

Group effort

Paul Rodgers and Joseph Giacomini introduce the manifesto of a new collaborative design group that they hope will serve as a rallying point for redeveloping aspects of the design curriculum

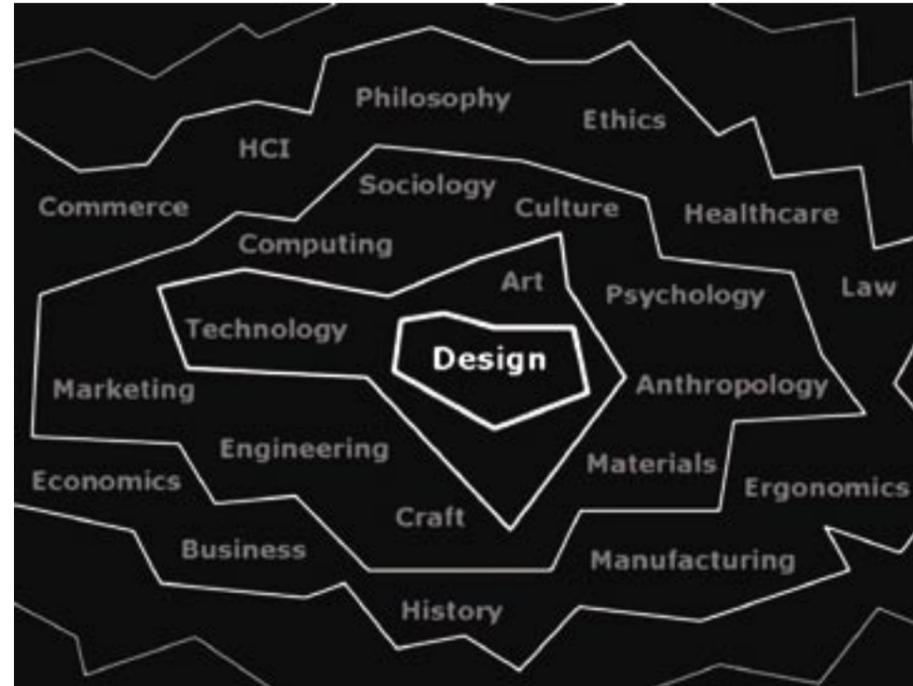
Design is a creative activity performed in support of people. As a profession it has co-evolved together with the society that it has served from pre-industrial times right up to the present day. At each historical stage in its evolution design teaching and design practice have adapted to the needs of society, from the mass production of essential consumer goods, to the conception and branding of goods intended for quality of life enhancement, through to the mass personalisation of products today.

However, there is now compelling evidence that design is in the midst of a minor revolution. The market driven years of the 1980s and 1990s have gone and the emphasis of design is now on a more human-centred agenda. Design in the early 21st Century is characterised by a number of striking phenomena that include:

- People who are not educated in design are significantly involved in the activity of designing such as Hilary Cottam who achieved the Designer Of The Year award in 2005, by the Design Museum, London, for her contribution to the regeneration of the Kingsdale building that was once a rundown school in south-east London.

- The blurring of edges between traditional, discrete design disciplines such as the design of mobile phones, which offer not simply a mere physical artefact but services including music and video downloads.

- The edges between historical design



■ Many modern day design pursuits can be viewed as having a core of design activity backed by other subject specialist areas such as fine art, technology, anthropology, computing and economics.

disciplines are steadily dissolving and the work of design companies and designers such as Hella Jongerius, Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec, Marti Guixé and IDEO now commonly transcend disciplinary borders such as interior design, product design and graphic design.

- The focus of a lot of new design is on the experiential rather than the physical or material.

As we survey our new 21st Century horizon it becomes clear that designers no longer

fit neatly into distinct specialist categories. Today's rapid social, economic, technological and environmental demands require individuals who are highly flexible and quickly able to adapt to different contexts. Traditional professional boundaries have been blurred. Recognition of this changed scenario is essential if both design education and design practice are to meet the major challenges that face humanity in this new century.

In light of these significant changes, the Post Disciplinary Design (PDD) Group, made up of staff from the departments of Design at

Northumbria University, Brunel University, Loughborough University and Delft University of Technology, has been formed to share knowledge, skills, experience and best practice in design education and research that has relevance to the demands that designers are now facing. Each of these institutions has a long and well-established product design programme that has been at the forefront of design education for many years.

PDD is a new movement characterised by the concepts of multi-curiosity and multi-disciplinary working, which are all-encompassing and inclusive approaches. They begin with the careful observation and understanding of people's needs so as to sensitively shape solutions. This general approach creatively and seamlessly mixes relevant knowledge and skills from many sectors in a manner that is appropriate to 21st Century endeavours.

PDD also transcends traditional academic and professional boundaries. The emphasis is on the identification of opportunities and on the solving of problems using appropriate knowledge and methods from areas such as business studies, computer science, economics, engineering, human factors, management, physical sciences, psychology and the social sciences. It does not recognise barriers and limitations to creative activity in support of people, and it does not limit itself to a specific sector such as fashion, product or graphic design.

The approach is a response to the growing need for training and professional practice,

which can contribute effectively to any area of the modern global economy. It emphasises the many benefits that derive from the combination of a solid grounding in social and technological knowledge, coupled with a strong emphasis on personal expression and creativity. It is broadly aligned with modern policy objectives supported by the Cox Report, the Innovation Nation Report and the various documents treating the Creative Industries Agenda.

The institutions that currently form the PDD Group have produced a number of stellar designers over the last two to three decades that includes individuals working in positions such as global heads of design at Apple, Philips, Nokia, Virgin Atlantic, group brand director at Virgin Trading Company, the CEO of 'Showers Pass' cycling wear, programme manager at Dyson, and studio director at IDEO. Moreover, many PDD Group design graduates go on to take up distinguished positions within the design industry and beyond at the likes of Norman Foster & Partners, Adidas, Saatchi & Saatchi and Hewlett-Packard amongst many others. Furthermore, a number of PDD Group design graduates decide to continue their education to Masters and PhD level at places such as the Royal College of Art (RCA), the University of the Arts, London, and Goldsmiths College, University of London.

The main aim of the PDD Group is to continue to develop important and relevant provision in design education and research.

It is hoped that other like-minded individuals will join the group in its efforts to establish new knowledge and new practices, which enable the designers of tomorrow to face humanity's future challenges with confidence. ■

If you would like to collaborate with the Post Disciplinary Design Group on research and education projects then visit www.cldr.co.uk or email Paul Rodgers at paul.rodgers@northumbria.ac.uk or Joseph Giacomini at Joseph.Giacomini@brunel.ac.uk.

The Post Disciplinary Design Group

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