Document

Brighton 05-06-07

In early June 2007 a small, international, group of designers and design educators gathered in the Sussex countryside near Brighton for three days of intense conversation on the challenges and opportunities that shape the practice and understanding of design today. In a collegial atmosphere and facilitated by the editors of *Design Issues,* the participants, all involved in various ways with the University of Brighton, exchanged insights and ideas that reflected a rich diversity of personal experiences, professional concerns and national agendas. Rather than hindering the conversation, this diversity served to sharpen an appreciation for common concerns and fostered the recognition that the great challenge facing the contemporary design community is the promotion of wellbeing through design.

The document that follows bears the title "Brighton 05-06-07." More than the playful recognition of a felicitous numerical sequence, the date 5 June 2007 locates this discussion of design and wellbeing in a particular historical moment. The implications of this moment begin to emerge when cast against the background of earlier efforts to refine a shared understanding of design and focus on design-related agendas.

In the modern era design has always served as a revealing gauge of economic, political and cultural conditions. 2007, for example, marks the centennial of the founding of the Deutscher Werkbund, one of the most significant early modern efforts to align design with industry in an effort to promote national competitiveness in global markets. The years surrounding the founding of the Werkbund also witnessed the emergence of various programs and manifestoes such as the Founding Manifesto of Futurism (1909), intended to promote the provocative cultural agenda of an avant-garde movement. A half century later, nations on both sides of the Iron Curtain were busy organizing their displays for the 1958 Brussels World Fair where design, treated as both a tool of propaganda and a revealing index of the differences between Capitalist and Communist systems, figured prominently in this Cold War confrontation. A quarter of a century ago Postmodernism dominated discussions of design by introducing another element, emotional expression, that overrode the older emphasis on form and function. At the same time, a new tool, the personal computer, began to make its presence felt. Alignment with industry, promotion of political ideologies, cultural critique and engagement, exploitation of new tools and materials: these themes constitute the legacy of a century of sustained design activity and discourse. This list certainly

is not exhaustive and this legacy does not preclude further discussions, fresh perspectives, and intriguing new conceptions regarding design's contribution to the contemporary world situation.

Despite noteworthy differences among the participants, and the range of cultural perspectives and traditions they brought, one thing all shared was the conviction that design truly can be a significant force in the promotion of a noble end. The collective statement on wellbeing through design that follows is considered as the basepoint for future engagements and actions that will help to achieve the goals set out.

Wellbeing through Design

In a fragile, complex, world designers must envision and realize the routes to wellbeing—wellbeing in which peoples' basic needs are assured and individual and collective aspirations are realized through a process of forethought called design. Design can transform particular conditions in order to create wellbeing—wellbeing that is contingent upon a healthy, harmonious and equitable world. Design is a potent tool through which to achieve this goal.

To create human wellbeing in the twenty-first century, designers must act in harmony with the natural world, sustaining balance, lifecycles and climates. They must challenge the technological world to create means that will enhance our capacity to achieve wellbeing. They must engage with the political world in order to influence opinions and mobilize actions that are both affirmative and effective. They must nourish the inner worlds of spirituality and belief with due respect for human identities and cultures.

In doing this designers must ethically and responsibly:

- shape the visible world of signs, spaces, structures and objects along with the invisible world of systems, economies, narratives and networks;
- reconfigure elements of the physical world in order to make new materials, ecologies, and technologies as well as the immaterial world to create new environments, scenarios, and experiences;
- enable the transportation of people through space and time, with efficiency and comfort, along with the means to navigate landscapes and environments;
- develop skins, fabrics and objects that help people to function and survive in life as well as to manifest their personal identities within the social cohesion of a culture;
- embody the principles of good citizenship through designing for well-being.

Designers must recognize that the things they make will directly impact peoples' lives and have the capacity to stimulate new futures. This power must be knowingly exercised, with dignity, good humor, and a wisdom that is accompanied by responsible stewardship throughout the endeavor.

Our goal is to foster the positive effects that such actions can have upon peoples' lives. Design educators, design researchers, the design professions, and policy-makers each have a key role to play in achieving this. It will take our sustained, collaborative, efforts. Through these actions, we believe that good design can offer a route to wellbeing.

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