

Design Research and Education: A Failure of Imagination?

Andy Polaine

When Don Norman wrote that he is "made to read a lot of crap" in *Why Design Education Must Change*, he had me sighing in agreement. Around ninety-percent of the design and design education research I read sends me to sleep. I am interested in design, education and research and the futures of all three, but why is the strike rate of interesting material so low? It leaves me rather depressed about a discipline that claims creativity to be among its key attributes. When it comes to engaging in public discourse, design research has suffered a failure of imagination.

I should clarify here that when I am talking about design research, I am talking of institutional, mainly academic research. I'm not talking about research that designers do in design practice. That this needs explaining is part of the problem, of which more in a moment.

The media regularly contains calls from scientists for more research funding, more science to be taught in schools and claims for the enormous importance of science to the world. STEM subjects—an acronym for science, technology, engineering and mathematics—are the centrepiece of curriculum development and the associated funding. Newspaper columns and sections are devoted to science. Entire television channels and expensive series, such as the BBC's highly successful *Wonders...* series featuring Professor Brian Cox, are directly aimed to inspire and ignite the imaginations of schoolchildren and adults alike. Where are the equivalents for design? Gary Hustwit's *Helvetica* and *Objectified* may have been seen by most Core77 readers, but I doubt the average schoolchild is aware of either of them.

To be clear, I'm not bashing science. Science is important, as are technology, engineering and mathematics, but this is just one side of the coin (and brain). Given that the world is not only filled with designed objects and media, but also suffering under the enormous weight and consumption of much of them, design clearly has a central role to play in society for good or ill. Where are the impassioned calls for the role of design and for teaching design in curricula debates in mainstream media? Where are the TV programs, magazines and books? I am not talking about superficial style magazines or the design periodicals that essentially print articles on the reverse pages of press releases. Where are the design equivalents of *Scientific American* or *National Geographic*? Why isn't design debated in government in the same way as STEM subjects?

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