

Designing for the 21st Century
Interdisciplinary Question and Insights

Edited by Prof. Tom Inns

GOWER

Preface

Once you enter its world Design becomes a passion. For me it began in 1973 as an undergraduate on a new and very innovative Multidisciplinary Design course. I discovered I had the skill and imagination to create something not only visually interesting but also functional and useful, and had a way to improve aspects of the world around me. As so many (young and possibly naïve) designers had done before me, I wondered why so few people understood the power of design. Ever since I have been on a mission to illustrate the value of design and designers as professionals, as educators and as researchers. Indeed I realised there was very little design (other than engineering design) research undertaken in universities and very little funding to do it.

When I began my research career it was the Engineering and Physical Sciences Council (EPSRC), I turned to (well actually its predecessor Science and Engineering Research Council in 1993). Gradually EPSRC funded more design research, especially as it funded sector related work in manufacturing and construction. With the welcome formation of the Arts and Humanities Research Board (later Council) another opportunity arose to fund design research, especially when related to the creative industries. Having been closely connected through my own research and roles on EPSRC and AHRC panels and committees, I used every opportunity to promote design research. I was convinced there was value in funding research that addressed design research from every angle. I was therefore thrilled when AHRC and EPSRC joined forces to fund ‘Designing for the 21st Century’ as a research initiative, and very happy to promote and support its development, through the appointment of Tom Inns as Programme Director, the creation of an Advisory Group to the launch of the call for proposals.

Tom has led the programme with enthusiasm, energy and professionalism, whilst we have been guided by an Advisory Group championing the programme and advising Tom and the Research Councils. As Tom says in his introduction we did not have a clue what might emerge, yet this book is evidence of the startlingly rich picture, with the emergence of new directions and new roles for designers, researchers and others working in the field of design.

Change is ever present, as the challenges of technology, environment and society demand our continuous attention and we struggle with issues of complexity, we see that the science, social science and humanities need a means of working together. Design research provides the orchestration, the systemisation and visualisation to bring together the disciplines to build bridges to the future. Such research will provide the evidence and insights upon which professional designers, industry and society can create solutions and contribute to global wellbeing.

This book is just the beginning. The programme continues and we look forward to a continuous flow of papers and books illustrating the value of design and design research.

Prof. Rachel Cooper

Chair

Designing for the 21st Century Advisory Group