

Introduction 1984

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach. And not, when I came to die, that I had not lived."

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, 1854

No one, least of all the designer, can operate meaningfully in today's fast-changing economic and cultural situation without a well-defined sense of purpose. On a personal level, this means knowing what one's life is about; and on a professional level it means understanding one's possibilities for working, both for economic survival and for effecting change. Just as one needs to know oneself, one must also know one's profession—its history, its theoretical propositions, and its critical assumptions.

Within the American design tradition, too little attention has been given to understanding the profession of design in all its dimensions. Americans have always prided themselves on pragmatism and a hard-nosed confrontation with reality. But as the conditions of life become more complex, the celebration of an over-simplified pragmatism is unconvincing. At the same time, as design programs proliferate throughout the United States, many educators have realized that design education lacks the dimension of history, theory, and criticism that can foster more sophisticated and critical responses to the new situations.

It would be presumptuous to say that *Design Issues* has been created to solve this problem since it is difficult at this point even to know what might constitute a history theory, and criticism of design. The founders of this journal, a group of colleagues at The University of Illinois at Chicago, believe that before the design profession becomes too concerned with conclusions, a place for ongoing deliberation must be established.

Design Issues is a journal of ideas that will embrace many forms from scholarship to polemics. Articles are selected by the editors with the intent of presenting a range of positions and subjects. Some of the material will be complex but that is the challenge of reflection. If the contemporary situation is hard to grasp, how can its analysis be simple? However, we seek articles that avoid jargon which is daunting to the layperson. There will also be space in the journal for visual material—experimental typography, drawings, sketches for objects, and so forth.

In Europe there is a long tradition of discussing design as a significant social and cultural practice. This tradition is scarcely

evident in the United States although there are signs of change. Design Issues can play an active role here. The journal does not seek a set of universal principles and methods; rather we recognize the need for and value of a diversity of design strategies, ranging from large organizations of specialists operating with the latest technology to small teams of individuals concentrating on alternatives to mainstream practice.

The formation of a new set of directions for thinking about design is a long-term project. Therefore, a new level of thinking is not expected to emerge full-blown like Athena from the head of Zeus. Discussion and debate are encouraged. Beginning with the next issue, space will be provided for readers to respond to the articles and reviews. Articles and comments from outside the design field are also invited.

The aim of this journal is to be provocative and to raise controversial issues. The best design is done with intensity and commitment and we seek the same qualities from our contributors.

Victor Margolin, *Editor*
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