VISIBLE LANGUAGE
41.2

Designing Philosophy

/ David Sless

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Abstract

Drawing on the everyday experience of collaborative design, and using ordinary language, I examine the nature of design practices and rules, how they come about, and how we use them.

I offer some arguments to suggest that our conventional ways of thinking about rules are wrong. I conclude by arguing that the practice of designing and doing philosophy are merging, opening up exciting new possibilities.

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INTRODUCTION

I am writing this essay on designing philosophy for fellow designers, in the belief that it may offer some useful insights into our everyday practice. I am also writing it conscious of a design tradition in which elegance, simplicity, truth to materials, function and above all a deep respect for people and the environment are at the core of what we do as designers.

I take philosophy to be something one does in order to help oneself and others make sense of everyday life. For me it is also an extension of what I do in my daily practice as an information designer: making information accessible and usable to people so that it makes sense to them.

In this essay I am offering what I hope will be accessible and usable design philosophy that will make sense to fellow designers, which will improve our capacity to think about the everyday matters we deal with, and which will be a contribution to a design tradition. In particular, this essay concerns the rules we designers use to guide our practice.

In taking this approach to doing philosophy, I am following the injunction of Ludwig Wittgenstein when he wrote to his friend Norman Malcolm (1984, p.93) saying:

> *··· what is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is to enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc., & if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life.*

I will also be following Wittgenstein's approach to dealing with philosophical matters through ordinary language and using some of his methods of argument, supplemented with some information design methods of problem solving that emerge out of contemporary information design practice.

AT ODDS WITH THE MAINSTREAM

My approach to doing philosophy puts me at odds with the mainstream 'academic turn' in philosophy, to use Saarinen and Uschanov's apt phrase (1998).

> *With some notable exceptions like Russell, Wittgenstein and Sartre, the history of philosophy in the twentieth century has exclusively been the history of university philosophy. ··· It seems to us that the key turn in philosophy this century has not been the linguistic turn, nor the epistemological turn, nor the logical or formalistic turn, but the academic turn.*

It also puts me at odds with the mainstream academic design research community which has recently turned its attention to design philosophy: one whole issue of the *Design Studies* was devoted to the subject in 2002; a new publishing venture *Design Philosophy Papers* was launched on the Internet in 2003 (http://www.desphilosophy.com/dpp/home.html); the recent Design Research Society Conference Common Ground had a stream devoted to the topic; and the PhD design list (http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/phd-design.html) has had a number of discussion threads about design philosophy.

Even though I have participated in some of this activity and read with great interest many of the contributions, like many practicing designers I find much of this corpus disconnected from my everyday practice and difficult to use as a basis for improving my capacity to think about the everyday matters that I deal with. This may, of course, be my fault. No doubt, there will be those who will delight in pointing this out to me.

Nonetheless, from where I view the 'academic turn' in design philosophy, it goes against my designerly sense of elegance, simplicity and respect for the

user: in this case those of us who try to read this writing in search of insight. But rather than offer a critique of its modes and manners, I prefer to engage in something constructive using the ordinary language available to us. I offer some thoughts on what we do as designers and I explore how we might use that language productively in the future to extend our design work.

I think it is premature to join the academic turn's eager embrace of abstractions. At the very least, we need to exhaust the ordinary everyday usages at our disposal before we deem them inadequate and create new usages, new words; time enough to embrace specialist terms and jargon, but only when absolutely necessary and without rushing to embrace academic discourse. If we are to create neologisms and specialist terms, then let us apply the same sensibility to such language as we have applied to the design of books and chairs, instead of following the halting attempts of academics. Moreover, if designing is to be genuinely participatory and involving of both professional and lay people as our designers, then we have some obligation to conduct our conversations in language that is widely shared and even enjoyed.

However, before we can do so, we need to free ourselves of intellectual shackles—ways of thinking and methods that still dominate most of the academic research and lay thinking into the nature of rules.

THE BLOCKED ROAD

Semantics, syntactics and pragmatics

In the last century, three categories—semantics, syntactics and pragmatics—were used extensively as a way of dealing with different aspects of rules, particularly as applied to language.

One of the clearest and most accessible definitions of these three terms is to be found in a slim volume by Charles Morris, published in 1938: *Foundations of*

the Theory of Signs. In this volume, one of the seminal texts in linguistics, Morris articulated the framework through which most of the research and thinking in linguistics, computer science, information design and many other social phenomena involving rules were studied in the 20th century. Each of these key terms—semantics, syntactics and pragmatics—have been used to describe a particular aspect of language. To paraphrase Morris's definitions: semantics is concerned with the relation between words and the things they stand for or represent, what we think of in popular discourse as the meanings of words; syntactics is concerned with the relations between words, what in popular terms we refer to as grammar; and pragmatics is concerned with the relation between words and their users, what in popular terms we would describe as speech or reading.

These three types of relationships—and it is extremely important to see these terms as defining relationships—not objects—are generally accepted as covering the range and scope within which we can study rules, whether linguistic, or, as in my own case of information design, the hybrid yet indivisible combination of language and graphics.

In Morris's formulation and in most other theoretical treatments of the subject, the three types of relationship are treated as having the same status, the same right to existence under the sun. They are treated as three aspects of language, but seen through different approaches and methods. However, in practice semantics and syntactics are treated as more important. The argument, broadly put, is that the way we use language (pragmatics) is determined by what words mean (semantics) and by the grammatical rules we apply to putting the words together (syntactics). That is, pragmatics is secondary to, and dependent on, semantics and syntactics.

The arguments I present here totally upend this view. Pragmatics, I will

argue, is not only more important than the other two, but semantics and syntactics have no existence outside of pragmatics. Indeed, I suggest that any semantic or syntactic analysis is a pragmatic invention. Far from being real and valid subjects in their own right, I argue that semantics and syntactics are generated, constructed through pragmatics. This upending has profound practical implications for design.

WHY PRAGMATICS RULES

The arguments in favor of my thesis must stand up against one powerful proposition of classical linguistics which sustains the superior ontological status of semantics and syntactics: namely that there are fundamental rules underlying usage. Certainly, observations of people and societies point to many areas of consistent usage, whether in language, graphics or other communicative forms. It is argued that this observed consistency must be the product of an underlying rationale or process. The proposition that my arguments have to counter is that semantic and syntactic studies open up for scrutiny this underlying rationale.

I offer three arguments against this central proposition of classical linguistics and three observations.

Three Arguments

1. **Neither semantic nor syntactic** properties of language are observable in themselves. We only have 'access' to these properties through instances of language use. To use the terminology of theories in this area: we can only study competence through performance; we can only study *langue* through *parole*; we can only study cognition through

behavior; we can only study the unconscious through conversation; and so on. The object of study is never observed, always inferred.

2. **Within any theory of semantic** or syntactic structuring or rules we also need a theory that explains how these structures or rules determine behavior (or action depending on your theoretical preferences). Such styles of thinking resonate well with dualist philosophical claims about the links between mind and body, spirit and action. And they suffer from the same logical flaws and *reductio* ad *absurdum*.

3. **Any theory** that presupposes underlying rules that powerfully determine behavior or action must also account for our daily encounter with aberrant behavior and changes in consistent usage. Why do people break so-called 'underlying rules,' rules that are supposed to determine their actions? How do people invent new ways of acting consistently, supposedly changing the underlying rules? Again, these are not new questions and are similar to other earlier challenges to functionalist thinking.

The classic tactic in defense of 'underlying rules' is endless elaboration: every exception creates a new rule. But the deployment of this tactic exposes a costly aspect of sustaining a belief in the existence of semantic and syntactic features of language. This belief requires elaborate and costly academic institutional frameworks within which to sustain the endless elaboration. Faith is, as ever,

greatly demanding of individual and collective effort. Yet despite the effort deployed in order to 'create' the impression of a body of knowledge there are three repeated observations made by researchers that bedevil attempts to turn these so called 'fields of study' into useful bodies of knowledge.

Three observations

1. None of the theories that fall into this broad church—from psychoanalysis to transformational grammar and cognitive science—are predictive of peoples' behavior or actions. In their defense we are given two explanations. First, these are young sciences and we need more research. Second, these are theories of interpretation or hermeneutics, ways of understanding that enrich our world. The first explanation must await the verdict of time, but the second one is disingenuous; it may be true, but such theories derive much of their rhetorical force from the implicit and sometimes explicit claim that they actually explain human conduct. Plausible *post-factum* 'explanation' is good story telling, no more nor less. But it is not a useful body of knowledge in any scientific sense.

2. More damningly, if one is concerned about rigor, these theories offer no methods of proof that enable us to distinguish between discovery and invention. A typical feature of such theories is that they offer a dense and multi-variable complex explanation of human action, far more dense and complex than the phenomenon they seek to account for. In

simple terms, they always present us with more unknowns than knowns. As most high school students learn: to solve a set of equations containing unknowns, you always need the same number of equations as unknowns. It doesn't matter how many equations you have, how elaborate or complex they are; 100 equations and 100 unknowns can be resolved, 100 equations and 101 unknowns cannot. Behind the wealth of elaboration and scholarship, there is at best an unresolvable uncertainty and at worst, nothing to resolve.

3. **Most compellingly,** however, is a simple fact that many of us have 'discovered' in design when we test our design with people: namely the best predictor of future action is previous action, not an appeal to underlying reasons or causes. It is for this reason that our work in information design always involves testing designs with those who use them (Fisher & Sless, 1990; Sless, 1992).

On the basis of the three arguments I have offered and the three observations I have just made, I want to assert my thesis that pragmatics is at the very least ontologically superior, and probably all we have, all else being invention and good story telling.

We can take a much simpler view of the consistent usage in language than that offered by appeal to the abstractions of semantics and syntactics. Simply, consistent usage occurs because it works. There is a simple and compelling utility in consistency. If we learn the rules, we can take part in the game. One needs no greater depth of explanation.

RULES

Preliminary points

Some important points are in order before my main discussion on rules.

First, I am talking here about human action—things people do. I am not talking about behavior—responses to stimuli. My interest is in what people do in the world, not what causes human behavior.

Second, such simplification or deflation of arguments is not the same as reductionism. I am not reducing something complex to its simpler constituents and thereby losing a holistic view. Rather, I am suggesting that the complexity does not exist in the phenomenon itself. It is an unnecessary human invention—an inflationary form of thinking that results in ever more elaborate and complex schemes to 'explain' something that does not need explanation.

Third, I would suggest that the inflationary tendency in design is most apparent in academic design research. This may have something to do with the current political economy of the academic world. One is more likely to get research funding for studying something complex rather than something simple. Reductionism may be out of favor in the academy, but inflationism is in.

My preference is for synthesis and, where possible, radical simplification.

I want to say something general about such rules—what they are and how we might productively apply our current insights about them to the long-term intellectual development of our design practice. To do so I turn to the philosophy of language. Language is the most sophisticated and well developed social practice for which we have articulated rules; and it is also the area of social practice that has been most rigorously and imaginatively explored by philosophers, particularly in the last century.

In Wittgenstein's footsteps

In developing what I have to say about rules, I am drawing heavily on Ludwig Wittgenstein's seminal contribution to the philosophy of language in the 20th century. I cannot point to a single text in which the reader might find the exact point of reference on which I am drawing. Wittgenstein never resolved or finished his work. He constantly revised his thinking. Moreover, Wittgenstein's work is impossible to just dip into and get much sense out of a single quotation or even a collection of such quotations. Only through a careful reading of the progression of his thinking and knowing the background to his thinking—the philosophical ideas or arguments with which he was disagreeing or agreeing—can one make sense of his work. This makes his work difficult to access and probably impossible without the necessary background.

For the general reader, the excellent biography by Ray Monk (1991) may be illuminating. For the more technically-minded reader, with a knowledge of the philosophy of language, José Medina's excellent analysis of the development of Wittgenstein's thoughts on rules would be useful (Medina, 2002).

For me, the most inspiring of Wittgenstein's writing is his later work; in particular I am drawn to the insights in the collection of fragments that made up his final work, *On Certainty* (1969). In particular, I am drawing on Wittgen-

stein's method of arguing. Happily, it is possible to articulate those methods of arguing in ordinary language, without reference to the technicalities of philosophical debate from which they emerged.

Wittgenstein uses two relatively simple methods in his later work.

First, when faced with a question about the meaning of a word or phrase, he exhorts us repeatedly to look at ordinary usage of that word or phrase. Wittgenstein was interested in the words and phrases used by the philosophers of his time; words such as 'knowledge,' 'truth,' 'certainty,' 'logic' and so on. He argued, and repeatedly demonstrated, that by looking at ordinary usage, many abstract philosophical ideas, like those mentioned above, just dissolve. Moreover, he argues that such terms only make sense in philosophical arguments when they are taken out of any specific context of use—and this results in an unproductive spiral of abstraction.

Second, when faced with questions about the articulated rules of usage—grammar, logic, syntax, codes of practice—he exhorts us to look at the community of users and their shared practices. Wittgenstein's principle preoccupation was with the articulated rules of logic, mathematics and language. In his earlier work he took the view that underlying all language use was logic. He came to doubt this and later considered it a mistaken view. In his later work he argues that the rules of logic or mathematics, or any other

activity for which one could articulate a set of rules, could be seen as rule-following practices agreed by a community of practitioners. Thus the rule in mathematics that says that 2 + 2 = 4 is not an expression of some fundamental universal truth, but rather an agreed rule of practice by mathematicians. This makes the rules of mathematics on a par with say, the rules for playing chess—human inventions that are useful in a particular context. They only have their 'fundamental' properties within that context. Taken out of context, such rules are empty unproductive spirals of abstraction.

These two simple methods—looking at usage and looking at the context of usage—resonate well with designing. This is, after all, what contemporary designers try to do! Moreover it provides an important *raison d'être* for the practice of designing collaboratively. I believe it also provides a basis on which we can extend the insights that design philosophy can offer our everyday practices.

Where do rules come from?

The fact that one can teach rules and maintain the stability of their usage over a period of time has an unfortunate side effect with which Wittgenstein wrestled in his philosophical arguments. Because the rules can seemingly stand apart from the actual practice they articulate, they seem to have an independent existence. This has led many people to think of rules as not only separate from practice, but in some respect superior to practice. After all, once articulated, rules are followed and this makes it seem that the rules are the

more important of the two.

As I have already suggested, this type of thinking has led many to believe that syntactics and semantics are in some sense more important than pragmatics. But this cannot be the case, as I will demonstrate below. Wittgenstein brings us back to earth. With these thoughts in mind, I shall proceed to look at some of our ordinary usages and the rules they give rise to.

Over millennia of social practices, people have developed many shared ways of doing things, across many aspects of our lives. We invent new practices all the time: some lapse, others persist. As designers, we learn to follow agreed ways of doing a large amount of what we do. Aesthetics, styling, composition, layout and presentation are all designerly concerns that draw on established ways of doing things. At the same time, we create new ways of doing things—new styles or arrangements. Sometimes we create new ways of doing things that extend existing practices. At times we create totally new practices that undermine and negate previously agreed ways of doing things.

These agreed designerly ways of doing things—social practices that persist—are sometimes investigated and then articulated as rules. A rule, as I use the term here, is an agreed social practice that has been articulated. In other words, rules follow practice; practice does not follow rules.

This process of investigation and articulation has been called by Frayling (2002) the 'Normative Tradition of design research'—a tradition that was the heartland of design research in the 19th century. Frayling also comments that research into these types of rules "in the digital age, is making a comeback" (2002, p. 5).

I'm not so sure it has ever gone away. Those of us involved in information design research still regard it as the heartland, with many important contributions to this type of research in the last century and continuing into this

(Engelhardt, 2002; Horn, 1998; Neurath, 1936; Richards, 1984; Twyman, 1979; Waller, 1987).

In typographic design, as an example, there are many articulated rules: how much space to allow between sentences, how to indicate the start of a new paragraph, when to use bold, italics, caps, small caps and many others. These rules have been articulated in style manuals and they provide prescriptive rules of typographical layout (Walker, 2001).

Once a rule has been articulated, we can use it as a basis for guiding action. In that context we can say that rules precede and guide action. Indeed, we say that people follow rules.

But rules can only be followed once they have been articulated. As an example, the publishers of this journal issue a style guide to authors. This is a set of rules about how we should set out paragraphs, headings, references and so on—a design guide. In writing this paper, I try to follow this design guide. This is much easier than my sending in a manuscript and receiving it back from the editor full of corrections because I have not conformed to the editor's normal way of doing things. Our human capacity to make articulated rules available to each other is very powerful: it enables us to teach others a particular social practice and, of course, enables us to maintain that practice over a period of time.

Rules, therefore, are human inventions that follow practice. Rules are how we 'explain' practice to each other and they arise out of our desire to explain to others what we do. The great power of rules is that they enable people to share common practices by means other than laborious trial and error and copying.

Research by design

These practices and their articulated rules can only be researched and devel-

oped through actually doing design. This type of research emerges out of practice, largely outside the academy. Professional and lay designers, in collaboration with those who use the designs, develop newly shared practices. In the case of information design it occurs in the collaborative struggle to make sense out of emerging communicative opportunities, like email and the World Wide Web.

Such research, which later gets articulated into rules, is one way in which both experts and laypeople make contributions to our collective knowledge. It is collaborative designing at work. It is only when researchers try to articulate it as a set of rules, such as the studies mentioned above, or it takes on a prescriptive form, such as a publisher's style guide, that it finds its way into the academy. By that time, however, the practices have been largely developed and agreed. Of necessity, most of the serious consideration of precedents, trial and error, experimentation and refinement takes place through the everyday practice of trying to make things work in the world. In other words, it is, as Frayling describes it, 'research by design' (Frayling, 1993). For those who assert that (Friedman, 2002) " [s]o far, the category of research by design has proven fruitless," I suggest they take a long and careful look at this ancient and still practiced form of design research.

In information design (my own field) there is a vast, though scattered, body of practice for which rules of usage have been articulated. Some of this body of articulated rules is used in the education of graphic designers, technical illustrators, map makers, statisticians, architects, photographers, editors and writers. Doubtless, practicing designers in other areas can point to a similar corpus, as could many other professionals who have developed regular practices which have been articulated as rules.

FROM LANGUAGE TO DESIGN

I want to suggest that ordinary language activity and its rules on the one hand, and design and its rules on the other hand, are different manifestations of the same thing. I am therefore extending Wittgenstein's insights on language into design.

Wittgenstein's preoccupation was with ordinary language conversation and what makes sense to people engaged in such conversations. Language, like other artifacts, is something we have made collaboratively with others over millennia. Indeed, one could argue that language is the most ancient and sophisticated ongoing collaborative design project that people have ever undertaken. It is constantly being tested, refined and changed to meet user needs; its features get discarded or added depending on user needs. I find the idea of language as prototypically a collaborative design project compelling.

Designing for me as an information designer is about making artifacts collaboratively. We designers not only invent new practices—new usages of the material and symbolic worlds—through the creation of new objects and symbols—but we also codify some of what we invent into rules so that others can take part in the new practices.

If the arguments I have developed above, following Wittgenstein, are sound, then design rules are, like language rules, something which people articulate as a result of actual usage—through design. Design rules, like language rules, are not the result of logic or underlying causes; rather, they are constructed, after the event, from usage; rules are our way of articulating agreed social practices. They do not exist prior to usage, they only come into existence following usage. They are, in fact, inventions rather than discoveries. Designers invent rules in order to give coherence to practice.

LIBERATING RESPONSIBLE DESIGNERS

The cumulative consequences of these arguments are enormously liberating for designers, but with the addition of some important responsibilities. As designers we are relieved of a great burden of explanation. We do not have to provide a logical or causal explanation for the practices we invent, nor the rules we articulate to share those practices with others.

None of this argument should be used to suggest that designers are in some sense free from taking account of the material, psychological, social, economic and environmental conditions in which they work and in which their designs will be used. On the contrary, these are and always have been important and legitimate concerns of anyone who wants to engage in responsible design practice. But I would distinguish between the factors that designers should properly take account of in the scoping stage of a project and the creation of new social practices which is at the heart of the design process, that do not have their basis in either logic or causation.

However, the argument does suggest that as designers we do not have to legitimize the practices we invent in terms of psychological, social, cultural, material causes or in terms of logical coherence. Rather, we can invent practices and see where they take us. This is, of course, liberating, yet with that liberation comes a new responsibility. As there is no basis in either logic or science to the practices we invent, we cannot appeal to those traditions to legitimize our inventions.

If we, as designers, wish to legitimize the inventions we create, we—the designers—have to provide the evidence in their support.

For example, we cannot claim that our designs will work because we have followed a logical process to arrive at a solution. Following a logical process may be valuable to us in organizing our activity and bringing some order into

a complex incoherent problem domain, but in itself it offers no guarantee that the resulting design will work. Formal methods will always have only a limited role in design problem solving, whether those formal methods have their basis in logic or any other already articulated rules. Rules have a special place in human affairs: they can be followed, changed, broken, ignored, even subverted; people can invent new practices or choose to ignore existing ones.

The same applies to the application of scientific knowledge. For example, we could not claim that our design will be usable because we have taken account of human factors research findings. Nor could we claim that our designs will be environmentally appropriate if we take environmental issues into account.

Such formal methods or scientific knowledge may be valuable in narrowing the range of potential problems that a new design might create. Indeed, it can be argued that any responsible professional designer should take account of these and any other factors that might affect the quality of what we create. But, in themselves, neither formal methods nor scientific knowledge offer a guarantee or evidence that a new design will work, will be usable or will be environmentally appropriate. The onus of proof—providing the evidence—rests squarely on designers' shoulders.

Such a conclusion may not be welcomed by those who pin their hopes for the future of design as 'science or technology' in which taking account of other people's knowledge will result in successful design. This I take to be the core of Friedman's recent bold claim (2002, p.10): "Design is of necessity in transition from art and craft practice to a form of technical and social science focused on how to do things to accomplish goals."

Friedman is, of course, not the first to make such a claim. David Jonassen (1982, p.x), for example, made a similar claim twenty years ago in the field of text design: "...a scientific approach to text design...exists as a counterpoint to

the artistic and unsystematic approach to text design and layout that has prevailed since petroglyphs were first inscribed on walls."

Interestingly, what many of us in text design have been taught, through practice, is that the 'prescientific' approach to text design and layout was far from 'unsystematic' and that 'artistic' contributions to our knowledge and practice are at the heart of what we most value. The fact that little if any of this taught know-how, we internalize through experience, finds its way into the 'scientific research' literature, makes it no less real nor less valuable.

Undoubtedly, claims about the superiority of science and technology over art and craft will continue. But we should resist them; they undervalue the importance of rules as discussed here to which the arts and crafts have made, and continue to make, significant contributions. Indeed, if one is playing the futurology game, one could easily argue the contrary case, saying that design is 'of necessity' in transition from technical and social science to art and craft practices. I prefer a much more ecumenical approach. Moreover, my concern here is not with the future but rather with what we are doing now and how we should make sense of that to each other.

My conclusion about the need for evidence is also unlikely to be welcomed by those who rely on the normative tradition of 'established' rules as a defense of contemporary practice. This is not an argument for ignoring or dismissing established rules, far from it. Such rules are the bedrock of contemporary practice. We learn our craft as designers by learning these rules and we pass on what we learn through them. However, through practice, we continually find new circumstances not covered by existing rules and in some instances we create new practices that we then articulate as rules.

Whether or not the new practice and its articulated rules are actually usable or appropriate, however, is not something that we can determine in advance

of their application. Only evidence of successful application can enable us to assert that a design using a new practice will work.

Neither the application of scientific knowledge nor the observance of established rules allows us to escape the need for designerly evidence to establish a claim about whether a particular design works or not.

This is a very practical matter concerning our everyday practice. Part of what we do every day is to seek ways to legitimize the value of what we do. If we don't provide evidence that shows the value of design know-how, we don't eat. I have suggested that we cannot use either logic or science to legitimize our practices; we therefore have to offer our own types of evidence, based on our practices, systematic methods and, of course, results. Some of us already do this (Fisher & Sless, 1990; Rogers et al., 1995).

For those educators and researchers working to legitimize design in higher education, it might be more useful to look towards those of us who are providing designerly evidence to our clients on a routine basis, rather than trying to legitimize design in higher education by turning it into yet another 'technical and social science'—thereby losing the very thing that makes us distinctive and able to offer a distinctive contribution to the world.

DESIGNING RULES, DESIGNING PHILOSOPHY

With the idea of generating new practices and articulating rules for those practices as something distinctive that we designers do, I want to come full circle returning to philosophy and our everyday concerns.

At a recent conference on designing information for older tourists, I was struck by a discussion we had with one of the speakers, Karin Nijhuis of the Netherlands Board of Tourism. Karin is concerned with the design and development of an 'inclusive internet platform'—www.holland.com. In the discus-

sion, Karin shared with us some of the difficulties in designing a suitable set of categories for grouping information in a way that was useful to a diverse range of tourists. For example, some information is directed specifically to older people, but as many older people do not think of themselves as older, nor do they want to be thought of as associating with older people, they will not respond to a category system based on tourists' ages. In other words, Karin was trying, through practice, to develop a set of useful rules for guiding future practice. Three things can be learned from Karin's problem.

First, the problem of categories is a design problem. It has to do with creating a new structure, albeit a conceptual one.

Second, this type of conceptual problem and many others have become commonplace, everyday issues in a range of design disciplines. It is obvious, of course, in information design where organizing information in new ways is at the heart of what we do. The conceptual problems can also be found in the design of IT products and services, though in IT they extend beyond the problem of categories. Many new products, like mobile phones, radically transform everyday social practices. In my own personal and professional world, as in the worlds of many others, the newly designed IT products have transformed my working and family life and how I define myself and my relations to others. The link between the 'objects' we design—the design domain—and the ways we define who we are—the philosophical domain—have become obvious in our time. This

link brings philosophy and design closer together. After all, the richest source of experience in exploring the nature of concepts, categories and who we are is the history of philosophy. Designers, therefore, can turn to philosophy for help to guide their work.

Third, and most importantly, this example illustrates a significant shift in the nature of design and philosophy in our time. Had we been discussing the nature of categories in any domain at a conference in an earlier age, the challenge would have been to come up with The True Set of Categories. For centuries philosophers and scientists saw their task as revealing the nature of the world as it existed. Their task was discovery and what they aimed to discover was the absolute truth. But in this conference discussion, we were not concerned with absolutes. We were discussing designing an appropriate set of categories for a specific context. We were engaging in work that Wittgenstein would have recognized as philosophical. The implication of treating a design task as a philosophical task suggests not just a link but a merging of activities.

Another way of viewing this merging is to point to the obvious fact that much of the world we live in is of our own making. Our focus is on trying to make sense of what we have done and are doing in creating our world, rather than on trying to make sense of a world seemingly created with us in it. As designers we do not discover, we invent. And as Wittgenstein's insights about language sug-

gest, we invent new practices and articulate rules to share those practices with others. Philosopher becomes designer and designer becomes philosopher.

This merging is for me one of the most exciting challenges of our time, one that has the capacity to reshape how we practice our art and craft and how we might reshape the intellectual and teaching activity in our academies. As the title of this paper highlights, we are in the business of designing philosophy.

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