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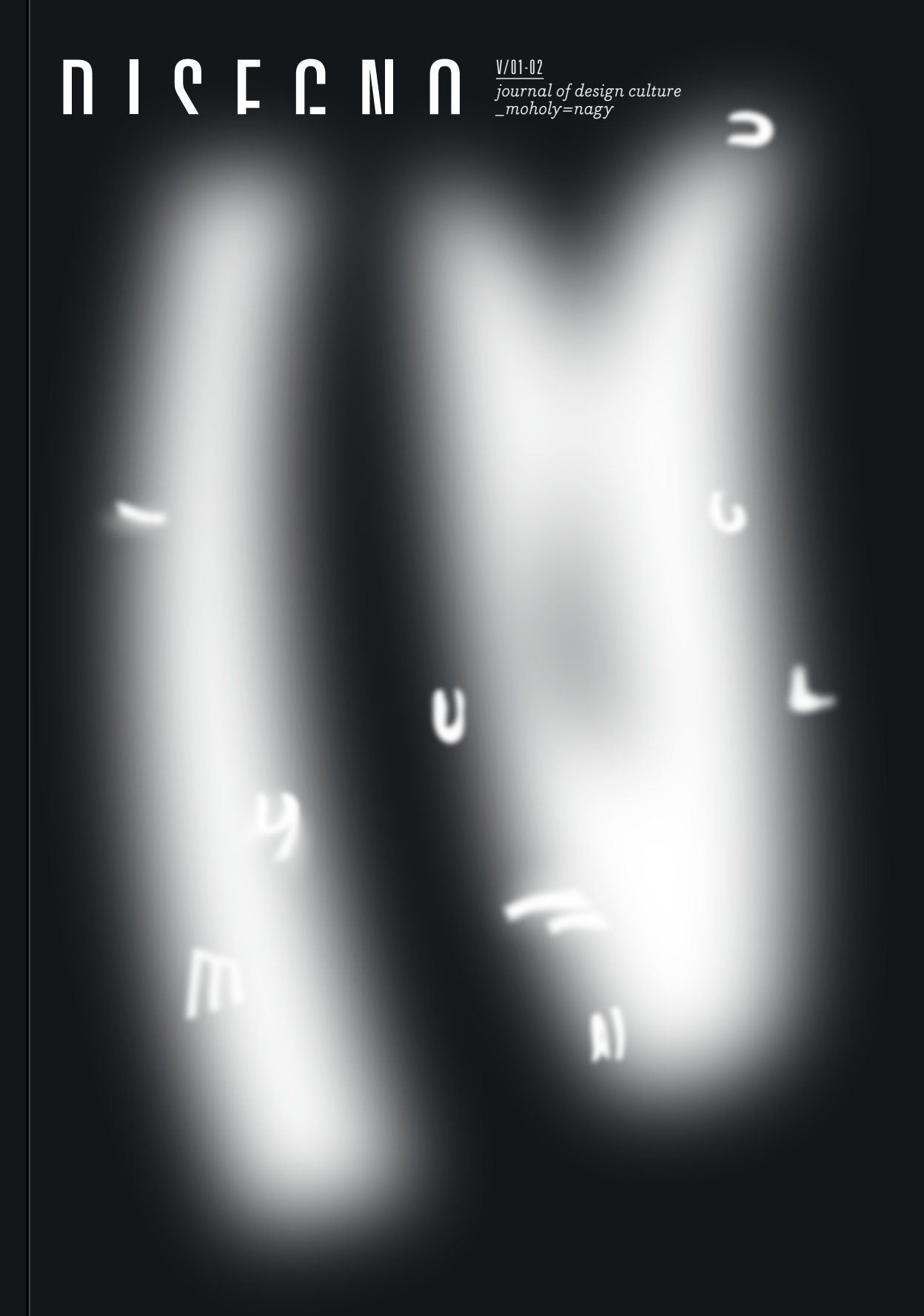

Disegno

Journal of Design Culture

Double-blind peer-reviewed, open access scholarly journal. Not for commercial use.

Aims and Scope

Disegno publishes original research papers, essays, and reviews on all aspects of design cultures. We understand the notion of design culture as resolutely broad: our aim is to freely discuss the designed environment as mutually intertwined strands of sociocultural products, practices, and discourses. This attitude traverses the disciplinary boundaries between art, design and, visual culture and is therefore open to all themes related to sociocultural creativity and innovation. Our post-disciplinary endeavor welcomes intellectual contributions from all members of different design cultures. Besides providing a lively platform for debating issues of design culture, our specific aim is to consolidate and enhance the emerging field of design culture studies in the Central European academy by providing criticism of fundamental biases and misleading cultural imprinting with respect to the field of design.

All research articles published in Disegno undergo a rigorous double-blind peer review process.
This journal does not charge APCs or submission charges.

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Attitudes of Design Leadership

An interview with Guy Julier by Márton Szentpéteri [1]

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[1] *The interview was conducted in the framework of "Moholy-Nagy 125 – The Light of Future," the podcast version of which is available here: https://moholy-nagy.mome.hu/podcast/*

Guy Julier is the leading expert in the field credited with having established design culture studies as an autonomous territory of academic study and research. He was professor of design at Leeds Metropolitan University (2001–10). In 2011 he was appointed as the Victoria & Albert Museum/University of Brighton principal research fellow in contemporary design and professor of design culture. He is currently Professor of design leadership at Aalto University in Finland and was previously Visiting Professor at Glasgow School of Art (2005–10) and the University of Denmark (2013–14) and Visiting Fellow at the Otago University (2009). He holds an honorary PhD-degree of the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design. He is the author of Economies of Design *(2017) and* The Culture of Design *(3rd Revised Edition 2014). His other books include* New Spanish Design *(1991), Thames & Hudson Dictionary of Design since 1900 (2007) and* Design and Culture *(2019).*

Disegno: I am interested in your thoughts about the relevance of Moholy-Nagy's design pedagogy today, specifically regarding your everyday experience at Aalto and in the context of design education in general.

Guy Julier: We can still keep going back to Moholy-Nagy. In fact, just the other day I was reading *Vision in motion*, where he discusses two important things for design culture studies. One is the interconnectedness of different spheres of life, in particular between material and immaterial aspects. So, between society, the nation, the family, individuals, institutions, and communities, but also the interconnectedness of these with multi-material components, the world we live in. In addition to that, he talks about relationality and how each of these works together. As designers or students of design, it is important to return to and reconsider these important topics: how we can take these ideas of interconnectedness and relationality, how can we think

about them in the vastly different industrial, economic, technological, and societal conditions in which we live today.

D: Well, it is natural that we reconsider, mutatis mutandis, Moholy-Nagy's intellectual heritage. There is this bon mot, for example, in the above* Vision in motion *that designing is not a profession, but an attitude. What do you think of this today?

GJ: It is intriguing that the idea of design attitude has become a fashionable term quite recently. In fact, the idea of design attitude is about a sensibility, a way of being sensitized to the multiplicity of what makes up design culture. That is one sense in which we can think about design attitude then as being not just something which goes beyond the design profession as a specific field of professional sort of activity. Moholy-Nagy is perhaps also thinking of design attitude in terms of a kind of citizenship, a democratic engagement with the material and immaterial constellations that make up everyday life. I mean, we can replace the term design attitude with diffuse design, as Ezio Manzini calls it.[2] The idea is that it is not just professional designers doing design, many people are engaged in the shaping or the configuration of things. So, we can perhaps call design attitude defuse design, or we might even call it design culture living in a period of dominance of design culture. We can make a comparison, for example, with visual culture, especially in the early days when visual culture studies was emerging as a discipline, maybe twenty-twenty-five years ago. There was a lot of discussion about where visual culture starts, and many academics pointed to the 1870s and 1880s when the idea of the visual became ever more pervasive. Especially when thinking about the rise of photography as a visual technology or the arrangement of cities. So that is when this idea of visuality became more commonplace, that is, where visual culture in the modern age begins. We can think about a design attitude or design culture as being something which belongs very much to the modern age. This is a kind of intensification of what design is, where it is, how much it is present. This kind of shift is almost a kind of a bodily shift. It is a cognitive shift as well. Going back to your question about design attitude, in a sense, I think yes, it is a way of thinking, it is a way of being. I think, we can push this further then to think about what are these ways of being? What are these ways of thinking? How are these constituted? What is the role of technology, urbanization, and globalization in this?

D: I would love to know more about your views on the recent appearance of design culture studies as a postdisciplinary endeavor. In fact, I would particularly love to know more of your views on when it appeared, who are the most important practitioners of it and how you are connected, or interconnected to it, and which are the most important centres if there are any.

[2] *Ezio Manzini.* Design, when Everybody Designs: an Introduction to Design for Social Innovation *(Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015).*

GJ: Well, design culture studies, how did it start? To some degree there are unknown, unrecognized or below the radar elements in this story. And it is also, therefore, about particular changes in what design was in the 90s. A whole set of discourses outside design itself which seems to be increasingly more relevant. From my personal point of view, how I came to, I suppose, construct for myself at least some notion of design culture studies came out of a frustration with design history as a discipline. I was trained as a design historian in the mid 1980s at the Royal College of Art. And at that moment in the mid 1980s, design history was beginning to split into two major camps. One was focused on the more traditional Pevsnerian approach of telling the histories and the stories of famous designers and architects and design studios. The importance of the modern movement was such a strong imprint into the way by which design history was done in this camp. On the other side, there was increasing interest in this thing called material culture. The idea of thinking about everyday consumption, leaving behind the stories of designers and thinking about how this design stuff is used and thought about, its domestic meanings, for example. I think, for ten or fifteen years, there was a bit of a standoff between these two camps in design history. Now, me trying to teach this stuff in a design school, I was in trouble to choose.

D: I think design history has gone through major changes since then.

GJ: In a way, as you say, design history has changed enormously. It is a lot broader. It has expanded its purview. Part of the story of how design history began in the 1970s really goes back to the famous Coldstream Report written in 1960. It was at the time when arts and design courses were considered as being full university degree level studies. The story goes that in order to push that through, it was agreed that all art and design courses should have twenty percent of credits dedicated to more traditional academic studies. That is the space in which design history began, apart from the influence of the Open University. I think in these early days of the 1970s, there was greater flexibility and creativity in design history, which I think has come back. And I think design history itself has also suffered from this expectation to justify the existence of design courses in institutions. Is it there to service art and design practitioner students? Or could it or should it be an autonomous discipline? Design culture studies, for me, does not necessarily suffer from this problem because I am increasingly tending towards the idea of design culture studies as a practice in itself.

D: Our contemporary world is truly complex, and I am pretty sure that design culture studies is one of the best means of understanding this complexity. Do you think that there is a common agenda of scholars of design culture studies in the world, or given that it is still an emerging field, does it not have a definite common agenda yet?

GJ: I think the common agenda, if there is one, is really just motivated by the fact that design in all its manifestations, in all its scales, and at all its levels is something worthy of serious academic study. Other than that, for me, there are probably two things which attitudinally sit in the background of design culture studies. The first one, in fact, goes back to Moholy-Nagy's idea that no object is an island, that all objects are part of complex networks and so one has to understand those networks in order to understand the individual objects. The second thing, which relates to this, is that everything, and design cultures in particular, are in a constant state of emergence, a constant state of change. Because, when you have networks, you have so many nodes, and therefore changes to individual parts of a network result in changes to the network itself.

D: You mentioned in the introduction of the 2019* Design Anthology[2], *that although design culture studies is historically grounded, it is much more concerned with changing the present or creating the future. So, it is much more interested in changing the existing situations or creating lifeworlds, if you want to use Ben Highmore's Heideggerian approach to it. What do you think about this? Design culture studies is historically grounded, but it is no longer design history.

GJ: By historically grounded, I mean two things. One is the need for specificity and rigor. But the second is about understanding processes of change. If we take design culture studies to be primarily interested in the present, in our contemporary world and therefore in contemporary worlding, it is about understanding something of the dynamics, how are dynamics in the world or in design culture, forced, played, or structured? What therefore are the processes of change in that? In a way, this develops work in practice theory, science and technology studies, and actor network theory, if we think of those as three overlapping fields of study. It is more focused on what might be changing in networks. There is, nevertheless, a tendency to think about stabilizations. About networks being kinds of stable ecosystems. Sometimes I find this use of the word ecosystem quite problematic because it suggests some kind of natural stability in patterns, processes, or contexts. On the contrary, I think it is interesting to look at destabilization. What are the processes of destabilization in these networks? So, this is where we get to the idea of what is driving these processes of change. So, design culture studies is, in a sense, about being historically aware in the present.

D: This leads us to a question which is for me a bit outdated, but still worth addressing because it is still discussed a lot. And that is how design culture studies comes into the picture, as we shall see. The question is: how can any kind of design theory be applied

[2] *Guy Julier, Anders V. Munch, Mads Nygaard Folkmann, Hans-Christian Jensen, and Niels Peter Skou, eds.* Design Culture. Objects and Approaches. *(London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015).*

in the field? And I am pretty sure that everything that you have already mentioned and your position as a design leadership professor points to a direction where these good old Aristotelian distinctions between theory and practice or theoretical, practical, and poetical are blurred, but still... What do you think about this?

GJ: A noticeably short answer to your interesting question here might be to recall a conversation I had with an industrial designer way back in the mid-1990s. I was in Stockholm, and I heard a product designer give a talk about Wittgenstein and notions of play. And after the talk, we were walking to get a coffee and I said it was unusual to find a professional designer talking about Wittgenstein at this academic conference. How do you find time to do this kind of work? And he said, well, it actually saves me time because reading theory and engaged with theory expands my way of thinking as a designer and I find I can get process ideas and get to solutions. So that is one aspect of it. But if we turn to the notion that design culture itself can be a kind of practice, we will have a second option I mean, in a really basic sense, we practice design culture by studying it, by doing it in an expanded field of practice. It might be that the current forms of this are the conversations with people listening in some way, or the organizing of symposia, events, and such things, or even policy making or decision making in marketing and retail. You asked me earlier about where design culture is being done. Well, when we think about one of the core places, the University of Southern Denmark in Kolding, their BA and MA courses are in fact linked to management courses. So, in that particular culture they found much more attraction in thinking about design culture studies. And yes, it can be conceived of as a humanistically or humanities grounded kind of activity, but it can be thought about vocationally as well. It develops people as better design clients for example, or better able to move into other fields. Hence, in Kolding, they run their programs with a significant amount of management studies as well. So, there is what you might call instrumentalizing aspect of design culture studies. But I think in a way this also resonates with Moholy-Nagy's idea of having a design attitude. That is about building up a sensibility and understanding about finding ways of approaching particular circumstances, problematics, ordering them, seeing what is there, mapping these things, understanding them, and also showing them to other people. Remember Ben Highmore, who you mentioned earlier, and who said very forcefully and interestingly that describing something is a political act. So, bringing stuff into consciousness, showing what is there, that is part of what the design culture studies activity is.

D: This brings us to the next question, if you like, namely that, for many experts, design culture studies is of course a critical kind of cultural practice. You mentioned the notion of describing, which already involves an act of criticism in the sense that when you describe

something it is already an interpretation in a way because the one who makes the criticism is the one who chooses what to criticize and what not to criticize. So, it is already a critical act to describe something. But of course, design culture studies involves much more than just describing. So, to what extent do you think that design culture studies can be critical? And of course, I am not referring here to a detached kind of criticism in the ivory tower of academic centres, but to a very practical sense, a sense we have been talking about, namely, that of design culture studies as a critical practice.

GJ: I would like to have another way of calling this notion of describing. In describing you pay attention and that is therefore a slowing down. Paying attention is therefore giving time and space to something. Paying of attention is an especially useful way of drawing out the unseen or the unnoticed or the forgotten. For example, neoliberal economic practices are quite chaotic, and largely premised on what you can get away with. So, by stopping, paying attention, and drawing out details we can identify what they are trying to get away with, in terms of, for example, the impacts of neoliberal practices on environments, well-being, and so on. Let us mention the example of SUVs! Currently, one in every three cars bought in America is an SUV. They are responsible for the second highest rise in global carbon emissions in the last ten years. Compared with standard passenger cars, they cause more serious injury when they collide with pedestrians. You begin to think about these figures and then about all kinds of other background activities the way in which SUVs were regulated or subject to fairly low safety standards because of all kinds of lobbying of the motor industries with governments. Then we begin to see there is a kind of connectivity between these massive things in our streets and a whole set of other impacts and policies and politics. And then we begin to think about it in terms of a consumer psychology, well, what does that mean? Well, safety. Why the need for safety? That opens up all kinds of questions about the society we live in. We see that this kind of connection is important in this process. So, it requires us to stop, think and study.

D: When you are actively working with people, but not necessarily in a productive sense—for example, with people who are embedded in a field, I mean politicians, businesspeople or decision makers—how can you step back, how can you apply this slow understanding of ongoing processes in which we are involved? Do you have any suggestion or even a strategy for stepping back and and then rejoining? How can one be a reflective practitioner working as a design culture studies scholar?

GJ: To start with, one thing is to acknowledge the temporal regimes.[3] Acknowledge, for example, that often budgets are allocated, or policies are made according to particular time frames and policy cycles or

[3] *Felipe Torres*, Temporal Regimes: Materiality, Politics, Technology *(London: Routledge, 2021).*

budget cycles. Then think about, well, how that is constructing certain kinds of policy making or certain kinds of budgetary thinking. This is a really tough question you have posed here, because to some degree it would be too stereotypical to say, yes, we academics are the ones who have time to sit back, read and think and reflect. Whereas in fact, most academics will agree that they are caught up in these cycles and just succumb to the speed of things. The second aspect here is to also recognize that we are working in different temporalities as well, either at different points or sometimes at the same time as well. Think about the relationship between the slow and the fast, for example, or what the medium might be. I started a conversation yesterday with some students and we were talking about the issue of activist design. There is a call for doing slow design, for stepping out and being involved with, say, the slow city movement or the transition towns movement and these sorts of things, and stepping out of this kind of relentless pace, the fast pace of contemporary commercial design.[4] The reasons for needing to slow down are incredibly urgent. So how do you make the transition? That goes back to the question of the processes of change, about how you transition. What are the structures, what are the resistances, what are the opportunities for transitioning between from one temporality to another? Perhaps that sounds very abstract. But if we begin to think about, say, with ordinary working hours, how our week or day is structured, we can consider if there might be other ways of thinking about these things. How do you change to a different way of working?

D: It is a big challenge for me as well and it relates to the publish or perish issue, naturally. We are writing too much or publishing too much because we must survive. We have to live in this scientometric world, if you want. This leads us to another set of questions, to the problem of the humanism versus post-humanism issue. I don't know whether you remember the conference last year to which we invited you to be one of the keynote speakers together with Richard Shusterman and Patrick Devlieger. Ákos Schneider, one of our PhD candidates gave a talk on design and posthumanism. He talked about the decentralization of human beings. Remember when Ákos was speaking about this decentralization of the human being or even the current decenteredness of the human being, you put a simple but very intriguing question to him, if I am not mistaken: "How can we imagine social struggle if we think of a human as an aggregate of information and viruses and other bio stuff instead of someone who is responsible for her or his deeds and still in the possession of the understanding of her or his world." How can we make sense of our position as representatives of design culture studies in the field of humanities or as Rosi Braidotti called it, in the field of post-humanities?

[4] *After the interview, Márton Szentpéteri and Attila Horányi had a workshop with Guy Julier titled* Design for Decline: Viable Futures? *at the Doctoral School of the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, on the November 5, 2021, devoted to similar topics.*

GJ: By no means am I an expert on this, it is all quite new to me as well. Your conference, which I was so pleased to be at, opened up a lot of new thoughts for me as well. There are two sides, two parts of the posthuman, or posthumanism. One is in this kind of Donna Haraway cyborg idea that we are not necessarily all ourselves. That got me really thinking a lot more about this question of somaesthetics and sensing. There is some really interesting work going on across fine art and anthropology these days around sensing studies and sensing methods. So, I have been interested recently in this notion of methods that create disturbances and using the disturbance as a method. In other words, what I have been doing is around performance and kind of bending and stretching the experience of being in a space to then be the audience to the effects of that. Using my body as a sensing method if you like. In a way, it might sound a bit perverse, but personally as a researcher, posthumanism in a sense brought me back to my body. Maybe I have become even more anthropocentric than I was to start off with. The other one is this question of the more than human that we were talking about within the conference as well. You are going out of the body and thinking about these other things. The virus outside, which becomes the virus inside. Intellectually and ontologically, that is an interesting point to currently be at in the context of the climate crisis and thinking beyond the anthropocenic. I do, however, and the historian in me does want to think, well, it is us who got here. What is it about the human that has got us into this mess in the first place? So, I would caution against the notion of posthumanism, forgetting who we are, or how we have become who we are; or even as a way of avoiding these pressing human decisions and actions that need to be taken. That sounded horribly grandiloquent. I do apologize.

D: You mentioned that, thanks to the challenges of post-humanism you began to be much more aware of your body. Funnily enough, I also regard posthumanism as an intellectual challenge being a former Renaissance scholar who has been pretty much involved in the history of humanism and even Enlightenment. So, it is also very inspiring for me to see what my colleagues do, and especially what Ákos does at MOME. What he is involved in and some of other philosophers at the Eötvös Loránd University as a small group of posthumanist scholars, what they are doing is quite inspiring. But their challenge took me back to my humanist roots, even to my existentialist roots. Of course, I do understand the critical posthumanist philosophy. And I absolutely appreciate that we must take into consideration all the current changes and challenges like the AI challenges, or the climate change challenges, or the epidemiological challenge nowadays. So, I do appreciate the posthumanist perspective, but still, I am always smiling at the situation with all the posthumanist scholars authoring books and papers and giving lectures to a human audience. It sounds a bit

like what the Brexit guy, Nigel Farage, did in the European Parliament, constantly criticizing the European Union but taking a nice salary from it.

GJ: Yeah, massive expenses and claims.

D: Yes, exactly! Okay, so why not to wrap up with the vexed question. What does a professor of design leadership do at Aalto University now?

GJ: Well, yes, I am a professor of design leadership because that is the job I applied for. So having made an application, I then had to make a presentation as part of the hiring process about the role of research and practice in design leadership. So, I thought I would better think about that and what this design leadership role is. I managed to create a very broad definition of design leadership, which was that design leadership is about the creation of new forms of design and designing and the creation of the conditions in which that might happen. I probably do more of the second of those things than the first. I probably do not do any of the first, but the second of those things perhaps through design culture as a lens. In other words, setting up situations where questions are raised, which might lead to thinking about new objects of design, new processes of design, new publics and so on. I mean those settings, those situations which one sets up might be, for example, writing a book. It might be curating an exhibition. It might be running a salon, a discussion salon. It might be working with students on a project or whatever, out of which perhaps comes to light new ways of thinking about what design is or what the design object might be. So, it is a perverse form of leadership from the perspective of followers.