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on Doctoral Education in Design (1998)**

Hua Dong

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## DRSelects: Hua Dong on the Proceedings of the First Conference on Doctoral Education in Design (1998)

By Hua Dong, IAC Member

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20240229061155/https://www.designresearchsociety.org/articles/drselects-hua-dong-on-the-proceedings-of-the-1st-conference-on-doctoral-education-in-design-1998>

I am Hua Dong, Professor and Inaugural Dean of Brunel Design School. Prior to this I was Professor in Design at Loughborough University. I also worked at Tongji University as Professor at the College of Design and Innovation. Between 2014 and 2018 I was the Dean of the College of Arts and Media at Tongji University.

My PhD research at the Engineering Design Centre (EDC), University of Cambridge and Postdoctoral job at Cambridge EDC and the Helen Hamlyn Research Centre at Royal College of Art laid the foundation of my research expertise in inclusive design. I share my passion and expertise through keynote speeches at international conferences, initiating new courses and research programmes, and academic and popular publications. I also have extensive experience in providing specialised research consultancy to industries in the UK, Finland and China to help designers adopt a more inclusive approach, and support companies to implement inclusive practices. For example, I led my research team at Tongji University to help Alibaba (Ant Financial) to develop the first industrial guidance in China on inclusive design.

I served as a council member of the Design Research Society (DRS) for many years. In 2019 I became DRS Fellow, and in 2020 I was elected as International Advisory Committee Member of the DRS. I am the convenor of the DRS's Inclusive Design Special Interest Group.

I took interests in reading the digital library's archive: the Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> Conference on Doctoral Education in Design (1998).

Klaus Krippendorff argues that the development of a rich design discourse (i.e., the practical process of designing and redesigning design) should be the 'foremost aim of a Ph.D. in Design', and believes that 'A Ph.D. in Design could create the kind of practical thinkers that would give design the social status it deserves.' This view seemed to be shared by Victor Margolin, who argued that 'design theory is at its most fundamental a theory of how design functions in society.'



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Design thinking was already discussed extensively in 1998. Klaus Krippendorff shared his observation of the shift in design thinking, many of which still have resonance today, e.g.,

- From perfecting functionality to affording the enactment of multiple meanings;
- From satisfying given specifications to being accountable for intervening in an ecology of artifacts;
- From relying on past scientific findings to creating future truths, arguable paths toward viable futures.

Richard Buchanan also observed the changes; he mentioned that 'the role of designers has expanded', and recognised 'greater awareness of the consequences of design within social, cultural, and natural systems and environments', with the conclusion that 'the way we build our doctoral programmes will, in turn, build us - and the field of design'.

Richard Buchanan states that 'to make design knowledge explicit, general, and public, designers and design scholars have engaged in three kinds of research: design history, design criticism, and empirical and speculative inquiry'. Similarly, Victor Margolin proposed that 'history, theory, and criticism' should 'play a central role in doctoral education in design'.

Richard Buchanan believes that the field of design inquiry 'is united around a common subject and a common set of questions', i.e.:

Our *common subject* is products made by human beings for practical purposes

Our *common problems* are how products are made, how one understands and appreciates what products are, and how we understand the consequences of products in the lives of individual and groups.

The sources for creation of a new field of inquiry, to Richard Buchanan, are 'personal experience, history, and searching (for answers to good questions about the nature and practice of design)'. To Ezio Manzini and Silvia Pizzocaro, their hypothesis is that 'it may be possible to conceive design research as similar to shelf innovation, accepting that it can generate "research semi-finished components" that can be shelved for future utilization.' They think that doctoral programmes are 'emerging places where design research can be stored'.

Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl quoted Charles Owen who stated that "Design is not science, and it is not art - or any other discipline. It has its own purposes, values, measures and procedures. These become evident through comparisons, but they have not been extensively investigated, formalized, codified or even thought much about in literature created for the field." One of the reasons of this, according to Lorraine Justice, is that

'design "content" occurred in the studio and was supported by theories from other disciplines. We "did" design in the studio but rarely wrote about it.'

Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl further discussed the 'outward' and 'inward' approaches to defining the knowledge base of design, and suggested that 'if we look outward to borrow from other disciplines, we need to become not only knowledgeable about the context from which the model or technique is drawn, but sensitive to differences in design's purpose and use of the model or technique.' Consequently, this means 'the model may need a translation or modification so that it works fluidly within the context of design. It may also mean that results from use of the technique may be limited to the context or situation under consideration.' She observed that design teachers, researchers, and practitioners 'often overlook the defining properties of design as they are so much a part of how we view the world and create artifacts', thus looking inward forces them 'to identify design's characteristics by viewing the field as an outsider might.'

She emphasised the importance of recognising the inter-relationships between practice, theory, and method, in order to 'improve understanding(theory), performance (method), and result (practice)'.

When reading the proceedings, I strongly felt that a lot of issues discussed then are still relevant. I would recommend PhD researchers in Design to read at least three papers from the proceedings, and the recommended order is Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl, Klaus Krippendorff, and Richard Buchanan.

Buchanan, R., Doordan, D., Justice, L., and Margolin, V. (eds.) (1998) *Proceedings of the 1st Conference on Doctoral Education in Design* (1998), 8-11 October, Columbus, Ohio, USA, Carnegie Mellon University, School of Design. <https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/conference-volumes/49>

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