

A Natural Death Is Announced

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We have, for some considerable time, been living in an era of unprecedented change, but only now are we apparently becoming aware of the paradigm shift overtaking our life on earth. We hardly need the admonishment of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*¹ to point out the material unsustainability of our manufacturing and consumerist base. We cannot afford to keep focusing on designed objects in isolation from the real problems of the world, and we cannot afford *not* to link the present manufacturing / consumerist base with the changes happening to and in society as a whole. We have to ask what these paradigm shifts are all about, and we will be required to give up our comfortable worldviews and to construct, to *design*, our new and better paradigms of thinking and living. We have to announce our own death in order to live.

However, we cannot do so from within the parameters of any of the design disciplines as we know them today because “we” are not enough. But before I bury the corpse of old-fashioned design (because its self-deception ignored the concerns of everyday life), let us pause a moment and reflect upon what could have been by asking this: *Why do I see a discipline being buried and do I not see something else?*

“We see what we do and do not see something else because of the *way* in which we look. And these ‘ways’ constitute ... reality-generating mechanisms ... [and each of these] schemes has its own characteristic set of tools and methods for answering the question. The methods [produce] a set of rules [that] are of a special type and, in contrast to many other reality-generating procedures, are always subject to revision in the light of new evidence.”²

The way I see and the way I use design thinking to view the world has changed, initially because I discovered systems thinking and cybernetics, and recently, because our faculty had to change its character when it was subjected to an official merger process. In this article I unfold the development of a way of thinking in, with, and through design theory and practice first by briefly dealing with our new faculty structure and the renewed research direction(s) this afforded us, and second, by following the trail of emergent signs that seems to point to an *undisciplined* future development of design.

An Arranged Marriage

Because of the educational merger (between the Cape Technikon and the Peninsula Technikon) that resulted in the Cape Peninsula

1 I am well aware of the fact that many well-meaning commentators and scientists have made light of this effort to publicize a complex problem, but Al Gore has at least brought to people's attention that business as usual is not an option anymore, and that we are, indeed, living in an era of consequences.

2 John Casti, *Paradigms Regained* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 1–2.

- 3 Yrjö Engeström, *Activity Theory and Expansive Design* (http://projectsfinal.interactionivrea.org/2004-2005/SYMPOSIUM%202005/communication%20material/ACTIVITY%20THEORY%20AND%20EXPANSIVE%20DESIGN_Engestrom.pdf) (accessed June 3, 2010).
- 4 Bonnie Nardi (ed.), *Context and Consciousness: Activity Theory and Human-Computer Interaction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
- 5 Arthur Tatnall and Anthony Gilding, *Actor-Network Theory and Information Systems Research*, Document from Proc. 10th Australian Conference on Information Systems (<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/summary?doi=10.1.1.10.1265>), (accessed June 3, 2010).
- 6 It would be more accurate to say that “merging” rather refers to an integration of our research capabilities at this stage because an officially curriculated and government-approved program that contains practical and theoretical elements of both design and informatics has yet to emerge. What makes this direction a worthwhile one to follow, however, is that the students (particularly in industrial design) are naturally drawn to products and systems that require the merging of both design and informatics knowledge.
- 7 To know where you come from is one thing, but to know how you did so is another, and besides, the fact that you are now *here* changes things in terms of where you thought you were going, since you can’t get out of *here* by the way you came in. Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass* (London: Octopus, 1978).
- 8 Should one ever be surprised? No methodology or discipline was ever immune to the directions taken by other ways of investigating the world. Bruno Latour (philosophy of science) believes the social is to be reassembled each time, Checkland (business administration) has society recreated by its members, and social constructivism agrees substantially with both. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

University of Technology, our newly formed Faculty of Informatics and Design provided many unique research opportunities, both disciplinary and interdisciplinary. This merger also gave us a chance to reconfigure our collective research focus, and we soon realized that research into the relationship between knowledge and technology must also view “technology” as any human system designed to classify and organize the world. As a new research group, we have chosen a methodological framework based on the social construction of reality, since industrial, interaction, and information systems designers, in general, agree with qualitative researchers on the need for research data that is sourced directly from the emerging needs and concerns of a specific social group or market.

Engeström’s³ interactive design, based on activity theory, looks at both designed objects and people as embedded in the same dynamic social structure or activity system, and in this everyday practice, according to Nardi,⁴ all human experiences are shaped by the tools, signs, and systems used by them. The closely related ideas embodied by actor-network theory (ANT) are depicted by Tatnall and Gilding⁵ as not concentrating on the real differences between humans and machines (artifacts), but rather focusing on their interactions, viewing the social and technological “properties” as “network effects rather than innate characteristics of an entity.” Based on the work of Latour and Callon, Tatnall and Gilding view the world as filled with hybrid and co-existing human and non-human entities, and they state that ANT can help resolve situations where these two entities cannot easily be separated and identified each in its own right, as if they exist in isolation from one another. This very brief background illustrates our thinking, leading up to the position we find ourselves in at the moment, and it also illustrates why we chose *designing interaction spaces for usability and usefulness* as our overall research focus.

However, realizing the need for something and knowing how to go about achieving your goals is usually not such a straightforward exercise in logic. To merge⁶ two distinct disciplines such as design and informatics (also, confusingly, variously known as Information Systems, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), or Human Computer Interaction (HCI)) is not an easy matter, but to *not* find collaborative ways of working together would have been worse than short-sighted.

For the purposes of examining the concept of *undisciplined*, how is this helpful? Well, we could do worse than to ask this Lewis Carroll⁷ question: “‘Where do you come from?’ said the Red Queen. ‘And where are you going?’” Casti’s (above) notion of reality-generating mechanisms, subject to constant revision, can be a useful guide to rethinking the discipline of design, and to reconsidering where the subjects you teach have their origins, and where they are going—in fact, to ask who their new friends are and what new influences they are bringing home, as I do in the next section.

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- 9 Peter Checkland is the “father” of Soft Systems Methodology; Peter Checkland, *Systems Thinking, Systems Practice* (Chichester: John Wiley, 1981).
- 10 Susan Szenasy, *Sustainable Pedagogies and Practices* (<http://www.metropolis-mag.com/story/20040301/sustainable-pedagogies-and-practices>), (accessed June 3, 2010).
- 11 Bela Banathy, *The Primer Project* (http://www.newciv.org/ISSS_Primer/aseM04bb.html), (accessed June 3, 2010).
- 12 Wolfgang Jonas has long been a proponent of an undisciplined field of knowledge for and in design, since what we, as designers, need to work with looks like islands of potential knowledge floating in a sea of disciplines, but not yet connected to each other, that is our contextual responsibility; see Wolfgang Jonas, *The Paradox Endeavour to Design a Foundation for a Groundless Field* (<http://www.verhaag.net/basicparadox/fartikel.php?ID=9&lang=e&version=lang>), (accessed June 3, 2010).
- 13 Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).
- 14 My use of the term cyberdesign is not meant to be associated with the manner in which unsuccessful (in human interaction terms) and badly navigable website design is foisted onto an unsuspecting user public. Trawl through the links to “cyberdesign” and you will find many promises from capitalist companies that your new website will outperform your rivals and beat them to the next goal post newly established by Moore’s Law. The term mechanistic comes to mind. Cyber was never meant to indicate beyond human and was never meant to replace our bio/meta/physical space of possibility with electronic control. I am demanding that this term, cybernetics (original Greek for steersman, and later, Latin, for governor), be reinstated so that the affordances of the term can, again, be allowed to aid our search for the humanly driven direction of design sustainability.

Describing the Perceptible

Systems theory and cybernetics started life as systems of control, but with time and a shift from object to subject, these ways of understanding phenomena needed to be adapted to social issues, and the mechanical, hard approaches that could predict and control (i.e., an assembly line [think of Henry Ford’s mass production environment]) became “soft” systems and “second-order” cybernetics: An investigation of *observed* systems became a method of inquiring into *observing* systems, or how humans behave. Surprisingly sounding like Latour,⁸ Checkland⁹ affirms that systems thinking is not a recipe but a way of looking at the problems of social reality we wish to tackle because “the latter is not a ‘given’ but is a process in which an ever-changing social world is continuously recreated by its members.” On the other hand, a combination of cybernetics and systems thinking is what is needed in design education, according to a *Metropolis*¹⁰ survey, seeing that this hybrid can provide “the very basis of sustainable ethics, aesthetics, and processes” in design.

Still, why would cybernetics change our faith in the structure and usefulness of a discipline? This methodology (a lens, *not* a method!) differs significantly from other methodologies used by *fully described disciplines* in that it appreciates the necessity of selecting from a wide range of approaches, plus a range of tools and corresponding methods, “that best fit—the type of system, the purpose and nature of the inquiry, and the specific problem situation.”¹¹ The notion of design as a groundless field of knowledge¹² follows this same pattern, of necessity sourcing what it needs from many other contextually relevant fields of knowledge, as dictated by the specific design problem. Any discipline that can be depicted as “fully described” can only be seen as such because of the fully satisfied (and themselves “fully described”) academics and researchers who keep this scaffolded edifice in place, in opposition to the evidence of social constructivism and the contemporary acceptance of a world in flux, including its bases of knowledge.

To more fully make use of new opportunities for learning, then, my constructivist design theory classroom uses cybernetics and systemic thinking as if they were one system, a combined way of seeing those things that have been in full view but “hidden.” In other words, we seek ways to bridge the gaps between Jonas’s disparate islands of disciplinary knowledge, and so realize what Polanyi¹³ meant when he spoke of arriving at the edge of another reality, after crossing this gap. I regard cybernetics + design as a Nigel Cross-type *designerly way of knowing*, hence my use of the term cyberdesign,¹⁴ both a *thing* and not *anything* (cf. below); thus, this expanded, groundless field of possibility (making use of more than one field of knowledge) that allows us to see the world through Dooley’s¹⁵ “cybernetic lenses,” with the consequent unsettling effect this perspective has on our unproblematic and safe way of

viewing knowledge and its relationship to the world. It was in this re-enlightened sense that I read the following definition of a discipline as seen through the lens of interdisciplinarity.

Parncutt,¹⁶ in discussing what he identified as “controversial terms” (musicology, discipline, interdisciplinary), attempted to clarify what was meant by the term discipline, both in terms of a chosen field of knowledge (musicology) and in terms of what we could mean by using the term *interdisciplinary*, since the scope of any academic field of knowledge, surely, will obstinately transcend its own boundaries if defined too narrowly.

Reading a particular passage from his work, it struck me that the questions Parncutt was dissecting so carefully also applied to my own discipline, and, in fact, to all contemporary academic disciplines. If we are prepared to admit—even if simply for the sake of a rhetorical argument—that in our modern, connected world, with its dependency on information-sharing technologies, we would find it nigh impossible to keep any discipline as pure as we would like, then the term *natural hybrid* springs to mind. What Parncutt seems to be saying (my interpretation *and* transformation of his text) is that the academic study of any field, besides containing a core fidelity that differentiates it from other fields of study, contains yet larger areas of overlapping interest; thus, if researchers in both music analysis and music history discover that analysis is strengthened by history, and vice versa, then the core fidelity of music can only be enhanced by an interdisciplinary approach (while, of course, questioning the very meaning of the term interdisciplinary).¹⁷ I would assume, at this point, that design researchers would not find it problematic if I call the discipline of design a *natural hybrid* and, given the potential of the Parncutt example, I transform this passage from his work merely by substituting the term *cyberdesign* for *musicology*, and the term *design* for *music*. In the result, then, we can begin to discern the *undisciplined* nature of contemporary design investigation.

Cyberdesign is design scholarship. It is the academic study of any and all design phenomena. It addresses the physical, psychological, aesthetic, social, cultural, political, and historical concomitants of design, design creation, design perception, and design discourse. It incorporates a blend of sciences and humanities and is grounded in design practice. It involves a wide range of non-design disciplines and corresponding research methods.

Our faculty’s research group has found this integrative approach to be closer to the systemic thinking we surmised would be necessary to our merged research efforts—hence, our focus on the broad question of designing *interaction spaces*. We have to keep in mind the network effects of the interactions between the hybrid and co-existing human and non-human actors who populate our fields of investigation. We simply *have* to become *undisciplined* to deal with a blend of sciences and humanities, especially if we are willing to listen to non-design disciplines, as our Informatics staff have found to their

15 Dooley speaks of “The process of things being cybernetic together,” and further describes the cybernetic way of seeing as essentially constructivist. Jeff Dooley, *Systems: The Science of How Things Are Connected* (<http://www.well.com/~dooley/systems.html>), (accessed June 3, 2010).

16 Richard Parncutt, *Definitions 3rd Conference on Interdisciplinary Musicology*, Tallinn (<http://www.uni-graz.at/~parncutt/cim07/definitions.htm>), 2007.

17 If music, analysis, and history are subjects integral to three independent disciplines, how is an analysis of music history possible? Or indeed the history of musical analysis? What happens to the “original” discipline when selected elements are used in such cross-border raids?

credit.¹⁸ Our research efforts are based on the qualitative aspects of social reality, relying on a wide range of corresponding research methods, since our approach is largely interpretivist. I thus consider the concept of cyberdesign as a hybrid lens, an approach that, in finding its investigative level, continually generates undisciplined moves toward a coming-into-being of individual, as well as of “disciplinary” understanding. In the next section I question the viability of the old working definition of a discipline.

Unlicentious Freedom

Undisciplined: what do we think of when encountering this word? Would we not assume that the design researcher is *without discipline*, working in a disciplinary vacuum with no official support for whatever results may emerge, no official *network of opinion* against which to evaluate those results? How else is one to maintain rigor in design research and design education? What is this thing called a discipline, and why would we need one?

To put these questions in context, we have to take notice of the emerging scenario of a networked socio-technical society, one that requires undisciplined design theory and consequent practice, which is not to acknowledge that this is something unforeseen or even radically new. All designers are likely familiar with Simon’s definition of design as changing existing situations into preferred ones, but how many believe Jonas’s definition of design as a groundless field of knowledge? These two definitions, in combination, point to the necessity of an “undisciplined” approach to design’s renewal because the notion of *preferred situations*, today, implies innovation and creativity in order to integrate (systems, manufacturing processes, technologies, etc.), and therefore to change (the designed artifacts we surround ourselves with), while the concept of a *groundless field* highlights, not a serious disciplinary vacuum, but the added advantage of being able to share in an array of foundations of knowledge.

In our modern and technology-scaffolded everyday lives, can we identify any designed object that is the product of a single discipline? Were the products of the Industrial Revolution based on single-discipline-restricted thinking? I can only assume that we have become so used to the perceived safety of a “discipline” that at all costs design must be *disciplined into submission*; the original meaning of the word discipline is thus enforced without being adapted or understood in modern terms. As Cohen¹⁹ states, the hierarchical organization of a university *segments* fields of knowledge, but trying to teach within rigid disciplinary frameworks cannot satisfy the demands of a complex modern society. Increasingly, design has to deal with the networked society,²⁰ and after exposing itself to this natural hybridization, the next step has to be that (silo) disciplines will have to network as well. These are real world challenges, and in *Brighton 05-06-07* a number of international designers²¹ ask that

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- 18 It is worth mentioning that many of the authors in the information systems field have backgrounds in “non-design” disciplines (e.g., Terry Winograd [Mathematics & Linguistics], Bonnie Nardi [Social Sciences & Ethnography], Yrjö Engeström [Educational Psychology], Kalle Lyytinen [Economics], Ari-Veikko Anttiroiko [Public Administration & Local Government], and Bruno Latour [Philosophy & Anthropology]).
- 19 Eli Cohen, “Reconceptualising Information Systems as a Field of the Transdiscipline Informing Science: From Ugly Duckling to Swan,” *Journal of Computing and Information Technology* 7:3 (1999): 213–219.
- 20 See Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).
- 21 Anne Boddington, Bruce Brown, Jonathan Chapman, Rachel Cooper, Dennis Doordan, Ken Garland, Catherine Harper, Soonjong Lee, Victor Margolin, Jiri Pelcl, Oscar Salinas, and Jonathan Woodham, “Brighton 05-06-07,” *Design Issues* 24:1 (2008): 91–93.

the design community take on the challenges confronting design today—something that sites such as NextD, Doors of Perception, and dott07 (the U.K. Design Council’s designs of the time 2007), amongst others, have been doing for some time. We should rather ask the question, why does it take the design community, and design education, such a long time to change the course of this lumbering ship?

In the *Brighton* declaration, Boddington et al. are asking designers to seriously look at ways to transform society through the powerful influence of design. What *does* this mean? What will give us the freedom to maneuver within/ without the present disciplinary boundaries, and yet retain the un-licentious regard for order that *rigor* promises? Move beyond personalities, move beyond vested interests, and we hear Boddington et al.; we hear the many voices that have sounded the call to change design in a fundamental way. Let’s accept the necessity for change, and ask, “how do we change?” and change quickly. Perhaps we are obtusely refusing to ask our friends and cousins what they think. The following paragraph was suggested by and deconstructed from the work of Rees,²² a theoretical astrophysicist.

In the new world of emerging (hybrid and interactive) design, there’s always the thought-provoking possibility that the way we see design, and the way we use design thinking to view the world and our interactions with the world, are by now inadequate and should be changed. Design “as subject” is beginning to interest people more and more, as more designers and “designers” launch projects visible and accessible to the public. Design can be seen as asking fundamental questions dealing with the very world we live in and on—theoretical/practical, figurative/literal questions that allow people to focus on their interactions with the world itself (recycling/sustainability/reducing the carbon footprint), and to question their interactions with their fellow human beings (advanced information systems technology). Perhaps we should look on this general development as an extra motivation for change, and look to this willingness to explore our world and the way it operates for ideas for design’s renewal. The modern world of interactivity that today’s youth and tomorrow’s designers find themselves inhabiting can provide them with the very reasons for studying an exciting and revealing design course—one that will help them to become designers-of-living-circumstances and explorers of what’s *out there* and, to me more importantly, what’s *in here* (below).

Another and very fundamental reason for design to change is that designers need to begin to understand how societies evolve to deal with the undoubted world of complexity we face every day. Too much of our thinking is still based on simplistic cause-and-effect perceptions, while the world has to cope with, for instance, the complex and networked causes and effects of global warming. Possibly the best reason for change is that the-world-out-there

22 Martin Rees, “An Ensemble of Universes,” in J. Brockman (Ed.), *The Third Culture: Beyond the Scientific Revolution* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1995), <http://www.edge.org/documents/ThirdCulture/x-Ch.15.html>, (accessed June 3, 2010).

can be treated as a living laboratory that allows designers to explore the hybrid vigor²³ effect of design on the world and all its living ecosystems. By going out to the world and, in addition, finding innovative ways to bring that same world-in-motion to an educational setting, we can extend our knowledge, not of design principles per se, but of the reasoning behind human interactions.

Latour,²⁴ a sociology of science philosopher/anthropologist, regards texts, in his “discipline,” as “the functional equivalent of a laboratory. It’s a place for trials, experiments, and simulations.” This same *laboratory* situation that Rees and Latour have in mind is fundamental to the intellectual activity of Castells,²⁵ since his version of social theory is a form of grounded theory based on a combination of theory/research. “That is, I literally cannot think without observing and understanding what’s going on in the world,” and that world is defined by “the interaction between the network society and the power of identity and social movements.”

Bovina Sancta!

Ask not what a single discipline can do for the many, but rather ask what creating a socially situated problem space can achieve, inspired by multiple disciplines.

To talk about the big issue of a discipline—that very wide view of what we would call our knowledge in design—I need to step back and, as it were, look away toward who is doing the viewing, toward the individual. That would mean looking at both the networked effects of social change and design intervention, as well as the forming of identities *within* those networks. To understand what’s going on in the world, as Castells says, is first to understand what’s going on within your own world of identity formation, which in turn means looking at this interaction between the networked society and the identity of both the designer as individual and the designer as the person-within-the-discipline. This is a viewpoint that can help you “design” and re-assemble²⁶ your own new self, and the new “self” of your discipline, by exposing it to what it can become, in true Heideggerian fashion.

However, this is a vast topic of investigation, and in this article I can only focus on one necessary aspect that could help in our search for an *undiscipline*: death. A personal identity, as much as a discipline, needs to die so that it can live; it needs to reassemble itself. A discipline needs to be undone for its own sake. According to Genosko,²⁷ Baudrillard regarded the concept of death as a theory of symbolic exchange, “an incessant cycle of symbolic reciprocity obliging the code to respond in kind.” A cybernetic conversation, between observer and what is being observed (the knowledge contained in a discipline), has to include this element of reciprocity: Each partner has to give up something of its safe ground to reach out to the other; to understand is to lose, before regaining.

23 See The Hybrid Vigor Institute, “a global network of diverse thinkers from both public and private sectors who are comfortable with these kinds of boundary-crossing inquiries” (<http://www.hybridvigor.org/about>). (accessed 6/7/2010).

24 Bruno Latour (2005:149), op cit.

25 Manuel Castells, Interviewed by Harry Kreisler, *Identity and Change in the Network Society: Conversation with Manuel Castells* (<http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people/Castells/>), (accessed June 3, 2010).

26 Bruno Latour states clearly that there is no such “thing” as a society, except as an assembly of individuals, and even then they have to recreate or reassemble that thing they wish to name society; see Latour (2005), op cit.

27 Gary Genosko, *Undisciplined Theory* (London: Sage, 1998), 13.

I subscribe to the ontological phenomenology of Heidegger,²⁸ which deals with the ongoing and developing relationship between “the world” and the self—a relationship between the *out there* and the *in here* that uncovers the processes of *coming-into-being*. Not only does Heidegger not make any distinction between ontology and phenomenology, but he stipulated that its essence lies in possibility rather than actuality. As such, we may experience a *moment of recognition* of our *new selves*, and we can do so precisely because we do not and cannot uncover the processes of *coming-into-being* alone. It is these formative moments of recognition that take us forward, especially in design education, as long as we remember that the world of education, of the classroom, is but another aspect of the world *out there*. This world of people, designed objects and events, contains three elements that are always at work in our phenomenological and ontological development: the observer, the observed, and the results of that observation. It is the importance of this third element that we should focus on, instead of assigning too much relevance to the authoritative discipline, the observed, that is only one of the aspects of education. Baudrillard used theory as his instrument to undermine, to undiscipline, the disciplines. For him, the results of observation is this undisciplined and *inbetween* theory that refuses the absolute authority of the disciplines, and its very *inbetweenness*, its positioning of itself in this new *nomansland* between the disciplines, this act creates a refusal “to reconcile itself with the disciplines and the disciplines with themselves.”²⁹

For a design student, this taking of a position *inbetween* would normally be an impossible task, given the rigor with which any design discipline is deployed in too many design schools. The self is not encouraged to develop; indeed, it is discouraged to develop except as a carrier of “design knowledge,” as a solver of linear design problems. To really see what a design discipline can become, we cannot afford to neglect the future architects of that discipline. Design students must be taught the meaning of learning, and how to deal with the relationships between the “I” and the “other.”³⁰ It is for this reason that I use cyberdesign as a way of knowing, since this allows designers to act as transformative change agents. Emancipatory and transformative, as working ideas, must equally apply to the individual as much as to the basis of knowledge used for learning (i.e., the discipline). The rigour of new design disciplines should be redirected at the new associations between designer, user, technology, designed objects, and the contextual and social systems within which all these actors have to network. Rigor should be emphatic in nature when reassembling methodologies because of hybridization and integration (while asking what was rigor for in the first place?), but rigor, as a concept, should be scaffolded, given a backbone, in shaping network society alliances. The way to change anything (and how to know why a change is necessary) is the way shown by ontological phenomenology, or as Maritain³¹ put it, this

28 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1962). See also Anne-Marie Willis, *Ontological Designing* (<http://www.teamdes.com.au/whatsold.htm>), (accessed June 3, 2010).

29 Genosko, (1998:4), op cit.

30 Normally, when the word “Other” appears in a text (capitalized) it is taken to refer to the philosophical “other”, and usually a person taking up a socio-political position in contrast to yours. Here the “other” is used to refer to anyone and anything outside the self.

31 Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, J.F. Scanlan, translator (London: Sheed & Ward, 1939), 52.

journey or method of discovery “must be steeped in logic; not in the pseudo-logic of clear ideas, not in the logic of knowledge and demonstration, but in the working logic of every day [social reality], eternally mysterious and disturbing [in its complexity], the logic of the structure of the living thing.”

The logic of the continual restructuring of the living “thing” constitutes the third element that education and design practice should focus on, and in this process a discipline becomes one part of that “living thing” that various philosophers have described as *das ding an sich* (things in themselves), or the essence of “things” in the world.

De Integro

The seeming confusion around the term *de integro* is rather revealing, I think. Most websites give the translation as *from the beginning*, while another professional site tells us that, in legal terms, it means *as regards the whole*. One version of the term *integrity*, of course, refers to the wholeness (of the structure) of something. Whatever the case may be, *de integro* set me thinking about the character of a discipline as the structure of a “living thing.” What does this word / term *thing* refer to, and what makes it a *living* thing?

*There ain't no rules around here.
We're trying to accomplish something.*
—Thomas Edison

A *thing* is a place, or, rather, a thing is an unfolding event, but since that cannot happen without the concept of place or space, a thing can be associated, at least, with place. In Afrikaans³² a thing is a *ding*, and a *ding an sich*, despite Kant's opposition, *can* be known; the question is how we come to that knowing / understanding. In Afrikaans we say *hier kom 'n ding* (“I see a thing coming”), which of course does not refer to an object, but to an event that has yet to take place. How do you *take* a place? By positioning yourself, and it is this *positioning* that we can trace and describe.

A discipline develops by exactly this same means because, as a discipline, “it” is not alive but is constituted by the people who participate in its construction: it is socially constructed. As a constructed *thing*, or a *ding an sich*, a discipline should follow the human rules of *thingness*, or, in this argument, the rules of the *topoi*, as Latour³³ reminds us: Like the renowned Icelandic Thing, or the Athenian agora, *topoi* are both places and events (assemblies, or meeting places), but never objects; indeed, they are places where “new interpretations and revisions of history” take place.

Design has moved from objects to processes, but this in reality means it has moved to focusing on human interactions—with object-*things*, yes, but more importantly, also with *topoi-things*. What Latour had tried to do with the *Making Things Public* exposition is what

32 Described by Wikipedia as “an Indo-European language, derived from 17th century Dutch and classified as Low Franconian Germanic.”

33 Bruno Latour, *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (http://www.bruno-latour.fr/expositions/002_parliament.html), (accessed June 3, 2010).

design researchers and practitioners should be doing with their discipline: *as* participants, they should realize that a renewal will entail a process that will “reassemble them and make them part of a totally new Thing.” Design participants will have to redesign themselves *and then* their own discipline. To understand something, or to come to know this *ding an sich*, the self must realize that this *knowing* is only possible “through the subject surrendering itself to the idea as subject-object.”³⁴ You cannot take part without jumping into the water, as it were, the way I was rudely taught to swim at age 9. A much bigger boy pushed me into the deep end of the municipal swimming baths, a very big and alien place, a watery environment that you have to make your body part of, surrender to, or drown. I died as a non-swimmer somewhat afraid of the water and was reassembled as a non-drowner; only with practice was I, later, able to more fully adapt to this alien watery environment and become a full participant, a swimmer, my new self. With hindsight, what I learned at that early age was how to redesign myself by phenomenologically rethinking my changed environment, one that suddenly changed from terra firma (familiar and safe) to terra aqua (unfamiliar and dangerous). As an individual I had to reassemble my “self” by surrendering to something *undisciplined*, and, perhaps not so surprisingly, this process still works today as an ontological/phenomenological reorientation of thought.

Not Last-Wording but Tagging

We, designers and users (that means just about everyone on the planet), can and should use every means at our disposal to make this world, this manufactured, socially constructed, and (let’s be honest), for the most part, artificial world, a better place in which to be human. Design can change the world *and* transform society, but *we* are not enough since we, as just the small design community, cannot do so from within the parameters and confines of any of the design disciplines as we know them today. If we want to keep up with the contemporary flux in world affairs, we need to learn how to start conversations/dialogues, and learn how to listen to the other, *all of them*.

At the Cumulus Kyoto 2008 Conference, titled [*Cu:*] “*emptiness*” *Resetting Design—A New Beginning*, a declaration³⁵ was signed stating that all the people of the world live in interdependent systems for living, a veritable groundless and perfectly cybernetic field for design investigation. This declaration calls for the merging of the sciences and humanities, technology and the arts, and puts it clearly that design thinking places itself in the midst of this important paradigm shift and must therefore redefine itself. Findeli³⁶ has warned designers about this transformative paradigm shift, and he called upon them to “open up the scope of inquiry... and push back the boundaries of our system in order to include other important aspects of the world in which design is practiced.”

34 Michael Eldred, *Heidegger's Hegel and the Greeks* (<http://www.arte-fact.org/untp/tcl/hegelgrk.html>), (accessed June 3, 2010).

35 Kyoto Design Declaration, *Cumulus Kyoto 2008 Conference [cu:] “Emptiness”* (<http://www.cumulusassociation.org/>), (accessed June 3, 2010).

36 Alain Findeli, “Rethinking Design Education for the 21st Century: Theoretical, Methodological, and Ethical Discussion,” *Design Issues* 17:1 (2001): 5–17.

The Kyoto conference gives us a valuable clue about how to do this—by listening to the other, which is hardly a conquering alien, but constitutive of the new self in possibility. Through the term *basho*, expressed as *emptiness* and *nothingness*, we are offered a cure for what ails us—this Western duality of mind and body. A very natural death is again announced because *basho* refers to more than simply the place where one lives, physically; it also denotes the space within which we can reassemble our relations with the other. We seem to be afraid of terms such as death, loss, emptiness, and we use negative expressions such as *deathly quiet*. I can, with gratitude, claim that I have experienced this last sensation in a positive sense, in a town like Arniston. Go past the turn-off to the cave (tourist attraction), down the last incline to the sea, round the bend, and over the line of dunes to your right. Suddenly, the roar of the ocean disappears, and it is *deathly quiet*. An all-encompassing presence has seemingly been withdrawn, although the ocean is still “there,” except that I am now in a *place* where a silence (expressed first as a lack of the ocean’s roar, this absence of a previous presence), an “emptiness,” comes rushing in to fill the void. But now a new presence can be felt, one that represents all possibility. I learned to swim again, only this time in an *emptiness* that filled itself with an awareness of the other.

What I now realize is that I had found a *basho* that has never left me, this “whole paradigm of conceptions of place, field, topos, or context,”³⁷ and yet, as Cipriani further puts it, “we are less and less well disposed to ‘empty’ ourselves with care and consideration,” because what we “fill” our consumerist lives with is truly and contradictorily empty. The absolute nothingness that is *basho* is not a *thing* (object) but a *thing* (space for reassembly), a relational principle, the so-called empty center that is a consequence of “the betweenness of selves in the world . . . one becomes a social self by rejecting one’s individuality. The real self . . . occurs between these two contradictions.”³⁸ This approach by the Japanese philosopher Watsuji is explained by Carter³⁹ as a loss of self that, in fact, reassembles the self as authentic, but only because the self can forsake its claim to independence from the other (read as the non-dual relational principle of *basho*).

I can only reiterate that our design discipline(s), and in fact, any other academic voice, can play the role of the other; indeed, our Faculty’s research focus of *designing interaction spaces for usability and usefulness* depends on this happening. The process of the subject surrendering itself to the idea as subject-object (above) applies equally to the self *and* to a discipline, seen as the principle of *basho* and not as a definitive dictionary. Our renewed disciplinary resource for design thinking can resemble the aggregation of a tag-cloud phenomenon, a topos for design’s (re)assembly. Using Web 2.0 technology as a modern prompt to achieve *basho*, this redesigned and real-time configuration for reassembly is possible because this new platform has “a gravitational core. You can visualize Web 2.0

37 Gerald Cipriani, “The Wrong Form of Emptiness in Global Design,” *Cumulus Kyoto 2008 Conference* [cu:] “Emptiness” (http://www.kyoto-seika.ac.jp/cumulus/e_programs/oralpresenters.html#os1), (accessed June 3, 2010).

38 Robert N. St. Clair, *The Phenomenology of Self Across Cultures* (<http://www.uri.edu/iaics/content/2004v13n3/02%20%Robert20w%20st.%20clair.pdf>) (accessed 6/7/2010).

39 Robert Carter, *Watsuji Tetsurō* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/watsuji-tetsuro/>), (accessed June 3, 2010).

40 Tim O'Reilly, *What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software* (<http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>), (accessed June 3, 2010).

41 I do not refer to cloud computing in the business sense, but to an open source, interactive method to display and change/add to "data packets" (information) and the links between these. By now everyone is familiar with the "tag clouding" addition to a web site that displays "tags" or key words and terms in a static "cloud"—now imagine this as a virtual, four-dimensional cloud reacting to your interest in it, and doing so in a research-based, academic way in real time, as a full-blown image-and-text communicative tool for learning.

as a set of principles that tie together a veritable solar system of sites that demonstrate some or all of those principles, at a varying distance from the core."⁴⁰ It seems to me that what O'Reilly calls the *architecture of participation* can also be achieved by means of this tagging phenomenon⁴¹—a place, topos, a transformative *basho* that will, by its very open-source cybernetic nature, help to *undiscipline* design thinking, to the benefit of all.