exists. One possible definition is that *design is a systematic, methodological process of visual and expressive ordering*<sup>1</sup>. The substantial introduction of digital tools in all stages of the design process has had a radical influence on how designers work. It is obvious how digital tools are able to support the designer in being *systematic* since this is exactly how computers work. But what happens to the design *process*, which is governed rather by creativity than by a complete set of rules, when we introduce digital tools? And how is the *visual* and *expressive* part of the design process, which aims at fulfilling functional as well as emotional needs, influenced by the use of digital tools? The concept of *ordering* in the design process is related to the creation of form by rethinking and experimenting with existing artefacts and ways of living. How do we become confident with this part of the design process, and are computers supportive in this?

The design profession has become blurred too. Digital technology is probably the most important reason for this. First it has changed the existing design traditions radically as mentioned above, and secondly it has created new design professions. Digital technology is part of many of the designed artefacts we live with. This challenges the existing design professions and create new professions. Until recently software was considered as a something developed by engineers, but today it is widely acknowledged that software also has to be designed. Terry Winograd coined this by the publication of *Bringing Design to Software*<sup>2</sup>.

This movement from software engineering to software design makes the creation of software and existing design traditions converge. This convergence can also be seen as part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> culture movement, in which art and science meet and form a 3<sup>rd</sup> culture.

This issue of Digital Creativity is devoted to papers and viewpoints contributing to the discussion of the education of future designers.

Most of the contributions to this issue is motivated by the discussions evolving in the process of developing new education programs or redesigning existing education programs for designers, but all with a deeper thought on what design is, what the designer is, and of what the role of the designer is.

Robin Baker takes a look on how the historical development of computers and programming languages have influenced the creative possibilities of designers. He suggest that some kind of notational system to assemble the current experience of computer technology will enable teachers to offer a more informed and useful curriculum for the teaching and learning of computing in art and design. As opposed to the statement presented in Mervyn Kurlanskys

essay, Robin Baker suggests that the introduction of computing in the art and design area provides a new medium for creative exploitation

Pelle Ehn's manifesto for a Digital Bauhaus expresses the philosophy on which a new design school in Sweden - School of Art & Communication - is founded. A major aim of the original Bauhaus school in Weimar was the unification of art and modern technology to create architecture and design for the modern free man and woman. Pelle Ehn's manifesto attempts to bridge between the democratic ideas of the original Bauhaus and the democratic ideas of the postmodern Scandinavian society. He claims that what is needed in design and use of the most post-modern of medias and technologies - the information and communication technology - is not a modernism caught in a solidified objectivity in the design of modern objects in steel, glass and concrete, but a comprehensive sensuality in the design of meaningful interactive and virtual stories and environments. Further he claims that what is needed is not the modern praise of new technology, but a critical and creative aesthetic-technical production orientation that unites modern information and communication technology with design, art, culture and society, and at the same time places the development of the new mediating technologies in their real every day context of changes in lifestyle, work and leisure. The manifesto unfolds these two statements, and their influence on the creation of the Digital Bauhaus.

Mervyn Kurlansky, an initiator of the Pentagram Design group, discuss his worries about our use of digital tools in the design process. How do these tools influence our way of thinking? His essay argue that computers do not allow lateral thinking, which is essential in letting the designer create new ideas. This rather provocative statement establish a discussion with the paper of Robin Baker. A discussion we hope will be continued in the following issues of Digital Creativity.

Jonas Löwgren and Eric Stolterman argue, as experienced IT-designers and teachers, how IT-designers can develop their design skills by creating a rich repertoire of templates and a developed language for design qualities. They discuss "tools" for the individual designer's development of a repertoire and a use-quality language. They identify a number of genre-bound, contextual use qualities that represent steps toward a use-quality language for IT design. These qualities are social action space, tight coupling, dynamic Gestalt, autonomy, intrinsic motivation and playability. Finally they discuss how these tentative steps relate to product semantics in more mature design fields, and show how repertoire and use-quality language development can be introduced in the education process for IT-designer.

We have met substantial interest for discussing questions related to the education of future designers. The editors would like to use this opportunity to thank everybody who submitted contributions to this debate. Some of the submissions which are not printed in this issue of Digital Creativity will appear in forthcoming issues of Digital Creativity, in order to create an ongoing debate on how design education may be reconsidered and developed, and which new areas and issues designers in the postmodern digital society should be prepared to relate to.

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<sup>1</sup> This definition is used at Danmarks Designskole (Danish School of Design)

<sup>2</sup> Winograd, T. (ed., 1996). Bringing design to software. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley