

Editorial: Back to the future

Peter Lloyd, Editor-in-Chief

Nigel Cross, Emeritus Editor-in-Chief

This first issue of *Design Studies* in 2018 marks a significant event in its history: it is only the second time in the journal's 38 years of publishing that it has had a change in chief editor; and the last time was 34 years ago! Sydney Gregory was the first editor, from 1979 to 1983, and ever since it has been Nigel Cross, who has now retired from the role. There have been several long-serving other editors, varying in roles from Co-editors to Regional Editors and Associate Editors, who have played important roles in handling, reviewing, improving and approving the submitted articles; one of those has been Norbert Roozenburg, who also retires from his Associate Editor role at this time.

At such a change point, it seems opportune to look both backwards and forwards in terms not only of the journal itself, but also the wider field of design research.

1. Looking back

The Design Research Society was instrumental in establishing the new *Design Studies* journal (the first of its kind) in 1979. At that time it seemed a risky exercise, given the lack of much prior history in publishing works of design research. In fact, there was not a great deal of work going on in design research. Nearly forty years later, both the Society and the journal are thriving - as, indeed, is the whole field of design research - and design practice has been transformed.

There are still some doubts about the achievements of design research, but the critics need to realise that it takes a long time for research to bear fruit in practice. It is clear to those of us with long memories that some of the things that today are taken for granted in design practice, or are marked as best practice, are things that thirty to forty years ago were obscure novelties within design research. Probably the strongest example is computer graphics and computer-aided design, which are now widespread in conventional design practice but forty or more years ago they were things only design researchers were interested in and were trying to develop. It was 1963 when design researcher Ivan Sutherland unveiled his novel and extraordinary (but by today's expectations extremely limited and clunky) interactive 'Sketchpad' CAD system; it was 20 years later before Autodesk's 'AutoCAD' system was launched, and another 20 years before 'SketchUp' appeared.

Within the pages of early issues of *Design Studies* other examples can be found. In Volume 1, January 1980, we published an article by Charles Eastman on 'Information and databases in design' - pioneering work that led to Building Information Modelling (BIM), now a widely-used process in designing, constructing and operating not only buildings but all kinds of physical infrastructures. In that same 1980 issue Tom Maver's

article on 'Appraisal in design', not only described then current work in computer aided assessment of design performance but also looked forward to international collaborative design facilitated through telecommunications, and immersive technologies for 'experiential appraisal' of design proposals. A few years later, in January 1984, Jack Ingram's article on 'Designing the spatial experience' was about using prototypes and full size mock-ups not just for evaluating final design proposals but as integral parts of the initial design process. He also wrote about 'designing the user experience', using methods such as 'user trips', pre-figuring all the current usage in design practice of early prototyping, user-centred design, participatory design and experience design. A little later, in July 1984, Donald Schön was writing about 'Problems, frames and perspectives on designing', introducing the concept of problem framing and describing design thinking as a process of inquiry and experimentation.

Many new techniques, methods and approaches in design practice - ranging from design method cards and toolkits to virtual reality - originated in design research. It seems it takes a generation, at least twenty-five years, maybe thirty years or more, for the things that seemed 'ivory tower', pointless or perhaps even foolish research projects and ideas to become adopted in practice. Usually, the practitioners don't realise that what they are doing or using are something that originated in the design research world. Often, contemporary observers and commentators don't realise either, because of course the practitioners don't reference their work back to its origins.

However, the aims and objectives of design research are not just focused on applications for design practice; there are also many other kinds of achievement to mention. For example, research also feeds into education. One of the significant achievements of design research has been what it has contributed to the broadening of design education beyond apprenticeship training; the understanding that has grown of the nature and relevance of design thinking. Design schools that have the culture of research within them are producing different graduates from those schools who don't have that background. These design graduates are now better educated; more self-aware about designing and the design process, how to be a designer and the contribution designers can make to society. Even beyond that, design research has made it possible for, and actually encouraged design to interact with many other disciplines, from computing science to cognitive science, anthropology to psychology, management to philosophy.

2. Looking forward

The interdisciplinarity that design researchers publishing in Design Studies have naturally embraced has been a distinctive feature of the journal from the first issue. While it now seems that all Universities promote interdisciplinary research, Design Studies can justifiably lay claim to being an early innovator in this area, realising the need to speak other languages of research in pursuit of a commonly held interest. Occasionally people have criticised the overly technical orientation of some papers in

the journal, along with the mainly empirical nature of the studies reported (though in fact we report many other types of study) but what remains distinctive is the focus on the process of design as a basis for all types of research inquiry. The full international range of contributions to the journal demonstrate the universality of studying the process of design.

What might the future hold for the journal? Most readers experience *Design Studies* online in its digital format (we now publish less than 100 physical copies of each issue) and this presents new opportunities for engaging with the research reported. The entire back catalogue of the journal now exists digitally and new tools in publishing allow us to exploit this rich resource as a kind of database. Special Sections mean we can theme past and new work, or a mixture of both; Virtual Special Issues allow us to publish specially commissioned work over an extended period, not having to wait for all papers to be complete. Indeed the wait for a paper to be published is becoming shorter and shorter as papers appear online soon after they are accepted for publication. Monitoring a paper's performance in terms of citations and downloads is becoming easier and more accurate.

Digital formats also allow a loosening of the idea of a research paper. Traditionally viewed as a definitive endpoint, digital access means that a paper can now become part of an evolving and more complex research dialogue, structurally linked across many types of media. It is now possible to submit video to *Design Studies*, for example, as well as research data, software code, and CAD models. These elements provide researchers with the tools to verify and reproduce results, which will only make the design research knowledge base more robust. As we move forwards the journal will seek to experiment and explore what is possible with these new ways of capturing and presenting research.

The move to be more open with research data comes at a time when open access publishing has become widespread and that trend will surely continue. Though *Design Studies* remains a subscription-based journal, an increasing number of papers that are published are done so through open access agreements and the first volume of every year remains open to all for the duration of the year of publication. The sharing of data in design research has long been an innovative feature of a number of Special Issues from the Design Thinking Research Symposia series, first published in 1995 and with the latest (the eleventh in the series) appearing later in 2018. We also have two further Special Issues planned for 2018 on Participatory Design and the emerging research area of Service Design.

This is an exciting time for *Design Studies*. It is certainly a time to reflect and review what has been achieved, but it is also a time of change and an opportunity for a new generation of design researchers to engage with the journal. In this volume and the next we publish a special section featuring some of the best papers from the 50th Anniversary Design Research Society conference held in 2016. Though slightly wider in scope than

usual, the papers nevertheless point the way to different kinds of design research that we may consider in the future. The core themes and values of the journal will not change, the design process will remain central along with the various ways in which designerly ways of knowing can be understood, explained, and enacted. We carry a sense of our growing history, but look forward to a productive future for design research, and continued success for *Design Studies*.