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DESIGN

If design is not anymore of the “exclusive” domain of a selected few and it is often developed with open-sourcing, a simple question comes up, what is then, design? What is a designer? What is it that we call design in an open-source system? Is design still a problem of authorship?

COMMONS

As a contemporary example of this struggle, we would like to offer an image: New York’s Zuccotti Park enclosed by police steel barricades. Located on a side wall, we find a plaque that reads “open to public”; paradoxically “open to public” is not in that case equivalent to “public space.” In the age of adhocracy, whose common interests does design seek to protect, and by what means?

Since its inception as a discipline of industrialisation and modernity, design has come to influence—or even define—almost every facet of contemporary existence. From cities to typefaces via architecture, vehicles, objects, interfaces, and infrastructural systems, acts of design permeate our lives almost to the point of saturation. **Design has become so ubiquitous as to have almost become invisible**, subsumed into everyday life to the point we forget it is also inevitably a political activity with far-reaching social implications. Today, it stands at one of the most significant crossroads in its brief and conflicted history.

With the advent of the network as the dominant mode of social and cultural organisation, a fundamental shift is taking place. **Design is no longer the domain of a select few creating products of consumption for the many according to the top-down model of Fordist industrialism.** It is evolving beyond its definition as the production of immutable objects for mass markets, its geographical center shifting away from the West. The convergence of instantaneously shared knowledge, the birth of countless transnational networks, new technologies of production, and a collective impetus towards a culture of collaboration instead of competition suggest a new economic and political interpretation of the act of designing.

This new paradigm reveals an incipient role for design as an act of shaping society by enabling self-organisation, producing platforms of exchange, and empowering networks of grass-roots production. The emergence of the open-source movement; the arrival of affordable micro-manufacturing technologies; the explosion of hacker and maker culture; the democratisation of technology through projects like Arduino and participatory platforms such as Kickstarter—all point to an ideological shift away from established conventions of consumerism and the inception of a new understanding of design’s role within society, one in which end-users are no longer merely passive consumers but active agents. For the first time, the prospect exists of an equivalency of influence between the strategies of states or corporations and the tactics of individuals, and in response, established structures of power are quickly evolving. In many ways, design is now the theatre of a fast-moving conflict over society’s future, and **the search for a new language of design is the struggle for the establishment of a new, networked commons.**

Welcome to the age of adhocracy. As the opposite of bureaucracy, adhocracy cuts across accepted conventions and power structures to capture opportunities, self-organise and develop new and unexpected methodologies of production. It inhabits the horizontal, rhizomatic realm of the network, in which innovation—resourceful, subversive, anti-dogmatic, spontaneous—can come from anywhere. / J. Grima

INVISIBILITY

In what ways does the visibility of design relate to its political potential? Does design lose its potential to political agency at the moment in which it becomes everyday life and is unnoticed – or, should we rather look for the political in the design which is invisible in the first place?

VALUE

One of the main features of design is its capacity to add value, which leads it to play a two-fold role: to make an actual improvement on the quality of life, and to be a part of the engine of capitalistic production. Is this two-fold role of design a concern for the adhocracy? If so, what are the ways in which we might escape from such contradiction?

Promiscuous Encounters Addressing/Assessing Adhocracy

