

The role of design in a new digital era

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Deyan Sudjic began by introducing the two speakers, Tagawa Kinya and Bo Linnemann, stating that they work across the field of design in multiple formats. Both of them have practices on both sides of the world, with Linnemann's in Denmark and Tokyo, and Tagawa's in London and Tokyo. Sudjic stated that design keeps changing its shape. Giving the example of the Design Museum, he explained that when it opened 30 years ago, a Design Museum could have had only chairs. Of course whilst chairs are fascinating and they tell a technological story, design is now about so many different things. In some ways it has become less tangible. For example, the smart phone is only 11 years old but it has transformed how we meet each other, the way we consume, how we fall in love and so on. Yet as humans, we also have a desire for things we can touch, feel, hold and smell, which is why design is so vital. He finished his introduction by explaining how design is also subject to the same fluctuations in how people see things.

Tagawa Kinya began his talk by introducing his company Takram, a design firm that he described as a semi-technology and semi-design firm, with studios in Tokyo, London and New York. He explained that the name Takram comes from the Japanese word meaning planning, and it also has roots in the ancient words 'takumi' and 'takumu', which are connected with craft and design. Tagawa gave a brief explanation of his own background: he studied mechanical engineering before turning to design. In 1999 he joined the Royal College of Art (RCA) in London where he learnt about design engineering. On his return to Tokyo he started as a design assistant before setting up Takram. At Takram, while design is central to the practice, technological and business aspects are also merged with design.

Tagawa then moved on to explain two diagrams, which are metaphors for how Takram aims to operate. The first was a pendulum, demonstrating pendulum thinking, which is a metaphor for how the firm aims to create solutions. One pole is engineering and the other is design, with the aim being for their designers to switch their mind-set between being a designer and being an engineer, moving at a tick-tock pace, like a pendulum, to create higher-quality integrated solutions. The next diagram was a type of transcendence, referring to workers occupying a professional space but also able to jump out of a familiar space into a neighbouring space. This attitude can create a different type of space and bring a three-dimensional perspective to a problem.

For the next part of his presentation, Tagawa showed several examples of how this thinking is utilised. The first example was a video of the space rover Hakuto. Tagawa explained that this project was developed in collaboration with a Japanese start-up. The product will be launched and sent to the moon on the Space X rocket in 2021. This shows how design engineering is contributing to technology for the future.

The second example was a software and data visualisation project which was designed for the Japanese Government's Ministry of Economy. The Ministry wanted a way to show how the Government could utilise big data. The Government was hosting 80 companies' big data internally, but it was difficult for bureaus to come up with a way of using the dataset. They proposed a 3D depiction of money flows with the company as the central point, red lines representing money entering the company, and blue lines showing the network around the company. The overall diagram shows the local economy around the company. The Government wants to build this system because of earthquakes, particularly the 2011 earthquake, which caused huge damage to the local economy. Following that, they wanted to understand how local economies work in order to be able to build up their resilience. This system is a type of communication tool for the government to be able to

understand the local economy. It is also a way to select leading corporations. This is data-driven decision making, which is a new way of thinking to enhance decision making processes.

Tagawa then showed a future focussed project that has been designed for Toyota, who are trying to shift from being an ordinary automotive business to a mobility service platform. A team from Takram had been working on a two-year project with Toyota's advanced design team to develop holistic thinking about new businesses. Tagawa explained that it is rare for the design team to lead on this type of project within Toyota – it usually technical or businesses teams who lead on future strategy projects.

The final example was of a speculative design approach which arose after Takram joined the dOCUMENTA art exhibition in Germany in 2013. The director of dOCUMENTA asked them to think about a new water bottle which is not a water bottle. They came up with a design that has five artificial organs that turn the human body into a water bottle. For example, the first organ located in the nose takes humid air from the lungs so water can be retained inside the body. Tagawa explained how this process is an interesting way of seeing how we can move from ordinary thinking to developing extraordinary ideas. This design reduced the amount of water being emitted by the human body from 2000ml to 165ml. Instead of creating a water bottle, they designed a human body which does not need a water bottle.

Tagawa went on to explain that, despite the four examples he had shown, 80% of projects are serious, corporate projects, giving the examples of Haneda Airport lounge, an accessory project with Issey Miyake and a sake project.

To finish his talk, Tagawa spoke briefly about the design laboratory that was established at Tokyo University, and the Takram Cast podcast. The department at the RCA is multidisciplinary, but this type of department didn't exist in Japan, so they set up a design laboratory in Tokyo University in collaboration with the RCA where leading figures can come together. He ended his talk by explaining that Takram Cast shares ideas about design with the public and aims to stimulate the Japanese design community to explore the new age of design.

Bo Linnemann began his talk by stating that he is a type designer. He explained that his talk would be about how type design can develop into branding in big agencies around the world. Linnemann founded the design studio Kontrapunkt in Copenhagen in 1984 and it has since expanded to having offices in Tokyo. At Kontrapunkt, Linnemann explained, they believe in developing genuine brands, referring to an 'honest' brand that does what it says and says what it does: it expresses the identity and nature of the brand in all touchpoints, from sound to visual.

Linnemann then moved on to explain how he sees branding. A brand, he argued, is what defines you, is what you offer, the values you believe in, it is how you sound, look and act. Type design has developed into a lot of other disciplines. Being a designer is all about knowing human beings and users: you have to know their dreams and behaviours, and try to transform this into meaningful services that people want to use.

Linnemann then spoke about a commission from a few years after Kontrapunkt was established. The Danish government commissioned the firm to redesign the visual identity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He explained the impact that this had on him, as for 10 years he only worked for the public sector in Denmark. This has led to a significant change in the perception of the public sector. Linnemann's aim in designing the Ministry's visual identity was to bridge the gap between governmental power and citizens – how can you make this gap as small as possible? In Denmark the gap is already very small, but Linnemann wanted to see if it could be made even smaller. This design

process was also happening in 1989, when the public sector was facing demands to become more active. It was about getting the sector to move from being regarded as 'public bailiffs' to 'political troopers', and from administrators to players. As well as working on this project, Kontrapunkt were also invited into a competition for the new visual identity for the National Museum. Both projects had to be submitted within a few days of each other. It led them to think about what it means to portray national institutions and how could this be done in a completely new way. Kontrapunkt won both competitions and when the projects were launched, the whole public sector was able to see and understand how different this new branding was. They were then commissioned by all the other ministries to create designs which could fit into this concept. Over 10 years, Kontrapunkt designed brand identities for each ministry, and also for public services such as the police, libraries and theatres. The designs were based on the Royal Crown from 1536. They wanted to try and change this royal symbol into a lot of different crowns and change the symbol of the royal family into the symbol of democracy. Within the design, Linnemann explained that they wanted to use Danish self-irony and keep a sense of 'Danishness', even though the designs were for formal government ministries. Linnemann then showed examples of the different crowns they designed, such as the crown for the Royal Danish Theatre which had a jester's hat and bells, and the crown for the Ministry of Education which included a book. This also gave each Ministry its own identity.

Linnemann then explained how he began working in Japan. After his work for the Danish government, Linnemann was invited to Tokyo in 1999 to deliver a speech. He spoke about his designs for the public sector and was then invited to put on an exhibition, which opened in 2001. At the opening he met the graphic designer Hara Kenya, who invited him to teach at a university in Japan. They also set up a partnership between Nippon Design Centre and Kontrapunkt. The exhibition was held at a venue owned by Dai Nippon Printing (DNP), who then asked Kontrapunkt to do some design work. The first project was to create a new dual language way-finding system for their headquarters in Tokyo. Linnemann's aim was to make the two languages look as if only one voice was speaking, as usually Japanese and English text look very different. He took some features from the Japanese typeface and put them into the Latin typeface to create a commonality across both languages. This job led to work with the bakery Andersen, redesigning the visual identity and the shops. After this project, Kontrapunkt won a competition to work with the jewellery brand Tasaki, for which they created a typeface based on calligraphy.

Linnemann then moved on to talk about car companies for which Kontrapunkt has produced design work. In Linnemann's opinion, car manufacturing is the industry that has changed the most in recent years and, in a few years, everything will be completely different. So these companies have to adapt very fast. Car brands are going from being manufacturers to content providers, as soon what will matter is how you spend your time in the car, rather than the driving experience. Kontrapunkt are currently working with Nissan to see how their brand can become more consumer-or user-oriented in the future. He showed an example of a talking Nissan logo which could communicate with people while they are driving.

Linnemann then spoke about the situation in the branding industry today, which is to figure out what is happening in the heads of consumers. Recently there have been rapid changes, with a shift in thinking from 'what do I want to buy?' to 'what do I believe in?'. Political consumers are driving these changes. He gave the example of Patagonia, which is a brand that does what it says and says what it does, which may be why it is so successful. Until recently, branding was about repeating what you do and being consistent, but now consistency is boring and consumers want to be stimulated and entertained, meaning brands have to become more creative. It is not only about how a brand looks, but it is about how it behaves. Linnemann summarised his points by explaining that yesterday's brands

were driving the consumer, but today it is consumers driving brands. Brands used to be driven by profit, whereas now they are driven by purpose. The consumer has therefore won the battle with brands.

To finish his talk, Linnemann spoke about the influential designer Bjarke Ingels. Ingels has teamed up with Elon Musk and they are planning how to live on Mars. To Linnemann this is the ultimate example of how design can be used to change our lives completely. It can therefore definitely be said that design has an impact.

Sudjic then gave some questions to both Linnemann and Tagawa. He began by asking Linnemann if he really believes that consumers have won against brands, in a world in which disruptors answer to no one, especially when companies based in southern California who have huge economies are considered.

Linnemann answered that somehow, yes they have won. Today brands adapt to the situation more than they did 5 years ago. They are much more oriented towards how what they do influences consumers' daily lives and how they do this. Sudjic countered this by commenting how some companies will sell our data to anybody. Linnemann agreed, but said that the rise of the internet has made things much more transparent as demonstrated by, for example, WikiLeaks. This forces brands to be more transparent and open, as there is nowhere to hide. Sudjic remarked that he was surprised at how benign Linnemann thought the situation was. Many new ideas and companies were initially presented as being about an optimistic, brave new world. For example, Twitter was going to fuel the Arab Spring; it gave us Donald Trump. Air B & B was meant to be a way for us to share our homes and see the world, but instead there have been the unintended consequences of pricing people out of their neighbourhoods. These were all meant to be about creating a caring, sharing world. These developments are presented as being about the future, but in many ways the digital explosion has pushed us backwards: it has actually killed the idea of privacy and made us live in villages – but villages are not always comfortable places and they stifle difference. His next question to Linnemann was whether people really want to be entertained by the Danish Ministry of Finance, as there is such a difference between the idea of public service and consumerism. Linnemann responded by saying that whilst ministries should not be entertaining, they should be closer to citizens. These designs were produced 30 years ago, so it was an attempt to be more friendly and casual and make ministries distinct from each other, making it easier for people to engage with them. Sudjic commented that gov.uk is a much later but similar attempt by the British Government. Linnemann agreed, but also said that gov.uk is a monolithic concept, whilst his own firm's designs were a diversifying concept, so they are also very different.

Sudjic then asked about Tagawa's pendulum concept, asking why he thinks engineering and design are different. Tagawa said that when they create a new product, business, technology and design professionals all work together. However they all have different ideas, theories and so on, which means it can be difficult to find the best solution. To bypass this, pendulum thinking demonstrates how a problem is complex, ensuring that different engineering and design perspectives are considered. Sudjic then asked if the thinking of a designer is different from the thinking of an engineer. Tagawa said yes, the thinking is different. When he was a student at engineering school, he learnt a lot about, for example, fluid dynamics. However there was no discussion or mention of humans or users. So engineers are ordinarily not trained to be good observers of humans. Now when we look at, for example the utilisation of AI, scientists are like children with a big brain, so they can write code pushed by their curiosity. But sometimes the gap between humans and technology is very wide. Sudjic agreed, saying how at the Design Museum they try and make the point that design makes technology work for people. It is the only discipline which seems to bring all these things together. He then asked

whether when Tagawa was working on the moon rover project, he hid the fact that he was also making gifts for Issey Miyake, as some people believe that engineering is serious, but design is not. Tagawa stated that the engineering teams for both projects were slightly different but on both projects, the engineers and designers utilised pendulum thinking. Whilst the project leader on the Issey Miyake project was from the design side, in the team there were design engineers as Miyake's products are based on product engineering. By understanding the theory behind how something is produced, sometimes engineering knowledge supports a creative jump.

Sudjic then asked Linnemann if he sees typography as different from branding. Linnemann said that from his experience being a type designer gives him a tool that very few brand designers have. He can develop custom typefaces which are unique to each brand, meaning you don't need logos or colour as the type gives the brand a distinctive identity. Sudjic asked if in Danish the word 'face' is used in typeface, as in English the word face implies personality and character. Whilst the word is not used in Danish, Linnemann agreed with Sudjic's comments. He gave the example that when you walk along the street and see a crowd of people, it is easy to spot a friend. This is the same with typefaces, as once you are familiar with a typeface it speaks to you like a friend and you are connected with it. Sudjic asked if letters are something deep in people's personality, or if it is about familiarity. Linnemann answered by saying that it is both: certain typefaces capture aspects of the culture in which they have developed. Sudjic then commented that he does not think there are innate national characteristics in design, although design can be used to push and symbolise some characteristics and create a sense of commonality. Linnemann responded by saying that design, when you get it right, is a type of magic tool – you can put some human values into it, which is the real strength of design.

Sudjic's final question was if design had changed since the two speakers began their careers. Tagawa said that it depends, as within a studio there are so many techniques and tools, with the younger generation more likely to use digital tools.