

not
white

diversity in beginning design education



Shannon Chance, AIA, Editor

PROCEEDINGS of the
20th National Conference on
the Beginning Design Student
Hampton University Department of Architecture

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Diversity in Design: The Journal of Inclusive Design Education

Relevant contemporary design education enables students to make critically sound and socially conscious choices in complex situations.

It fosters actions that:

- a) take the viewpoints, needs, and desires of ‘the other’ into consideration;
- b) encourage thoughtful navigation between states, media, and disciplines;
- c) relate various languages, systems, and cultures;
- d) bridge data and knowledge; and
- e) broaden and deepen the comprehensibility and accessibility of our complicated multi-environments.

To address these issues, the Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access has initiated a new academic journal entitled *Diversity in Design: The Journal of Inclusive Design Education*. This journal is a forum for in-depth and timely analysis of scholarly issues related to diversity, and, particularly, issues related to inclusive design. It focuses on the changing roles of the designer in increasingly diverse societies. Through peer-reviewed articles that examine diversity issues in design education and interviews with leading scholars/educators, the journal encourages a global community of designers and educators to create new knowledge, partnerships, and gateways to inclusive design education. The content of the journal will challenge the meanings of design in situations where traditional notions have been broken or reconfigured. It will advance the critical examination of who is doing the designing; what is being designed; where ‘design’ is taking place; why certain types of design are being promoted; and how these images, products, and environments are designed, produced and consumed. It will explore the ways that various diversity groups have affected the design disciplines and, in turn, the ways that these disciplines have affected various diversity groups.

The journal is a pioneering technological initiative that employs the most up-to-date information delivery technologies to ensure seamless information retrieval in a fully accessible W3C-compliant format. An invaluable resource for the multi-disciplinary academic design community, *Diversity in Design* is the only publication of its kind. This presentation is the formal introduction of this new journal to the design community.

abstract

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Alex Bitterman earned a M.Arch. degree from the University at Buffalo, The State University of New York as well as a Baccalaureate degree in Business Management and English from State University of New York College at Buffalo. He also holds a certificate in pre-professional study (Architecture) from the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University.

Presently, Alex is Program Director for Information Design and Dissemination at the Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access and the RERC on Universal Design at Buffalo.

As the Fred R. Brunkow Fellow of the University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning from 1999-2001, Mr. Bitterman turned his various interests in architecture, literature and graphic design toward editorial and activities. Most recently he has directed the design of a number of academic texts and journals, and is co-editor of *Diversity in Design*, an international peer-reviewed academic journal.

Mr. Bitterman is an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the department of Regional and Urban Planning at the University at Buffalo, The State University of New York, and an Adjunct Professor of Design at Buffalo State College. He is also a founding partner of k629 design.

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Beth Tauke is an Associate Professor and former Associate Dean in the Department of Architecture at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Her scholarly research combines the areas of inclusive design, visual perception (color), spatial analysis and design education. She has published in *Building Material*, *Design Issues*, *Utopian Studies*, *Representation*, and *Foundations in Art, Theory and Criticism*, among others; has co-edited *Universal Design: New York* with Dr. G.S. Danford; and is co-editing a new academic journal

Diversity in Design: The Journal of Inclusive Design Education with Alex Bitterman. Tauke is project director of a U.S. Department of Education Curriculum Models Project, part of the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Universal Design at Buffalo directed by Dr. E. Steinfeld. In addition, she is a co-investigator for the National Institute of Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education – Field-Initiated Development Project entitled *Universal Design Education Online*. Professor Tauke's awards include a National Institute for Architectural Education Award, the American Collegiate Schools of Architecture Robert R. Taylor Award, the Lily Endowment Teaching Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts Grant (with M. Lum), and the State University of New York Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching. email: tauke@ap.buffalo.edu

paper

“What sets worlds in motion is the interplay of differences, their attractions and repulsions. Life is plurality, death is uniformity”

Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*

The term diversity seems to be everywhere these days. It is peppered throughout university websites and design magazines. It can be found in the NAAB student performance criteria and has even been spotted in a few studio project statements. More and more, design competitions are including the term in their briefs. This year, it is the theme of the 20th National Conference on the Beginning Design Student at Hampton University.

Despite its ‘loaded’ content in our PC culture, the term ‘diversity’ has maintained enough potency to sustain a place of influence in our contemporary vocabulary, and, therefore, one might argue, it is worthy of our further attention and study. What are the underlying concepts of diversity that relate to our designed environments? Do we really understand the complexities inherent in these relationships? Is diversity a necessary component of the content, process, and participants in design? What are the consequences of the diversity agenda, particularly in education?

The term ‘diversity’ can be traced to the Middle English *divers(e)* meaning ‘sundry’, ‘several’, ‘many’ and to the Old French *divers* and Latin *diversus* meaning ‘different’, ‘contrary’, ‘separate’, ‘to turn aside’, ‘divert’.¹ Because of this paradoxical history, we’ve inherited a term that now has multiple and often contradictory interpretations. One the one hand, diversity is considered to be variety and multiformity; on the other, it is identified as the fact or quality of being different. The ‘group’ component of the term refers to arrays, ranges, assortments, collections, and multiples. The ‘individualistic’ notion of diversity suggests distinctness, disparateness, uniqueness, unlike others. The incongruous development of the term has put ‘diversity’ in a ‘both/and’ situation that challenges the ways in which it is incorporated into design language, research and practice.

The complexities in diversity and design relationships, perhaps, stem from this set of oppositional definitions. Not only do these definitions refer to noticeable heterogeneity, but also diversity can be the more active condition of the change process itself. It follows that design then assumes at least two roles in these relationships: it can build assurances of variety and choice into its processes and products, and it can also be the source or catalyst for change.

Diversity is an important component in design and design education because, as the website for the next Design for the 21st Century Conference states “we are now more diverse in age and ability than ever before.”² This increasingly diverse population will be participants in and recipients of all of our design thinking and making. However, as Pentagram designer Michael Beirut claims, “Modern design education, on the other hand, is essentially value-free: Every problem has a purely visual [and formal] solution that exists outside any cultural context.... Until educators find a way to expose their students to a meaningful range of culture, graduates will continue to speak in languages that only their classmates understand.”³ Moving beyond these self-referential modes could assist designers and design educators to develop processes and work that resonates with the broader population, that contains meaning for more people. As designers, if we imagine the wide array of possible values, we can uncover an equally wide array of possible design approaches and solutions that might manifest and support other ways of thinking and being. And that might be the way design becomes a primary catalyst for social and cultural change.

While these idealistic notions are encouraging, it is important to remember that the consequences of considering diversity and difference as a fundamental component of design education have yet to be fully determined. Nonetheless, we do know that learning about and intelligently contributing to our constantly changing and multiple designed environments

requires remarkable flexibility on our part. Making design choices that ensure both sensitivity and the possibility for challenge and enrichment for others and ourselves involves a level of tolerance—a willingness to explore ideas and ways of being that we don't necessarily believe in or admire. Developing the ability to explore and understand issues in as many contexts and from as many points of view as possible is a crucial part of this endeavor. Equally important is an ability to comprehend the 'connectors' between these vantage points. Understanding differences and the ways we connect are as fundamental to design education as classic principles that concentrate on formal outcomes and conventional linear processes. It follows that a broader notion of scholarship focused on multiple notions of design and their attendant consequences can establish a set of frameworks through which this education can take place. Relevant contemporary design education and practice enables us to make critically sound and socially conscious choices in complex situations. It fosters actions that:

- a) take the viewpoints, needs, and desires of 'the other' into consideration;
- b) encourage thoughtful navigation between states, media, and disciplines;
- c) relate various languages, systems, and cultures;
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The journal is an initiative that employs current information delivery technologies to ensure seamless information retrieval in a fully accessible W3C compliant format. Developers of the site have strived to make the site usable to as many participants as possible, regardless of browser or format.

Our first postings include an interview with GSD professor and architect Monica Ponce de Leon, principle in Office dA, on her socially focused critical practice; an article by Craig Vogel, industrial design professor at Carnegie Mellon, on the ways in which his changing physical abilities have affected his design thinking and processes; and an article by Andy Proehl, director of the Sony Design Center, on the role of design diversity throughout the product development process and the ways in which these roles have changed since the growth of the Internet.

We invite all of you to subscribe to this free online publication and, equally important, to submit your scholarly and design work for consideration. Articles will be peer reviewed and posted on a monthly basis, as well as e-mailed to those on the subscriber list. Please contact co-editors Beth Tauke tauke@arch.buffalo.edu or Alex Bitterman at aeb1@ap.buffalo.edu if you are interested in submitting your work for review.

The URL for Diversity in Design is www.diversityindesign.org.

We hope you will consider participating in this important project. It is through critical

study of the ways that our systems include or exclude meaningful developments of diversity in design that we transition from supporters of the status quo to arbiters of change.

NOTES

¹ The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology. ed. T.F. Hoad (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press. 1986). 130.

² Adaptive Environments, D 21³ Designing for the 21st Century: An International Conference on Universal Design. January 2004. <<http://www.designfor21st.org/>>

³ Michael Beruit. "Why Designers Can't Think," *Looking Closer, Critical Writings on Graphic Design*. ed. Michael Beruit, William Drenttel, Steven Heller, and DK Holland (New York: Allworth Press. 1994). 217.