

AIGA Design Educators Conference

## **New Contexts / New Practices Provocations**

<http://www.ncsu.edu/graphicdesign/newcontexts/>

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At North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC

### **FROM CHANGING CONDITIONS PROVOCATEUR **Shelley Evenson:****

Service experiences are multifaceted and co-produced. Conventional design practices have changed in the last 30 years to embrace interaction design as a way to address conditions when systems can respond to people's actions. But we know little about the design practices that must emerge to give shape to what John Rheinfrank referred to as "adaptive worlds."

Service design challenges traditional object-centered or static world foundations of design with adaptive world notions of flow and emergence. Service design is about designing for situations that are under-determined. Service designers must account for situations that are continuously informed by people, machines, and an awareness of the context either explicitly or through sensing. Designing for service assumes the people, machines, and context are all participating in the co-production of the experience and the designer's role is one of producing effective resources for participation in the design.

Are we equipped to help students understand everything from macro trends to complex systems? Design for emotion to business value webs? What will it take for us to transition to skilling for service designing?

### **FROM DESIGN RESEARCH PROVOCATEUR **Sharon Poggenpohl:****

Peppered with words like stagnant, puny, anti-intellectual, mute, poisonous, xenophobic, anxious, illiterate, devalued, joke and shockwave, the provocateur nevertheless takes the high road and asks seven fundamental questions about design research. What is not design research? What is research? What are kinds of research? When is research complete? Where does research count? How does research fit into design education? What is the state of design research? Such questions, while briefly answered, are open to further investigation and argument. Additionally, two brief examples from outside the US demonstrate recent action in design research, one from an administrative point of view and the other from a graduate design program perspective. The provocateur wants designer to use both brain hemispheres to address the final word: pre-paradigmatic.

### **FROM INTERDISCIPLINARITY PROVOCATEUR **Rick Robinson:****

*"Interdisciplinarity is not, as a thing in itself, subversive or transgressive, or transformational or even new. In many respects, interdisciplinary is a ratification of existing arrangements."* Louis Menand

The saying goes, "Jack of all trades, master of none," and it is not a compliment. Yet 'interdisciplinary' is, and has been for some time now, an unvaryingly positive aspiration in business, in the design and development professions, and in the educational systems that support both. We, and our colleagues, expect interdisciplinary work to provide "transformational" and "new" all the time.

It isn't something that is easy to reduce to a simple choice. Nor is anyone well served by dodging the issue with "balance." We need experts. We need adepts. And those don't come from a smattering of distribution requirements. Where we locate the notion of interdisciplinarity-- in the person, in the organization, or in the process, the workflow, matters to how we approach training the next generation of design professionals. In this talk, I'm going to look at what the implications of each of these framings might be. And suggest some ways that we can be productively subversive and transgressive.

#### FROM SHIFTING PARADIGMS PROVOCATEUR **David Thorburn:**

Media are and always have been in a state of transition and uncertainty about where new technologies will lead us. This condition is not new, but the urgency and intensity of the apparently perpetual churn created by advanced capitalism seems significant. There are some principles or ground- assumptions that can be helpful in what novelist Thomas Pynchon calls our “ceaseless spectacle of transition.” First, there is no “cutting edge.”

The proliferation of systems, platforms, pathways of communication means that no one can predict which are durable, which will have the life-cycle of a fruit fly. To seek to work on some outer edge of our emerging technologies is to operate blindly. Second, less is more. The nearly limitless range of design options and communication choices available is exhilarating, of course, but also dangerous. Both designers and makers and educators must face this onrush by choosing sparsely among the myriad options available to them. One of old media’s most cherished ideals may be crucial here: the principle of organic form, the idea that formal or technical choices must grow out of and embody the message. Third, as we enter a period of radical, extended innovation, it becomes even more necessary to teach and study older media. Our old formats and practices won’t disappear overnight, some will surely continue in altered form, and the purposes and pleasures they served will survive and find equivalent embodiments in successor media. For me this is an argument, most of all, for a media practice and pedagogy that is deeply informed by history, by a recognition of the complex achievements of analog culture.

#### FROM DESIGNING FOR EXPERIENCE PROVOCATEUR **David Small:**

Participation and interaction radically change the role of the graphic designer. Powerful experiences are as much about doing and engaging as they are about seeing and feeling. The designer, who once may have drawn inspiration from film, theater and dance now must become a serious student of each of these arts and more in order to pull together all of the many parts that constitute experience. Understanding how space, environment, mood, and audience shape our perception will enable designers to effectively communicate.

What is the current state of information design in the built environment? We must develop a design practice that is aware of context and responsive, that simultaneously encompasses multiple displays and people, and that uses new technology to create fluid experiences with information. Designers are also facilitators of social engagement and must address human behavior and relationships. Using examples from my own practice and others, I will discuss the role of technology and the current state of design culture in relation to the design of powerful, memorable and useful experiences.

#### FROM SOCIAL ECONOMIES PROVOCATEUR **John Thackara:**

We face an array of so-called ‘wicked problems’ that are simultaneously complex, uncertain, and urgent. Because their causes and effects are interconnected, wicked problems cannot be broken down and tackled piece by piece. Neither can they be addressed by experts, such as designers, acting on our behalf. All stakeholders need to be involved. This, too, is a challenge: if the right people are involved, they probably have conflicting perspectives and interests.

Tackling wicked problems is therefore like herding cats—and cat herding is untypical, to put it mildly, of the single-vision approach to design we are used to. But these are hardly typical times, and new approaches to co-creation in complex contexts are emerging. These approaches use a variety of social skills and technologies to engage groups in meaningful conversation, and help them embark on collaborative action. There is scope for design to enhance these approaches.