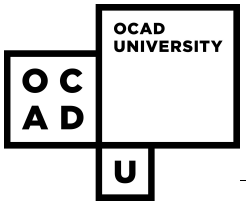

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Formulating national design policies: An exchange of letters

Tunstall, Elizabeth (Dori) and Woodham, Jonathan

Formulating National Design Policies: An Exchange of Letters

In the Spring 2010 issue of Design Issues *we published an article by Dr. Jonathan Woodham entitled* Formulating National Design Policies in the United States: Recycling the "Emperor's New Clothes"? *It drew a response from Dr. Elizabeth (Dori) Tunstall whose work was mentioned in the article. We forwarded Turnstall's letter to Woodham and offered him the opportunity to reply, which he accepted. Unlike other forms of academic writing, letters are by nature an immediate and direct form of address. Therefore we have not edited this exchange of correspondence but present both letters here as we received them.*

Dr. Elizabeth (Dori) Turnstall

Dear Design Issues Editorial Board,

I would like to respond to the Spring 2010 article, "Formulating National Design Policies in the United States: Recycling the 'Emperor's New Clothes'?" by Dr. Jonathan Woodham. I am Dr. Dori Tunstall, organizer of the U.S. National Design Policy Initiative and author of Redesigning America's Future and the 2008 U.S. National Design Policy Summit Report mentioned in Dr. Woodham's article. While I appreciate Dr. Woodham's interest in the Initiative and its historical precedents, he has made three methodological decisions that I believe have led to some "lacunas" in his assumptive propositions regarding the Initiative. The first is to use *Redesigning America's Future*, as the main text for his critique instead of the 2008 U.S. National Design Policy Summit Report. The second is the inconsistent attribution of authorship to me, Elizabeth (Dori) Tunstall of the two documents, thereby missing additional primary source materials to inform his arguments. The third is to focus solely on the rhetoric and ignore the activities of the Initiative in his evaluation. By addressing Dr. Woodham's lacunas, I seek to provide additional information to assist his inquiry into the intentions and outcomes of the U.S. National Design Policy Initiative.

When analyzing the work of others, I often use the anthropologist Alan Barnard's framework of theory as a "…set of questions, assumptions, methods, and evidence.[1]" This ensures that I have correctly framed the author's arguments before proposing alternative interpretations. So what is Dr. Woodham's question? He does not frame his analysis in terms of a question, but rather as a statement:

1 Barnard, Alan, *History and Theory in Anthropology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 5–6.

It [this article] considers the extent to which self-confident, yet historically very familiar, assertions about the capacity of design to engender real change in national and international settings stand up to scrutiny.[2]"

To reframe his statement as a question, Dr. Woodham is asking whether the rhetoric expressed by the U.S. National Design Policy Initiative (USNDPI) will result in significant national or international changes. As an historian, his overall methodology is to conduct secondary research using a variety of primary and secondary sources related to national design policy in general, and the U.S. National Design Policy specifically. His primary sources related to the U.S. National Design Policy Initiative include the document, *Redesigning America's Future*, the 2008 U.S. National Design Policy Summit Report, the Initiative's press release, and the program document from the Summit presented on the group's website, www.design-policy.org. His main assumption is that the USNDPI will not lead to significant change. He provides additional supportive assumptive propositions and evidence, namely, that the USNDPI, as represented in the rhetoric of *Redesigning America's Future* and its 2008 Summit Program, is traditional and conservative in its ideology;[3],[4] focused solely on the U.S. interests and in particular those of the American professional design organizations;[5] under-informed of the history and current practices of international design policy[6] or its progressive global rhetoric;[7] and bland.[8]

As I stated before, three of Dr. Woodham's methodological choices have resulted in "lacunas" that have led to his misunderstanding of the Initiative. First, he selected *Redesigning America's Future* as his main primary source instead of the more comprehensive 2008 Design Policy Summit Report. Second, he overlooked the existence of a single author/architect of the Initiative and thus did not avail himself of the extensive primary sources and scholarship I provide to understanding the Initiative. Lastly, he focused only on the Initiative's rhetoric not activities—the real proof of its effectiveness. How would his assumptions have been different if he had used others methods?

Through his content analysis of *Redesigning America's Future*, Dr. Woodham finds evidence for the "conservative ideology" and lack of global progressive rhetoric[9] of the Initiative based on the configuration of the Initiative participants,[10] the homage to the Federal Design Improvement Program,[11] and the minimum rhetoric of sustainability, inclusion, or accessibility (e.g. sustainability is only mentioned twice[12]). If Dr.Woodham had used the 2008 Summit Report as his main primary source, he would found 45 instances of democratic, 31 instances of the word sustainability, 20 instances of inclusion, and 15 instances of accessibility. Rather than being "minor," the discussion of sustainability and citizen-centered design activities consisted of 693 words, just less that half of the 1400-words essay on Design Policy for Democratic Governance.[13] He would have found

2 Woodham, Jonathan, 'Formulating National Design Policies in the United States: Recycling the "Emperor's New Clothes"?' *Design Issues*, 26/2 (Spring 2010), 27–46, p. 27.

3 Woodham, "Formulating National Design Policies," p. 27.

4 Woodham, "Formulating National Design Policies," p. 40.

5 Woodham, "Formulating National Design Policies," p. 30.

6 Woodham, "Formulating National Design Policies," p. 40.

7 Woodham, "Formulating National Design Policies," pp. 33–37.

8 Woodham, "Formulating National Design Policies," p. 42.

9 Woodham, "Formulating National Design Policies," p. 37.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Tunstall, Elizabeth, *Report of the U.S. National Design Policy Summit January 19, 2009*, (Washington D.C.: U.S. National Design Policy Initiative), pp. 14–15.

that the Initiative's admiration of the Federal Design Improvement Program, as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act, was because they articulate an alternative definition of design policy—one based on expressing the values of democratic governance, which led to progressive ideas of accessibility and public use.[14] Of course, Dr. Woodham did find this out because he admits that the document is more "substantive" but dismisses it as "based more on aspiration than any deep rooted or penetrating evaluation."[15]

Here Dr. Woodham assumes that the Initiative was under-informed of the history[16] and current practices of international design policy[17] or its progressive rhetoric.[18] He did not access my over three-years of research and scholarship that served as the framework for the Initiative. If he had investigated me as the architect of the Initiative, he would have visited my blog, Dori's Moblog, to follow my 2006 German Marshall Fund fellowship to investigate design policy in Europe.[19] He would have read through the posts on the Design Policy YahooGroup, where I engaged in discussions with those who have written or implemented national design policies globally.[20] Through Google Scholar, he would have found my 2007 article, "In Design We Trust," where I fully articulate the framework of design policy for economic competitiveness (e.g. design promotion and innovation policy) and design policy for democratic governance (e.g. design standards for safety, sustainability, inclusion, and quality; and policy as designed) in critique of Heskett's definition[21] and based on the mapping of global design policies.[22] Thus, he would have concluded that the Initiative was in direct dialogue with global movements in design policy, but crafted based on an American history of design policy and its contemporary context: the need to scale the "design policy" activities of its private and educational actors in partnership with the government.

Dr. Woodham focused solely on the rhetoric of the USNDPI and expressed his opinion of its blandness and lack of inspiration without providing evidence. To answer his question as to whether the Initiative will lead to significant national or international changes, one must compare the rhetoric to the actions. The outcomes of the Initiative are not its documents but the actions that it inspires in others. This includes the over 20 organizational participants in the Summit who continue to support its activities, the 84 designers who wrote to their representatives in endorsement of the Initiative and its proposals,[23] the hundred participants in the Initiative's viral video campaign[24] and the staff of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office who met with the Initiative in May.[25] The inspiration continues as reflected in the Second Annual USNDP Summit held in December 2009, which had over 200 global virtual participants through Ustream.tv, Facebook, and Twitter.

I hope that I have been able to shed some light in the lacunas in Dr. Woodham's arguments concerning the USNDPI. While we all have our preferred methods, Dr. Woodham's methodological choices

14 Tunstall, Elizabeth, *Report of the U.S. National Design Policy Summit*, p. 13.

15 Woodham, "Formulating National Design Policies," p. 40.

16 Woodham, "Formulating National Design Policies," pp. 45–46.

17 Ibid.

18 Woodham, "Formulating National Design Policies," p. 39.

19 Tunstall, Elizabeth, 'Bilboa Spain' Weblog entry. Dori's Moblog. June 16, 2006, Accessed 20 August 2010 (http://dori3.typepad.com/my_weblog/bilbao_spain/).

- 'Quick Question' Weblog entry. Dori's Moblog. June 16, 2006, Accessed 20 August 2010 (http://dori3.typepad.com/my_weblog/bratislava/).

- 'Rock the Vote Poland' Weblog entry. Dori's Moblog. June 4, 2006, Accessed 20 August 2010 (http://dori3.typepad.com/my_weblog/warsaw_poland/).

20 See http://groups.yahoo.com/group/designpolicy/.

21 Woodham, "Formulating National Design Policies," p. 40.

22 Tunstall, Elizabeth, 'In Design We Trust: Design, Governmentality, and the Tangibility of Governance', *International Associations of Design Research Societies (IADRS) Conference 2007* (Hong Kong, China: School of Design, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 2007).

23 USNDI, 'Endorsements' DesignPolicy.org. January 2009, Accessed 20 August 2010 (http://www.designpolicy.org/usdp/participants.html).

24 USNDI, 'U.S. National Design Policy Initiatives Viral Video Campaign' DesignPolicy.org. March 2009, Accessed 20 August 2010 (www.designpolicy.org/usdp/2009/03/us-national-design-policy-initiatives-viral-video-campaign.html).

25 USNDI, 'Report on Meeting with the USPTO' DesignPolicy.org. June 2009, Accessed 20 August 2010 (http://www.designpolicy.org/usdp/2009/06/report-on-meeting-with-the-uspto.html).

have the potential to mislead readers about the USNDPI, who may be recycling the Emperor's new clothes, but has the power to make the parade happen.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth (Dori) Tunstall

Dr. Jonathan Woodham

Dear Editorial Board,

I welcome the opportunity to respond to Dr. Tunstall's observations on what she describes as the methodologically induced *lacunae* in my article. There are three decisions that she claims that I have made in presenting my arguments. I will address them in turn.

1. The 'use [of] *Redesigning America's Future,* **as the main text for [my] critique instead of the 2008 U.S. National Design Policy Summit Report.'**

I have read carefully both the full *Report of the National Design Policy Summit*, published on 19 January 2009, the shorter *Redesigning America Future*, published on 5 January 2009 and, over the last 30 years, numerous other national design policy reports and related documentary materials. Your readers might wish to reflect as to whether Dr. Tunstall's interpretation of 'substantive' regarding the 2009 *Report* is in itself both rose-tinted and partial. She draws particular attention to the fact that, in the latter, discussion of sustainability and citizen-centered design activities comprised 693 words, just under half the 1,400-words essay on Design Policy for Democratic Governance'. Equating word length with 'substantive' is, in my view, problematic. It also undermines her own argument: as she makes clear, the whole essay [by far the longest in the *Report*] is shorter than her letter (1,498 words with notes). The 'substance' of the *Report*—that is to say, the full extent of its articulated argument and rationale—totals less than 4,000 words.[1] Furthermore, if one considers the *Report's* four 'essays' as synonymous with its intellectual content, they occupy little more than 10 pages of text (out of a total of 90 pages), neatly set in generous expanses of white space. In this core context, Dr. Tunstall's citation count for the words 'democratic', 'inclusion', 'sustainability' and 'accessibility' falls by 84%[2].

When using words such as 'minor' or 'substantive' I neither subscribe to the view that 'small is beautiful' nor that 'less is more', but nor do I believe that 'longer' is necessarily better, or more convincing, as intimated in my article.[3]

1 The remainder is constituted of 17 pages of tabulated data, 44 pages of Appendices, the necessarily repetitive one-page Executive Summary, and miscellaneous end-pages.

2 Here 'democratic' is used less than 10 times (rather than the 45 Dr. Tunstall cites), 'inclusion' twice (rather than 20 times), 'sustainability' 5 times (rather than 31) and 'accessibility' only once (rather than 15 times).

3 It might be noted that the core of the shorter document, *Redesigning America's Future*, is about 2,500 words and over 60% the total length of the four essays in the *Report*.

2. That I 'overlooked the existence of a single author/architect of the Initiative and thus did not avail [myself] of the extensive primary sources and scholarship [Dr. Tunstall] provide(s) to understanding the Initiative'.

This is simply not the case. I am, of course, well aware that Dr. Tunstall has been the key architect of the Design Policy Initiative but, given the collective nature of the organization of the Summit, its *modus operandi* and extensive range of participants, I perhaps (not unreasonably) assumed that the published findings in the two January 2009 documents represented a consensual view of the participants and the American Design Communities (even if written—or 'crafted'—by Dr. Tunstall), rather than the more restrictive outlook of an individual.

More specifically, with regard to *Redesigning America's Future* (2009), the booklet's cover includes 'The American Design Communities' beneath the title. The first mention of Dr. Tunstall is on page 21 (of 24) where she is described as Associate Professor of Design Anthropology at the University of Illinois at Chicago and one of 18 'Individuals Who Participated in the Crafting of these Design Policy Proposals'. The second mention is as 'Contact' on page 23 on which, under the title of 'Credit', she is also listed as author in the same font size as the designer, photographers and typeface. Similarly, in respect of the longer *Report of the National Design Policy Summit* (2009), the only reference to Dr. Tunstall is under 'Credit' on the final page (page 90), in exactly the same format as in *Redesigning America's Future* (2009). Had I wished, or indeed felt it in any way necessary or important, to write a critique of Dr. Tunstall's research and scholarship I would have done so, but then my article would not have focused on the content, context and wider implications of the published documents of January 2009.

My *Design Issues* article sought to provide an informed critique of the proposed U.S. Design Policy as expressed in easily accessed published documents with a large number of named U.S. designers, design educators, design associations, government agencies and others involved in its formulation. I set this in an international perspective in order that U.S. Design Policy proposals might be evaluated in the context of the global proliferation of national design policies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, alongside the cyclical and generally repetitive nature of their content. Dr. Tunstall suggests that I have failed to provide evidence for my views, an opinion with which I naturally disagree, given the many references I adduced as well as my careful scrutiny of the published USNDPI documents themselves. Having now read those of Dr. Tunstall's suggested 'required readings' with which I was unfamiliar (her weblogs/moblogs), I find myself no nearer to catching a glimpse of the 'Emperor's new clothes' nor to being persuaded otherwise via the labours of what is described as

'three-years of research and scholarship' and 'extensive primary sources and scholarship'.

3. That [I] 'focused only on the Initiative's rhetoric not activities—the real proof of its effectiveness.'

The word 'effectiveness' may be seen to operate on a number of levels. Whilst Dr. Tunstall may see this as being substantiated by 'activities' such as further conferences or meetings with influential bodies, federal and private organizations and individuals, the publishing of papers, the production of blogs, and everything else described in her letter's penultimate paragraph, I would prefer to calibrate 'effectiveness' against the attainment and implementation of a number of the *10 Design Policy Proposals for the United States of America's Economic Competitiveness & Democratic Governance* proposed by the American Design Communities. In my view 'activities' should not be confused with meaningful actions or results. Without the latter, the Initiative's impact, like so many others internationally and historically, remains largely in the realm of rhetoric and aspiration rather than solid achievement.

Yours sincerely,
Jonathan M. Woodham
University of Brighton, 9 September 2010.