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1

Approach

Manifestos generally offer a diagnosis of a situation and announce a set of claims and statements of what should/might be done. They have a declamatory character with an appeal for urgent action. Instead of following this established pattern, a series of questions is formulated – not necessarily in the form of questions – that can serve to start a discussion between all those who are interested in design and design education: professionals, academics, students, writers, the public in general. The reflections do not list a set of competences that a designer should have today in order to fulfill her or his role successfully. Rather they can serve to prepare the ground for formulating these competences.

2

Turbulences

In which way design today differs from the situation ten years ago when a manifesto for visual communication education has been formulated at Seoul? There exists probably consensus that we have entered a period of strong political, socio-economical, technological, financial and environmental (including climatic) turbulences that inevitably affect the design profession and might serve to reassess design education programs. One might say that design is a victim of these turbulences, and therefore nothing can be done from the perspective of design to address these turbulences. On the other side one might argue that, on the contrary, design cannot avoid to confront actively, at least part of these turbulences.

3

Proliferation of design

Design – at least the word – enjoys a bewildering proliferation. There passes hardly a month without a new type of design calling attention. The traditional core disciplines: industrial design, visual communication design, exhibition design, packaging design

and textile design confront an ever increasing variety of newcomers such as: navigation design, event design, generative design, scenario design, invention design, experience design, user experience design, genetic design, humanitarian design, interaction design, interface design, emotional design, service design, social design to name but a few that showed up since the nineties of the last century, in part as consequence of the propagation of digital technologies. Whereas formerly the efforts concentrated on the question to define what is design, today this question might be inverted: what is *not* design? Apparently – and only apparently – design is everywhere where you look. But if everything is design – as some would like to have it –, the notion loses meaning; it turns into an empty statement and might be read as an exorbitant pretension that has provoked acid comments about designers. Not everything is design.

4

Necessity and limitations of validating design proposals

Confronted with the inflationary use of the word «design» one might ask: is there a common trait in these different manifestations of design activity? And if so, what is this trait or what are these traits? Some people might claim that there is a particular feature called «design thinking» with a holistic approach that connects these activities bundled under the general term «design». However, this supposedly new type of thinking has been criticized as being simply a fashionable catch phrase for good old creativity; its justification has been questioned, and rightly so. It should come as no surprise that the opening of the domain of design has attracted specialists from other areas of human knowledge and expertise, particularly from the sciences and business administration. Scientists complain the discursive weakness of designers and the sloppiness of the design discourse; they demand a stronger preparation in sciences and scientific methods in design courses – a demand that is not new and has been voiced already several decades ago, though it may not yet been implemented in all design programs. The main request reads as follows: designers should not content themselves with assessments, but validate their claims by providing empirical proofs. Though this is valid request, it has its limitations, because it presupposes that tests of a design attribute can either be simulated (for instance in case of an architectural design) or implemented in reality (for instance in case of a milk package with smaller ecological

footprints). The difficulties to provide empirical evidence should however not be used as an excuse for not providing verifiable arguments if designers claim that a design proposal is better, innovative, sustainable and user-friendly or whatever have been their objectives and intentions. Scientists formulate assertions and have to provide evidence for these assertions. Designers however work in a domain in which assessments are prevailing, that are based on standards not always accessible to propositional knowledge.

Confronted with competing interpretations of what constitutes scientific methods – the idea that there exists one and only one fundamental scientific method has been abandoned – educators might analyze again the question which scientific discourses are particularly relevant for design? And asked the other way around: What should scientists learn about design in order to improve collaboration between scientists and designers? What can be done to avoid once for all a frequent, deeply ingrained misunderstanding that design is art? The question is not only which scientific disciplines should be part of a design program, but how to teach them. These two questions cannot be separated. As far as the two alternative teaching methods for design are concerned – problem-oriented teaching and discipline-oriented teaching – anecdotic evidence seems to favour problem-oriented teaching; however a comparative research is necessary to validate this observation. Perhaps the so enthusiastically praised social networks might reveal a potential for improving design education shifting the traditional role of the teacher who knows more than her or his students to a role as a coach.

5

Innovation

Perhaps the least common denominator of the rich variety of design activities is innovation. Innovation enjoys a good press, but it might be advisable not treat it as an aim in itself. Designers might – and perhaps should – take into account the content of innovation. The fact that something is new – the newness can be trivial, incremental or radical – has limited value for justification when set into a broader context. What are the criteria for evaluating design innovations?

6

Aesthetics and emotions

In public opinion, «design» is strongly associated with aesthetics and emotional qualities: pleasing, agreeable, exciting, boring, cool, hot, nice, beautiful, «wow! » Sometimes it is claimed that designers should design experiences and even emotions. As has been bluntly stated: architects design houses, and not inhabitant experiences; medical doctors heal persons and would probably look perplexed when somebody expects them to provide healing experiences; civil engineers calculate structures, they don't provide structural experiences. Nobody will deny the importance of emotions, however these are not an ethereal reality, but depend on a substratum, material or immaterial. And exactly that is the domain of design. Designers can design products and messages that provoke and trigger emotions, but design them directly is like wanting to learn to cook without ingredients.

7

Business

After decades of neglect, design has entered business administration courses; managers discover the importance of design for making business and survive in the competitive context of local and international markets. So the discovery of design is enthusiastically praised as added value – a deep misunderstanding. Design is not added value, design IS value.

8

Academic qualifications

Design started rather late to achieve academic standing and respectability. Design theory is one of its facets; though there were also intrinsic reasons for the development of design theory, not as an instrumental tool for practice, but as a space for reflection and critique. In the process of academisation, design disciplines tended to get subordinated to standards and criteria of excellence from other traditions, e. g. the sciences. Why not develop intrinsic standards for an academic master degree or doctoral degree in design? Why not recognize the development of a design as a result of cognitive activities that do not manifest themselves necessarily in a written document? The value of a written thesis for a higher design degree might be put into question.

Public domain

Economists included design as one of the branches in the category «creative industries». It forms part of prevailing market-driven activities, though it might be advisable not to accept unconditionally the market as the dominant institution that regulates all social relations. There are domains beyond the market, legitimate though weak. The design professions are not in a particularly strong position to question powerful, complex structures; they might however participate in an attempt to reduce the imbalances between public and private interests. Obviously, the protection of public interests is the responsibility of the government that cannot delegate this responsibility to private or semiprivate organisations. Taking into account conflicting interests, the possibilities of harmonizing different domains are dim. Designers face a contradictory task: to develop design proposals that are socially desirable, technologically feasible, environmentally recommendable, economically viable and culturally defensible. Concerning the implicit, though not always accepted political dimension of design activities and design education, the following question might be raised: does the design contribute to self-determination in the context in which it is put into practice and taught? Concerning the last question, it will not be easy to find a consensus. This assessment permits to draw a cautious conclusion: to practice care when trying to formulate a universal declaration for design and design education, and perhaps even abstain from that attempt because easily it can get lost in abstract generalities. A more promising approach might be: to accept and respect different design cultures, to foster diversity instead of striving for universal validity.