



Resource Review

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Review:

In *Design Futuring: Sustainability, Ethics and New Practice*, Tony Fry calls for a complete reconceptualisation of the practice of design. He wants to change how design is taught in schools, how the public perceives the profession that provides the objects they covet and consume, and most importantly, he wants designers to transform how they define and practice design. Fry makes a well-researched, articulate and passionate case for these changes, supporting his argument with a variety of fresh ideas, evidence, examples and philosophic reasoning to make the case for an expanded and revitalized profession of design.

At its core *Design Futuring* is concerned with humanity, and more specifically, how design can contribute to the continuation of humanity. Fry sees design intrinsically linked and intertwined with humankind and the myriad problems and issues facing the current state of the world. He argues that design practice as it currently stands is not only ineffective (from a humankind point of view) but has become a major contributor to our unsustainable lives, Fry posits that design is currently helping to 'defuture' us – literally taking away our future. He argues for a design practice that must 'fundamentally change – it has to be redesigned.' (Fry, 2008, p.26) and it is this redesigned design practice, that can lead us to a new form of living, one that is 'sustain-able' – Fry's term for living within our means (note the difference to sustainable, which Fry notes as being a somewhat abstract term that has lost much meaning).

The book is broken into three sections.

In the first section, entitled 'Rethinking the Context and Practice of Design', Fry investigates the current state of the design profession and lays the groundwork for

how we can change how design practice is 'understood, developed and deployed' (2008, p.15). In this section Fry introduces and contextualizes the concept of redirection, a political, philosophical and practical activity that becomes a key foundation for rethinking design practice. Redirection is positioned as the foremost means of moving designers from creators and endorsers of unsustainable practice to sustain-able ones; when enacted collectively redirection becomes the means of changing the whole practice of design. Fry uses a case study and two example methods to help contextualise redirection and map it to design practice: he documents an urban design project that successfully employed redirection and introduces the techniques of recoding and elimination design as effective redirective practices that can 'be appropriated and employed by all design disciplines' (2008, p.71).

The second section – 'Strategic Design Thinking' – presents a variety of means and strategies to enable change in the design field. Fry begins by decoupling design from its most commonly concerned outputs, or as he labels them, 'preconceptions' – structures, form, and images. He also argues for a separation of design from the hegemonic market economic system that has at its central focus the production of wealth rather than the production of quality of life. Once again Fry introduces and contextualizes a variety of methods of change to demonstrate his thinking, from platforming to return briefs to new teams and designing in team. He ends the section by returning to design as a practical occupation and lays out future roles for design.

In the third section – 'Design, Sustainment and Futures' – Fry re-places design within the context of the world and allows a consideration of how design can be used as a means of political activation and achievement. Fry then returns to the individual and lays out a framework for enacting sustain-able change beginning with one's individual actions and practices, arguing that if 'you cannot redirect yourself you are unlikely to be redirective' (2008, p.224). Fry ends the section by examining and evaluating other possible and more traditional means of achieving sustainment, from consumer action to international government conventions to sustainable design, finding little to moderate hope in these conventional methods.

This book is at its most powerful when Fry weaves together his thoughts and reasoning with case studies and real world examples. The case studies ground and document his concepts and provide models for mapping the theory to action. This is especially important due to the nature of the subject being discussed, Fry is aware of the possibility and probability of designers feeling overwhelmed at the mere mention of the subject of sustainability, let alone sustain-ability, and by documenting successful and innovative design projects he helps to both promote good practice and to reassure the reader of the possibility, and the possible pathways, of change.

Another strength of the book is Fry's reconceptualisation of design, away from its definition as a service industry with a concentration on end products, to one that focuses on process, large-scale thinking and transformative acts. This acknowledgement of the power and scope of design is not necessarily new but Fry is able to support his argument with a variety of means to create a cogent and convincing case for design as a truly empowering activity.

I have two criticisms of the book. The first concerns the case studies and examples cited. Although Fry deliberately links his methods and concepts to all forms and practices of design – he purposely talks about a variety of design professions – the selection of examples and case studies do not necessarily document the richness of the full field of design practice. As could be expected, many of the examples fall into architectural practice and urban design; a more varied selection of samples would help to further bolster Fry's arguments. My second criticism concerns the serious nature of a book on this subject; any book concerning design and sustainability that takes an honest and frank account of humankind's activities over the last two centuries can end up as a downer. Although Fry lays out the means and methods of enacting change at personal, local and international levels there is the possibility of

the reader being overwhelmed by the enormity of the task ahead. Fry attempts to address this in one of the final chapters of the book where he discusses humanity's relationship with the impossible, this section feels underdeveloped and somewhat tacked on. These criticisms are minor though.

This is an important book. One that is highly useful for designers, design educators and design students of any design area. The book presents a variety of fascinating and exciting methods and means forcing the reader to examine their own definitions and practices. This book has already worked its way into numerous of my reading lists for students and I have recommended it to fellow academics and designers.

Overall *Design Futuring: Sustainability, Ethics and New Practice* is a valuable addition to the canon of design writing, enabling us to better understand the history of design practice and allowing us to map out and redefine a future for design that has as its goal the sustainment of humankind.