GOING PUBLIC

PUBLICATION CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: DESIGN IN UNREAL TIMES

The global pandemic is causing major disruption to our daily lives. While longer-term impacts remain to be seen, our faculty of architecture will document the social, cultural, financial and spatial changes that are currently unfolding around us. We ask in the broadest terms, how these unreal times are changing the nature of design and speculate on what design practice could become in the near future.

Topics considered for this publication include, but are not limited to:

- How has mobility changed in cities and how does this alter the 'usual' urban flows?

- Has the relationship between public and private space changed?

- How do the current restrictions and obstacles to making work alter design thinking with respect to material conditions, working conditions, or collaborative conditions?

- How are our memories of place altered by the COVID-19 crisis?

- Should social distancing be designed into our living spaces and urban environments?

- What new educational dissemination models for design have emerged (on or offline) as a result of the lockdown?

- Have relations between people fundamentally changed such as citizens/policy makers, amateurs/professionals, or even neighbours?

Abstracts in English of no more than 100 words can be submitted to **lilet.breddels@kuleuven.be** by 20th May 2020.

Submissions are reviewed by the editorial board and all applicants are notified of the outcome shortly afterwards.

Final submissions are between 200-1200 words in length, or comprise up to 4x A4 pages of visual/graphical material. All submissions are due by the 26th June 2020 and will be published as a supplement to Volume Magazine, to be distributed in November 2020. The publication will be ready before the start of the new academic year (Assemblea) in September 2020.

SUMMARY OF TIME FRAME
CALL FOR PROPOSALS: MAY 12
DEADLINE PROPOSALS: MAY 20
DEADLINE CONTRIBUTIONS: JUNE 26

FORMAT
48 pages total (circa)
200 x 267 cm (portrait)
design: Valentijn Goethals
editorial board: Rachel Armstrong, Gisèle Gantois, Annelies de Smet, Tomas Ooms, Lilet Breddels

(see attached a text by Rachel Armstrong that triggered this publication)

Design Led Innovation: Confronting the Unbelievable
Rachel Armstrong, April 2020

In ordinary times, innovation is the territory of the pure and applied sciences. Having fine-tuned their approaches to address the needs of an operational society they both serve the challenges of the present and invest in the future through "blue sky" approaches, which are unfettered by immediate needs or challenges.

But what happens to innovation when there is no ordinary, operational society? In such unbelievable[1] times, those systems that have functioned well according to traditions and conventions may not be nearly so effective. Under these circumstances, the nature of knowing must be recontextualised, reconfigured and revalued, so that alternative, appropriate actions can be taken. While these include established practices and research protocols, known conventions alone cannot fully address radical change, as the baselines for everything have changed. Specifically, this means during unbelievable times, there are no experts and new knowledge syntheses are needed, to address an effectively, changed world.

An undervalued discipline during times of stability, design is widely viewed as a kind of research add-on, making social sense of important scientific and technological innovation, rather than taking the lead in innovation itself. Effectively, design is regarded by the broader intellectual community as a kind of "outreach", with little to offer the actual innovation process itself other than aesthetics. However, during unbelievable times, the capacity of design disciplines to synthesise meaning, develop ethical positions, contextualise different parameters and situate emerging relationships – is critical for sense-making that enables us to navigate widespread turbulence. **This design-led innovation platform, however, is not the same as that which exists in normal times**. In particular the speculative element that is often derided in times of stability since it is not evidence-based, is essential in maintaining our agility in being able to respond to situations that do not yet exist. **However, speculation alone is not enough.** Design-led thinking creates the space for rendering ideas towards operationality. Rather than producing universal, efficient solutions, a concerted, integrative approach is taken that moves towards innovation, which is characterised by *prototyping-to-functionality*. This provisionality and iterative exploration is at the heart of design-led research's agility, its ethical/aesthetic dimensions and raises questions about the assumptions made about knowledge and innovation during times of stability.

New ways of knowing are fundamental for navigating the unbelievable. This requires a reconsideration of ethics, of value systems and critically, an "economy" of exchange. Of particular importance, **the question of who research and innovation *is for*,** must be raised. Current conventions direct these notions towards commerce where business is left to steer and create wealth, for example in the EU's H2020 (soon to be Horizon Europe) programme "big ideas" are sought to form Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) that are supported to become bigger employers and finally corporations with global markets that bring revenue back in the EU.

There is a problem with this kind of innovation, as it benchmarks of all other forms of research, discovery and value, supressing alternative routes for knowledge generation. In unbelievable times, very different kinds of values, interest communities and framing of challenges are needed than conventionally supported by funding bodies, which prioritise the interests of business over the public good and environment. Following a huge systemic shock, such

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[1] Unbelievable times are those we have not had the capacity to sufficiently imagine so that we can address the challenges they present.

institutions, having made insufficient preparations for resilience are more likely to invest in alternative courses of action.

One strategy to address the narrow research and innovation model presently in use, is to generate communities of value that operate beyond the global capitalist system – not as reactionary statements, but in creating exploratory ways of living together. With the lack of a safety net and protection for working people in societies with rising inequality, especially for those working in the gig economy with no social protection, unbelievable times are a crucible for new forms of value and exchange: i.e. "economies". By actively shaping and creating communities of value capable of exploring alternative "economic" models, design-led research and innovation is directed towards communities (c.f. businesses) – whether they are geographic, or interest communities with shared infrastructures. While not conventionally steeped in the science of economics, design-led research possesses all the capabilities of generating research and development activities with value to a changing world. Through infrastructural, relational, aesthetic and resource-centred thinking, design-led research can play a huge role in shaping societal and economic resilience in preparation for unbelievable times – not as a top-down framework of utopian obligations, but through providing new tools, methods and practices that empower citizens while exploring appropriate "economies".

At a time of climate crisis, all our baselines of liveability are shifting and more unbelievable shocks to our system are inevitable. Taking a proactive approach to these challenges, design-led research itself has the capacity to reimagine that very nature of economies, markets, workers, and produce toolsets that *prototype other modes of living to functionality*. Simply put, our present society has deep architectural issues in the way that people work, live, use and inhabit the planet, which are being ignored by institutions and governments, because we're suspending our disbelief. Pending disruption should bring radical change – as Bruno Latour notes, We [should] have begun to change our food, our habitats, our means of transport, our cultural technologies, in short, our mode of production" Latour, 2017, pp.8–9), and will inevitably have unavoidable far reaching systemic consequences. Design's role is a critical one that can prepare us for unbelievable architectural transformations through appropriate and mutable strategies for living together that provide a research and innovation platform for creatively and urgently reinventing our futures.

Reference

Latour, B. (2017). *Facing Gaia*. Cambridge: Polity Press.