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VALUE, DESIGN, SCALE: TOWARDS A TERRITORIES AND TEMPORALITIES APPROACH



GUY JULIER

DEPT. OF DESIGN, AALTO UNIVERSITY GUY.JULIER@AALTO.FI **ELISE HODSON**

DEPT. OF DESIGN, AALTO UNIVERSITY ELISE.HODSON@AALTO.FI

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a preliminary exploration of some of the challenges in locating and articulating value in design, such that values beyond econometrically measured ones are considered more effectively. We take value in design – in its fullest extent – to be multiple, unstable, emergent and contingent. As such, it presents numerous forms beyond financial ones that are often difficult to articulate, let alone recognise. For design, giving closer attention to the territories and temporalities of value may help in this quest. Here, rather than taking 'bounded' frameworks for value measurement, we propose moving with and through the design project, revealing forms of value as they occur. Exploring and surfacing these is also part of the historical work of breaking free from contemporary neoliberal orthodoxies that govern value.

INTRODUCTION

It barely needs stating that new forms of design practice and research are constantly opening up. This is common design knowledge. Most recently, transition design, transformation design, organisation design and social design have gained increased impetus, bringing in wider and more complex sets of outcomes. These often challenge econometrically-loaded forms of value recognition. The question of value in design has therefore received new, albeit limited, attention.

This paper presents a preliminary exploration of some of the challenges in locating and articulating value in contemporary design. In it, we take value in design – in its fullest extent – to be multiple, unstable, emergent and contingent. This therefore requires multiple ways of locating and articulating design. Giving closer attention

to the territories and temporalities of value may help in this quest. We see this need as stemming from a contemporary historical juncture where notions of value may be reframed as new social and economic forms emerge or are designed. Exploring and surfacing these is part of the work of that transition. Examples are used to illustrate theoretical points in this paper. However, the narrative follows mostly a theoretical and conceptual line of argumentation.

In order to give better focus to this paper, our primary design sector interest stems from the sticky problems of value in social design where outcomes are not necessarily so readily identifiable in the bottom line of sales or customer numbers. As a growing field of activity, we recognise that the social design sector presents one of the most challenging sets of considerations for assessing and accounting for value (Kimbell & Julier, 2019). Our arguments are applicable elsewhere, though. We also note a growing enthusiasm in business circles for 'purpose-driven' activities where, also, drivers and motivations may be more varied to include societal, environmental, well-being and other values that are less connected obviously to monetarybased calculation (Quinn & Thakor, 2019; Largacha-Martínez, 2020). In any case, we recognise that economic processes include, or are dependent upon, many forms of exchange that are not necessarily monetary-based (Gibson-Graham, 2008). Mainstream capitalist practices are reliant on non-monetary systems of care, reciprocity, social dependency, informal knowhow, emotional dispositions and so on to exist. Social design and 'purpose-driven' business necessarily and explicitly enfold these into their economic logics, perhaps more so than mainstream commercial thinking. The territories and temporalities – the scales – through which these non-monetary systems run are that much more challenging to consider.

We view current, dominant notions of value as framed within a logic of neoliberal capitalism that has gained increasing traction over the last 40 years. An important element of neoliberalism since the 1980s has been the rise of systems of measurement and audit in order to track value and performance, but also anticipate and leverage future value (Strathern, 2000). This is to be found in mundane registers of everyday life: for instance, in notions of the quantified self that are attached to personal health and fitness (Ajana, 2017), the workplace (Moore & Robinson, 2016) or in the disciplining of citizens into calculative dispositions in the contexts of home improvements (Rosenberg, 2011) or educational games (Martin, 2002). It extends through public sector orthodoxies of New Public Management where 'best value' requires tight calculation of inputoutcome financial benefits in pursuit of social goals (Martin, 2000). The measurement of value also emerges, for example, in the competition of cities and nations in various forms of ranking: happiest country, most secure, best place to live and so on. Design practices are also subject to regimes of tracking and auditing, for example, in the management of workflows in the studio (Dorland, 2009; Sloane, 2017).

If we are to believe some pundits (e.g., Mason, 2015), it might just be that this dominant conception of value, and its measurement and control, may go away as neoliberalism gradually crumbles, giving way to a new order where value also has different meanings or modes of articulation and measurement. Perhaps we will stop talking about value altogether if we realise that this draws us inescapably back to neoliberal logics and should thus be avoided. Or, as others suggest, we are living in an era of 'zombie capitalism' or 'necroeconomics' where high neoliberal forms are still functioning, despite multiple reasons why they shouldn't (e.g., Harman, 2010). In which case, dominant understandings of value may continue unquestioned.

Whether social goods or outcomes can even be expressed in terms of 'value' has also been questioned. Praetorius (2015) argues that this leads automatically to their calculation within financially-dominant regimes of valorisation. She notes that this results in a dichotomous stand-off between the 'real' economy and the values-based activities of care. Equally, Miller (2019) makes a case for ceasing to separate economic, social and environmental valorisation, suggesting that one might more usefully think in terms of 'livelihoods'. Here, one just gets on with the making of life and communities as deeply entangled practices. Economic, social and environmental categories are merely enfolded into everyday existence without externally imposed targets and measurements.

For this paper, however, we seek a transitional approach. We neither fully reject nor embrace orthodoxies of audit, measurement and valorisation. Instead, we accept a need to recast how valorisation is conceived and explore and show a fuller panoply of design impact. Our approach is also informed by a need

to consider institutional logics (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) and even the obduracy of socio-technical systems (e.g., Hommels, 2020) within neoliberalism. With this knowledge, we can consider pathways to alternative practices and motivations.

Our lens onto these challenges starts from a disciplinary position based in the nascent field of Design Culture Studies as both a form of enquiry into worlds as they are but also as they might be (Fallan 2019; Julier forthcoming). We focus on a need to understand the empirical and ideological conditions of design and designing as a necessary starting point for design practice.

In terms of value in design, we recognise the multiple understandings of value that are pursued by Ouden (2012). This work provides a set of useful frameworks for enquiry. However, these are just frameworks and we note the absence of engagements with specific, historically-located, socio-material and policy contexts in texts such as this that sit closer to management, marketing, innovation and organisational studies. Our treatment leans on a critical view onto context such that understandings of value and its measurement are taken to be situated and discursive at multiple scales. It is this situatedness of value that provides starting points for exploring its implications and parameters. This provides for messier and more contingent approaches than the cleaner and broader canvas found in Ouden (2012). Our observations have some resonance with Heskett's (2009) conclusion that design value has to be viewed at micro-economic levels. The difference, though, is that our quest, ultimately, is not framed around value as perceived by Heskett in its economic context. But if we are to step outside this framing, where does one start?

Before we explore social value and design in more depth, let us examine where design, and indeed creative industries, as reflected in research and policy work, might currently be in terms of conceptions of value.

ORTHODOXIES OF VALUE AND DESIGN

The growth of design over the past 30 years throughout the industrialised world has coincided with new regimes of value measurement and audit (Julier & Moor, 2009). In design, value has been expressed in terms of design's ability to, for example, generate profit, improve public services, support social innovation, and more broadly, address complex global problems. The value of design for economic and social good has been advocated by designers and governments since at least as early as the 19th century (Ehn et al., 2014; Mulgan, 2014). The most recent *Design Economy* report by the Design Council (2018) continues similar promises: design can "make life better," address "seismic economic challenges and change;" drive "growth, innovation and jobs," and

create "better places, better products, better processes and better performance" (pp.3-4). While positive results are reported from investments in design, it can be challenging to credit the design process with specific outcomes. Many designers struggle to describe the value of their work to clients, and clients maintain that they have no measures in place to assess the impacts of their use of design. This has been repeatedly noted by the UK Design Council's own surveys of corporations, and it is of increasing concern for governments that have invested in design over the past decade (Design Council, 2004; 2007; Sheppard et al, 2018).

What to value and how to value it are continuously debated. Value is an arbitrary concept defined by particular views of need, desire and relative worth within differing social and economic contexts, inseparable from values, ethics and morality. No universal measure can represent its complexity (Boztepe, 2007). Similarly, the lack of any universal definition of design has contributed to studies that often fail to address what constitutes design or what is being observed and measured (Moultrie & Livesey, 2009). Design practices reproduce economic and social values (Boehnert, 2018), yet there is "no established theory of value that can guide design" (Boztepe, 2007, p.55).

Empirical research on the value of design has traditionally focused on financial measures and the value that investing in design brings to the client (e.g., return on design investment, number of new products and patents, integration of design in corporate strategy, overall brand value), the design profession (e.g., numbers of design graduates and designers hired), or the economy more broadly (e.g., growth in exports, contribution to GDP). Measures like the Design Index (Design Council, 2004), International Design Scoreboard (Moultrie & Livesey, 2009) or the McKinsey Design Index (Sheppard, 2018) document the financial health of the design sector and reinforce design's potential for innovation and improving the bottom line.

The underlying message is that design equals economic growth. Design is used to 'add value' so that companies no longer compete for consumer attention based on lowest price but instead based on what their products and services offer. It is notable that in studies of the value of design for the public sector, the emphasis may be on citizens and social goals, but success is often measured in economic terms, "deliver[ing] more for less" in the form of reduced spending and use of services (Design Council, 2010; Design Commission, 2013). While financial data are seen as more objective, and the methods for collection and analysis are more established and consistent than qualitative measures of value (Hoo Na et al., 2017), prioritizing exchange value presents a limited view of design, particularly when it comes to measures of social design impact.

Nevertheless, new research is emerging that recognizes the need for new understandings of design value. The Design Council (2020) is exploring how social and environmental impacts of design might be captured by combining quantitative data based on monetary value with qualitative case studies that account for diverse perspectives of value and the "invisible 'ripple effects'" of design. We look forward to *Design Economy 2021* in which these methods will be further developed and applied.

Looking more widely, towards creative industries policies wherein design sits, value continues to be expressed in terms of (financial return on) investment. In European Union policy and briefing documents (e.g., Barcelona Design Centre, 2014; European Commission, 2017), creative industries continue to be defined according to a framework of sectors that was originated in 1997 (Creative Industries Task Force, 2001). These are then described in terms of their contribution to GDP and number of businesses created. Their 'value chains' are then demonstrated, where the linear course from ideation, through production and promotion, distribution to consumption is shown. This may be all very well for discreet cultural goods such as novels, fashion garments or original music recordings. However, even these produce multiple, heterodox impacts such as reading groups, social media following or fan bases. Value chains may be more complex things: increasingly so when outcomes are not discernible in terms of 'sales' or 'customers' but in terms of societal goals such as wellbeing, civic cohesion or health.

MEASURING SOCIAL VALUE

Early versions of design consultancies that worked towards explicitly social goals frequently promoted themselves in terms of their effectiveness in making financial savings for their clients (e.g., Innovation Unit, 2015). This was also driven by policy reports that argued that by taking a research-led, user-centred approach, efficiencies could be made (Lehki, 2007). Here we see design enmeshing with broader policy approaches with regards to social value.

This 'bottom-line' approach has no doubt been attractive in the context of austerity, where welfare organisations have struggled to carry on delivering services on radically reduced budgets. It nonetheless causes their valorisation to be maintained within the narrow constraints of monetary value and, even, financialised attitudes. These mindsets have recently become further reinforced by the insidious rise of social impact bonds as a viable financial model for welfare delivery (Jackson, 2013; Dowling, 2017). Here, investors provide money for schemes towards achieving social goals – less homelessness or obesity, for instance

– and then reap increased dividends if these are met. This 'betting on welfare' has the capacity to promote various forms of performativity. This may be where, for example, schemes are designed to produce positive scorecards within fixed, often narrow, timeframes, no matter how these are achieved.

Such approaches as those mentioned above additionally have the effect of individuating inputs in pursuit of social goals, themselves measured along time-restricted axes. Thus, an input becomes a particular 'intervention' - a piece of urban design or a peer-to-peer skills sharing system – whose impact is evaluated in quantitative terms such as changes in local land-value or number of visits to the doctor. This approach reduces the object of measurement to a singularity, often ignoring its entanglement with multiple influencing factors and objects such as socio-economic levels, job security or demographic balance (see Herrick, 2008). Evaluation methods can also be restrictive by missing more experiential indicators that may be better understood through qualitative approaches and articulated beyond numbers (Mansfield et al., 2020).

Scholars of design studies have theorized concepts of value that move beyond orthodox financial definitions to consider different forms of exchange, use, emotional and symbolic value but little has been done to test these theories in practice or to address the value of service and experience design (Shove et al., 2005; Boztepe, 2007; Sanders & Simons, 2009; Heskett, 2017; Boehnert, 2018). Empirical research on the social value of design includes Hirscher et al.'s work on multiple forms of value (social, economic, environmental, knowledge, emotional, experiential) in relation to fashion, as consumers move from "value users" to "value co-creators" through "social manufacturing" (Hirscher et al., 2018; 2019). Yee et al. focus on the value of the design process as a working method in social innovation projects for the third sector, but the study does not assess the impacts of design on project outcomes (Yee et al., 2015). Hoo Na et al. (2017) examine the influence of design on "social value creation" in the corporate context, analyzing the effectiveness of existing tools. They note that measures used by NGOs (where social value is core to their operations) are not necessarily appropriate for business and conclude that tools need to be developed that combine qualitative and quantitative (financial) assessments.

Evaluation tools developed for social innovation, sustainability and health may offer alternative ways to assess the value and impacts of design, such as innovation scoreboards, lifecycle assessments, impact mapping, and other methods that capture value beyond the bottom line (New Economics Foundation, 2008). For example, social return on investment prioritizes what is valuable to stakeholders, using money as a

proxy for the value of impacts that may have no clear financial value (Nicholls et al., 2009; Richards & Nicholls, 2015).

Elsewhere, attempts have been made at value measurement using complex aggregations of both quantitative and qualitative data. This is particularly noticeable in grey literature rankings of places according to broad notions such as 'happiest', 'good growth' or 'security'. For example, the World Happiness Report ranks countries according to GDP, life expectancy, generosity, social support, freedom and corruption levels. This therefore links qualitative observation, for example on measures of subjective well-being, with quantitative data from economic and health sources (Helliwell et al., 2020). Other rankings, such as the 'Good Growth for Cities' report in the UK, build indices on statistical data. In this case, employment levels, income, health, work-life balance, new businesses, housing, transport, skills, environment and income distribution are surveyed and combined according to different weightings for each (Hawksworth et al., 2019).

Such indices are typified by their abilities in aggregating wide and varying datasets in a given territory at a given moment or timescale. These are effective in revealing the mutual dependencies of social, economic and environmental factors. They shift discussion of value beyond the bottom line of GDP, as several authors encourage (e.g., Raworth, 2017; Mazzucato, 2018; Pilling, 2018). They produce overall senses of 'value' of a location in terms of its attractiveness as a place to live or to invest in. Needless to say, there are elements of subjectivity or ideological bias in such assessments. By giving separate elements weightings in the calculation, different notions of what is of value among those doing the reckoning surface.

These measurements of value are, however, undertaken *post hoc*: they provide clues as to whether public policies are working or not and, indeed, what is privileged therein. Their focus on outcomes avoids the tricky thinking of how value is produced or what might produce value. It takes considerable analysis, historical understanding and speculation to work out the actual cause and effect of these relations, as, for example, Dorling and Koljonen (2020) demonstrate. Furthermore, fixing the location of value to territories such as nations or cities may even be arbitrary, missing opportunities to think about their relationality to peripheries, in-between spaces, diasporic associations, competing neighbours and other geographical scales.

Equally, these rankings are invariably annual and competitively conceived affairs. They therefore become ends in themselves, fixed to temporal cycles that make them subject to performative actions on the part of those being measured. They miss the complex, multi-speed, open-ended unfolding of everyday practices that

produce value. This is where we might turn back to a critical interrogation of value and seek some new pathways for thinking about design, scale and value.

BEYOND ORTHODOXIES: DESIGN, TERRITORIES AND TEMPORALITIES

Notions of value have been problematised in the social sciences to provide a range of critical perspectives to take us beyond econometric thinking. These are useful for conceptualising alternative approaches to thinking about value in design. Graeber (2001) summarises three fields of value: first, what is good and proper ('values' in a sociological sense); second, in economic terms of what the desirability of something may be; and third, in a symbolic or semiotic sense of how something differentiates and signifies. These pretty much cover what design tries to do, although often with different emphases at different historical times (e.g., see Whitely, 1994). The rise of consultant design in the social sphere in the last decade has attempted to align these three spheres more evenly (Koskinen & Hush, 2016). These broad observations nonetheless do not help in beginning to define tools, methods and grounds on which value in social design is determined and articulated. In this final section, we explore two starting points namely thinking about territories and temporalities.

The vogue for stakeholder mapping in service, social and strategic design takes onboard the idea that design touches into relational networks of actors who have different priorities and motivations. It attempts to try and understand the ways by which design can intervene into these such that different needs are addressed and new relationships brokered (Kimbell, 2014). In so doing, it sets territories of consideration and intervention. The project decisions made as to who is included into stakeholder maps also defines the extensity of where design value is considered. Actors outside this 'map' may be impacted, but the value of this is not directly measured by the project. Nonetheless, the value measurement may be situated against measurements outside it. Thus, for example, the carbon saving that is evaluated in a new community food network may be interpreted as a contribution to global carbon reductions. There is a co-articulation of different registers of impact here (Marres, 2016).

This is where being aware of the territories of value in design may come in handy. This concept is derived from the notion of 'geographies of responsibility' (Massey, 2004). Here, the territories of intervention are made explicit while recognising the relationality of different scales. This might be conceived as a 'Russian doll' effect where, equally, different forms of value may be at work between the actual location of design intervention and its layered hinterlands. To return to the

food network example, sociality and well-being may be key drivers in that specific community, while in regional terms, environment and health may be impacts that are valued and measured. The key issue here is that the design intervention instigates a set of socio-material impacts. It is the empirical fact of that intervention that provides the starting point for valorisation at different scales, in different territories, through different geographies of responsibility.

If value is multiple and contingent in this territorial sense, then it is also mutable and unstable in temporal senses. Heinich (2020) suggests that value is never static. Drawing on Kopytoff (1986), she notes how different types and registers of value emerge at different points in the life of something. Design comes into play along temporal axes in different ways. For example, it produces value in potentia as 'intensities' (Lash, 2010) in the form of plans, blueprints, guidelines or other forms of intellectual property. Subsequently, though, different forms of value come into play through practice (Shove et al., 2005). This means that both the quantities and qualities of value may change at different stages in the 'life' of a design process and outcome. New, unanticipated and, even, unknowable forms of value may emerge at distinct points as a design project is formulated, executed and rolled out. Conception and deliberation, implementation, adaptation, routinisation and reconstitution all have their momentary significances.

The implications of this territories and temporalities thinking for design and value are twofold. First, we are encouraged to abandon bounded framings for the determination and measurement of value. This means that we cease to place spatial or temporal constraints such as in the case of 'happiness in such-and-such a country in a year'. Similarly, the traditional econometric approach to value chains takes value as a calculation of the same thing (money) at different points along the life of a product or service within particular timeframes and across defined geographies. Rather than 'following the money', we recognise the changing kinds of value that take place in different locations and times in the life (and afterlife) of a design object or project. This perhaps resonates with Bryson and Rusten (2010), in their critique of actor-network theory in the context of design. They observe that design is focused around the processing of projects such that focus is given to its varying objects and contexts. These have different lives at different moments, challenging the flattening that actor-network theory is prone to. Following from this, we might pay attention to their changing empirical conditions that are rendered almost kaleidoscopic in the on-going emergence of different value registers.

Second, part of the design project itself can include deliberation towards and reflection on what value means in its various manifestations (Julier & Kimbell, 2019).

Where multiple stakeholders and collaborators are engaged in the same project space, conflicting accounts of value will almost certainly be at play. These are shaped by respective institutional bureaucracies and dispositions. Building shared understandings of the different registers of value that may occur and ways of accounting for them would be part of the project. Understanding its context in terms of externally-imposed expectations of value may also figure. Finally, it may be accepted that other forms of value may reveal themselves along the way. Some may never be knowable, though.

CONCLUSION

The question of value in design has become something of an 'elephant in the room' lately. This connects to wider issues of what is important in life as the neoliberal paradigm of the last 40 years falters in the face of climate chaos and biodiversity loss, demographic imbalances, inequalities and extractivism and, of course, the global Covid pandemic, to name but a few. Designers, but also policymakers, heterodox economists and activists, have called for a wider set of values to be recognised, assessed and described beyond the bottom line of money. What is meant by this has remained hazy. Certainly, other measurement systems exist, not least in the fields of environmental impact assessment. But in situations where heterodox values work together, there has been little progress in academic or policy thinking.

This is important to address. We might not bother, trusting that some other sense of how good or bad something is may emerge through historical change. This would consign a passive role for those who study design and its impacts, though – waiting to see what happens. Instead, grappling with value is a way of effecting change by bringing alternative possibilities and evaluations into consciousness and practical use.

Through this paper, we propose a design-focused approach to value wherein the unfolding of the project or programme becomes the spine through which value comes into view. We advocate following the sinews, fluxes and pulses that make up the vectors of design action and engagement. Methodologically, this would involve exploration of actual and anticipated value within the design process. It may also require close observation - ethnographic, even - of the unfolding of the project in open-ended and unbounded ways. This contrasts with some other approaches that, in aggregating different forms of value, focus on outcomes of various activities over fixed times in pre-defined locations. It represents a preliminary and notional direction for further consideration of and experimentation with value beyond the bottom line.

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