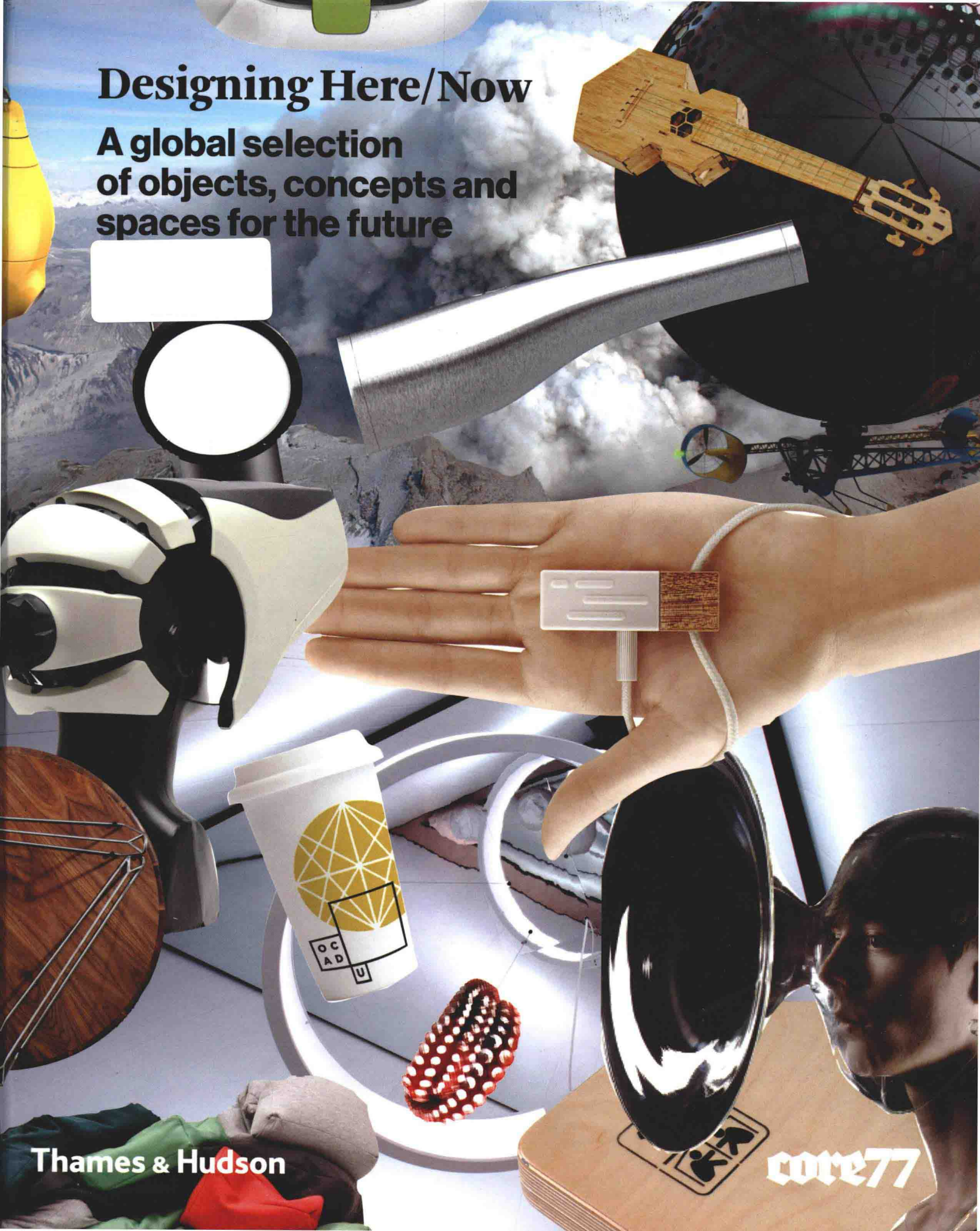
Designing Here/Now

A global selection of objects, concepts and spaces for the future



Thames & Hudson

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Edited by Allan Chochinov and Eric Ludlum

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Core77 acknowledges the collaborative nature of any successful design project. The Design Awards would not be a success without the countless hours and sleepless nights that designers all over the world have dedicated to the pursuit of design. We appreciate each entrant into our awards program and look forward to seeing our categories progress as we build the program.

The Core77 Design Awards recognize each jury captain and juror who has played an instrumental role in helping to lead and define the currents of the practice by not only judging their respective categories, but taking the time to share their thoughts and comments in the live video broadcasts. They opened their offices, homes, conference rooms, campuses and hotel rooms to us and we appreciate their enthusiasm and honesty when engaging with our global audience. We are proud to have had juries representing six continents, 15 countries and 31 cities in the first three years of the Core77 Design Awards program.

Thank you to Project Projects for guiding us through the process of producing our first book. To Studio Lin for giving our vision for a completely reinvented awards program a visual identity, and to Zut Alors! for re-imagining our outreach. To Studio Mercury, our website designers, for making our entry, judging and results process so seamless. To Rich Brilliant Willing for recognizing design as a team sport and creating a trophy that serves as a DIY mold to cast facsimiles for collaborators, clients and staff. To Laura Des Enfants and Deb Aldrich for strategy, partnerships and endless support. And to Lucas Dietrich and the entire team at Thames & Hudson for their enthusiasm, direction and dedication.

Finally, to everyone who gave us a foot up with an email forward, tweet, blog post, like, shout out...we couldn't have done it without you!

Total Rewrite
About the Core77 Design Awards
Introduction

Since its founding in 1995, Core77 has experimented with design awards programs of various kinds. From 1999 through 2002, we hosted the Heavyweight Design Competition, honoring the most forward-looking conceptual design projects. In 2003, we curated *Canary in a Coalmine: The Coroflot Members Show*, a gathering of some of the most outstanding work amongst the hundreds of thousands of portfolios at Coroflot.com. But it wasn't until 2010 that we decided to stage a juried, international design competition that would span nearly 20 categories and celebrate some of the most notable designs that the world had to offer. Like many, we were a touch cynical about design awards, sensitive to common complaints about "same winners, same jurors; same dumping-of-students-all-into-one-category." We knew that if we were going to launch a credible awards program, we would need to completely rewrite the rules of how an awards program was conceived, positioned and executed. And so in 2011, after a year of strategy and design, we pulled the trigger on what we felt represented "the next design awards program."

There were five principal innovations that we brought to bear on the Core77 Design Awards. Each significant in its details and execution, together they combine to create a truly unique program that is broad and inclusive, user-focused and candid in how it represents design enterprise across all fields of design.

Progressive Categories

The first element we addressed was the categories of a design award. In addition to the (beloved) stalwarts such as consumer product design, visual communication and transportation design, we added many new, progressive categories that we felt were vital to the practice and conversation around design right now. Categories such as Service Design, Educational Initiatives, Social Impact and Strategy and Research acknowledge the future-forward, change-making design disciplines that have emerged and injected so much energy into contemporary design endeavor. Categories such as DIY and Food Design—radical categories for a design awards program—recognize a return to the hand, a collaborative spirit, systems thinking and an exploration of the senses. Categories such as Design Writing & Commentary and Speculative Design welcome work that is fundamentally discursive and editorial—giving voice to the narrative, story-telling vectors of design that play such a critical role as design disciplines continue to flourish and mature. So with seventeen progressive categories (and growing!), we feel that the Core77 Design Awards are helping to define the extraordinary breadth of current design, telling its diverse stories and pointing to its dedicated practitioners.

Distributed, International Juries

Perhaps this is the most significant departure we took from typical design awards programs: Rather than the usual practice of flying a couple dozen jurists to a major city, banishing them to a hotel conference room and feeding them chocolate and almonds for two days, we went the opposite route. For the Core77 Design Awards, we invite individual Jury Captains—expert in their respective category and located in cities around the world—and ask them to choose their own, *local,* jury teams. So no plane fuel (we encourage "biking, jogging or training distance") and, as a result, we enjoy a much more expert-driven process. Work entered in the Interaction Design category, for example, is juried by a team of four or five professionals deeply steeped in the discipline and fluent in its contemporary practice. This results in a richer discourse, a more focused assessment and an informed commentary.

For the 2012 Awards edition, for example, we had a virtual *army* of seventy-four jurists involved in the program, and through the active recruitment and advocacy of our Jury Captains, the reach of the Core77 Design Awards is unparalleled. We are deeply grateful to the Captains and all the members of their teams over the past couple of years, and look forward to the participation of more and more design field leaders as the program continues to grow.

Increased Transparency: Video Testimonials

From the start, we've argued that one of the designer's superpowers is in her or his ability to *conjure*; to wave their arms around and make us imagine and understand the potential of a great idea and how its manifestation in the world can create great impact. But the problem with other design award programs is that designers are limited to an (often onerous) application form (we did our homework and talked to people in large consultancies who were forced to fill these out!) and a couple of jpegs. We felt that this was a lost opportunity. Why not encourage a designer to genuinely, passionately, tell their story in their own words...in a kind of video testimonial that gives them an opportunity to look into the camera and tell why their design is great, how they found their way to an innovative solution and what the experience was in terms of challenges and opportunities?

Well, we know why you wouldn't do this: Because *design awards are supposed to be anonymous*; because it's imperative to hide the identity of the designers so as not to bias the jury and the results.

But there's a flaw in this argument: In design awards programs, the work submitted is *from the past year*, and jurists often know exactly who is responsible for what work, what design firm was involved, what other awards it may have won...never mind the ubiquity of design publication blogging and tweeting, and design firms' own social media outreach. In other words, in the vast majority of cases, we already know who did the work. So the posture of anonymity just doesn't stand up.

And so we challenged this conventional wisdom: The Core77 Design Awards invites participants to submit a video testimonial in which they are asked to "tell the real story" of their project—how it was inspired, researched and instantiated. They're truly amazing to watch, with designers passionately sharing their enthusiasm around both their work and their process. We're not naïve in thinking that jurists won't occasionally be charmed (or dazzled) by famous designers talking about their work, but the bottom line is *we trust our juries.* (This has become something of a mantra of ours.) We trust that our juries

will recognize design excellence no matter the provenance, and are well able to separate the steak from the sizzle.

Increased Transparency: Live Jury Broadcasts

So we've got increased transparency (and excitement) on the way *into* the program via video testimonials from the designers themselves. But what about the design juries? The jurying process is often long, arduous and passionate, but typical results reflect none of that; you end up with a handful of "jury comments"...and that's about it. We knew that showing how the whole sausage got made would be overkill, but wouldn't it be wonderful if the participants and fans of the program could actually *hear from* the juries in their own words; where they could reflect on what they picked...and why? And so that's what we do: Two weeks after the juries conduct their deliberations, they reconvene once again to participate in a live, from-their-home-city and in-their-local-time-zone webcast presentation. Lasting approximately thirty minutes, these live webcasts (recorded for later viewing) give the jury teams the opportunity to talk about the entries in their category, what caught their imaginations, what they chose to award and why. These reveals provide a candid, unvarnished glimpse into the jurying process and they are very exciting to watch—especially if your work was an entrant in that category. As an added bonus, our website offers readers the ability to set a timer for the broadcasts in their calendaring software, so that your computer will wake you up, at say 3am, "to watch the Social Impact award live from South Africa." And people do.

The Trophy

As a coda to all the innovations around the program, we felt challenged by the actual trophy itself. What should it look like? What should it mean? Conventional trophies can be nondescript or nice, but they all share in the same common problem: There is only one trophy.

At Core77 we recognize that design is a team sport; that it takes a group of people to produce great design. So a single trophy is wholly inadequate to materially recognize more than one contributor. We worked with the design firm Rich Brilliant Willing to conceive of "a trophy that makes trophies"—a mold where winners are able to create multiple trophies for their team members *and* their clients (and their schools). We ship the trophy with a bag of crayons, so that you can simply fill the mold and cast as many trophies as you'd like. (Wax is historically the casting material of choice for greatest fidelity—and it's friendly.) We feel that this design represents a generous, conscientious choice, and it's an element of the program we're very proud of. And one more thing: We double the number of trophies, because each of our design categories has a Student section in it; we don't collect all the student entries into one bucket with one jury. We want to honor their efforts equally with the pros.

A final note: We never used the word "best" when we talked about the awards program, and we still don't. We think it's a bit overreaching to say "such and such design is the *best* design of the year." There is simply so *much* design happening all around us—big and small, proud and humble, grassroots and corporate-sponsored—it's just too large an enterprise from which to presume to represent an ultimate accomplishment. Rather, we talk about celebrating design, about design initiative and intentionality, and about creating positive value.

So that's where we are in 2014. We created an international award program that recognizes excellence in myriad areas of design, that celebrates the richness of the design profession and the brilliance of its practitioners, and embraces the diversity of design engagement—commercial, cultural, social and environmental.

And we're glad you're a part of it. Whether participant or fan, advocate or critic, we invite you to immerse yourself in these pages, these people and these projects. We believe that design is in a more powerful place than ever, and we're proud to play a part in the singing of its praises.

Allan Chochinov
Editor in Chief, Core77

About Core77

Core77 is a New York-based organization that supports, promotes and advances the field of design through its network of established resources that include Core77.com, Coroflot.com, DesignDirectory.com, Hand-Eye Supply and the Core77 Design Awards. As an Internet pioneer and industry leader, Core77 fosters community by providing employment, promotional and educational services across online channels and offline events. These services have catalyzed and sustained myriad design career opportunities and facilitated business and community connections around the world for over 18 years. Core77's early advocacy of sustainability and accountability in design helped pave the way toward their mainstream understanding and acceptance, and its promotion of design as a positive force has fueled its many offerings—from local design discussion panels to international design competitions. Through it all, the company has remained steadfastly independent—today, it is still run by the same designers who have led the organization since the beginning.

The State of Design
Roundtable Discussion

The State of Design: A freewheeling conversation about the state of design in 2012, moderated and edited by Alice Twemlow, recorded in the Design Criticism MFA department library at the School of Visual Arts, fueled by coffee and cakes, and featuring: Paola Antonelli, senior curator of Architecture and Design, Museum of Modern Art; Zoe Coombes, co-founder, Cmmnwlth; Tina Roth Eisenberg, founder, Swiss Miss, Creative Mornings, Tattly; Robert Fabricant, vice president of Creative, frog; Richard Grefe, executive director, American Institute of Graphic Arts; Steven Heller, co-chair, MFA Design, School of Visual Arts

The Cast Introduce Themselves

Robert Fabricant (RF): I'm Vice President of Creative at frog. I'm immersed in interaction design in all its various forms, starting with physical environments. The areas of design that I'm most interested in right now are around the role that interaction design plays in processes in organizations and communities, and how that kind of thinking can drive more participatory ways of solving problems and changing mindsets.

Alice Twemlow (AT): Is there a particular project you're applying that thinking to right now?

RF: I've been doing a lot of work with UNICEF, both within some of their programming in individual countries as well as on a bigger scale.

Tina Roth Eisenberg (TRE): Most people probably know me as Swiss Miss, which is the name of my design blog. I run several design-related businesses, like Creative Mornings, a breakfast lecture series that now takes place around the world. And I started a temporary tattoo business that connects really talented designers. So, I have a lot of side projects that have become my work life. The thing that I'm most excited about in the design world is the combination of design and technology, what it can do to society, the impact it has on our lives and the ways in which it can build community.

Zoe Coombes (ZC): I run a furniture and lighting design studio with my husband David Boira called Cmmnwlth. We've been quite focused on the technologies of automation that are increasingly ubiquitous in making, and I'm interested in how to combine that reality with a sensibility that's a little bit more timeless and related to longer histories of design.

AT: What are you making right now?

ZC: We're actually beginning some architecture projects. Our background is in architecture and we've been really fascinated by objects, things, product design. But we're moving into larger spatial issues.

Paola Antonelli (PA): I'm senior curator of the Department of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art, and recently I've also become MoMA's director of R&D. I've always been interested in the aspects of design that amplify design's presence in the world. And I'm lucky enough to have a pulpit. Some of us have made our own pulpits; at MoMA, I inherited one. I'm trying to teach people to recognize design beyond the stereotypes of cute chairs, fast cars and posters. And, beyond recognition, I'm trying to teach them how to criticize design. It's about putting the power in the hands of people and letting them be vocal, and also more critical about what is offered to them.

The types of design that I'm most interested in are the mutant types—interaction, critical, interface. To some of us, they've been normal for a while. But to the public outside, they are still new. So at MoMA we've done that with exhibitions. We've done that with acquisitions. We acquired the @ sign a few years ago. We just acquired digital fonts. We're about to announce the acquisition of some video games.

AT: Can you talk about the exhibition you're researching right now?

PA: I've been working on an exhibition about design and violence together with Jamer Hunt, and we're hoping to make it first a digital project and then a physical one. But really the collection is what I've been working on, because the project to acquire the video games has been huge—like exhibition-huge—because of the legal issues, conservation issues, display issues, how to show video games not as entertainment or arcade-like but rather as deep examples of interaction design.

Richard Grefe (RG): I'm Executive Director of AIGA, a professional association for design. There's been an awful lot of discussion about design moving from the making of objects into strategy and design thinking. And yet, what is really unique about the design mind is also the ability to execute in a way that affects people. And so the issues that I'm intrigued by are not only the application of the design mind to complexity, but also how to encourage the design mind in the context of head, heart and hand so that, even as design is applied to more complex social problems or morphs into design thinking and the way people deal with strategic issues, the craft element of design isn't lost.

AT: In what ways does this take a tangible form within your professional organization?

RG: Through organization design. Figuring out whether a professional association has a role in the 21st century when social media challenges the principles of association. And so part of it is how do we use the design mind to come up with what holds people together? What is the element of community and information sharing in the future that also gives a profession a core set of ethical guidelines?

Steven Heller (SH): I am co-chair of MFA Design as Author and Entrepreneur at the School of Visual Arts. I have co-founded five or six MFA programs including MFA Design Criticism with Alice Twemlow. I write books on design and popular culture, and I write columns for the *The New York Times Book Review* and *The Atlantic* online about design and popular culture. My focal point is graphic design.

My primary interest is to accumulate stuff, analyze it, write about it, create stories about it and then put it out into the public, both for the purpose of helping designers to understand the design profession, and for the purpose of educating people who are not in the design field.

So that kind of complements what Paola does at the museum. It's extremely important to make the design language into something universal while at the same time retaining the uniqueness and distinctiveness of what we do as designers. So now that we've given up the word "font" to the public, let's keep something else for ourselves. I don't argue with jargon. What I'm working on right now is a book on the history of graphic design magazines for the last 150 years.

AT: I'm in the last stage of a Ph.D. dissertation about the history of design criticism. I've been lurking in the past, and so I'm really looking forward to a discussion of contemporary design today. I'm also the chair of the Design Criticism MFA program at the School of Visual Arts.

Alice Twemlow, Steven Heller and Richard Grefe

The Contemporary Contexts For Design
A sense of crisis, necessity and urgency

AT: Let's start by talking broadly about the contextual issues for design. What forces are shaping, reshaping and changing the landscape of design, and what are the implications of those changes?

PA: Designers have been in several types of bubbles in the past decades. But right now there's more connection with reality. And many of us have been thinking of the late 1960's and 1970's as having similarities with today, even though at that time there was much more overt violence. At that time—after the student protests of 1968 and then with the terrorist years, the oil crisis and Syria's turmoil—radical architects and designers all over the world were trying to respond with equal vehemence.

Today, there is a great sense of crisis, necessity and urgency. There is less political overtness. The response on the part of the design community is much more moderate, but with a deep sense of narrative and the same sense of seriousness as there was in the 1960's. So reality definitely is the basis for much of today's design.

TRE: I work with a very young team. And what I'm noticing is that these bright, hard-working, young, talented people are all looking for meaning in what they do—something that makes the world a little better in whatever sense that is.

SH: We started talking about design entrepreneurship fifteen years ago, as an alternative to what was being taught in the schools, which is basically "provide a service to your client." And it goes to what you're saying, that many people did not want to just go into an industry or a corporation and work for the man. But they also didn't know what to do—the language and the skills they had available seemed kind of limited.

And the idea of actually creating products that have value, whether they're commercial value or social value—those distinctions can be discussed—but ultimately it's about creating something that has more than just the hands of a client constricting you or even letting you free.

Designers can understand the physical. If you're telling them, "You can make something that has an outcome and an impact," then that leads the design. In the 1980's and late 1970's when everything was glitzy—certainly in graphic design—style used to be the focus. Now it's not the focus anymore.

RF: Design is, for the first time, truly relevant in the startup economy. You know, designers and design ideas are actually at the heart of the new wave of Internet and technology-based entrepreneurship. In 1999–2000 that was not the case. It was much more technology and business model driven. So, that shift is great.

But there is also a massive hallucination going on right now in the design world. There's this idea that young people can throw together these open-source web-based technologies and change the world. And I'm not saying it can't happen, but it's going to take a very different form than the self-fulfillment path people seem to be on right now. One of the things I'm the most proud of is the way in which two designers on my team are successfully embedded in truly meaningful areas of social impact.

One is working with the Earth Institute doing work in India and Nigeria. Another is a designer who's networking with one of our partners in South Africa. And they are full-time embedded in these worlds.

And the things they're doing are very, very different from what they thought they would be doing. They are learning what it's like to work with communities in a really open way, working with a cluster of partners and dealing with the perception/cultural issues. It's a humbling kind of work. We're at a moment now where we've got to get past that

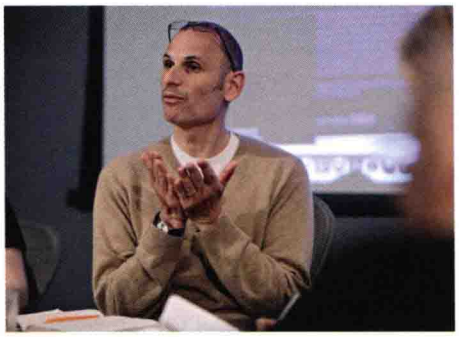
change-the-world hallucination phase and see if people are really in it for the long run.

AT: But don't designers need that sort of imaginative, hallucinogenic vision, to drive and inspire them to do this very practical, embedded work of the kind that you're talking about?

RF: Yeah. And I don't say "hallucination" in entirely a derogatory sense. Imagination is an important ingredient, and often missing in a lot of these contexts where designers are trying to make a difference. But I do think that the next five to ten years are going to be about programs and organizations really deciding if we can live up to these expectations set by today's designers.

ZC: What's the downside to that kind of optimism? If you follow what your education said, you're doomed. If you do one of a hundred other choices, you're likely to come up with something kind of vital. There's a sense that in the world of business there's a huge amount of "disruption," if you want to use that word, which is dangerous because there's a huge employment problem looming.

But there's a sense that the old kind of dialogue of design—that that's not really taking us somewhere good. Something different is going to take us there. So why don't you open your mind, put your fear of failure to the side and start playing?



Robert Fabricant

AT: Robert, what are the specific drawbacks of the hallucination that you have evoked?

RF: There are a few things that we as designers and design leaders need to grapple with. One is that designers—and particularly the young designers we're talking about—tend to be, in good and bad ways, pretty impatient, and haven't always had the diligence to stick with it and follow through their ideas. This plays back into awards, and what we celebrate.

AT: Right, awards and the design media only recognize the new and rarely revisit a project after years have passed to see how it actually fared.

RF: Design has become this huge piece of corporate theater, so that's one challenge we have to deal with. And that comes back to what you're saying about the tangible elements that get celebrated. One problem is about persistence. Another interesting challenge is dropping some of the models that we're so quick to fetishize right now around connectivity, apps, services and technology and what it's doing in the world—I think we're reaching the horizon around the areas where that's been applied.

The third challenge—and I'm the most optimistic about this one—is that the partners and who we look at as designers, and how we draw that line or don't draw that line, is becoming kind of critical. Some of the most creative people that we can work with have no particular orientation towards design, don't talk about design, and yet they are going to be the drivers of a lot of work.

PA: You were talking about trying to get rid of, or to drop some things. But it has to happen naturally. It's not something that we can impose, right? My feeling is that whenever there's something big and attractive happening—a new technology, a new web expression, open-source—there's a moment of drunkenness. And sobriety sets in later, and that's what I'm looking forward to. We're still in the drunkenness and it would be wrong for us to try to offer coffee to everybody.

RG: I agree with you about the surge of euphoria, if not drunkenness. But there are certain trends that are not a flash in the pan. Industry and the economy have reached a point where there's a recognition of the need for the creative mind or a creative solution. Creativity defeats habit. Industry has largely recognized that habit has gotten in the way of being able to create new markets. So, one trend that is defining what design is doing is this demand for thinking differently in order to create new markets. Another trend that will not be short-lived is the understanding that, for the most part, corporations are dealing with experiences rather than objects. And part of that is because of the acceptance of

I think that getting to the difference between design and designer is going to be a big theme moving forward for the next five to ten years. There's a huge cultural gap between traditional systems of value and the role of creativity and experimentation. And I think design is very fortunate to be right at that intersection and have a fairly nice space to play, there.
—Robert Fabricant

branding over the 1980's and 1990's, which is the way people experience products, rather than by simply acquiring them. How do we use designers and the creative mind to create new experiences, in any kind of media or form? The third significant trend is the one that Tina and Robert raise, which is this issue of the underlying values of the millennial generation who want to make a difference, and to have some kind of an impact that is greater than themselves. And those three dynamics are going to continue to change the nature of design but also the demand for design.

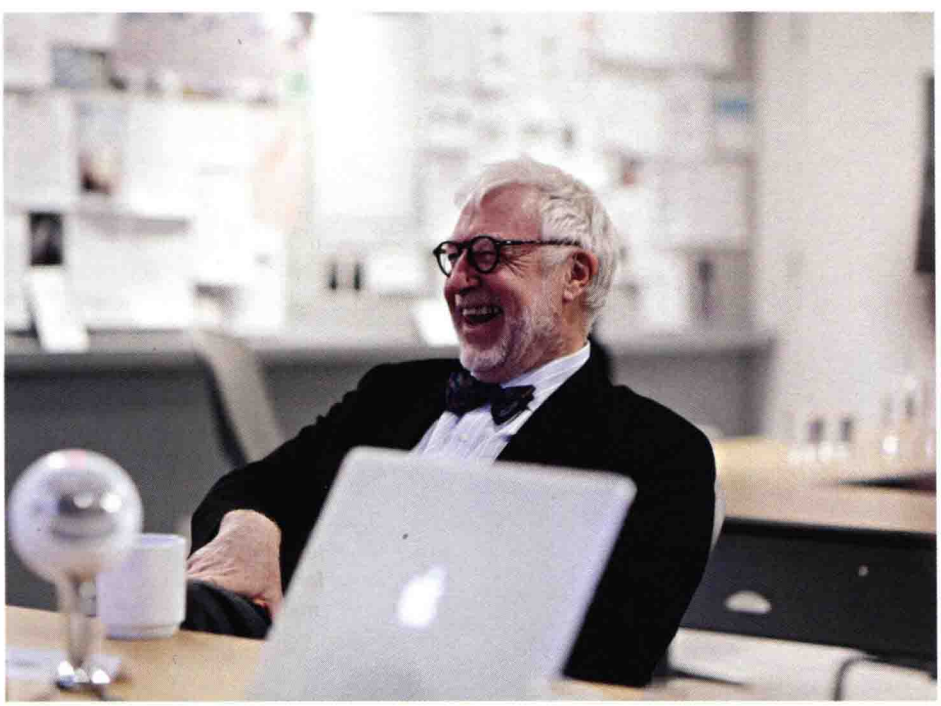
Design Discourse
Exhibitions, journalism, blogs

AT: I'd like to return to the theme of patience and impatience. But first, let's move on to the discourse of design, as it manifests through exhibitions, blogs and journalism. Does the rise of the profile of design in mainstream media give it new powers, and how should they be exercised?

PA: Design's raised profile gives it more visibility, but also it fosters misunderstanding about design in some cases. I've been complaining about *The New York Times* not having a design critic. And now there's a great design critic there [Julie Lasky] but she is still in the "Home" section. So the stereotype is still there. And when it's not a stereotype, it's confusion.

So, when I talk about interaction design or interface designers, the mass audience doesn't necessarily know what I'm talking about. What I find really important in the discourse surrounding design is the emergence of good writers. What we've been missing for a long time in non-graphic design is dissemination. Graphic designers have always been good at fighting, having opinions, writing Op Eds. Product, interface and interaction designers have been talking toward each other, not in an academic way, but in a timid way.

And there's never been this attempt to really write the best *New Yorker* piece about design. We're getting there slowly but surely. So as far as I'm concerned, once again it's about disseminating. It's about making people aware of the importance of design, and knowledgeable and critical about design.



Richard Grefe

This ability to communicate widely is something that we're moving toward.

AT: And how does the exhibition, as a format, lend itself to that challenge, and what are its drawbacks?

PA: It lends itself wonderfully—depending on the exhibitions. People are really interested in design. They might not know it. Taking the example of the Museum of Modern Art, they might be there to see Matisse and Picasso but then they stumble upon the design show. They spend five minutes in front of Picasso and two hours in the design show. But the problem is that, especially in this country, there is still a hierarchy of the visual arts where design is quite close to the bottom.

When it comes to making decisions in a museum that is not only about design, it's not necessarily that easy to find the right slot. So, design is important. Exhibitions of design are extremely popular. They are great to convey not only the message of design, but the message of the importance and value of culture within a whole society. But the stereotype is still very much alive, and the stereotype still casts design at the lower rung of the visual arts hierarchy.

And the mass media, with some exceptions, still consider design decoration. So there's still a long way to go.

SH: I would add that very often the lay public goes to design exhibitions as if they were going into a mail-order catalog. They go and look at things and, because design is everyday, because design is within their grasp—design within reach—they can see what will be an additive to their own lifestyle.

AT: And that happens even more directly on blogs, right?

TRE: Do you mean that blogs are seen as a marketplace?

AT: Yes, in the sense that it's very difficult for a blog to gain any critical distance from the products from which it's interpreting, or evaluating, or otherwise telling stories about.

TRE: See, I don't really consider myself as a typical design blog, anyway. I always look

at Swiss Miss as letting people get a glance of what it is like to look at the world as a designer. I initially started out with a lot of product design. But I've noticed that my interest has gone away from actual physical product and more into tools that allow me to connect with people, or have an impact. I don't think I'm a typical product-based blog. But I do hear that criticism a lot.

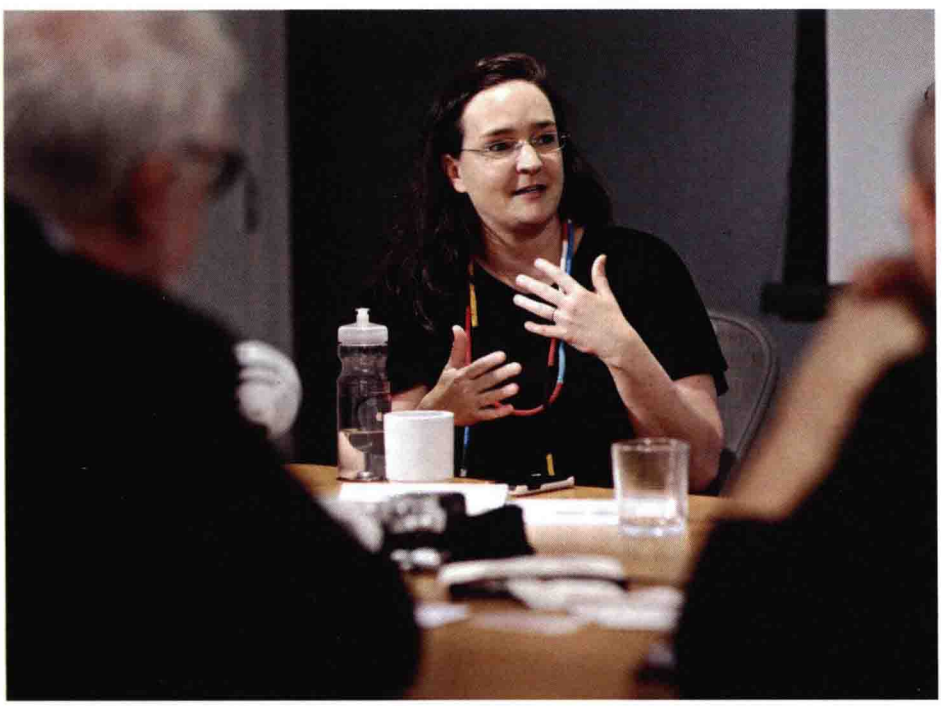
SH: I don't think it's a criticism. I mean, it's part of the experience. When I was at *The New York Times Book Review*, the books that were being reviewed on a very intellectual level were being chosen because they were books that people should want to buy or should want to know about. The main business of most people in this society is consumption—and as designers, we've been trying to increase consumption. I just reviewed a book on the life of Norman Bel Geddes. It's a great design book because he covered so many different areas of design, including the white knight of industry category. You know, his exhibitions for the '39 World's Fair were to increase the economic condition of the United States after the Depression. And it was all about consumption.

It's high-minded. It's about changing technology. It's about changing form and content. But it's also about getting consumers to spend money to generate a healthy economy.

TRE: See, that's exactly something I don't want to be associated with, because I can sense myself shifting toward more thoughtful consumption.

SH: Well, however you define it, consumption is what makes this economy move, brings in the jobs and gets the students employed. And that's something that we do have to take ownership of. And going back to the first question, those of us who believe in the greater good and the students who want to do greater good, they can't be taught to ignore that. They have to be taught that there's a balance. And what they are doing is making something that people will want to spend money on.

RG: You know, when I heard Paola mention "Five minutes before Picasso and two hours in the design exhibition," I was wondering whether it's about accessibility, where the barrier of understanding is lower in dealing with design. And part of that is, if design is well done, it's done with a human-centered outcome in mind, rather than a personal one. And you know, it's not necessarily about consumption. It may well be sort of a validation. It's easier to validate who you are, looking at design, because it may apply to you or it may not apply to you.



Tina Roth Eisenberg

AT: Graphic design is in a really interesting position in all of that because when you're writing about graphic design, it's less likely that there's a product to buy at the end of it. So perhaps that does allow for a little bit more critical distance of the kind that Paola was talking about, earlier. But even though she sees graphic designers as leading the way in design discourse, the AIGA, which is an association of graphic designers, has been subjecting many of its media outlets, competitions, conferences and the online journal to close scrutiny about how they perform and function, and has got rid of a lot of them. Ric, can you tell us why?

RG: We recognize that the era of an organization that is the arbiter of excellence, rather than the vehicle for an expression of many voices, is over. So, we're trying to encourage many voices from our 22,000 members while still highlighting those voices that may have an element of judgment that others don't have, but let the audience themselves choose which ones they want to follow.

AT: What does that look like online?

RG: A web presence that no longer appears to have a banner headline, but rather reflects tiles of many voices. It shouldn't be as if we are taking a magazine and making it digital, because that's passé.

How Design is Used in Product Ecosystems

AT: This connects to Robert's area of expertise. I'm fascinated by the notion of ecosystems of products, and the need amongst business and companies to find linkages between the products and to provide human interfaces.

RF: One of our clients is the largest equipment infrastructure company in the world. And yet they're asking questions around the cohesion and coherence of their products and services. And there are a couple drivers for it that are really interesting. Design is a footnote to most of these drivers, but it is nonetheless an ingredient.

One of the drivers is that there is an increased sophistication around information and how we interact with it, and the experience we have across the different points of contact—with each other and with businesses. Sophistication has increased dramatically in the last five or ten years. I'd cite the headline today about Apple firing the guy who led the map effort. To most people in my family, a mapping piece of software that you carried in your phone could be one thing: Google Maps. It was Kleenex.

There was no question about the layers or how they rendered or worked together, no question of perspective. Irrelevant. It was just—that's what maps were. And now I have them, and that's great because I need to find where I'm going. And suddenly the experience changed, right? And it changed in all these subtle ways. It's unfamiliar. And it suddenly introduces you to the notion that there are a whole bunch of very intimate decisions being made around this basic thing. It doesn't have to be the way Google made it. And suddenly they're faced with a choice of half a dozen maps because they know the Apple one is lame, right? So they have to go find a map that they like. So, there's a level of sophistication there that is migrating across society in a really interesting way.

The engines of change are mostly in the technology sector, but they're going way beyond it. And so I find it pretty interesting that one of the reasons I'm talking to this infrastructure company is that the executives at many of their large scale customers, utilities, have started to walk around with iPads. They suddenly expected that the information about their business, about how their infrastructure was running could be well presented on an iPad, similar to ESPN sports. And why wouldn't it be?

And why is it so hard to look at and interact with? That's the first light bulb. The second light bulb is if it's that hard to look at and interact with, my God, how much money is being lost, if you can't manage this power plant more effectively or this fleet of rail engines, or whatever it is?

Design is becoming the most up-to-date non-community, a continuously mutating cloud of exchanges based on the task at hand, ingenious and entrepreneurial, generous and socially motivated...designers are becoming so wise and powerful, they are well on the way to becoming the moral, intellectual and pragmatic pillars of society.
—Paola Antonelli

So, I would say there's a corollary trend we haven't touched on, which is that we're seeing a greater appreciation in larger-scale businesses for the notion that around this user experience "stuff" are real core business assets that are worth billions of dollars. Companies are starting to define and maybe try and protect some of the ideas that are at the core of how people interact with their product or service; they are realizing that those ideas are as important to their business as any other piece of technology. And they need to invest in it and protect it.

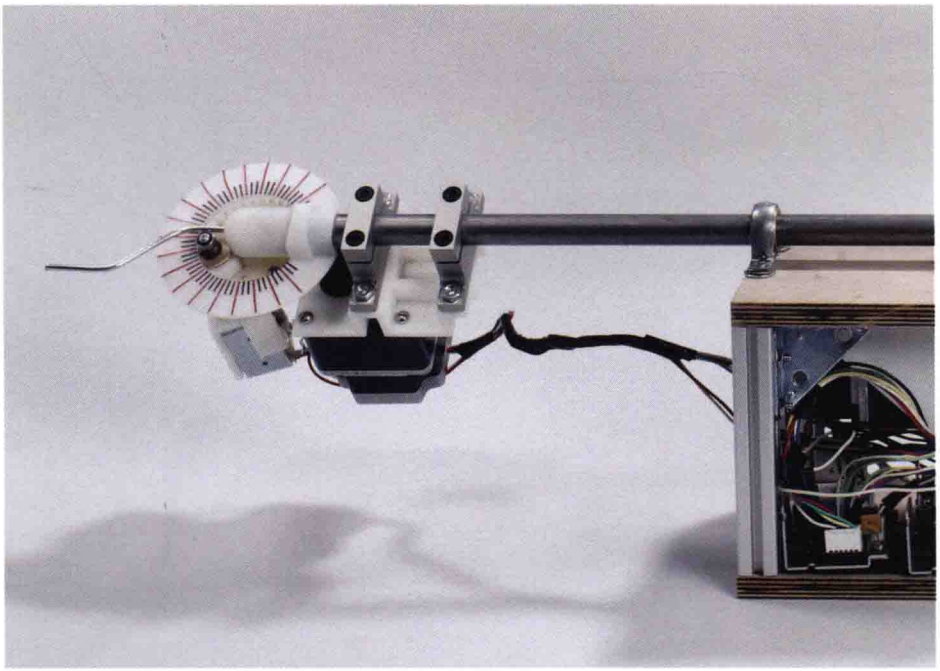
So they're thinking very differently about where it fits, you know. And every executive today at a lot of these companies knows that they're measured by the Steve Jobs standard. There's a much greater migration of design talent into companies, and a big push right now to both build design groups and to bring more senior talent inside, and not just to outsource to design firms.

Corporations are starting to realize the pain of trying to recruit that design talent, and to compete with the frogs, IDEOs, Smarts and others of this world. So, that's the first thing. And then the second thing is, even if they can bring in the talent, how are they going to manage and build design teams and design culture? Not the capability, not just the skills, but the assets around the way a more cohesive experience is managed and experienced over time. How will that be built into an organization? How will they get MBAs and engineers to build that into the mindset of how they release and manage products?

AT: Does what you're talking about fall under the umbrella of "service design," or are we talking about something different, here?

RF: Services are a big part of it. But is the umbrella service design? Is the umbrella interaction design? Is it experience design? Is it design strategy? Which of these things is the biggest doll in the little Russian doll set? I don't know. But I do think that service design is becoming a more important ingredient to most design curriculums and design programs, whether they talk about it in an explicit way and buy into a little bit more of the discourse around service design which you find more prevalent in Europe versus here.

But nonetheless service design gets you focused on the intangible elements, which is really a big part of it. And system design, you could argue, is maybe at the core of it.



DIWire, DIY Runner Up 2012, page 406

SH: It's interesting that the word "design" is attached to all of it, because it wasn't fifteen to twenty-five years ago.

ZC: Well, there's an explosion happening at both of these scales. There's a renewed interest in working in big companies, like innovation at Google. And at the same time, there are tools available to small groups of people to be able to work at the small scale in ways that really become important to us in our social organization.

So I don't want to leave the conversation as saying that all of design needs to move into big companies. But there's a real relevance to big companies that's new. And there's a real ability and a palette of very powerful tools in very small groups at the same time. And that's what makes this time interesting.

RF: To make a very optimistic statement building on that, about the role and the new relevance of design in the startup economy, at the end of the day, if you look at MBAs coming out of the top business schools, number one on their list of things to go do is to start a company. There's a lot of talent in the startup space. It's a bubble. It will burst. But nonetheless, right now, along the way, they're learning about design.

And they're not all going to be successful. The ones that are, are going to get acquired by big companies because that's the new buyout, the new exit strategy. So they'll be running big divisions of big companies. The ones that don't succeed will migrate into middle management and senior management at companies. And they're going to come in, expecting a design methodology to be part of the way people think about products. And they're going to come in thinking about user experience as a big part of the way you succeed in business.

Right now it's only bold, maverick leadership that's going to drive those design topics deep into organizations, but ten to twelve years from now it's going to level out, big time.

DIY and Maker Culture

AT: Let's pick up our discussion of making—we haven't talked about DIY culture yet. What does the rise of DIY and "maker culture" portend for design, and what are the relationships between what we used to call "professional" design and "DIY" design going on right now?

ZC: There's a real interest in, "How do we engage with a marketplace that doesn't have to be about the bazillion dollar idea?...How do we make something for market that is based on smaller batches, and what does that mean, and how can we grow that to a sufficient size?" And maybe there's an idea that they can't grow infinitely in the way that Etsy can grow infinitely, or eBay.

AT: I'm putting this image up to symbolize DIY practice. It's a machine where you can fabricate solder-free wire shapes—so lines, rather than volumes.

ZC: The DIY world often gets written off for creating work that is overly nerdy, techy, futury, Jetson-y and amateurish. DIY is something that is substantial, here to last, and something that we will feel, once it's done better...

RG: But isn't that the whole nature of invention? Look at patents going back to the 19th century. They're all for things jerry-rigged together for a need. They put these spit and wire

I also think that ad-hoc, provisional fixes for real world problems are beginning to be valued and to displace the belief that you need to design whole systems or nothing at all.
—Alice Twemlow

things together, get a patent for it, and then if they're lucky they sell it and it becomes Apple. I mean, that first Apple machine was done with wood, right?

TRE: But the thing that I'm so excited about in the DIY world is the company that Zach Klein started, called DIY. And as a parent and as a creative person with kids, I couldn't be more excited about something like this because he built a platform that lets kids share the things they've made and built. The DIY mindset that kids have today is going to have such a tremendous impact upon what's coming.

My daughter knows how to build things. When she was only five, she said, "Let's make a hack" (in the sense of "let's fix it") if something was broken.

AT: And as 3D printers enter the consumer market, this mindset becomes less nerdy, more naturalized?

ZC: This is the big paranoia in America, that we're not educating kids in math and science, right? DIY is actually an incredible vehicle for creating people who will innovate in big industry, at places like Caterpillar or Google.

RG: It's also part of what Robert's talking about, in terms of coming up with problems that have social consequence in other parts of the world. In fact, DIY is the desired outcome where you give people the capacity to solve problems.

ZC: It's populist.

RG: Right. It's not just a prototype any longer.

SH: But DIY is also part of the school experience. Now kids in high school and even grade school are working on these things that they can see will work and then have a purpose, because in order to win their competition it can't just go in and beat the other robot and cut it in half. It has to have some functional aspect to it. So that's pretty cool.

RG: Ten to fifteen years ago when I first visited Media Lab it was like going into this fantasy world where you could see people mix together technologies and mediums for these creative dreams, purely frivolous ends. This access was just phenomenal. I couldn't believe what people were doing. And you needed corporate sponsorship. That's the only way you were going to get there. Today, you go to Maker Faire, and these identical experiments are happening simultaneously all over the world. And it's really profound. It's profound from an education point of view and defining what Media Lab is going to be. It's profound from an Intellectual Property point of view. If these ideas are truly happening simultaneously around the world, and other people are taking the pieces of them and recombining them, then hopefully—for young designers and product people—it's shifting their notion of how you create value, and shifting that history of patenting and the rest of it, in a whole other direction.

Urgency Versus Disruption

AT: Absolutely. I also think that ad-hoc, provisional fixes for real world problems are beginning to be valued and to displace the belief that you need to design whole systems or nothing at all. Here's a good example of this smaller-scale thinking with large-scale consequences. Noting that one of the main causes of death among children with respiratory conditions was the fact that the mouthpieces of oxygen delivery devices were the wrong size, the designers of the AdaptAir Pediatric Nasal Interface simply made a smaller device with a closer seal.

SH: Well, that's an educational issue. If you're going into "save the world" class, then you're going to get flummoxed. If you're going in to save the world one teeny weenie step at a time, that class will have much more of an outcome.

RF: It gets to a topic related to the intersection of these things, which is urgency. One of the profound values of putting design practice into areas of true social need is that it creates that sense of urgency and forces a focus. It's something that businesses need to learn from, with all the talk of disruption out there.

Disruption doesn't create urgency. It creates a kind of risk averseness. One of the things we found is by bringing some of our commercial partners into these broader partnerships that are focused more on social impact, you get people into a different mode of decision making.

And you create a sense of urgency that allows people to practice what it's like to work in more open partnerships and open networks—practice what it's like to step out of the traditional lock-step "Six Sigma" type process. Businesses are starting to realize that given the instability of the world today, not only are they getting a halo by working in some of these areas, but their teams can learn some tools and practices around innovation that typically have difficulty getting a hold in companies, given corporate culture.

RG: Wasn't it that UNICEF form where the term "be patiently urgent" came up? Firms have got to learn to be consistently urgent. But they also have to be patient.

Closed and Sexy Systems

AT: Here's the runner up in Consumer Products, the Nest Learning Thermostat, which looks nice and encourages energy conservation in the home.

SH: I'd buy that.

AdaptAir Pediatric Nasal Interface, Social Impact Student Winner 2012, page 300

RF: We have so well educated the public, now. Fifteen years ago, if you put this image out on a poster, people would be completely confused. What's that leaf? Why is it there? Why are they touching it? Today, you put this one image out there—sure, there is a group of early adopters. But for everybody else who hasn't bought it yet, they know exactly what that is.

They can imagine that entire experience from this one image. They're going to go back to their home, hit their crappy thermostat or adjust their radiators, and feel completely different about the kind of world they occupy and how they manage it. I don't know if this product is ultimately going to have a lot of impact in the world, but it's having a lot of impact as a shift in perception for people.

RG: At one point it might have been suspect because it wasn't complex enough.

ZC: There's always a design critique of sexy, and critique of obsession of the new. And I have a lot of faith in sexy and contemporary, to tell you the truth, because I think "sexy," "fashionable"—we can talk about it as a very shallow kind of trait. But it actually means, "I get it in my core. I get it in the non-rational parts of my body. I absorb it." And there's something about this sexy simple thermostat interface that's just like, "I get it."

RF: I went to visit a friend of mine in Miami who just did a state-of-the-art, huge, huge condo. And it's all this stuff. I mean, literally, you put a cup into a little slot, and you press a button in her wall and coffee comes out. No one could believe it. It's so freaking cool, right? The music and media, the temperatures, the food, everything has these very slick embedded interfaces.

They're slick, closed, sexy, complete. And we all know what happens to these things ten years from now, right? They're ripped out of the wall, they don't work. It's fantastic when you go back to pre-war apartments in New York and you see the systems for calling the help that were embedded. You could argue that this kind of closed, embedded technology is, to some degree, trying to skim off the top of the DIY kind of ethos and package it into these very self-contained products and applications that, to some degree, are the sign of its demise.

And what we should really be celebrating is the little rigged-up solar metering system that somebody in Uganda soldered together because that's creating knowledge that can be shared, adapted and used. And are we going to get to a point, coming back to the thermostat example, when our kids are older, and they'll look at something like this and laugh because if they need this they'll download it or put it together with Lego?

Nest Learning Thermostat, Consumer Products Runner Up 2012, page 61

AT: It must have been around ten years ago when Bruce Sterling and the Viridian movement had a competition to design thermostats like this, as prototypes, as a sort of design fiction. So it's really interesting, to Robert's point, that it often takes that long for something to actually materialize and fit the consciousness.

TRE: What I find so interesting is this is from Tony Fadell, who could have become the new Steve Jobs. This product has a complete Apple quality right there, right? I find it interesting that it came out of something that has really defined our world, and how we see products.

Closing Thoughts about the Health of Design and its Future Paths

SH: We're in a state of flux in terms of design, certainly in terms of graphic design, where the job category and all the qualifications that are needed for it are changing. Graphic designers are entering areas that they never entered before and becoming more entrepreneurial and learning more skills, and at the same time pulling back and focusing on very specific skills.

Paola Antonelli and Zoe Coombes