

TIME TO RETHINK DESIGN

David Report

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YOUR PATHFINDER INTO THE FUTURE

Foreword

Has Design reached its sell by date?

Have we not fulfilled Design's 20th Century's mission to market, style, brand, and added value, to innovate and to experiment through design?

Is it not time to pause and rethink, and question why, before we react the same way in the 21st Century?

We are increasingly dwelling in a created world, and for over half the world's population this is the environment of the designed metropolis. Do we need any more, can we desire much less?

Let's face it; design is now a major source of pollution, as process and a phenomenon, design has degenerated into a state of aesthetic proliferation that has reached accumulative and destructive levels, in terms of loss of meaning, value, and identity.

The result is a vacancy of purpose, a world full of 'designer jetsam and flotsam' that is swilling around or embedded into or above our planet; poorly designed products, unwanted solutions, unfriendly materials, and a mutli-choice of artefacts that are discarded as fast as they were adopted.



Advertising signs
in Mong Kok

**Do we need
any more,
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desire much less?**

Has Design
reached its
sell by date?

BÄST FÖRE
14-03-2010
03.55

From cars, mobiles, computers, lighting, chairs to clothing, packaging, food and toys, driven by our daily addiction for the new, there is a lack of respect for the well tried, trusted, and workable.



Landfill compactor in work

Is this design fit for purpose, one asks?



The iPhone may be the zenith of iconic user design, but why is it encased in glossy shell when we are required to purchase add-on protection to resist daily wear and tear. Is this design fit for purpose, one asks?

The iPhone

Why can't products be allowed to collect memories like good leather chair, why don't we accept the patina of usage like a loved skateboard, when will we accept aging as life's rich story, like a prized brooch our grandmother left us, or the lines of our grand father's face, of a life well lived!

Whilst our perceived redemption has been our recent passion for sustainability and energy efficiency, this has

come from the expense of surplus, and for the majority who remain in a state of abundant denial. We have to face the fact, that as with climate change, we are at a tipping point when the equilibrium is lost, and like our current economic crisis, the currency of good design is devalued by a tsunami of rapid change when everything good or bad is submerged and becomes equally contaminated and loses its relevance.

Face of a life
well lived.



**consuming what we
really need, rather
than what we believe
we want**

Design Contamination

We have reached a contamination point, a crisis for Design – depicted by the white plague of 'white' goods and white/silver products, a design pandemic of gibberish and solutions for the one, and not the many.

Design contamination, how has this happened? Can we reverse the levels of pollution, the state of impurity, and nature of corruption?

Part of the issue is the success story of Design itself. Design has come a long way in a short time, a profession that is barely a hundred years old. The practice of conceiving, planning, shaping, and fashioning solutions to our natural environment, has made for a highly designed world of the purely man-made. We have become so successful in our ardour to improve and refine, that the act of designing has become part of the problem and not the means to respond to authentic human need.

Why are we not more perturbed or disturbed as professional community, why are we so tolerant of the surplus, and indulgence of pure creative experimentation?

Ideas are evidence of imagination and expression of human ingenuity, but do all ideas have to be made, and masqueraded as design solutions? Why are we so complacent, should we not be calling for a guerrilla war against 'designerism', antiviral campaigns against the design establishment, or do we need a revolution to cut the ties with the hero's of 20th Century Design?

a design
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gibberish
and
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many

Junk in
the Tiber,
Rome.

If we are indeed facing a pandemic of 'designed stuff', what is the diagnosis?

Fact: Design has become a visual and quantifiable pollutant, in being responsible for the proliferation of unnecessary artefacts that respond to no real brief, rather they appear as variations on a theme – visual configurations (conceptual design) material exploration (new articulations of the same) stylistically driven outcomes (design signatures) or the preoccupation to focus on the minutiae of detail (design as art).

Fact: Design has been over active, we need to stop and think and to return to considering what can design contribute, and find genuine ways to enhance the quality of everyday life and add to the human experience. Time out is required to rethink, profoundly. This is about re-examining our values and identity, and disregarding our preoccupation with the Brand, brand newness, and our blind consumption for the ready, easy, cheap and deal-making. It is about reconnecting with emotional value and relevance of well being in our everyday existence.

Fact: Responsible design is not about doing nothing, but it's about doing the right things.


To create long term acquired value, instead of short-term gain and profit. To build a future on generosity instead of greed, about care and attention, about making a difference rather than making more things!

Fact: Design's gloss and smoothness newness is a passing moment of gratification; the rest of the life of design is about use and ageing, and being buffeted by life's progress. Buy new, toss the old and buy even more, should be about buying selectively, nurturing awareness and thinking do I need to buy again? Buying for self-image, driving the global economy is no longer sustainable when markets are saturated, materials are depleted and humanity is exploited.

Fact: The Designer Lifestyle for a lot of people is no longer acceptable buying afresh, the trendy and the unnecessary products of design, when people are starving and without the basics of food shelter and resources, and we are overheating, blown by high winds and tides and bloated by obesity and indulgence. Is it economically, ecologically and socially justifiable? We are in fact longing for simplicity, time, and good karma. We need modest, sound ideas, responsible producers, intelligent products, and consuming what we really need, rather than what we believe we want.

The diagnosis is not making Design better, but making Design matter.

Zaha Hadid's
Design for the
Art Center in
Dubai



Do all ideas have to be made, and masqueraded as design solutions?

Table
Gun by
Philippe
Starck



Dyson
vacuum
cleaner



reconnecting with emotional value, and relevance of our well being in our everyday existence

Ningbo Historic
Museum

Culturally connected design

Making Design matter should be about 'mind over matter'. Using our creative minds, our collective imagination and ability to evolve human construction. The act of design is a truly powerful human intervention, but we must do it lightly and we must think more coherently before we act. All design should support or strengthen life in one way or another.

Does design have a value if it does not favour the human context? Design remains an isolated foreign object when it has no sense of belonging; it employs no reward and processes no *genus loci*. The best design has so often managed to transfer social trends and lifestyle changes into successful responsive products and services. It does so by holding onto a holistic perspective, which respects humanistic values and cultural identity.

Designs' DNA needs to be reconfigured. Rather than continue to focus its attention upon invention, innovation, and enterprise, it should be reconciling the human state and contributing humility, compassion, empathy and beauty. To transcend the norm, and to leave the world a better place than we found it.

Design is no longer about the lifestyle, but the lifecycle. Everything that is man made is designed, so we cannot blame nature for overreacting or the current design aware generation for poor quality. We must orientate our endeavours towards understanding ambiguity and contradiction, embracing diversity over uniformity and identifying inclusiveness, over exclusiveness.

Designer Naoto Fukasawa speaks about this kind of design ethic, in a recent interview: "I understand that my role is about enhancing our living.... I've become more attached to the current life, and have started considering the betterment of our lives in a reality where we all belong, rather than predicting what could happen". This interview displays Naoto's interest in the act of living the now. He puts his ear to the ground and listens. He brings sensuality and ritual back into our lives.

to rethink
design we
need to
enter

our own
'dreamtime'

We need new narratives to revalue our spiritual needs over and above our physical wants. The affective and our relationship to one another our space and habitat has to be re-learnt and shared. Whilst narratives allow for the past to be retold in the present, their presence is felt not in their completeness, but in their innate ability to re-contextualise and have relevance like a fairy tale that is lived through its telling over and over. To rethink design we need to enter our own 'dreamtime', like the Aborigines of Australia who revisit the land of their ancestors, our collective cultural memory needs to listen to new narratives, take time to ponder and revalue our lives.

"Aboriginals believe in two forms of time: two parallel streams of activity. One is the daily objective activity, the other is an infinite spiritual cycle, called dreamtime, more real than reality itself...". *Fred Alan Wolf The Dreaming Universe 1994*



Aboriginal cave
paintings

Design Care

Kid incentive toys

What meaning lies in recycling, durable materials, environmentally friendly production and use, if the consumer does not discover, understand or care about the product, i.e. products are discarded and disregarded when still functioning? What makes us want to retain and keep certain objects (however worn and battered) while we throw away others without thinking twice about it? Is there a lesson to be learnt, and is there a useable formula for making Design matter more?

Much of present design has become unresponsive in being irresponsible and wasteful, disregarding traditions and accumulative knowledge of the community. It has instead become a global language of the objectified adhoc, juxtaposition of hybridization, random customisation that has been still born, rendered obsolete as its newness is replaced by more newness. One is left with questions without answers. Who understands this language? Is there a purpose? Do we need this Esperanto of design? Can we afford this incoherency? What legacy does this leave our children?

Successful design thinking often manages to transform a problem into a solution, and permits confusion to become clarity, obstacles to be overcome. The better design processes create order and effectiveness without affecting the creativity and wit of the designer. It is about cross pollination, and non-linear diversification and converging given attributes into a transformative resolution. These kinds of methods could create design that unites the past with the present, balancing the simple with the sophisticated and the discreet with the bold. Quite simply creating a new generation of design outcomes that are founded on a holistic, sustainable, meaningful view. We need new storytellers.

This is important factor, as timeless aesthetically appealing high quality products are rarely discarded or end up in landfill. Is it not true that products or design that retains integrity, an intuitive identity, and that speaks its story and moves us culturally, is prized over thousands of artefacts that pass through the journey of our lives? Don't most of us appreciate sensorial products that respond to our senses simultaneously. Whereas McDonalds 'Happy Meals' toys are the perfect example of simply products that lack a story to tell, have no sensorial reward and are unnecessary and soon to become unwanted.

What legacy does this leave our children?





thousands of artefacts that pass through the journey of our lives

Thousands of new chairs are launched annually at furniture fairs in Italy, Spain, Germany and Scandinavia, that are pure essays on a well-known themes and meet neither a real need nor distinguish themselves in an already saturated market, which finds it hard to discern one design from another. Or furniture in general that does appear to enhance the home environment, but expresses a designed anonymity that imitates design rather than contributes it. This is not about attacking the designers for their individual efforts, but it begs the question – do we really need another chair? One can only conclude that this is about short term profits and novelty over substance.

Of course, it is accepted that there must be fresh development, and true innovation often occurs through a process of trial and error and experimentation, but must we release every version, variation, or accident, on a production process that makes for future health hazards, a surplus of products, or ill fitting outcomes that cause discomfort, fall apart at the seams and are not aesthetically rewarding?

We need radical processes and to encourage genuine creative stimuli like art, theatre, cinema, new media, music and dance, that does not avoid asking awkward questions, that challenges our views on the world, that encourages new stories to be enjoyed.



Composting bottle

Design Ingenuity

The question is how to change old habits and not to perpetuate the sales argument that the main role of design is added value. Design has a collective role to encounter and mediate change, to develop new communities and in the sense of philanthropic to give back to society, as an act of social entrepreneurship. The Danish producer Mater has been grappling with some of these questions. They have a deep desire to meet their social responsibilities in combination with genuine design deep in their genes. American designer Todd Bacher works with Mater and describes their collaboration like this;

"Working with Mater is a chance for a designer to connect with local artisans to exchange ideas. With globalisation the world is losing indigenous crafts and skills, which is why an awareness of preserving such crafts is increasingly important. They are not only important expressions of our cultural diversity; they also represent a wealth of experiences and knowledge that are essential

resources in developing novel concepts and designs."

The product philosophy Cradle to Cradle by architect William McDonough and Prof. Braungart is another interesting and plausible solution. It is based on designing with the help of nature products with the least possible environmental affect that are degradable and after life use will become part of the ecosystem. Airplane manufacturer Airbus has worked with applying this philosophy and has made seats that are completely degradable and hence cheaper because there is no end garbage to dispose of. We see a new area of 'Bio-plastics' that uses starch celluloses or lactic acid to replicate the natural cycle. The products break back down into minerals, biomass, water and carbon dioxide. They are considered carbon neutral as they absorb as much as they release, and they have a growing applications in gardening, medical, packaging, consumer goods and catering.



Similarly, Tom Dixon's china cups made out of pressed grass, Unilever's plant derived icicle wrappers that melt at room temperature, the mono-use disposable plate UFO (Unidentified Feeding Object) designed by Andrea Ruggiero, Peepoo single-use toilet that is hygienic and biodegradable by Peepoo will afford basic sanitary revolution to billions of homeless, ill housed or disaster relief scenarios are other thought provoking examples.

to transcend
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Mono-use disposable
plate UFO



Peepoo toilet



Kuntiqi a surfboard manufacturer in Ecuador, that goes back to the roots of surf board and rather than using polystyrene or polyurethane (which are made from mineral oil and intensive energy and are not biodegradable) uses core balsa wood (*Ocroma Pyramidale*) that is fast growing and when laminated with 98% linseed oil is renewable and ecofriendly in production.

Kuntiqi surfboards



**to be alchemists with
creativity and reduce the
tide of contamination so
we can tell a new story to
our children**

Transformative Design

In considering the ill patient, diagnosis, and possible medicines designing for the 21st Century, the holistic process provides a new field of applied design that of successful innovation in a social context, where the emphasis is on 'transformation' utilizing the ingenuity of transdisciplinary design approaches to integrate creative thinking with dealing with the complexity and uncertainty of the near future, as far as we can know it. With

say it is not of our doing, but to give and receive, to be open and accept, that the endeavour of design is not 'what I did for you', but 'what we did for us'; it is the humanitarian in us that speaks quietly from the heart, and not the that shouts from head, on the podium of design celebrity.

But in adopting this stance we have to have time to design holistically, to be proactive and not reactive, we



**embracing
diversity over
uniformity and
identifying
inclusiveness
over
exclusiveness**

Paper bags by
Saskia Diez

the technique of Transdisciplinary Design, we can converge, share, and focus our collective and combine human energies and knowledge in a fundamentally new manner, reconfiguring old elements in new ways and enlightening new problems with acquired wisdom and insight.

"It's not where you take things from – its where you take them to" *Jean-Luc Goddad.*

It is time for Design to take on the mantle of responsibility, not to ignore what is happening around us, not to

have to generate new communities of collaborators who use the power and influence of the new culture of individuals to knowledge share, be intelligence, smart, to impact on models of consumption and to recalibrate the role and value of Design to a greater effect to tell narratives, to be clever with materials, to be alchemists with creativity and reduce the tide of contamination so we can tell a new story to our children.

"Now you have a duty to invent a new story, invent a new poetry!" *Philippe Starck TED Dec 2007*



Building for Dutch power company Essent in Enschede, Holland. Architecture by de Architekten Cie Amsterdam, clad in blue and white Delft ceramic tiles with images by legendary stencil graffiti artist Hugo Kaagman.

invent a new poetry



to be alchemists
with creativity

OP-1 is an all-in-one portable Synthesizer, Sampler and Controller. developed by Teenage Engineering.

You can easily drag and drop audio files between your computer and the OP-1. The built-in Tape feature let you record anything you do on the OP-1. Everything is colour coded for a super intuitive and fast work flow. It has additional features like the FM Radio and a built-in motion sensor for pitch and bend effects.



**the humanitarian
in us that speaks
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shouts from head,
on the podium of
design celebrity**



Purifying
white
charcoal by
Sort of Coal.

Our wind-up

'The diagnosis is not making Design better, but making Design matter!'

David Report

about:

This issue

This issue of David Report is created by David Carlson and Brent Richards.

About David Report

The David Report covers the intersection of design, culture and business life with a creative and humanistic approach. By challenging conventional thinking we are always trying to make a difference.

About David Carlson

Having worked with design as a competitive advantage for more than twenty years David Carlson is renowned for his knowledge of strategies in design, communication and brand development. David Carlson is a real design entrepreneur. Except for David Report he is the founder of the furniture and fashion brand David Design, the knowledge company Designboost and the lifestyle store Carlson Ahnell (recently crowned as one of the ten best boutiques in the world by The Observer).

About Brent Richards

Brent is multi award winning Chartered Architect and Designer, ex Dean of Design at Saint Martins, he has Design Masters (Distinction) Saint Martins College University of the Arts London. Brent has over twenty years experience as International Creative consultant and Design Mentor to major Corporations, SME's and Academic Institutions. He is currently advisor to Barcelona Centre

of Design, Academy of the Arts Reykjavik Iceland, and is a regular speaker on UK Creativity, Innovation, Sensory, in Europe, Japan and Scandinavia.

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Brent Richards