

DISCURSIVE DESIGN: HUMANITY'S NEW WAY OF EXPRESSION

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Abstract. *This article presents the innovative nature of discursive design. It aims to make people more aware of the existence of this new classification and how we can use it as a tool of human expression. As the world becomes more unpredictable, it takes more than one person to solve all the problems. Discussion becomes a pivotal factor in operating for an unsure tomorrow. What makes good design in today's world? Who is a skilled designer? How will discursive design change humanity at the moment? This type of questions will be analyzed and debated. The author compares the nature and the manifestation of discursive design against old-school ways of observation. This type of design and way of thinking has already inspired a grand number of people throughout the world, and by the looks of it, it is only getting bigger. The phenomenon will grow to heights way above the world's expectations.*

Keywords: *design, discursive design, observation, discussion.*

"Discursive design is the way of developing one's discipline. It matters, because without designers rethinking design, there would be no design. Without reflection, we would be commerce, technology, and industry without humanity."

- Daniel Weil, Communication with the authors (of the book "Discursive Design" Bruce M. Tharp and Stephanie M. Tharp), December 22, 2017

Introduction

For the longest time, the consensus was that observation is the first step in discovery. Through it, people have determined every known law of the universe. Humans have solved countless problems with their talent to notice and analyze the world around them. However, it does not take only observation to resolve or to create; plenty of discourse and idea-sharing need to be involved in the process. The laws of the universe intertwine with our creative nature. Both old-school knowledge and new-age innovations are necessary to create good design.

What defines good design in our contemporary world? Is it still about functionality and solving problems? Or does it create a shift in people's minds? Perhaps we will not have an answer to this question soon, as such questions reveal their resolve only when you look back at them. Only in the future will we be able to tell from an unbiased point of view where we went wrong and where we changed the trajectory of our livelihood. In this fast-paced and ever-evolving world of innovation and advancement, we often grapple with uncertainty and ambiguity. However, amid this complexity, principles such as observation, discussion, and collaboration serve as our guiding light. They help us navigate the intricacies of our modern society and enable us to find solutions to even the most challenging of problems. Here is where we find our first and most important tool in today's design world: Discursive Design.

Defining Discursive Design

In the pages of the history books, the profession of design emerges as a relatively youthful endeavor, yet its essence predates the modern era by millennia. From the dawn of civilization, humanity has wielded its creative faculties to create tools and implements essential for survival

and progress. Although the profession of design is relatively new, its essence can be traced back to the beginning of civilization, over 2.5 million years ago. The *Homo habilis*, our early ancestors, were the pioneers of primitive tool crafting, and they began to hone their design skills long before humans even walked upright. They fashioned spears around four hundred thousand years ago and evolved into specialized toolmakers by forty thousand years ago, laying the foundation for the innovative spirit that defines us today [1].

Deep within our core lies an instinctual drive to innovate, refine, and produce, constantly striving for progress. Design, an integral aspect of our identity, has propelled our advancement as a species, shaping our development into the intelligent, solution-oriented beings we are today. Though "design" can take many forms, its foundation remains rooted in the principle of serving others - a commitment to creatively addressing human needs and overcoming everyday obstacles [1].

Enter the realm of discursive design, a frontier that diverges markedly from conventional paradigms. Although the term may sound familiar to those in the design field, its exact definition often proves elusive even to the most experienced professionals. A veil of ambiguity surrounds the discourse, leading many to avoid strict categorization. At its core, discursive design moves beyond the mere consideration of what and how we design, turning inward to reflect on the deeper questions of why we design and the messages we aim to communicate [2].

The realm of discursive design is vast and varied, encompassing a wide range of cutting-edge practices. From speculative design and critical design to design fiction and adversarial design, each approach offers a unique perspective and purpose. Despite their differences, they all share a common goal of promoting intellectual exploration and fostering meaningful conversation. Together, these diverse strands of communicative expression combine to form a cohesive tapestry under the expansive canopy of discursive design. Product design holds significant sway over human behavior and action within the larger context of design disciplines. However, its ability to inspire profound introspection and shape thought processes is somewhat restrained. Enter discursive design, an alluring opportunity to transcend the realm of mere functionality and engage in thought-provoking discourse. It beckons us to engage in conversations that go beyond the ordinary and ignite intellectual exploration [1].

Discursive Design Fiction

Design fiction is the skillful use of design to imagine potential futures and unlock creative potential. Designers are well-versed in this art, frequently engaging in imaginative journeys to craft compelling narratives and visually represent future scenarios. While these glimpses into the future may not always see the light of day, they serve a crucial purpose in the iterative process of innovation, acting as steppingstones towards tangible products and services [3].

Design fiction, despite its crucial role in the creative process, is often relegated to the periphery, eclipsed by more practical considerations. Seen as a transient phase on the path to innovation, these imaginative exercises are sometimes overlooked in favor of more concrete outcomes. However, within the realm of design fiction lies the opportunity for something more significant - a forum for discussion and reflection [4].

Jon Kolko recounts a powerful story shared by Allan Chochinov that perfectly encapsulates the heart of discursive design. The tale revolves around a student's invention - a plastic holder for lollipops - that impresses the class with its creativity. However, when asked about how to manufacture it on a large scale, Chochinov offers a momentous insight: "As a discursive design, it is already real, and that is all that matters." The design in question already served its purpose: it calls out the ridiculous cult of useless plastic consumption, and it creates an attractive 3d image that pleases the eye [3].

Indeed, the power of discursive design lies not in its materialization but in its ability to transcend physical form and serve as a mirror to society. Like a portal to an alternate world, it prompts us to contemplate the ramifications of our choices and address the deficiencies of our

cultural norms. As a result, discursive design surpasses the confines of conventional design methods and acts as a catalyst for introspection and meaningful societal transformation [2].

To fully grasp the concept of discursive design, it's essential to acknowledge it as a thoughtful and intentional approach guided by logic and forward thinking. This viewpoint closely echoes Cameron Tonkinwise's belief that designers should possess a clear and comprehensive understanding of the larger future they aim to create through their designs. Tonkinwise's words emphasize that designers have a duty not only to innovate but also to contemplate the potential social implications of their actions [1].

The individuals who are considered experts in the design field possess an in-depth knowledge of the delicate balance that exists between structured, purposeful frameworks of discursive design and improvisational approaches that are often favored by creative professionals. While they recognize the benefits of exploratory design that allows for greater freedom of expression, they are also aware of the challenges that come with gaining support and managing risks associated with such approaches.

How we approach design can have a profound impact on how we interpret it. When we view design through a lens of skepticism or doubt, we risk questioning the validity and intention behind the designer's choices. This can lead to a shallow understanding of design and its role in society. However, when we approach design with an open mind and a willingness to explore its nuances and complexities, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the values and ideologies that are embedded within it. By assuming the legitimacy and sincerity of a design, we create a space for critical engagement and exploration. Rather than dismissing a design as misguided or flawed, we are encouraged to investigate its underlying assumptions and implications [1].

This shift in perspective can foster a more sophisticated understanding of the design process and its relationship to the wider socio-political landscape in which it exists. Ultimately, this more nuanced and open-minded approach to design can help us to understand better the ways in which design shapes our world and the role that we can play in shaping it ourselves. By engaging with design thoughtfully and critically, we can become more informed and empowered citizens, capable of making meaningful contributions to the world around us [5].

As we navigate through the complexities of our contemporary world, the transformative power of Discursive Design emerges as a beacon of possibility, offering a platform for dialogue, exploration, and collective problem-solving. It is within the crucible of discourse that ideas take shape, assumptions are challenged, and new paradigms of design excellence are forged. Thus, in the relentless pursuit of progress and meaning, we embrace Discursive Design as not merely a tool, but a philosophy - a testament to the enduring spirit of human ingenuity and collaboration [5].

Conclusion

In this fast-paced and ever-evolving world of innovation, we can almost feel hopeless dwindling with the idea of creating something new, something more. The uncertainty that lies in every one of our actions is evident. However, during all of this, we find our most modern and igneous tool: Discursive Design.

As we reflect on past descriptions of design and dwindle in its philosophy and practice, it becomes evident that contemporary design is no longer about problem-solving or mere functionality. It can be an exploration of the human mind and soul, societal problems and values, human dynamics and conflicts, cultural norms, and so on. Through the lens of discursive design, we are given the opportunity to engage in dialog with one another through creation, redefining old beliefs, traditional boundaries, and stereotypes. It challenges people's assumptions and provokes rethinking and introspection [1].

Design Fiction serves as a poignant reminder of the transformative potential inherent in the whole creative process. No step is useless while climbing the ladder. It's not only about the envisioning of some complex alternate realities but about setting imagination free. Letting it rest

in its natural element so it can enlarge and encapsulate issues it was unable to beforehand. A design is a manifestation of needs, of discussions, of cultural and societal reflection [2].

The more we venture into the future and the unknown, we realize only one thing is clear: design shapes our collective thinking and a generation's destiny. Embracing the truth only helps us become more aware of the changes and possibilities that are ahead of us. The principles of observation, dissertation, and collaboration can unlock the prospects of a more inclusive, aware, and progressive world. Discursive Design becomes our beacon of hope of bringing awareness back to the masses, of having a light that guides us through the dark, and of creating a world where creativity, humanity, and innovation are on the center stage once more.

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