DISCENA

III/01-02

Copytheft – Cultural Practices
Transgressing Copyright Boundaries

Disegno

Journal of Design Culture

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Aims and Scope

Disegno publishes original research papers, essays, reviews on all possible aspects of design cultures. The notion of design culture is understood by us as resolutely vague: our aim is to freely discuss the designed environment as mutually intertwined flows of sociocultural products, practices and discourses. This attitude openly ventures beyond the academic distinctions between art, design and visual culture being accordingly open to all themes with relation to sociocultural creativity and innovation. Our post-disciplinary undertaking expects intellectual contribution from all potential members of different design cultures. Besides providing a living platform for debating issues of design culture our particular aim is to consolidate and enhance the social legitimacy of design culture studies as an emerging field in the Central European academe providing criticism of fundamental biases and misleading cultural imprinting with respect to the field of design.

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Editorial

The papers of Disegno are presented from the particular perspective of design culture studies, which is the fundamental approach of our journal. Design culture studies is a relatively new and emerging field, and as such it remains variously understood, hence *Disegno* is resolutely post-disciplinary in its approach to it. This means that we are generally following in the footsteps of Pyrrhonian skepticism and Potamonian eclecticism. Our methodological *epoché*—that is, our adogmatic suspension of judgment—helps us to observe as many scholarly aspects of design culture as possible. As a result of this, we are able to combine components of design culture studies from an extremely wide range of theoretical practices. We take design culture to be a flow of cultural products produced by and reflected in social practices and cultural discourses, and therefore we welcome papers from all academic fields that are interested in different aspects of design culture, such as: design history, design studies, literary criticism, linguistics, cultural studies, cultural anthropology, sociology, media theory, film theory, intellectual history, and the history of knowledge (among others).

In the twenty-first century, human beings live almost exclusively in designed environments that surround their life in all its aspects. In order to better understand this surrounded life, we should constantly seek effective ways of understanding the designed products we use, the design practices that influence us, and the design discourses that flow around us twenty-four hours a day, determining our emotions and decisions. To work towards this goal, one has to combine interpretative techniques that have been established in the humanities and can elucidate our knowledge of the cultural usability of objects. In turn, social sciences provide knowledge that sheds light on how to comprehend the design practices of the stakeholders of different design processes. Finally, design discourses are explained and understood by the interpretation strategies of narrative disciplines. Naturally, this Aristotelian model (in the sense of Victor Margolin)—that echoes the triad of *theoria*, *praxis* and *poesis*—only separates these three aspects of design culture for the sake of analysis; they are only three hypostases of the hyper-complicated single substance of design culture.

Undoubtedly, the most important concrete motivation behind the call for papers of this issue was the belief of the editorial staff that the real transmission of ideas is a tool for the reduction of inequality.

As Thomas Piketty puts it, 'historical experience suggests that the principal mechanism for convergence at the international as well as the domestic level is the diffusion of knowledge. In other words, the poor catch up with the rich to the extent that they achieve the same level of technological know-how, skill, and education, not by becoming the property of the wealthy.' (Piketty 2014, 71) This is the reason why we think that the defense of intellectual property, copyright and patents are among the major tools of global capitalism to maintain social and economic inequality. *Disegno* not only fights the limitation of the transmission of knowledge through the choice of its topic, but also through the fact that it is published according to the standards of open-access academic publications, under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 license. This issue is thus also a protest against the enormous and immoral profit making of commercial scholarly publishers, which are the main barriers to the free circulation of knowledge, and are the clearest examples of the privatization of knowledge created by public funding.

The papers assembled in the current issue evolve around the already canonical topic of the crisis of the author and of the artwork or the design product itself. We were interested in research papers that targeted artistic or design practices that were based on copyright infringement strategies that tried to circumvent or directly question copyright laws and practices. Our original idea was to critically investigate and better understand the currently fashionable cultural phenomenon of open design in the broadest possible sense, with special attention to the different traditions of transgressing copyright boundaries and suspending the power control of intellectual property that impedes truly democratic creativity and innovation. In addition, we were also interested in the analysis of redesign, remake, and remix practices that question the very idea of exclusive authority in design culture. The papers published in the following pages deal—among others—with fake design products (Bea Correa), copies of buildings (Giuseppe Resta), remix and remake strategies in moving images (Adela Muntean) and photography (Gábor Pfisztner), the role of copies and replicas in fast-fashion companies and the legal boundaries of copyright in the fashion industry (Amanda Queiroz Campos, Luiz Salomão Ribas Gomez), and standardization and quality control in the mash-up era (Dr. Robert Phillips, Dr. Matt Dexter, Prof. Sharon Baurley, Prof. Paul Atkinson). Of course, copyright infringement is not only used to transcend social and class barriers. As is well-known, mass-copying is one of the main driving forces of the current economic system. This is clearly shown in a paper that explores the motivational factors of design protection legislation on knockoff manufacturing (Megan E. Blissick, Belinda T. Orzada). Another tantalizing side of copyright infringement is that 'the design, architecture, and aesthetic language of Western luxury is copied and consumed by a rapidly growing Chinese

middle class with little compunction about the moral, ethical, or environmental implications of their consumption.' (Dr. Christopher Brisbin) Another different strategy related to the reuse of forms, styles, buildings and public spaces of past is discussed by a paper, which analyzes the logic of a process of restoration that took place in a Transylvanian town in the last five to six years; a process that tried to remove the signs of the communist era and hide or replace them with the restored and remixed image of the late nineteenth to early-twentieth century urban development (Dr. Dénes Tamás).

Recently, the issues of authorship and copyright have also been brought into question by the ever more pervading cultural phenomenon of open design, which originated in several open-source software movements, such as those represented by the pioneering programmer activist Richard Matthew Stallman, who launched the GNU Project, wrote the GNU General Public Licence (GPL), and founded the Free Software Foundation[1]. The original idea was to build a global community of free programmers and users subverting the power concentration of neo-liberal software companies monopolizing the field. The program of freedom embodied in such efforts truly foreshadowed the idea recently popularized by Jeremy Rifkin of building a post-capitalist society of 'collaborative commons' in which open design and the sharing of ideas using 3D printers and other free and open-source hardware (FOSH) plays a crucial role (Rifkin, 2014). One of the papers proposes a preliminary framework for understanding and working with the integration of design with open, P2P, diffuse, distributed and decentralized systems. (Massimo Menichinelli) Another truly stirring aspect of this issue is related to the ramifications of open design for 'author-driven' contexts (Deanna Herst, Michelle Kasprzak).

The papers collected here demonstrate that the questions raised in the current issue of *Disegno* are relevant to many aspects of the contemporary art world and design culture. We hope that this collection of papers offers a unique insight into the topic and that it can reach far beyond the commonplace and vague mainstream discourses on copyright and intellectual property. We also hope that with this issue of our journal we could advance the idea touched upon by Piketty, and we were able to contribute—at least to a minor extent—to the open transmission of knowledge and hence to the intellectual struggle against the increase of social inequality.

[1] *See https://stallman.org/, http://www.gnu.org/, http://www.fsf.org/. All accessed on 01/07/2016.*

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