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Design Education and Research from *Commitment to Curiosity* and Beyond

Curiosity and Commitment. Perspectives on the Transformation of European Universities, ed. by Arantes et al., 2024, S. 133–151.
https://doi.org/10.25364/978390337430008

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Zusammenfassung

Der Aufsatz präsentiert Perspektiven auf die Rhetorik and Richtung britischer Forschungsgeldgeber, zu einem Zeitpunkt als Großbritannien Kraft des EU-Austritts zum neuen Europäischen Grenzbereich wird. Erfahrungen, die über 2 Jahrzehnte im Lehr- und Forschungsbetrieb eines traditionsreichen schottischen Design Instituts gesammelt wurden, werden mit Leitbildern aus der Akademie und Kommuniqués aus der Politik verglichen, um zu hinterfragen, warum Forschung immer mehr als Ökonomisierung verstanden wird und ob Wissenszuwachs bestenfalls als abgeschlagener Dritter hinter Unternehmungsgeist und Volkswohl fingieren darf. Wie reell die vielerorts gefürchtete Abwendung von Wissenschaft hin zur Anwendung ist, wird daraufhin am Beispiel der fundamentalen Debatte des (Welt-)Entwerfens versus Unterwerfen im Design betrachtet.

Schlagwörter: Design Forschung, Innovation, Ökonomisierung, Wissenschaft

Abstract

As Britain looks set to leave the European Union, the paper offers perspectives from the ‘new European margin’ on changes in the rhetoric and orientation of UK funding for research. Drawing from experiences in a Scottish design institute over 20 years and contemplating mission statements from The Times’ Inter-national University of the Year 2018 (HWU), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the UK’s brand new research funding body UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), it asks how research came to be mentioned (always) alongside enterprise, whether expansion of knowledge could become (a distant?) third behind contribution to economic prosperity and national wellbeing, and how real a much feared shift from basic to applied research is. Special attention will be paid to what kind of bed fellows research and innovation are within recent debates on rewilding versus taming the academic discipline of design.

Keywords: design research, innovation, enterprise, knowledge

Climate emergency and identity politics dominate much public discourse at present (Block 2019) as classic ideologies of the left or right seem to flounder in many an election. At this time, the discipline of design has been elevated in two very different ways as it is blamed for driving overconsumption and hailed as holding the key for sustainable production, and it simultaneously champions global collaboration as well as a retreat to local horizons, depending on practitioner and client. In this paper, I consider what research can teach education so that the University discipline of design might best meet expectations placed on it in the face of contemporary challenges. Through authorised narratives and grass-roots accounts by Alumni of what is now Heriot-Watt University's (HWU) School of Textiles and Design I will look back, and by studying current research policy documents I seek to project a future. By focusing on a more than 130 year old institution that evolved from a local technical weaving college to the design school of the UK's International University in the year 2018, so at a time when Brexit looms large over all discourse on the island, I am able to trace how outlooks for design in academia meander between offering *solutions* and providing *ideas*, between showing *commitment* to industry to being *curious* individuals, and how these paths might finally come together in a *curious commitment* to solving real challenges.

Design as a University Discipline. Introductory Thoughts on Research, Education and the Challenge of Heritage

In the UK, a research census is taken every five to eight years to distribute research specific government funding for Higher Education institutions, with the next such event happening in 2021. The census looks mainly at the quality of outputs but has more recently moved towards affording increased importance to research impact beyond academia, in what might be described as a shift in appreciation from a researcher's personal *curiosity* to *commitment* to wider societal relevance. This chimes with research funding directions in the UK and Europe as challenge led calls, frequently referencing UN sustainability goals, proliferate at the expense of funding that is reactive to individual research initiatives and agendas.

At the same time, a growing number of design institutions in Australasia and northern Europe are fundamentally regrouping discipline specific degree programmes to encourage multidisciplinary approaches to finding solutions of universal challenges as their cohorts coalesce around the *planet, people, play* (Design School Kolding, Denmark), or *motion, leisure, activity, identity* (Design Academy Eindhoven, Netherlands). This drive is arguably less pronounced in the UK where Higher Education design attitudes towards *curiosity* or *commitment* reveal tensions that seem to be partly rooted in a particular stance on the relative importance of tradition and

innovation. This paper has sought heritage design education perspectives, not just because of (the UK) fashion's continued recourse to heritage narratives, but also because of a perceived nostalgia – at least in a proportion of UK institutions – about the tested pedagogy of delivering design education largely as skills-based making of product in studios and workshops, so essentially as a craft.

An increasing band of academic authors have concerned themselves with a resurgence of craft, and Leopold Kowolik recently posited that craft is 'inherently conservative' as he seeks to 'reveal where craft risks being reactionary in its nostalgia'. His paper in the journal *Craft Research* attempts to 'illustrate craft's inner logic, and in so doing rid craft's identity of elements that serve either as a nostalgic bid for pre-industrial simplicity or as a tool to be appropriated by consumerist branding falsely appealing to fictive notions of personal authenticity' (Kowolik 2018: 103). His concerns will strike a chord with many a UK design academic in their daily concern of translating scholarship and research into keeping contemporary the curriculum of design while being frequently met with resistance from alumni, some staff and occasionally students. Such resistance will invariably cite the fine technical tradition of the UK's design education. In my case, working at the Kingdom's oldest textile education institution[1], a vocal band of local stakeholders is demanding a renewed *commitment* to providing skilled workers to an ever smaller, but nonetheless influential group of textile businesses, but more about that later. The decision to elicit the heritage voices from amongst alumni of the School of Textiles and Design at HWU was timely: The School had decided to celebrate a historic milestone of its metamorphosis from technical training college to design school with an exhibition just as the wider University was championing the School's amalgamation with physics, chemistry and engineering departments into a new college that would espouse perfectly the proud HWU tradition of educating for industry; the planned move promised also to add design thinking and studio practice to the core competencies of science and engineering in a nod to the above mentioned perception that design might be central to finding solutions for all kinds of future challenges. The move therefore had the potential both of being a leap back into the future, or a new direction for both parties, but the discourse around the proposed merger, much like many discussions involving art and design's inclusion into STEM subjects to form STEAM, equally seemed to expose a certain lack of explicitness in our own educational methods: How might a design school convey its most coveted asset, *the tacit*

1 The author of this present paper is an Associate Professor at the School of Textiles and Design of Heriot-Watt University. Founded in 1883 as a technical college that trained loom tuners for the local weaving mills, and known as the Scottish College of Textiles since 1968, it became part of Heriot Watt University in 1998, at a time when many further vocational education institutions achieved University status in the UK.

knowledge of design, to cohorts of engineers used to being lectured facts about physics and stochastics, nuts and bolts?

In short then, instances of parallel and frequently conflicting realities and concerns underlie this paper's exploration of design futures between curiosity and commitment as we realise that seismic changes are required to address academia's role in the potentially apocalyptic destruction of our planet.

Heritage Perspectives

Design Research

Back in research, heritage continues to be one of the three priority areas of the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). And while some might consider its association with design passed its prime, brands continue to employ their heritage as marketing capital, and many an educational institution's reputation is built on its history, generally the longer the better, rather than its forward plans. Craft's currency in design has grown again after a long decline, and the debate on what might lead us to the preferred futures that designers ought to seek is lively, ranging from Kowolik's doubts about craft's futuring credentials and the branding intentions behind its revival, to Don Norman's more sanguine attitude towards 'the [making vs thinking] forks in the road' for design (Norman 2016: 348).

As a heritage researcher working in a design school in the UK, I approach the holy grail of design futures from the angle of heritage understood broadly in Rodney Harrison's words as 'a dialogue of (…) actors who are engaged in keeping pasts alive in the present, which function toward assembling futures'. I share his hope that understanding heritage as natural and cultural, as including practices, artefacts, environments and actors 'might be (…) productively connected with other pressing social, economic, political, and ecological issues of our time' (Harrison 2015: 28). Unlike Harrison I do not consider this understanding to be necessarily at odds with more traditional heritage definitions which widely acknowledge that authorised and endogenous perspectives of heritage co-exist and can be equally valid, as these equally conclude that any heritage account must be constructed in a discursive manner amongst many actors (e.g. Smith 2006).

Chamithri Greru and I tested such definitions in fieldwork in India (Greru and Kalkreuter 2017) and Sri Lanka and were able to confirm that

> *what precisely to invoke as heritage (…) [can] become (…) a choice that is dependent on circumstances, on whether to promote, ignore or alter traditional practices,*

> *whether to maintain kinship structures or abandon egalitarian and communitarian values to an extent, in summary, dependent on what is at stake (Greru and Kalkreuter 2020).*

On that basis, heritage can be regarded as an often conscious and even strategic choice rather than a uniform recollection with implications that are easily agreed; but rather than being troubled by such parallel realities, this paper posits that valuing and including diverging interpretations of the past into a dialogue might lead us into productive solutions for the difficult (indeed wicked) problems that lie ahead.

Design Education

Gleaning past lessons for future design education from heritage actors was planned around the 50th anniversary of my institution's renaming from the 'Scottish Woollen Technical College' to the 'Scottish College of Textiles'. The intention was to elicit official and grass-roots perceptions of the educational and professional heritage of an eminent institution that today forms part of the industrially focused Scottish Heriot-Watt University under the current name of the School of Textile and Design. This endeavour presented a complex anthropological field site: An exhibition to mark fifty seminal years of design education had initially been planned to form an educated backdrop to the 2018 degree exhibition of the school, to present, in the mind of management, a proud lineage of the institution's involvement with industry through skills training. Pilot research into the institution's archive and alumni network did, however, quickly reveal that the polysemous nature of what alumni and associates of the institution regarded as its educational heritage offered no realistic prospect of presenting adequately in exhibition format what lessons for future design education might be worth learning from considering our past. Instead, a memory wall was installed in the hospitality area of the annual degree show to elicit as wide a range of voices as possible.

In preparing the memory wall, I visited the school's archive with an alumnus of the late 1960s, to search boxes of yearly reports, graduation photographs, industry events and so on, which are kept in a yet to be fully catalogued state. The alumnus had recently semi-retired from a successful international textile consulting career that brought textile expertise to fashion houses around the world. Since his retirement he had turned some considerable attention back to his Alma Mater as well as the remaining local design industries, frequently giving up time for mentoring students while rallying the school's management for support in establishing a museum of textiles heritage in the Scottish Borders.

The position of our alumnus on what constituted 'the golden years in textile design education' was never in doubt, and while his freely and frequently declared bias ruled him out as a preferred grass-roots heritage narrator, his expertise in making sense of archived notes and images was vital.

Figure 1: Memory wall at degree show May 2018, School of Textiles and Design, High Mill Building, Galashiels, Scotland.

Believing in the elicitation potential of the visual, the memory wall was constructed of built heritage images carefully selected to charter the transformation of the school's development over the past fifty years from a bricks and mortar perspective on the one hand, and as it had presented itself in the varied archived material on the other hand. The memory wall illustrated the school's move into a modernist campus in the late 1960s to expand and transform from local loom tuning facility to the 'Scottish College of Textiles'. Furthermore, it shed light on the acquisition, floor by floor, of a 19th century mill to develop workshops from local weaving manufacturers, following in the steps of designer Bernat Klein who was an early design occupant of factory floors left empty by the declining textiles industry in the Borders. Other elements of the memory wall dealt with the addition of campus residences in the 1980s to cater for increasingly non-local students and the gradual replacement of carding machines and fancy yarn twisters by sewing machines and domestic knitting machines in the 1990s. Finally, the handing over of much of its industrial

production space to a local vocational college in the 2000s and the building of a campus in Dubai to make HWU's brand of design education a global one were issues dealt with on the memory wall.

Alone the last decade of the school's existence had seen only superficial makeovers, certainly as far as its built environment was concerned, but even with regards to the development of its academic outlook and engagement with stakeholders, according to records and local perceptions.

Most of the above can be regarded as versions of authorised heritage accounts as the selection of the school's milestones was based on artefacts, images and evidence that were subject to an institutional collection policy.

Figure 2: Grass-roots appeal at Memory Wall, Degree show May 2018, High Mill, School of Textiles and Design, Galashiels.

Grass-roots testimony was sought as well, and even ahead of the opening of the memory wall, as alumni and former staff of the institution were asked to contribute personal perspectives on their education and professional careers. Visual and narrative images were elicited in an opportunistic, yet broad sample based on personal links that staff in the school had maintained with colleagues, students and stakeholders. Contributions were encouraged via the school's social media channels and finally through the University's alumni networks, fully acknowledging that, while allowing polyvocality, this sampling method would likely reach only those areas of

memory that were institutionally valued or were coming from stakeholders that had reason or desire to stay in touch with their Alma Mater.

The response was as follows: Graduates from the past two decades were by far the most enthusiastic contributors, and their images of extra-curricular activities portrayed no discernible lack of party potential in the small University town of Galashiels where textiles industry had once dominated the headlines. From this community of alumni little could be gleaned, even after prompting, about the educational or professional foundations laid at the times of such great social memories, other than the great number of fellow graduates that remained part of one's social, not however professional network.

Figure 3: Example of grass-roots photo display, Degree show May 2018, High Mill, School of Textiles and Design, Galashiels.

These more recent graduates' attrition rate from the specific design disciplines they trained in is high, and as they focused on having 'personally grown so much during time at the School' one might conclude that they see a great value of University education in design as encouraging individual curiosity in the wider world rather than educating a workforce with commitment to existing businesses.

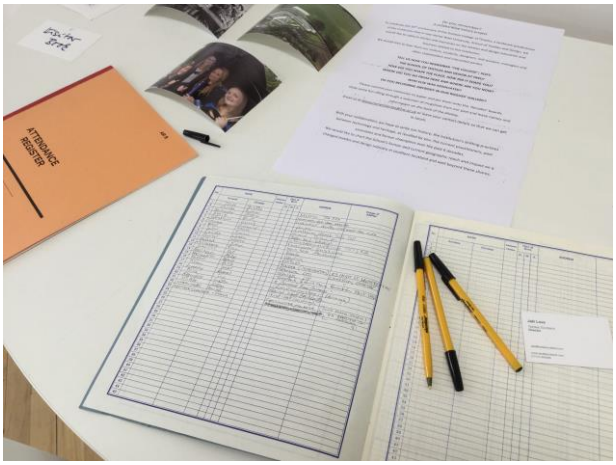

Figure 4: Visitor book at the Memory Wall, Degree show May 2018, High Mill, School of Textiles and Design, Galashiels.

The voice of older alumni was recorded in personal interviews during the opening event of the 2018 degree exhibition in front of our memory wall, and was also gleaned from comments that visitors, many of them connected to remaining local industry, had been invited to leave on cards underneath the built heritage images. The accounts received by this older generation of former students are broadly characterised by what a group of alumni who had all started their degrees in 1968 had to say about their educational experience and careers. Their professional networks had also been forged as social networks during their student years and maintained through professional changes that shared important trajectories: All five graduates had started careers (then in textiles) with Small and Medium Enterprises that were either local to the school or to their own home area. Two of the three women had soon taken indefinite career breaks to raise families. The three remaining textile designers saw their companies change from cloth production to garment and product manufacturers before downsizing saw them lose their positions as production moved overseas; one then sidestepped into marketing of overseas production, two started a career in an unrelated area.

The standout aspects of their recollections of time spent at the school were technical expertise and skills and the ability to 'hit the factory floor running', so to fit in and be useful to the existing business of established textile mills. For them commitment more than curiosity was the key advantage of their university education in design.

But the businesses did not of course survive for more than a few decades, and the most interesting testimony came perhaps from one of the women who had put her career on pause in the 70s after having children: Having left the College a year before completing her studies in what was then called Industrial Design (Textiles), she returned to her old place of study some twenty-five years later to resume her degree in Textile Design as it was called by then. Both her educational and professional experiences are of note, and the fact that she returned as a weave tutor for some years in the early 2000s and had collaborated with local weaving industry made her a multiple expert witness for this enquiry. She was able to compare that practising a comprehensive range of possible weave structures strictly in black and white yarn had been replaced by less technical experimentation, but now in full colour; that fewer technicians supported ever growing numbers of design students in the weave shed but lecturers did now exist not just for technical areas but also in visual studies and even history of art; that replacing weave and knit as the core of student learning in the school, the disciplines of fashion, marketing and communication alongside surface design now drew the largest numbers of (now mostly female) applicants. While a Head of Design had been appointed alongside the long serving Head of Textiles in the early 1990s, design as an explicit area of studies was still not to be found in the curriculum.

The name change of the degree was echoing the reputational difficulties that industrial degrees on a declining manufacturing base in textiles had developed by then, while highlighting the increased attraction of textiles for the wider design community.

On graduating in the 1990s, our loyal two-time student never sought to work for the remaining weaving mills in the Scottish Borders but instead set out as a local designer-maker, using existing production capacity in the Borders once her business went national. When international success followed within the decade, her garden studio remained the business hub and design studio for luxury accessories made in Scotland, while marketing moved increasingly into franchising before going online. She retired some ten years ago, and the business closed with her.

From these educational heritage accounts a hazy picture was beginning to emerge: It outlined a three-decade long rise of student numbers in not-industrially focused design disciplines while the local industry – seeking to transform from abundant cloth makers to providers of highly specialised luxury fashion products made in Scotland – provided fewer and fewer employment opportunities for such graduates.

It showed graduates during the latter parts of these decades remembering their design university more as a place of social growth and personal learning than as a provider of skills targeted at existing employment opportunities.

Future Directions

Design Research

The Universities UK's (UUK) pledge on Brexit makes interesting reading for those trying to understand what vice-chancellors and principals in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland see as a university's core contribution to society. As a dyed-in-the-wool Art Historian, I was probably always going to baulk somewhat at the strong and exclusive emphasis on 'economic growth', on 'improving productivity', on 'Industrial Strategy' and on 'strengthening trade relationships'. But could working for almost two decades in a Scottish institution that brands itself as 'a pioneering University (…) with innovative research and highly employable graduates' (University UK 2018) have changed my outlook on what University research should and could deliver? Many design graduates in the UK are encouraged to hang on exclusively to research through practise paradigm that remains somewhat at odds to the contemporary view of seeing designers as creators of preferred futures. Entrepreneurship – for designers: the ability to make an immediate living with an innovative market proposition – here appears favoured over the recognition that design emanating from academe might aim to address some of the pressing concerns of today's design industry. The ubiquitous bringing to market of yet more products is not necessarily a concern that coincides with our wider society's, or the planet's interests, yet ethical, environmental and societal challenges tend to remain undervalued in student work. I posit that we have a way to go in UK design research to bring to deserved prominence terms like Anthropocene, Decolonialising, Elimination Design and Design Futuring, while these are starting to become second nature to design schools Down Under and across the sea. And unsurprisingly, many students show the same lack of ambition that in extreme cases can be observed in some practise-based research, also: Critical practise, with its notion of design having cultural resonance and a degree of responsibility is only slowly influencing a discipline whose dominant approach since engaging with research has been the development of individual creativity. Research content here is expressed in terms of the individual's intention and personal rationale for an innovative design rather than a rigorous and intentional framing, and then solving of a 'wicked problem', a dilemma worth thinking about for more than just the entrepreneur (Douglas, Scopa and Gray

2000). Specifically, it seems to me that design education and research in many institutions still focuses on individual competence rather than collaborative efforts as students and staff are all too rarely engaged in group projects or multidisciplinary efforts. Yet we know that only very few can vanquish the collective strength of a group by working alone; think of research funding applications, curriculum design or preparations for product launches when the market is saturated and known to harm the planet.

Design Education

However, as consumers seek identity beyond ubiquitous fashions and grow weary of the environmental impact of the mass market offerings, a further shift in textiles education from curiosity back to commitment could be witnessed locally, but significantly not at university level: A 2018 initiative to inject more than half a million pounds of government funding into a textiles skills' based training facility in the Scottish Borders shows renewed commitment to educating a workforce for transformed (now luxury) manufacturing industries when the government press release states that

> *a centre of excellence for textiles is to open (…) to address skills shortages in the textiles and knitwear sector and (…) to provide industry-specific training for both the current and future workforce. (…). This initiative will address business critical issues in the local textiles and knitwear sector and provide a stream of skilled young workers across all roles, enabling the world-renowned Borders businesses in this sector to address succession planning issues and reduce or remove the need to send work overseas (Holyrood 2018).*

The development is of note as it shows nostalgic expectations for continuing the skills-based pedagogy of 19th century art schools in 21st century University settings overtaken by government skills training initiatives outside higher education. In doing so, this development proves a clear reversal of the tide of art and training college incorporations into UK Higher Education during the 1990s formation of polytechnic Universities. Alongside this we see a remarkable repatriation of craft-based making skills training back into an industry that seeks to protect its specialist base, as for example Chanel completes its Métiers d'Arts headquarters in Paris and supports hundreds of apprenticeships around Europe, including Scotland. It leaves us to question what place Universities in design might occupy in the future when commitment to local industries is covered by other providers and curiosity has led design to be considered somewhat of a general degree that furnishes graduates with personal more than professional networks. On this basis, a worrying trend towards

design becoming a professionally irrelevant degree might be feared, but, surprisingly, some promising horizons seem to emerge beyond the cliffs of Brexit: This topic's relentless ubiquity in any academic future gazing at the time of my preparation to be a UK voice at Graz University's 2018 symposium on Curiosity and Commitment: Cultural and social sciences and the transformation of European Universities brought into sharp focus future potential for research. In the following paragraphs, I will be reflecting on some signposting of what design as a holistically cultural rather than merely technical discipline at university level might gain from these.

Commitment as Taming an Out-of-Control Status Quo, Curiosity as Rewilding our Collective Efforts to Improve the Present

The Design studies researcher Alice Payne has recently framed this potential crossroad for design as the choice between taming and rewilding, which strongly resonates with the commitment and curiosity theme of this tome: Her point of view derives from fashion studies, a discipline still not taken seriously in certain quarters of academe, yet arguably the design discipline that affects many of us most on a daily basis, and one that contributes a mighty £ 50 billion to the UK economy alone each year. What Payne, an award-winning fashion designer and senior lecturer in Fashion at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia states in her paper deserves to be cited in its entirety here:

> *The Anthropocene describes our current geological era, in which human activity has grown to become a planetary force. Interest in 'sustainable fashion' reflects the necessity to address the social and environmental ills of fashion. Yet thinking on sustainable fashion remains chiefly industry and user-focused, examining narrow questions regarding how industry may shift practises, or how users may engage with fashion differently – hence only tacitly positioned within the context of the Anthropocene. (…) First, fashion's Prometheans, the techno-optimists, propose a future in which cleaner technologies can lead to the gradual evolution of a better industry. In contrast, fashion's Soterians take a cautionary approach, and seek to unbind fashion from the unsustainable growth imperative of capitalism itself. Under these two, the definition of 'sustainable fashion' may differ, but, critically, their dialogue will shape the direction of fashion. Together, their actions create a 'fashion futuring', a dynamic process of negotiation between what I term the 'taming' and the 'rewilding' of fashion, within a world of our own making (Payne 2019: 5).*

To me, Payne's conceptualization of the current fashion design industry revives a challenge to all design researchers and educators that was at the heart of the Bauhaus, the Hochschule für Gestaltung, Ulm and other great design education movements of the 20th century: To be critical contributors to the prevailing economic system in that our offerings are informed by research rather than our research being shaped by industry needs; and that our ultimate goal for design research and education must be enriching community and society by presenting ideas for preferable futures rather than offering solutions for (often individual) economic growth in the short term.

An approach such as this places dual emphasis on curiosity and commitment, with curiosity demanding a collective push towards preferred futures or ideas, and commitment describing a continued will to constructively critique existing paradigms, or solutions.

For design, the writing might be on the wall as design anthropology and participatory research methods are moving quickly into design research and practise projects to perhaps soon relegate trend forecasts and profit charts from the university library to the boardroom.

Positioning Design between Curiosity and Commitment

In my mind, the crossroads for design research, and for education by implication, is whether we are content to provide business with solutions over ideas, with profound effects not just on our curriculum but also the sustainability of our discipline, our industries, our planet. And politics have much to do with current discussions as the UK seeks to position itself as a major economic powerhouse, while academic concerns over Brexit grow daily, while environmental and ethical deadlines are (dis)missed daily.

The body representing all UK Higher Education Institutions, Universities UK (UUK) lists Brexit as one of key concerns on its website, not just because of concerns over the movement of students and academics into a UK outside the EU, but also because of the immense importance of EU funding for research and innovation.[2] UUK unsurprisingly lobbies for continued full association with Horizon Europe 2021–2027 (worth € 100 billion), and interestingly for this paper, the funding is structured

2 EU funding is vital for the health of research in UK universities, with close to seven billion Euros of European money pouring into UK research between 2007 and 2013, accounting for as much as 15 % of yearly Research and 2.5 % of total income for UK universities. Five out of the Top Ten EU Universities in terms of attracting EU research funds were British in that same period, and the total value of EU research income gained by UK institutions is second only, and marginally so, to Germany (Full Fact 2018).

around the three pillars of (1) open science, (2) global challenges and industrial competitiveness, and (3) open innovation, mirroring research rhetoric in the UK. Horizon 2020 was seen by the European Commission as 'a means to drive economic growth and create jobs', while the European Horizon framework 9 places much emphasis on 'fundamental research and grants for research mobility and infrastructure' before clustering research into five formidable challenges of our times: health; inclusive and secure society; digital and industry; climate, energy and mobility; and food and natural resources. Enhancing Europe's innovation output limps in a distant third, with a lack of demonstrable impact from Horizon 2020 research cited as one of the drivers for this shift in emphasis (European Commission 2018).

In the UK, the newly established UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) body has similarly vowed to work 'in partnership with universities, research organisations, businesses, charities, and government to create the best possible environment for research and innovation to flourish.' It continued by promising that 'we will invest every pound of taxpayers' money wisely in a way that maximises impact for citizens, in the UK and across the world.' The radical news for researchers tired of having to spin out their ideas into money making ventures in order to attract funds is the emphasis on three separate impact scenarios as UKRI wishes to 'push the frontiers of human knowledge and understanding', 'deliver economic impact and social prosperity' and 'create social and cultural impact by supporting our society and others to become enriched, healthier, more resilient and sustainable' (UK Research and Innovation 2018).

The last strategy of my own university Heriot-Watt was placing much emphasis on closeness to business, with Applied research, Graduate Apprenticeships, Spin outs, Knowledge exchange and Entrepreneur competition support for staff and students given high priority. Our website still cites Business as a third priority next to Study and Research, and it proudly declares its position of the second University in Scotland with regards to the number of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships [InnovateUK], and the 4th in Scotland and top 15 in UK for number of spinouts created [PraxisUnico & Young Company Finance 2000–12] (Heriot-Watt University 2018). We are encouraged to run live projects with industry that excite our students, save industry the need for Research and development Departments, and exhaust staff. But at my University also there is a realisation that research funds are shifting towards more than immediate business impact, and broad stakeholder engagement has been sought for the new Strategy 2025 as it places much more emphasis on equality of opportunity and the transformation of lives. The UN Sustainable Development Goals are being cited here as an 'imperative to link equality of opportunity, economic growth, sustainable use of resources and protecting our planet's environment in a single

framework' and the website stresses that 'the research and teaching capacity of Universities is recognised as a key mechanism for driving economic growth *and* transforming lives within this framework' (my emphasis).

Curious Commitment to a Promising Future of Design in Academia

Based on my observations above, the design academe in the UK of 2019 might be described as having moved from commitment, via curiosity to a position of curious commitment, where wild ideas from multidisciplinary engagement with broad issues are valued as part of the solution for taming current challenges, and where design is buoyed by its rightful perception as offering practises for inclusive problem solving. Some heritage actors from industry and academe will be disappointed at the discipline's turn away from straight-forward training for existing industries; some students will resent the emphasis change from personal discovery to global challenges, whether ethical, environmental or indeed economical; but many academics will welcome the subtle shift away from Higher education's neo-liberalisation towards design's true potential. Considering the evidence in this paper, design researchers might be cautiously optimistic that the challenge-driven and impact-obsessed transformation of the funding landscape can bring some positive developments for our area and well beyond, to academic fields that tend to be drawn to ideas as much as solutions, that value curiosity alongside commitment, that like to rewild at least as much as to tame. If we agree with Roland Barthes (1967) that fashion is a social system of meanings for which clothes are the material basis, then education in fashion as well as all design must value research and training beyond immediate application to existing business systems. It must be oriented towards preferred futures and more carefully critique what part of its great heritage is still fit for purpose, so that the discipline might have the potential to positively transform the ways in which we live and to meet the formidable challenge of regaining sustainability in our actions.

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