Design as Common Good / Framing Design through Pluralism and Social Values

Swiss Design Network
Symposium 2021
Conference Proceedings

Edited by
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University of Applied Sciences and Arts
of Southern Switzerland

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Conference Proceedings
Swiss Design Network Symposium 2021
25-26 March 2021, held online

Organized by
University of Applied Sciences and Arts
of Southern Switzerland, SUPSI
Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, HSLU

Conference Proceedings Design
Claudia Tambella

Proceedings Compiled by
Vanessa De Luca

Editors
Massimo Botta, Sabine Junginger

Conference Proceedings
Design as Common Good
Framing Design through Pluralism and Social Values
ISBN 978-88-7595-108-5

Published by
SUPSI, HSLU, swissdesignnetwork

Since 2003, the Swiss Design Network has been promoting
and fostering the development, quality and constant improvement
of design research in the Swiss Universities of Design and Art.

Design for Common Good Needs Some Ground Rules - The Need for Ethical Design Pedagogy

Keywords: Design, Ethics, Placemaking, Social Justice, Design Justice.

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A placemaking study in Toronto, Canada is highlighting the need for Ethical Design curricula that will serve the larger context of "Design for Social Good". In reviewing diverse theories for socially informed design practice, it is apparent that Ethical Design, specifically socially-engaged design, as a core value is largely absent in pedagogy, training, and disciplinary practices of designers. As new health, social, economic, and environmental realities of contemporary life develop, communities are emerging as the driving force for social change, including dismantling colonial practices that sustain inequities in the making of our material world. Who a designer is and is not, as well as what role and position a designer may hold in that material world, is in need of reframing. An Ethical Design framework for both education and practice is needed to ensure that future designers respect communities as a collaborative partner and valued design team member.

1 Introduction

Design, in all its forms and definitions can no longer be considered the sole purview of those trained in the disciplinary fields. Citizens, individually and collectively, make design decisions, interventions, and changes on a daily basis that they deem good for their needs. These active choices directly affect their personal and community well-being, giving agency in the making of the world (Arendt, 1998). There is much that designers can learn from these innovations as they explore new definitions for "good design".

Design ManifesT.O. 2020 (DM2020) is a participatory action research project for Toronto, Canada, that is exploring grassroots placemaking within urban neighbourhoods. Placemaking is the practice of creating spaces within neighbourhoods that reflect the residents' identities and needs (Stewart, 2018). DM2020 has an inclusive design focus that expands thinking about accessible environments by considering culture, ethnicity, race, ability, and other diverse and intersectional ways of being (fig.1). The participatory nature of DM2020 uses narrative inquiry data collection practices to share stories and generate placemaking ideas together. The research team, consisting of educators and practitioners, work alongside participants, both listening and collaborating on ideas, in order to learn from lived experiences. The stories are positioned as *case-stories*, and include methods for working with city protocols and through disruptive measures.

Fig. 1: *The DM2020 Creatrive Practice as Protest Youth Workshop took place in OCAD U's Inclusive Design Building. This image depicts culmination presentations by youth participants. Photo by Nick Sagar.*

The emerging data points to a need for reframing the discourse around design in the public realm with greater respect and inclusion of citizen voices and community's lived experiences. This discussion should address the social, political, material, cultural, and aesthetic needs of people including a community's unique identity and its aspirations for the greater good of the urban or rural context it resides in. In this moment, as communities are driving major social shifts across environmental, racial, political, and economic realities, design has a civic role in contributing to this shift - including Black Lives Matter (Black Lives Matter, n.d.), Idle No More (Idle No More, n.d.), Me Too (metoomvmt, n.d.) and Climate Change Action (Climate Justice Alliance, n.d.). Communities are acutely aware of and experiencing the colonial design practices that have historically left them out of planning and design discourse critical in shaping their lives. These exclusions include, among other harms, a lack of respect and unethical practices in developing cities, spaces, and places, as well as the products and services created by designers *for* people and communities (Pitter, 2020). Citizens are mobilizing and dismantling old power structures that have for too long influenced designers and design practice.

Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change, written by Victor Papanek and published in 1971 laid bare the need for dramatic shifts in design and design pedagogy for human-centred outcomes. Change, though slow, is happening, and design education once lagging in its response to the need for Ethical Design, is undergoing a gradual transformation towards greater inclusion and diversity of perspectives. This paper interrogates the need for more holistic Ethical Design pedagogy, including redefining educational practices for future designers beginning with how institutions, educational or otherwise, define good design, design practice, and design as a force for common good. The gaps revealed through DM2020 findings in Ethical Design education and the youth workshop developed to explore Ethical Design practices in an educational setting all confirm our theories in terms of the need to evolve design education and institutes.

1.1 What is Ethical Design and Why is it Necessary?

Clothes that appropriate Indigenous patterns (Joseph, 2020), media that frames black protesters as thugs (Kilgo, 2020), the automatic soap dispensers that do not read dark skin tones (Goethe, 2019), the spaces that overlook those with different abilities (stopgap, n.d.), Chinese take-out containers that use stereotypical typefaces (Martin, 2020) - intentional or not, these are all examples of design decisions that support the continuance of xenophobia, micro and macro aggressions, and power inequities. These "mistakes" in design interpretation continue to this day despite all the efforts that have been made to ensure more equitable practices.

The architect Louis H. Sullivan famously stated in "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered", published in *Lippincott* magazine in 1896: "form ever follows function. This is the law". The form follows function debate has been an ongoing paradigm in both the public and disciplinary realms. However, if design directly affects society and the environment, then this equation is incomplete without consideration of societal values such as equity and justice. This is echoed by Equity Designer Antionette Caroll who believes that socially responsible values should be the main catalyst for any project and calls for designers to ask themselves "am I designing a better world?" before engaging in any design project (Carroll, 2017). Ethical Design puts people and the environment first and recognizes the need for multiple voices at the table, especially those whose lived experience holds the greatest expertise.

2 What is Good Design and What Makes a Designer Good?

With forty-five years of collective experience as both practicing designers and educators, the DM2020 team has noticed a prescriptive pathway for becoming a professional and practicing designer. It starts typically with a child or youth who likes to draw and/or build things, demonstrates creativity and talent, and is encouraged to pursue the arts. However, one often hears stereotypical tropes on the economical differences between creative disciplines that are intended to discourage a career in fine arts in favour of say, architecture or engineering. With respect to an education in design, the typical process for entrance to a post-secondary program includes the highly regarded portfolio of creative materials that can demonstrate stellar creative thinking, making, and technical skills. In addition, potential students need to meet requirements from their formal education in terms of their grade point average (GPA). Once enrolled they are taught critical thinking, aesthetics, sustainability, craft, and historically grounded and universally accepted principles of design. They are also introduced to award-winning "star" designers, thereby framing who is a successful designer and what is excellence in design. Their goals greatly vary upon graduation but have been influenced by the education they have received. However, unlike other professions that directly affect the well-being of humans, designers do not have a code of conduct, such as the Hippocratic Oath taken by doctors, upon entering the field. Taylor and Dempsey touch on the need for Design Ethics tools as a way to hold designers accountable to values within the professional context and sees this happening on an individual basis within industry (Taylor & Dempsey, 2020). This might be more effective if done upon graduation so that design values are unified across the various practices and designers can move forward in industry with a collective understanding of ethical conduct.

Contemporary criticism of design education and practice sees that they are skewed to colonial understandings and "capitalist-imperial strategy" (Ansari et al., 2018). Art and design schools like OCAD U are exploring ways to decolonize the institution. However,

decolonization means different things to different communities thus making this a challenging task:

"For some, decolonizing is a project of de-centering the perspectives of settlers to emphasize those of the indigenous; others focus on decolonization as a process of recovery and the restoration of identity; still others use the term to critique Eurocentrism and modernism. All the concept's varied, interconnected meanings have different implications when considered in the context of design" (Khandwala, 2020).

A portfolio review and specific GPA is still required for admission into many North American art and design schools. If designers and educators globally reframe the act of design as a fundamentally ethical one, with responsibility to not only fulfilling individual creativity, but also community and societal needs, then the make-up of future design students and practitioners may be more empathic, inclusive, and diverse. However, this would demand a shift in higher education art and design admission requirements.

While in higher education design students working with human participants are required to first submit their study proposal for ethics approval before proceeding - for example interactive design may require user testing for interface prototypes, while industrial design may need participants to test an object's ergonomics. The Research Ethics Board (REB) in Canada, Institutional Review Board (IRB) in the US, protects both the institution, the researchers, and the participants by ensuring that the study will do no physical or emotional harm. However, once a study has REB/IRB approval there is no follow up or oversight to ensure that that the study is being conducted as claimed. This means that design researchers must hold themselves accountable during the project itself. Sieber and Tolich, authors of *Planning Ethically Responsible Research* (2013), explain how students need to be taught how to be ethical researchers - REB/IRB is not enough:

"[...] to overcome the limitations of this abstract, one-time review, researchers need to expand their knowledge of ethical considerations and to take more personal responsibility for their ethical conduct in the field. This responsibility must be planned for in advance, meaning that researchers need to be competent, ethical problem solvers" (Sieber & Tolich, 2013, p.xvi).

Educating students in becoming competent, ethical designers is an imperative aspect to curriculum and should not simply be a box that is checked off at the beginning of a project. Relying on ethics review boards endorses the notion that research needs ethical oversight rather than establishing what Borrett et al. describe as "a culture of ethical research" (2017, p.84). Helping students define their own ethical stance would not only be a response to making

social change happen, but also foster leadership and initiative in creating societal good.

Once in practice, some design professions are beholden to policies and procedures imposed by governments, industry, and others. Design practice is riddled with technical rules and regulations that include ethical practices, e.g. accessible documents, and this goes a ways to ensure that design solutions, responses, and outcomes are safe and viable. However, this is often done at the minimum level of implementation, e.g. building codes (Fry, 2012). This begs the question: is a good design something that meets the minimum requirements or is a good design socially responsible/ethical?

2.1 Evaluating Good Design

Design awards, typically judged by other designers, are evaluated on form and function. At the moment, many organizations have a separate award category delineating design for social good (Core 77, n.d.; IDA, n.d.; RGD, n.d.) while others allow for the public to vote on buildings that deserve accolades as a separate public choice award (OPN Architects, 2020). Although these efforts recognize Ethical Design the question remains: why is Ethical Design not seen as simply good design - in other words, the norm? If Ethical Design values are added into all award categories; including broader social consciousness and sustainability for both the physical and existential states, and the value-added outcomes for people and communities, how might this shift the awarded outcomes?

Deiter Rams, industrial designer and academic, a pioneer at the renowned company Braun, among other global product design giants, was a proponent of defining what "good design" should mean for designers. In the 1970's, he formulated a series of design principles to consider in the making of the world, including: good design is innovative; makes a product useful; is aesthetic, understandable, unobtrusive, while long-lasting, and environmentally-friendly. He summarized that "Good design is as little design as possible" (The Design Museum, n.d.). However, in this discourse on good design, the designer is still the arbiter of design ethics and value.

The Seven Principles of Universal Design (Mace et al, 1997) were formed by a working group pioneered by Ron Mace, architect, designer-educator at North Carolina State University. The working group was comprised of architects, product designers, engineers and environmental design researchers, proposing that the design of environments, products and communications was in need of greater accessibility that informed all design with lived-experience. The principles, including Equitable Use; Flexibility, and Simple and Intuitive Use; Perceptible Information and Tolerance for Error; Low Physical Effort and Size and Space for Approach and Use (CEUD, 2020) formed the criteria for design consideration, and for a frame-

work in educating young designers on the merit of greater inclusion in design thinking, and practice. They have remained a foundational concept for design over the last several decades and support good and better design practice based on lived experience informing design.

2.2 The Evolved Designer

DM2020 findings along with the above suggests that design education is in need of review, starting with the admissions process. Requirements for entry into post-secondary professional design programs would benefit from looking beyond "talent" found in portfolios to include "soft skills", such as volunteering, community work, and social collaboration experience. These could be seen as core Ethical Design values worthy of recognition for design school admission. A debate in some North American design schools is whether or not to abandon the portfolio interview requirement entirely which would be more inclusive (Burke & McManus, 2011). In other words, design programs could open their doors to a broader diversity of thinking and a new cohort of student.

Once inside the institution, how might curriculum support the shaping of the evolved designer? Initial ideas from DM 2020 findings suggest that program learning outcomes would need to expand to include:

- empathic awareness,
- leveraging assets in other people,
- negotiation skills,
- outreach and engagement,
- community feedback,
- cultural and community exchange.

While some of this is embedded in existing programs around the globe, the prime weight of design program outcomes has been on the technical and creative expression in line with perceived industry career goals and other historically defined characteristics of a design professional - form and function. By including the soft skills from the list above into curriculum students may become leaders in the social revolution and education would lead industry and government, not the other way around. However, before these can be effectively implemented and included into curriculum, deep investigation into existing Ethical Design practices and precedents needs to occur - learning from the experts.

3 Ethical Design Practices and Precedents for Change

There are many papers, books, organizations, institutions, and individuals that are actively engaged in disrupting all areas of the design profession and education to shift existing systemic power dynamics and to encourage social justice within the field. The resources below demonstrate the many varied precedents, practices, terms, guidelines, and models for Ethical Design and the overlap happening amongst the various organizations. This list is in no way

exhaustive but was compiled to demonstrate the breadth of effort within the field.

- Equity Design - Equity Design Collaborative was organized in 2017 to use design tactics to "subvert exploitative power dynamics" (Equity Design Collaborative, n.d.). Systems of oppression are outcomes of design processes and can be redesigned by disrupting dominant white cultural perspectives. The organization Equity by Design (EQxD) calls for more equitable ways in design practices to improve "the human condition and quality of life for everyone" (EQxD, n.d.). In her Ted Talk from 2019, Carroll explains how Equity Design builds upon existing resources to transform from within through a collaborative process of iteration, making, and testing. Because this process is well established within the field, Caroll believes that Equity Design should not be seen as disruptive, but the norm.
- Socio-Economic Practices - The Social Economic Environmental Design Network (SEED Network) proposes Public Interest Design as a method for more inclusive community design practices. SEED Network "provides a protocol to help guide, document, evaluate, and communicate the social, economic, and environmental outcomes of design projects" (SEED Network, n.d.). Their book, *Public Interest Design Practice Guidebook*, elaborates on and provides methodologies and case studies for Public Interest Design (Abendroth & Bell, 2016). Triple Bottom Line (TBL) theory is a way for designers to think socially, environmentally, and economically about their work. TBL accounts for people, planet, and profits when considering the impact of their products and services (Savitz,2013).
- Disrupting Power Structures - Design As Protest (DAP) is an organization of "Anti-Racist designers dedicated to Design Justice in the built environment" (DAP, n.d.) and is a catalyst for individuals to participate in design activism. Their website also has a live, open-source Direct Action library with over 780 contributors. Digital Justice Lab is a Canadian organization that is focused on building alternative digital futures that are equitable by collaborating with technologists, community activists, and policymakers (Digital Justice Lab, n.d.). Sasha Costanza-Chock's *Design Justice* is an in-depth critique of design and a call to build "a world where many worlds fit; linked worlds of collective liberation and ecological sustainability" (Costanza-Chock, 2020, p.xvii).
- Inclusive Design/Accessible Design/Universal Design/Human-Centred Design - Inclusive Design Research Centre (IDRC) out of OCAD U is an international community working together to "proactively ensure that emerging technology and practices are designed inclusively" (IDRC, n.d.). Inclusive Design upholds the idea of designing with, not for - closing the gap between user and designer. Human-Centred Design focuses on the user and considers the entire product experience from the object(s)

to the packaging, marketing and distribution (Thomsen, 2013). Global design company IDEO has developed the Human-Centred Design Toolkit which is free and can be downloaded from their website (IDEO 2009).

- Decolonizing Design - Decolonizing Design group blog is a platform for discourse on the dismantling of colonial structures as a necessary course. They propose "the (re)design of institutions, design practices and design studies" (Decolonising Design, 2020). Decolonizing Design moves beyond the limited notion of human-centred design to include the ecosystem. Similarly, the Hanover Principles were developed by William McDonough Architects in 1992 and is a list articulating how humanity and nature need to support one another. Dori Tunstall, the first black female dean of a design program anywhere is the world, is decolonizing OCAD U's design program through focused equity hiring, supporting black youth and students (Lorenzo, 2020), and through robust cultural competency training for faculty.
- Sustainability and Environmental Justice - Landscape for Humanity (L4H), through the University of Oregon, supports social and environmental justice through landscape-based systems where "community and student engagement is central to the entire design and implementation process" (Landscape 4 Humanity).
- Ethical Design - *Ethics in Design and Communication* is a collection of essays edited by Laura Scherling and Andrew DeRosa, which discusses the complexity of Ethical Design within a capitalist structure. In her forward, Joanna Drucker asks "If we perform "ethical work" while continuing to practice and live within the very systems that perpetuate the abuse we protest, then how does this amount to an ethical agenda?" (Drucker, 2020, p. xiv).

What is consistent with all of the above is the idea that design needs to change - that design has been involved and continues to uphold systems of oppression and inequity. They all argue for providing platforms for voices that have been silenced in the past and they all offer strategies for how to move forward and evolve what design is and can be. What the above list also demonstrates is how these efforts to create ethical standards are fragmented — the complex plurality of the terms and theories make it difficult to pin down and teach effectively. What if all of these theories, strategies, and platforms are combined in order to find ways to deliver them to design students and studios in an accessible and actionable way?

4 DM2020 Study and the Creative Practice as Protest Youth Workshop

The focus of DM2020 is on spaces and how people make changes to create places for their communities to thrive. Through narrative inquiry the project is collecting stories of placemaking projects that occurred from the bottom up through proper protocols or guerrilla actions. These efforts hold valuable lessons for professional designers in terms of how to make sustainable places within neighbourhoods through ethical co-design practices. Inclusive placemaking happens from the inside and works out - it comes from the people who live, work, and play in those places. It is what the design field refers to as co-design - "working with, not for". When Placemaking is a top-down process it is less sustainable (McCreedy et al).

These stories and others collected from panel discussions and community forums are the main points of data that are being analysed for the DM2020 study. They have, so far, confirmed our theories about gaps in practice and pedagogy in terms of Ethical Design, and brought into focus the need to involve Ethical Design as an ethos for the Creative Practice as Protest (CPP) Youth Workshop.

Fig. 2: *Left: The Creative Practice as Protest logo. Right: networking and having a snack during a break at the Workshop (images by research team).*

The research team worked with social justice practitioners, community leaders, and community members to develop learning opportunities for youth participants that addressed the gaps discovered in Ethical Design pedagogy from data analysis (fig.3). The Workshop aimed to demonstrate Ethical Design practices that heard multiple voices and demonstrated ways that youth can make change happen within communities that they may or may not be a part of. Colloqate, a Design Justice organization out of New Orleans involved in activating and advocating for equitable and just spaces partnered with the DM2020 team for the workshop. Colloqate's founder Bryan C. Lee Jr. challenged the youth in the morning session with ideas on power, inequity, and racism which helped inform their design decisions in the afternoon session where youth participants worked on and presented placemaking ideas with peers, community members, and mentors (fig.4).

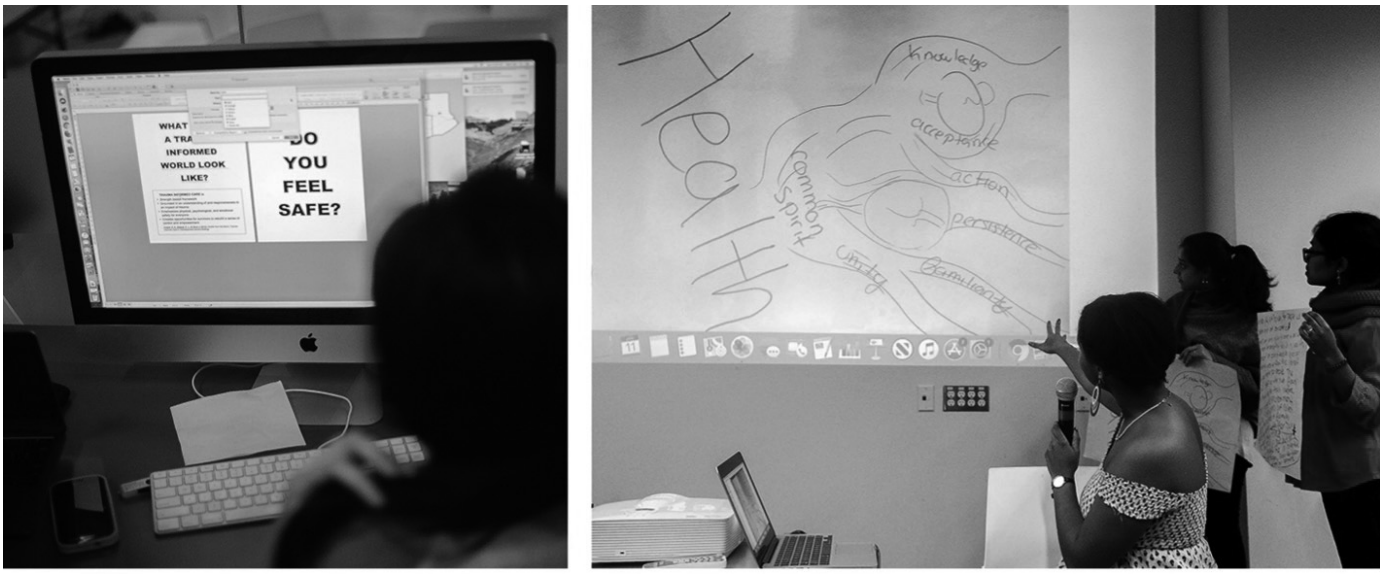

Fig. 3: . *Youth participants working on and presenting their ideas at the Workshop. Photos by: Nick Sager.*

DM2020 is still in-progress. The pandemic has slowed down the course of action. The forums must pivot to online platforms and will need to navigate alternative methods for creating a remote environment that allows for equitable exchange of ideas. Since the beginning of the study over 100 participants have been involved. The outcome of the study has shifted many times as input is gathered. One aspect to the outcome may be a tool or resource for individuals and communities looking for placemaking tactics. A viable outcome that has begun development, as this paper identifies, is to create a framework for the integration of Ethical Design into pedagogy - putting theory to practice.

5 Modelling Ethical Practices in Design Pedagogy

In Goodman, Dong, and Langdo's study from 2006, when asked why a designer or company was not involved in inclusive design the most frequent answer was being "not aware" or they thought that inclusive design was "too hard to implement" (McAdams & Kostovich, 2011, p.29). Although educational institutions are very aware of the need for Ethical Design, the time, money, logistics, bureaucracy, and perceived complexity of implementation can be a deterrent to moving forward. Some privately funded institutions in the US have some incredible programs that support Ethical Design education. MIT Community Innovators Lab (CoLab), for example, is a centre for planning and development which involves students, faculty, external experts, and community members to develop and implement "inclusive economic development that is environmentally sustainable, socially just, and deeply democratic" (MIT CoLab, n.d.). CoLab's process mirrors many Ethical Design demands and protocols such as the inclusion of systemically excluded voices, and economic democracy with the goal of sustainable outcomes for citizens and the environment. In comparison, state schools and public institutions are less able to support programs such as these due to limited resources.

Additionally, higher education design programs can look to Ethical Design organizations such as the one's mentioned earlier for insight into pedagogical strategies. Caroll's organization Creative Reaction Lab, which is educating Black and Latinx youth to become "Redesigners for Justice", supports the education of youth in Ethical Design practices through their Equity-Centered Community Design approach. Colloqate, the DM2020 CPP Youth Workshop partner, is another organization that can be learned from: "for nearly every injustice there is an architecture built to sustain and perpetuate it" (Colloqate, n.d.). Colloqate runs workshop and engages in projects with community members to make environmental change happen. Their approach is to challenge power structures and make more equitable places for people to live.

DM2020 research team and authors of this paper have been developing and evolving Ethical Design curriculum for years. OCAD U instructor/professor Giraudy has worked with students and community members on inclusive placemaking and wayfinding projects with community housing and health care facilities. She also has students build spaces that account for specific needs of a family member. While holding the role of Vice President of Registered Graphic Designer (RGD)'s Design Education Committee, van Kampen developed the nation-wide Designathon (inspired by Vicky Meloney's Designathon from Kutztown University) where graphic design students, design mentors, and non-profits partner up and complete a project within a 12-hour time frame. In these examples, students are working directly with the folks that will be affected by the outcomes - placing them into real situations, not hypothetical, where they must listen, share, and engage with others. These efforts are in no way unique, as many faculty are making similar opportunities within their courses. However, in many cases, these efforts are done on an individual level rather than holistically or throughout the department. Ethical Design needs to be embedded throughout the curriculum, not just housed under one social design course, in a smattering of classes, or through a workshop as this inculcates in learners that it is a choice, that it is optional. Ethical Design should simply be Design if human and environmental well-being is to be achieved.

6 Conclusion

When asked what a designer is, the most common answer is "problem solver". This claim is outdated, egocentric, and misleading. Designers are part of a diverse team that work together to address the needs of a community. By claiming that a designer can solve problems continues a hegemonic notion of design practice. As Papanek warned in 1971 designers may develop a solution that immediately appears to fix the problem. However, after a period of time the people for whom the solution was designed "realize quickly that, ... their 'solution' has resulted in twenty or thirty new problems" (Papanek, 1971, p.85). In other words, the design is not sustainable.

Ethical Design is happening both professionally and institutionally despite what some scholars, such as Margolin and Margolin, discuss. For them, in terms of "how design for social need might be commissioned, supported, and implemented, little has been accomplished" (Margolin & Margolin, 2002, p.24). It may feel as though little has been done simply due to how deeply embedded and systemically ingrained these issues are in our society - what some might call a wicked problem (Cooper, 2016). The fragmentation of the various theories along with economic and other barriers of access complicate the ability for institutions to embed these ideas into curriculum in a cohenrent way. DM2020 have recogniozed a need to develop an Ethical Design framework that will aid in this process. As well, because the work of designers, both student and professional, directly impacts society and the environment there needs to be a way to hold them accountable for the decisions that they make and the work they produce. Even the design professions that do have codes of conduct, such as architecture, tend to be rooted in the technical aspects of the profession. Ammending these to include values that uphold an Ethical Design framework may go a long way in reframing the form over fuction argument and normalizing Ethical Design as simply design.

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Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge funding by Social Sciences and Humanities Council, Canada under the Partnership Engage Grant (2019). Expression of thanks goes out to research partners Colloqate Design, USA, and Graduate Research Assistant, Lena Phillips, MSc. A final thanks is in order for the tremendous input and insight of the diverse local communities across the City of Toronto that agreed to participate in this design research.