Design thinking is transforming business as we know it.

Meta Thinking: Disruption and Transformation

Design is about change. During this time of unprecedented change, Art Center continues to develop the creative talent that will drive the future of human endeavors. Creative thought and design leadership is at the foundation of everything an Art Center education strives to achieve. Through art and design, Art Center continues to contribute to positive change in the human condition.

DOT is one element in a continuing dialogue between artists and designers and the education of future creative individuals. Our flagship publication aims to bring sensitive thought and valuable discourse to the state of art and design.

In DOT 17, we examine the ongoing transformation and growing influence of design and design thinking in the larger world, whether it is in healthcare, education and politics, the training of tomorrow’s business leaders, or the designer’s role in creating branded experiences. We look at the changes that are influencing ideas as well as how ideas influence change. I think Steve Jobs got it right when he said that “design is not just what it looks like and feels like—design is how it works.” The recognition that the design thinking process can play a critical role in the development and creation of successful products and services is no longer lost on a growing number of industries. In fact, some might argue that design thinking is transforming business as we know it.

In the same vein, Edward de Bono has said, “We need perceptual thinking, creative thinking and design thinking; none of these are part of our traditional systems of logic and analysis in business.” Making sense of this requires greater skill and clarity of thought from our creative disciplines. “Meta thinking” informs what we are looking at and where we find relevance and purpose in what we make. It is the translation of sometimes extremely complex matters into creative and relevant design.

Today, the ability of artists and designers to contribute to a positive change in our future is greater than at any point in our history. We live in an era of information overload, and the demand for highly skilled creative individuals who can evaluate diverse and large amounts of information, utilize new tools and drive valuable, creative products is increasing. Our futures will not be those of our fathers, but will be for those capable of understanding the opportunities inherent in the transformations of culture through art and design. An Art Center education has consistently distinguished its alumni in a variety of creative careers through a deep understanding of the relationship between creativity and the application of innovative thought.

Institutions, businesses and nations are being transformed by change in 2009, and Art Center is also embarking on new directions. We say farewell and extend our collective gratitude to Richard Koshalek, President of Art Center during the past ten years, and thank him for his endless energy, vision and leadership. His “Universe of Possibilities” has guided the College during this time and has outlined a bold future for art and design education in the global environment. As the College moves into the future, we continue to look forward to new directions with optimism and the confidence that Art Center will remain at the forefront of art and design education.
Today Washing Machines, Tomorrow Democracy: Design Thinking Tackles the Universe

By Mike Winder

What is good design? Is it the form-fitting shape of a Herman Miller Aeron chair? The functional minimalism of the Google homepage? Would you expect to find sophisticated design in your laundry room? Or in the procedures a nurse follows when administering medication to patients? Can good design reinvigorate education? Or help government live up to its ideals?

An expectation of quality design has become so omnipresent in our society that many businesses and organizations, from appliance manufacturers to the service sector, are now seeking the expertise of designers and adopting design thinking—the human-centric methodology used to create stylish, functional and profitable products—to make their brands and services stand apart.

Design thinking entails research, direct observation, brainstorming, experimentation, prototyping, and always keeping the needs, concerns and desires of the end user in mind. It’s a far cry from the number crunching and analytics that have traditionally driven product research, and it signals a dramatic shift for the role of designers in an organization. No longer are designers brought in at the last minute to simply add a new façade to a pre-existing product or create an eye-catching logo. Companies that embrace design thinking bring the unique perspectives and insights of their designers into a project from the earliest stages of development.

“The biggest benefit that can come from design thinking is a new product category,” said Frank Tyneski, executive director of the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA), an organization whose mission is to provide a voice for the industrial design profession and to advance the quality and positive impact of design. “Design thinking asks, ‘How are we going to add another wing to this building? Where are we going to get our growth? Where are we taking this enterprise?’”

Tyneski’s background as a designer—for General Motors, Fisher Price, Motorola, RIM Blackberry and Kyocera—made him a particularly appealing candidate to head up IDSA when they were looking for new leadership in 2007. Tyneski called design thinking “a very big word with many definitions” but said it essentially describes the trend of businesses calling upon designers’ creative capacities not just for ornamental or mechanical solutions, but also to improve processes, workflow and efficiencies.

INNOVATE, ACCELERATE, REPEAT

From Procter & Gamble to Hewlett-Packard, 3M to General Electric, there are numerous examples from the last five to ten years of commercial enterprises adapting design thinking as part of a larger innovation strategy. But one company that took everybody by surprise with its design bravado was global appliances manufacturer Whirlpool. Back in 1995, Whirlpool’s upper executives realized their company needed a strong jolt of innovation and decided to take design seriously. “Design is never an island. It must be part of a broader strategy,” said Charles L. Jones, Whirlpool’s vice president of Global Product Consumer Design. Jones, who holds degrees both in design and engineering, was wooed away from Xerox to head up Whirlpool’s advanced products department in 1995. According to Jones, at that time Whirlpool executives intuitively understood the difference that design could have on their company, but they couldn’t make it operational.

Four years later, Jones became the head of the company’s design organization and soon launched Whirlpool’s corporate innovation initiative. “We wanted to accelerate innovation by a multiple of ten or twenty times,” said Jones of the initiative. “The only way we could do that was to unleash the potential of every Whirlpool employee.” Working closely with renowned business strategist and author Gary Hamel, Jones created a global innovation council and a mentoring process with curriculum to teach individuals—whether they’re in finance, design or engineering—the tools and processes of innovation. “We approach innovation like a venture capitalist,” explained Jones.

“Design is never an island. It must be part of a broader strategy.”
— Charles L. Jones

Vice President of Global Product Consumer Design, Whirlpool

Researcher Mike Edwards tests a “glowball” at SMALLab in New York City. Participants use these wireless controllers to build scenarios and interact with each other as well as digital content. SMALLab’s mashing of the real and virtual turns education into an ethereal experience and illustrates how design thinking is transforming our world.

(continued)
Jones. “We’ll make seed money available to anybody in the organization who has a great idea.” Employees with a realistic plan are given 100 days to develop their idea into a product, service or feature. Jones pointed to this “democratization of innovation” as an important step that helped Whirlpool “unlock its creative spirit.”

As an example of the opportunities born from the spirit of design thinking, Jones pointed to the Duet, Whirlpool’s futuristic-looking front-loading washer/dryer pair that debuted in 2001. According to Jones, the Duet’s success overturned a number of established orthodoxies, including the notion that consumers won’t pay more than $800 for a washing machine (it debuted at $1,299 and demand outpaced supply) and the idea that consumers don’t care whether a washer and dryer match (as of 2008, the washer/dryer match rate across all Whirlpool brands exceeds 98 percent). With that kind of success, it’s hard to believe the Duet nearly faced the chopping block. When conducting early product research, Whirlpool found that 30 percent of consumers outright rejected the Duet—a percentage that typically dooms a product. “However, the other 70 percent didn’t just like the Duet, they were in love with it,” said Jones, who felt so strongly about the product’s viability that he put his job on the line to defend it. “Sometimes design thinking will only take you so far, and then you have to rely on good-old-fashioned stubbornness.”

One man with his finger on the pulse of innovation is BusinessWeek Editor and New School Professor Bruce Nussbaum, who was named one of the 40 most powerful people in design by I.D. Magazine in 2005 and whose widely-read blog, “Nussbaum on Design,” covers the emergent disciplines of innovation and design thinking. “Business culture is becoming a convert to design culture, and I think the next challenge is civic culture,” said Nussbaum. “We have to get design thinking into health and education and, ultimately, politics.” And while there’s still a great deal of work to do, Nussbaum said he sees many changes taking place in the healthcare industry, and a larger shift by designers from designing medical instruments to redesigning an entire organization. “There is an enormous amount of innovation going on,” said Nussbaum. “Most of the large, advanced hospitals are hiring designers now to redesign the patient-doctor experience as well as the physical spaces.”

**TAKING TWO AND DESIGN ME IN THE MORNING**

Nussbaum pointed to “The Power of Innovation,” a 2006 white paper that innovation strategy firm Doblin compiled for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Foundation as particularly important research into how design thinking can transform healthcare. According to the paper, the purpose of the project was to “discover when, where and how innovation was taking place in health care” and to “identify organizations that were developing model innovation processes.”

One organization highlighted in the paper is Oakland, CA-based Kaiser Permanente (KP), the nation’s largest not-for-profit health plan. Over the last six years, KP has built what it calls an “infrastructure of innovation” that embraces design thinking as a tool for finding solutions. This infrastructure includes the creation in 2005 of the Innovation Consultancy, a partnership with design consultancy firm IDEO that researches, brainstorms and prototypes solutions; the Garfield Innovation Center in 2006, a hands-on mock hospital environment; and the Innovation Learning Network, also in 2006, a group that helps internal and external health care organizations share solutions with one another.

As proof that society’s understanding of design thinking continues to evolve, the heads of these groups come not from design firms, but from healthcare and business administration backgrounds.

Chris McCarthy, director of the Innovation Learning Network, pointed to a medication administration issue that the Innovation Consultancy tackled. Helping with this project was Art Center alumna Laura Janisse (’07), a then-graduate student in the Media Design program who was interning at the Consultancy. “The health care field has so much potential for designers to make an impact,” said Janisse, whose thesis project “Embedded: Improving Post-Operative Patient Care” researched how users interact with the medical unit communicated and exchanged information relating to medication and patient safety. And in the medical field, good design could actually translate to lives saved. According to McCarthy, medication administration errors account for 7,000 deaths a year in the United States. In 2007, when the Innovation Consultancy first sought to develop a creative solution to this issue, they ended up speaking with those most familiar with the problem: nurses. “When we asked the nurses to explain the problem, they couldn’t articulate it,” said McCarthy. To find the truth, the Innovation Consultancy took the unconventional approach of asking nurses to literally draw how the experience of administering medication made them feel. “Many drew stick figures with hair on fire,” said McCarthy. “They looked frazzled, which indicated the nurses were not expressing how they were truly feeling.” By asking them to explain their drawings, many nurses finally voiced their concerns: administering medication was “chaotic,” “unclear” or “full of interruptions.”

Armed with a better understanding of the issue, the consultancy brought a group of 70 people—doctors, nurses, patients and outside experts—to the Garfield Center for two days. After hours of brainstorming, the group came up with 15 promising ideas that were field tested at Kaiser Permanente hospitals. After six weeks of testing, two solutions emerged that have been implemented in all Kaiser hospitals and are collectively referred to as KP MedRite. Nurses administering medication now wear a brightly colored sash that clearly indicates they’re passing medications. Also, when nurses administer medication, they enter a “sacred zone,” marked either by red industrial tape, or at some hospitals, red-colored tiles. “We’ve seen a remarkable increase in reliability in delivering medications into our system, as well as a reduction in the interrupts of nurses caused by outside influences,” said McCarthy. **LEARNING GETS ITS GAME ON**

So where does design thinking go from here? Education might be the next logical frontier. A number of design-inspired schools are opening up throughout the nation. The Design High School in Los Angeles, a partnership between Art Center and the Charter Development Alliance, opened in September 2007 with a mission of teaching 9-12th graders from underserved areas of the city how to think like a
designer by integrating the concepts and practice of design into a college-preparatory and career-oriented curriculum. In late 2007, Parsons, The New School for Design and the nonprofit organization Games for Change launched PETLab (Prototyping, Evaluating, Teaching and Learning Laboratory), with funding from the MacArthur Foundation’s Digital Media Learning Initiative, examines teaching tools. This project, which plans to open Quest to Play, also part of Parson’s, will use game design and design thinking to foster teamwork and develop complex problem-solving skills, participants at SMALLab’s state-of-the-art learning environment used wireless controllers, aka “glowballs,” and full body movements to interact with each other and digital content. Or it could take the form of a historically-charged episode of “The Amazing Race,” as was the case with RE:Activism, a real-world game developed by PETLab that had players racing through neighborhoods of New York City.

Along similar lines, in the Fall of 2009, the New York–based nonprofit Institute of Play, also part of Parson’s, plans to open Quest to Learn, a proposed 6-12th grade public school that will use game design and game-inspired methods as teaching tools. This project, a partnership with New Visions for Public Schools and also funded by the MacArthur Foundation’s Digital Media Learning Initiative, examines the intersection between the way games work and the way learning works. “We’re asking the question of what teaching in the 21st century will look like,” said Katie Salen, director of the Institute. “We don’t think it’s going to look the way it does today, which is based on an industrial revolution model.” Salen points out that in schools today, every student needs to know the same amount of information, and there’s a very direct instruction model, even when students are doing project-based work. Salen proposes that learning to think like a game designer—in collaborative, interdisciplinary teams that can leverage individuals’ expertise—will be a powerful way to think about the world in the 21st century.

So what will education of the future look like? Judging from the work being done at SMALLab (Situated Multimedia Art Learning Lab), a collaboration between the Institute of Play and Arizona State University’s K-12 Embodied Media and Learning Group, it could look like a scene from the next Star Trek film. In one experiment designed to foster teamwork and develop complex problem-solving skills, participants at SMALLab’s state-of-the-art learning environment used wireless controllers, aka “glowballs,” and full body movements to interact with each other and digital content. Or it could take the form of a historically-charged episode of “The Amazing Race,” as was the case with RE:Activism, a real-world game developed by PETLab that had players racing through neighborhoods of New York City. Players received directions via cell phone text messages that helped them trace the history of riots, protests and other political episodes in the history of the metropolis. Contestants solved puzzles and faced site-specific challenges, all in the hopes of becoming the most active activists.

REMAKING A MORE PERFECT UNION

Elements of design thinking have also found their way onto the political circuit. Barack Obama’s success in winning the election, thanks in part to online fundraising and social networking know-how, proved that politics and government are open to innovative tinkering and design improvements. Or at least that’s the hope of Dr. Elizabeth “Dori” Tunstall, an associate professor of Design Anthropology at the University of Illinois at Chicago, who in November 2008 organized a U.S. National Design Policy Summit, an intense two-day workshop that focused on creating an actionable agenda of U.S. Design policy for economic competitiveness and democratic governance.

With a desire to reestablish the American Design Council that existed between 1972 and 1981, Tunstall brought together over 20 individuals from both government and the design world, including Frank Tyneski of IDSA, Richard Greff, the executive director of the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) and Clark Wilson, an urban designer for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, to compile a list of over 250 proposals for how design can help shape a brighter future for the United States. The next major step is to present these proposals to the Obama administration. “The timing of the summit was very intentional,” said Tunstall, who admitted that some major rethinking would have had to take place had the outcome of the November election been any different. But Obama’s win isn’t the sole factor that’s making this kind of assembly a reality today, says Tunstall. Globalization and the rise of digitalization are forcing designers to become more strategic in order to compete, and design organizations have been working hard for the past ten years to truly articulate their strategic value.

And in today’s turbulent economic climate, that articulation becomes more important every day. Tyneski pointed out that today’s designers have one very big reason to shift their focus from object design to more strategy-oriented design thinking—design itself is at risk of becoming outsourced. Tyneski explained that global competition for price has become so fierce that many Asian manufacturers are now offering design for free to U.S. companies. “For example, you can send them a request for an electronic device for the 18- to 25-year-old market, and they’ll echo back to you 25 to 30 renderings by the end of the week. And they won’t cost you anything” said Tyneski. “The catch is that if you pick one of their designs, you have to build it there.” Meaning that in the not-too-distant future, design thinking may become less a means of leverage and more a tool for survival. ●
Think business school, and Excel spreadsheets, pie charts and an endless stream of case studies probably spring to mind. In this age of sleek hybrid cars and iPhones, however, a small but growing group of business schools are rethinking their curricula and seeking to instill in their students a more design-driven approach to problem solving—one that might leave previous MBA generations scratching their heads.

Yet it is this design-driven approach—which favors ideation, rapid prototyping, user insight and testing—that is increasingly touted as the surest path to the holy grail of business success: profits. Companies from a wide variety of industries increasingly realize they must forge new ground to stand out in this international and highly competitive business landscape (known as “innovate or die” in some circles). These firms are turning to the design thinking process to burnish their products’ functionality, their company’s image, and ultimately, their bottom lines. Business schools, in turn, are responding to industry demand by encouraging and cultivating unconventional approaches to familiar quandaries through courses in design thinking and innovation, both at the MBA and executive education levels. These programs seek to sensitize business leaders to the value of design methodology as a powerful business strategy. As this trend takes hold, let us take a moment to consider a few of the MBA programs that have added design thinking as a component of their curricula.
RETHINKING THE MBA

The economist Richard Florida has argued that in today’s creative economy, the MBA program needs an overhaul. The typical business school model of teaching hasn’t changed in decades, even as the business environment around it has become decidedly global and dynamic. Florida suggests that business schools need to evolve if an MBA is to effectively prepare the business leaders of tomorrow.

Design thinking seeks to fill part of the void, by giving students a new arrow in their quivers. Although design thinking contrasts sharply and may sometimes be at odds with the standard methodology taught at business schools, its potential benefits are difficult to ignore. For example, business schools often rely on the case study method, which certainly can be a valuable tool, but has also drawn criticism. Designer Brian Collins has pointed out that the case study method focuses on the past, and “many people in business school treat the past as a weight, rather than as an engine to create something.” Designers, on the other hand, tend to look at the past not as a weight, but as a fuel for creating new options.

MBA PROGRAMS TAKING THE LEAD

One of the first MBA programs to recognize the value of design thinking is INSEAD, a leading European business school based in Fontainebleau, France and Singapore. As featured in DOT 14, INSEAD formed an ongoing partnership with Art Center College of Design in 2005 to bring students from both schools together to develop new product ideas in an MBA course called “Strategies for Product and Service Development,” taught by INSEAD Professor Manual Sosa. According to Art Center’s Karen Hofmann, who currently oversees the partnership, this mutual exchange benefits MBA students, who discover the designer’s holistic approach to problem solving, while Art Center students gain through exposure to the fundamentals of business management. Art Center students also take additional MBA courses in marketing, entrepreneurship, and media management subjects.

Another difference between traditional business school curricula and the design approach is that business schools typically have been organized into silos of knowledge, with marketing, finance and operations as distinct disciplines with little or no overlap. The design thinking approach encourages collaboration across disciplines, cultivating in students the ability to view problems from various angles, and, as Kotchka observed, “to come up with more questions and bigger solutions.”

A very powerful and breakthrough idea for those who innovation and strategy at Procter & Gamble, “This is may not have been on anyone’s mind at the outset. The design approach would have making by analyzing the pros and cons of two choices Similarly, business students traditionally learn decision—mentals of business management. Art Center students mentoring and media management subjects.

Another business school at the vanguard of the trend towards design thinking is the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. Through its Business Design initiative, now in its third year, MBA students learn design thinking through elective courses, workshops and summer fellowships offered in its Designworks lab. “Business is a bit stuck in North America,” said Heather Fraser, an adjunct professor of Business Design and director of the Designworks program. “There are many challenges in finding new growth opportunities and breaking out of the rigid way of doing things.” She explained that the impetus for Designworks came from a desire to reconsider the fundamental business model to create a competitive advantage. “We view design in terms of strategic business modeling, not just the creation of an object or service. We see how far we can push design thinking to create consumer and enterprise value, and to give more insight, creativity and agility into the way business is done.”

Like INSEAD, Rotman partners with a design school in the development of its design thinking courses—in this case, Ontario College of Art & Design. The flagship course, “Design Practicum,” pairs MBA students with graduate industrial design students to develop solutions for real-world clients from a range of industries, including technology, health care and packaged goods. The course, led by Fraser, stresses design thinking principles such as research, consumer understanding, concept development, prototyping, role-playing and business model visualization. Moreover, the course emphasizes careful strategic thinking on “how to deliver solutions to the marketplace,” according to Fraser.

In healthcare, for example, students have tackled subjects from diabetic insulin pumps and chronic pain management to the redesign of the entire hospital experience. “The whole equation gets revisited, which is why the design of the model is actually the trump card to the design of the object itself,” she said.

Rotman’s emphasis on design is the brainchild of Dean Roger Martin, a leading proponent of design thinking in business schools. This approach complements the school’s guiding philosophy promoting integrative thinking—a cross-disciplinary approach that considers opposing models during the decision-making process. Rotman’s focus on design has become a selling point for the school in general, having attracted about 20 percent of the current MBA class, many of whom might not have otherwise applied to the program. To date, Rotman has completed 22 projects, and trained 100 students and about 700 executives in design thinking.

Rotman’s student profile is also shifting. Previously, Rotman students were largely Canadian and came mostly from financial services, investment banking and consulting. Today, half the students are international, and a much smaller percentage are interested in traditional, Canadian-based industries. Instead, more are showing interest in innovation, entrepreneurship and business design. An increasing number of designers are also enrolling in the MBA program to round out their skills and master the business process.

Stanford Business School harnesses the resources of the university’s Hasso Plattner Institute of Design (other—wise known as the d.school) to offer MBA students courses in design thinking. The d.school, which opened in 2005, is a multidisciplinary center of innovation where “big problems are solved,” to quote IDEO’s David Kelley,
who heads the program. Since the d.school is open to graduate students of all disciplines, MBA students may find themselves sitting next to students in the design, medical, engineering, humanities and computer science fields. Courses are taught by an equally diverse assortment of faculty members, reflecting the collaborative philosophy of the program.

Especially popular among MBA students are d.school courses like “Entrepreneurial Design for Extreme Affordability,” in which multidisciplinary teams of students design low-cost products for use in developing countries. The course provides a framework in design thinking, activating a “laser-sharp focus on the essential needs of the user,” according to instructor Jim Patell, a management professor at the business school. Several for-profit and nonprofit social ventures have resulted from these class projects, including the nonprofit Embrace, which produces a cost-effective incubator device for use in rural health care centers or homes, and D.light Design, which has developed a cost-effective incubator device for use in rural health care centers or homes, and D.light Design, which has sold thousands of affordable solar-rechargeable LED lights for use in Africa and Asia.

With the INSEAD, Rotman and Stanford programs, the interaction between MBA and design students can occasionally produce some tensions and initial resistance, as companies increasingly recognize the importance of design as a strategic tool. Its value in this regard can only be heightened in the current economic climate. As of now, the number of business schools adding design thinking to their curricula will continue to grow in the coming years, especially impressed with ESADE’s interest in creating a partnership between design and business education at all levels—from undergraduate courses through executive education. The idea of adding design thinking to the curriculum was “a natural next step,” said Fischer, especially in light of the growing number of companies recognizing its value. “We’re finding that some businesses that do this do very well, while those who ignore it do so at their peril.”

In addition to full-time MBA programs, design thinking has made its presence felt on the executive education circuit. The business schools at Rotman and Stanford both offer executive education workshops on design thinking, and the nonprofit Design Management Institute began offering professional-level seminars for small groups of CEOs and senior-level executives back in 2000 on myriad topics, such as design research, branding and the management of creative staff. This spring, a partnership between Art Center and ESADE, a leading international business school based in Barcelona, will launch executive modules on design thinking for senior-level executives. ESADE’s Colin McElwee explained the genesis of the program: “ESADE has always prided itself on being at the vanguard of change, and we wanted to work in an area that would drive more value, such as innovation.”

The five-day workshops will be led by Art Center faculty Nik Hafermaas, Karen Hofmann and Fridolin Beisert and will provide participants with a primer on how design can drive returns on innovation. Hafermaas, who developed the partnership with ESADE, said, “We have been especially impressed with ESADE’s interest in creating a partnership between design and business education at all levels—from undergraduate courses through executive education.” The program is a pilot for Art Center as well, which plans to develop executive education workshops for designers.

If the above examples are any indication, it appears that the number of business schools adding design thinking to their curricula will continue to grow in the coming years, especially among top-tier institutions. Schools that are not part of the joint program have shown a strong interest in taking the design courses as well. (The Kellogg MBA program itself offers an integrated design course, and, according to Fischer, design is very much a part of the marketing curricula.)

In many ways, MMM’s new emphasis on design represents a logical evolution. In the early 1990s, the program focused on total quality management, and slowly evolved to become more about the entire business organization. The idea of adding design thinking to the curriculum was “a natural next step,” said Fischer, especially in light of the growing number of companies recognizing its value. “We’re finding that some businesses that do this do very well, while those who ignore it do so at their peril.”

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The importance of a brand on a company’s bottom line almost goes without saying—a strong brand differentiates a product from its competition, builds customer loyalty and awareness, forms an emotional connection with the customer and, ultimately, enables the company to charge a premium.

Until relatively recently, brand development was left mostly to corporate marketing departments, with designers being brought in during the later stages to apply a pretty bow on top. However, as businesses increasingly discover the importance of design and design thinking in the innovation process, design firms are being called upon to develop or revamp brands from start to finish, while also applying them to various brand touch points—advertising, packaging, retail, online, even virtual. For many brands, the results of a design-centered approach have been staggering—think Apple, Jet Blue, Target and Nokia.

The designer’s role in creating branded experiences was recently explored during a panel discussion at the 2008 MOBIUS L.A./AIA Design Conference in Los Angeles. Entitled “Branded Architectures: Brand Slaves to Brand Stewards,” the panel was hosted by Art Center faculty member Sherry Hoffman and founder of (M)Arch., a collaboration of architects and creative marketing professionals in Santa Monica, and featured three leading voices on branding: Gensler’s Russell Banks, Imagination’s Eduardo Braniff, and Eight, Inc.’s Tim Kobe.

Among the issues discussed by the panelists were how to create effective brand experiences; using a multi-channel and multidisciplinary approach; the importance of authenticity in branding; and the brand as a physical destination. The following pages feature excerpts from the panel discussion.
“People look to be a part of something, and if a company can manifest the sensibility that connects people, it can be strong and deep. However, this must be earned and delivered on every day.”

— TIM KOBE

HOFFMAN: The design process can often differentiate one firm from another. Can you share a little bit of your design process with us, and maybe how that differentiates your practice?

KÖBE: It’s very difficult to take a brand and have it be something that it’s not. If it’s not being honest, it’s hard to be successful. If you look at Apple, many of the qualities we tried to bring to the retail space were extensions of what that culture inherently was before. We also look at opportunities to distinguish the experience. It’s about looking for opportunities to make something different. Finally, we have to make sure all these pieces lead to an emotional connection with people. If we’re not able to connect with people, everything else falls apart.

BRANIFF: We focus a great deal on working with the client to make sure they are aligned to make the project the best it possibly can be. In our niche of the world, there’s often this cry for revolutionizing the agency model. We’re trying to do that by revolutionizing the client side. I think Tim’s client roster is at the forefront of leading organizations, which begets incredible creativity. But I’m not going to lie to you, some of our clients are not revolutionary. So, we’re trying to create design thinking with our clients as part of our process.

BANKS: Because of the diversity of our projects, a collaborative dynamic has to happen. This idea is king, because the market puts a lot more demand on design right now. You can’t just do a great building and have it be a success—you have to look at it from many different points of view. Collaboration among different disciplines is very important to get all those perspectives working together to make something truly successful.

BRANIFF: That’s where strategy comes in very handy. That’s your touchstone. That’s how you can maintain a fluidity of collaboration.

HOFFMAN: Do you work with people like brand strategists who set the creative vision that all the designers follow?

KÖBE: No, it’s more collaborative. We try not to have any single voice drive it.

BANKS: The strategy isn’t necessarily setting the vision for a project. The strategy articulates what is of real value, what we’re trying to achieve and what we’re going to deliver. A vision can deliver this value and there can be many different visions. The strategy helps us understand the best ways to get there. When you’re justifying your design solutions, strategy is a way to sync up with the business goals and the objectives of your clients. When people talk about the brand gap, they’re talking about the gap between strategy and design.

BRANIFF: Unfortunately, strategy has become this loaded or dirty word. In some creative firms you get to sit at the pulpit of understanding the industry, the business or the consumer. What strategy is doing is simply putting out the proverbial box that we’re supposed to think outside of. I’m much more interested in leading teams who are thinking within a box, understanding the brand, what the consumer needs or wants, what the industry can bear and what the creative limit should be on a particular project. Strategy is simply putting the right

“Everyone thinks that virtual is like the Wild West, but I’m very keen on virtual becoming an important part of the brand equation, particularly when it comes to designing spaces and experiences.”

— EDUARDO BRANIFF

Whether it be in its advertising, design, interiors or architecture, Apple products make an emotional connection with the consumer by creating a human relationship with the brand. Pictured above is an Apple MiniStore interior, designed by Tim Kobe’s firm, Eight, Inc.

The Guinness Storehouse in Dublin, Ireland—a seven-story destination developed by Eduardo Braniff at Imagination—has become Ireland’s number one international visitor attraction by telling the story of the world famous beer through interactive exhibits, a tasting laboratory and branded memorabilia. Copyright: Imagination.
"Today, the architecture as brand model is becoming more and more obsolete, because there are now trends worldwide where people are coming into more self-sustainable lifestyles, where they can live, work and play within a certain vicinity."

— RUSSELL BANKS

parameters around the problem that you're trying to solve.

HOFFMAN: How do marketing and branding trends—consumer-driven content for example—affect design?

BRANIFF: At the end of the day, we still look for quality, but consumer-driven content is telling us that the turn-around time, the impact and the meaning of our work has to be much more fluid. You have to stand on great values and set your sights on something meaningful to the consumer and listen to them. It's about going from the independence of a particular channel to the inter-dependence of how your mobile phone can interact with your company blog or Web site. You've got to be listening and acting much faster.

KOBE: Being relevant is probably the most critical element to marketing these days. There's a general fatigue and almost a backlash from having to sort through too much content. By being intelligent about how and where information is conveyed and not over-saturating people's mind-space, you generate loyalty through respect for the audience.

AUDIENCE: All three of you invest a lot of time and energy into understanding your clients. Do you feel that upfront work builds a long-lasting relationship between you and the client?

KOBE: If you demonstrate a real understanding of someone's business and their brand, you can wield greater power when you're trying to sell ideas that are less traditional. If there's a trust there, it can result in a client going somewhere with you, versus constantly challenging you and wanting what's expected.

BRANIFF: At the end of the day, it's people, people, people. It's as simple as having a human relationship.

BANKS: It's like a marriage, up and down, and side-ways at times—but there's a certain trust in that.

HOFFMAN: What is the role of research in establishing this trust and understanding the business and the brand?

KOBE: It's huge. Our firm has 40 years in the business, particularly in workplace design, so we have a lot of research and market insight to bring to bear. It plays very heavily in the design process. In terms of branding, understanding the marketplace is critical. If you're trying to create an offering somewhere, you need to understand who you are up against and your options to what you're building.

BANKS: We do segmentation studies, both qualitative and quantitative, and we also have a strategic partnership with another firm whom we work with quite extensively on research. So it depends on the scale of the project. There's a certain amount of due diligence you can do without a huge investment to understand a marketplace. It's a scale game. Basing your decisions or ideas on research is critical, otherwise it's a game of "I like" or "I don't like," and that's a terrible way to design.

BRANIFF: We similarly rely on external research partners. We then complement that more formal process by giving each and every Imagination employee, of which there are about 350 worldwide, a very simple cheat sheet about subjects that are either of interest to them, relevant to the projects going through the company or to industries we're trying to court. One thing our clients are getting better at is actually placing value on the interpretation of that research, and how it impacts what they're doing.

BANKS: I think you're right. Research for research's sake doesn't get us anywhere. Research is another tool, an input to a bigger story, a larger discussion. And if you don't know what you're fishing for, that information is useless. I think of how Henry Ford asked people what they wanted and they said, "a faster horse." You have to have confidence in the relationship that allows you to say, "You know what? All of the information is telling us to try it there." That is where the fluidity and the more experiential stuff becomes exciting, because that is where you're pushing the limits of those boxes.

Russell Banks is the creative director at Gensler’s Brand Design group, which focuses on idea-driven design. His clients include CityCenter, Microsoft, The Beverly Hilton and American Express.

Eduardo Braniff is the global insight director for Imagination, an experiential design firm whose clients include Mazda, Guinness, Beer and Ford.

Tim Kobe is a founder and partner of Eight, Inc., an environmental design firm whose clients include Mazda, Guinness, Beer and Ford.

Sherry Hoffman is the co-founder of (M)Arch., a collaboration of architects and creative marketing professionals in Santa Monica. She teaches Branding Strategies at Art Center College of Design.

Visit artcenter.edu/dot to read more from the branding panel.

"Brand experience is about creating physical places where you can see, touch and sense the brand. It should be memorable and about creating stories.”

— EDUARDO BRANIFF
Design Thinking in a Global Economy

Design thinking is essentially a creative process for innovation or, as IDEO’s Tim Brown recently wrote in the Harvard Business Review, “thinking like a designer.” Designers have practiced the elements of design thinking for many years. What’s new is that businesses increasingly value this process as the key to innovation. Ten years ago, it was routine to say that businesses needed to understand design. But when Rotman School of Management Dean Roger Martin argues that “business people need to become designers,” we’ve entered a new paradigm.

One of the most noteworthy case studies of this new paradigm is Procter & Gamble. When A.G. Lafley became chairman and CEO in 2000, he immediately began to remake P&G as a design-driven company. Under the leadership of Claudia Kotchka, vice president of Innovation Design and Strategy, P&G created the “Innovation Gym,” where all employees took part in design thinking workshops created by IDEO. Kotchka said the workshops have not only dramatically improved innovation and profits, but employee morale and performance levels as well. At least three critical aspects of design thinking lead to innovation in today’s global economy. Designers are trained to think in holistic and integrative ways; they see the contingent parts of a problem within a larger system—which is crucial in our interdependent world. Additionally, few problems of significance can be addressed by a single discipline, and the team-based training of designers makes them particularly adept at the collaborative problem solving that designers’ “natural aptitude for empathy raises their currency in today’s creativity economy. Since the 1990s, businesses have increasingly turned to a more qualitative understanding in today’s creativity economy. Since the 1990s, businesses have increasingly turned to a more qualitative understanding of consumers’ emotional and experiential lives. Design thinking is a creative process for innovation, and as IDEO’s Tim Brown recently wrote in the Harvard Business Review, “thinking like a designer.” Designers have practiced the elements of design thinking for many years. What’s new is that businesses increasingly value this process as the key to innovation. Ten years ago, it was routine to say that businesses needed to understand design. But when Rotman School of Management Dean Roger Martin argues that “business people need to become designers,” we’ve entered a new paradigm.

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Art Center’s “Third Faculty”

Art Center has long prided itself on the rich artistic and intellectual environment it offers its students, and the College’s “third faculty” is one of the ways it continues to do so. While on-campus instructors are considered Art Center’s first faculty, and the alumni who provide opportunities and advisement are the second, the third faculty consists of the wide array of professionals who come to campus for lectures, conferences and other events. Not only do these speakers hail from domains as diverse as business, science, journalism and more, they are also at the top of their fields. The result is a student body that is more aware of the possibilities of art and design, and more prepared for a rapidly-changing job market than any other.

The experiences that the third faculty brings to campus are nothing new. At last year’s Design Conference, for example, Irene Au of Google spoke about hiring teams of anthropologists to conduct cultural research for revamping the site’s user experience. At Art Center’s 2008 Sustainability Summit, Amy Loves of the Rocky Mountain Institute spoke about the future of energy, arguing that “this journey beyond oil can be led by business for profit, rather than forced by public policy.”

The “Big Picture” lecture series provides another venue for distinguished speakers. In his talk last spring, Steel magazine Editor-at-Large Jonah Lehrer contended that artists often discover fundamental truths about biology and the brain long before scientists do. Lehrer addressed the pleasures of Beethoven and Kanye West as he argued that scientists, by looking closely at art, might hasten their own discoveries.

These are the kind of surprising and inspiring points of view that Art Center seeks in its third faculty. This exposure to a variety of fields, along with Art Center’s rigorous education, gives students a unique perspective on the ways that their own work can impact industries, businesses and ideas not normally associated with design.

Changing the Transportation Design Industry, One Graduate at a Time

Beyond individual vehicle design, the issue of sustainable mobility has received heightened attention. The ideas and strategies presented during the College’s annual Summits on Sustainable Mobility and Mobility and the Future have sparked the creation of new courses. (The third Summit was recently held in February 2009.) All students are now required to take a class on mobility to more fully understand the infrastructure and urban environments. One class worked with USC architecture students to examine urban congestion problems in Shenzhen, China. Students proposed a variety of solutions, including small personal transportation devices, mass transit and other commuter possibilities. In another course, students studied the Mobility Element of Pasadena’s General Plan, focusing on specific aspects such as “pedestrian design” to encourage walking and enliven public spaces.

In addition, the concept of sustainable mobility has extended beyond the classroom into real-world applications through the College’s Sponsored Projects. In the past year alone, students have examined myriad issues, including the safety and efficiency of transporting passenger goods and services over long distances for Volvo Trucks; the development of compelling and eco-friendly designs for the “Bus of the Future” in collaboration with Santa Monica’s Big Blue Bus line; the creation of a Scion vehicle that considers the entire life cycle of the vehicle; and the development of new opportunities for harnessing human power for the SRAM Corporation.

Sanders stressed that this new direction has not been in response to the problems plaguing the Big Three automakers, but rather represents a gradual shift in the department’s approach over the past few years. “Even before these recent problems, we’ve been engaged in areas of the transportation sector that are highly diverse. At last year’s Design Conference, for example, Irene Au of Google spoke about hiring teams of anthropologists to conduct cultural research for revamping the site’s user experience. At Art Center’s 2008 Sustainability Summit, Amy Loves of the Rocky Mountain Institute spoke about the future of energy, arguing that “this journey beyond oil can be led by business for profit, rather than forced by public policy.”

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Considering the great turmoil currently plaguing the U.S. automotive industry, it’s not surprising that Art Center’s Transportation Design Department is being called upon to meet the needs of a changing industry. The department has long served as a catalyst for innovation, and 60 years after its creation, the program continues to evolve to best prepare students who will become the next generation of designers to revolutionize transportation design.

The Transportation Design Department was founded in 1948 as part of Industrial Design, focusing primarily on exterior automotive design. This approach has been very successful, and it’s still working — students graduating last year were hired by Honda, Mercedes and more. The industry is changing, however, and Transportation Design Department Chair, Stewart Reed, saw a need to broaden the department’s focus. First, Reed said, “we’re going beyond cars.” Until recently, 95 percent of the department’s training has been in automotive design. Some alumni may have gone into motorcycle design or design for air or water vehicles, but their core training at Art Center was always in cars. Now, the department emphasizes a broader view of transportation.

Today, we are preparing our students for fields such as aircraft, marine, mass transportation and personal mobility design — a type of approach that sets us apart from other design schools and gives students the edge they need for a changing industry,” said Transportation Design Department Chair, Stewart Reed. Another distinguishing feature is Art Center’s prime location in Southern California, near the companies that are leading emerging fields such as new mobility and alternative energy, and with easy access to the automotive companies in the Pacific Rim who are piloting new technologies and transportation solutions. “Many of our graduates are being hired at design studios based in Asia—studios that are doing well even in this challenging economic climate,” Sanders said.

In the future of transportation design, as envisioned by Josh Citrohn, ILOV-U’s Design Thinking in a Global Economy

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As businesses look to creativity and innovation as the keys to success, "thinking like a designer" continues to grow in scope and importance. Business is finally catching up with design.

Procter & Gamble employees learn to think like designers at the company’s "Innovation Gym." NPR host, critic and author Kurt Andersen, Art Center’s Visionary-in-Residence for the Spring 2009 term.
“This piece was created for a figurative and gestural portrait assignment depicting someone close to us. I chose to illustrate my stepfather and his relationship with the ocean that began during his childhood in Belize.”

1. Owen Freeman, illustration, sixth term. “Aqualad.” Instructor: Jim Salvati

“As a woman who has lived in many places, I have noticed gender inequality, and as an artist, I realize I have the tools to make a difference through images. This poster, which addresses Article 1 of the Declaration of Human Rights, depicts two hands, one male and one female, that together create a dove with equal wings, allowing it to fly freely.”


“Clothing Girl is a portrait about a girl’s obsession with clothing and fashion. When she opened her closet, I wanted to capture the density of her clothes as well as the variety and types of fashion pieces—and her ability to bounce off of it all.”

"The inspiration for this hybrid car museum was chosen from a high performance object—the Nike 360 Air max shoe—because of its durability, lightness and comfort. I redefined the car museum typology by creating a hybrid space that not only includes a car museum displaying cars, a cafe and retail shop, but also a restaurant and bar for my second typology."

Jae Hyun Park, Environmental Design, third term. Hybrid Car Museum on Sunset Boulevard. Instructor: Jeff Kim

"This exhibition was designed to encourage people to learn about bio-mimicry, a discipline that studies nature’s best ideas and then imitates these designs and processes to solve human problems. I thought bio-mimicry could be a good mode for sustainability, because it is not only about survival but also about trying to be more efficient by learning from nature."


"This project combined my two loves—advertising and fashion—to create an ambient promotional campaign for GRAZIA magazine during London Fashion Week. I loved every minute of the project, from cutting all the papers out of magazines and creating dresses and accessories from scratch, to seeing my ideas come to life."


"My concept was to create a brand extension specifically designed around regional music and American roadside rest stops. The challenge was not in simply redefining rest stops in America, but doing so with a memorable brand that was a viable extension of Starbucks Coffee."

Aaron Jacob, Graphic Design, seventh term. "Starbucks on Tour." Instructor: Gloria Kondrup

"I wanted to portray the importance of fabric in design. I came up with the concept of using the periodic table to display all the different kinds of fabrics used in the fashion industry, from the most common staple, cotton, to a fabric as fine as silk."


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"In an effort to transition young buyers from Honda into the Acura brand, I focused on performance and ecological solutions. The resulting three-seater uses a hybrid engine recharged from a solar film underneath the top glass and uses thermoplastic carbonfiber instead of steel for a lighter body and structure."

Leon Paz, Transportation Design, seventh term. Acura 2+1 entry sports car. Internship: Honda R&D Americas

"Dainese is a world leader in protective clothing for motorcyclists and dynamic sports. The Dainese D-Lane Splitter I designed has the capabilities of a sports bike with the protection and high-tech advances associated with the Dainese brand."


"This project is the result of trend forecasting for today’s seven-year old car fanatic and determining what vehicle lies between a child’s go-kart racer and [his] first new car. I developed the idea of creating a skeletal design that would have the lightness of a go-kart but still hold a small car proportion in line with the infamous Mazda MX-5 Miata."

“While the elephant points to an attraction to objectivity and spectacle, it also literally hints at the presence of the hollowed wall by setting its sight at it. The wall, as opposed to the elephant as an object inhabiting space, requires a longer read and addresses the actual spatial surroundings of the viewer. In combination, the installation asks viewers to not only reflect upon the impact the elephant has on its surroundings in reference to animal habitats, but also as a way of looking at art in art institutions in general.”

Jordan Swerdloff, Fine Art, sixth term and Jennifer Joseph, Fine Art, third term. “Untitled (White Elephant and Hollowed Wall).” Instructor: Laura Cooper

“This image is part of a series in which I set out to construct a miniature labyrinth and explore one of the possible journeys through it. The project had two parts: one is a stop motion animation that follows a labyrinth in constant stages of creation and destruction, and the second part includes the still images that were composed and photographed to work by themselves.”

Luisa Loiso, Photography and Imaging, fourth term. “Labyrinth.” Instructor: Steve LaVoie

“After being heavily inspired by the visuals of HBO’s Band of Brothers, I set out to create a portrait reminiscent of that gritty aesthetic, something with a Frank Capra feeling but still utilizing all the lighting and technical tools available.”

Luisa Loiso, Photography and Imaging, fourth term. “Labyrinth.” Instructor: Steve LaVoie

Joseph Escamilla, Photography and Imaging, second term. Core Lighting final project. Instructor: Paul Ottenheim
“My intention was to create something visually arresting that would illustrate the issue of climate change and the way people seem to think about it. The problem is always there, yet we seem to ignore it. The film was shot entirely on campus with a large student crew working and prepping four or five locations at any given time over two days. It was a great experience.”

Hugo Stenson, Film, fifth term. “Apathy.” Public Service Announcement about climate change produced in collaboration with Designmatters for a Sponsored Project with the United Nations. Instructors: Mike Berkofsky, Andrew Harlow. Director/Producer: Hugo Stenson; Director of Photography: Ran Engel (Film, eighth term); Editor: Addison Marchese (Film, eighth term)

“I thought it would be fun to shed some light on Boba, the 1940s educational film, utilizing that carefree innocence inhabited by those films while divulging inane information. The challenge was in remaining true to the inspiration, considering the technique and technology is practically obsolete. To go back and embrace the fundamental past was quite fun.”

Alice Park, Film, eighth term. “Boba Jive.” Instructors: Dennis McCarthy, Brad Saunders. Director: Alice Park; Cinematographer: Parker Tollison (Film, seventh term); Producers: Cullen Miskit-Kelty (Film, seventh term), Derek Villanueva (Film ’17); Editor: C. J. Miller (Film, seventh term)

Thea Petchler, Art Center Humanities and Design Sciences faculty, Director of Writing.

If a business approach is driven by faith in the free market to solve social and environmental problems, the current economic crisis should turn our attention to designers who have been skeptical of that faith.

“I think of ‘design’ as motivating an audience on an emotional level, while ‘business’ means aggregating commonalities to find efficiencies in production, marketing and distribution. So in organizations, an impasse arises from the fact that designers understand the value to be found in a holistic experience for the end user, while their business colleagues are likely to reduce the project into component parts and look for savings at each step. The opposition of these viewpoints can only be resolved through respecting and valuing the contributions of the other party. This means designers need to know people from other fields and learn to appreciate both their personality types and the roles they play in an organization.”

Adam Mefford, Product Design, eighth term; founder, MINT Entrepreneurship at Art Center.

Corporate work is always done in a business context, and the real challenge is in balancing that responsibility and still staying loose enough to be innovative. That is the great adventure of each job. Being curious and maintaining an exuberance for the creative aspect of work provides the daily pleasure, but they are also the most difficult to keep floating in the face of financial pressures. You have to protect the part of yourself that is private and artistically unique.

Carla Barr, Graphic Design ’74; Graphic Design professor; owner, Carla Barr Design.

Has a business approach to problem solving influenced your design practice or the way you approach design challenges?

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