

Special Issue Preface

This special issue brings together work produced for the London Design Festival (LDF) by researchers at the Design School at London College of Communication within the University of the Arts London, UK.

The exhibitions, performances, talks, workshops and events of LDF 2017, LDF 2018 and the manifesto created for LDF 2018 were part of a series of activities that were initiated in an effort to define and tell a coherent story about the identity of the Design School. The effort in particular was to balance the value of diverse specialist research practices, professional practices, and teaching practices with a coherent identity for the school as a whole that could express critical mass and foster conversations with external partners. Using the exhibitions and the manifesto throughout the design festival allowed the story to be told through the work itself in visual and spatial formats.

The design school provides highly regarded outputs in both Research Excellence Framework (REF) and in creative practice and industry. Often seen in tension, framed as a difference between research for REF and research not for REF, practitioners sometimes shy away from bridging the gap between practice and REF research, and text-based researchers sometimes see their writing practice as too tempting to stop for the purpose of investigating the creative process. But what about design school researchers that are often both – practitioners and academics, designers with PhDs, scholars who create design work beside text-based outputs?

The perceived tension between different forms of scholarly and creative practice gets in the way of creating a collective identity for what research is in the context of a design school, what it looks like, and how this scholarly work defines who we are as an organization.

This dynamic operates within the organizational context, described by Giovanni Schiuma as follows: "Organizations are continuously challenged to find new routes to accomplish their strategic business objectives and to deliver value to stakeholders [...] This means that organizations have to be managed as 'living organisms' in which the people and the organizational aesthetic dimensions are recognized as fundamental factors to meet the complexity and turbulence of [our times]." (2011, p.2) Schiuma suggests arts based methods as a way to challenge the way we structure our work environment.

Over the past two years, the Design School has used exhibitions and events as a means to express different values and ethics running through the school, through the collaborations and exhibited installations and objects. These values expressed themselves beyond the headlines of the exhibition into other types of activities that took over in-between spaces and pockets of interaction in the form of workshops, symposia, events, and performances. These initiated conversations across and through the Design School's organizational framework and encouraged active collision of ideas.

This special issue aims to bring into focus the Design School's contribution to the London Design Festival in 2017 and 2018 by showcasing a selection of works made by researchers and practitioners over the previous two years of our participation in the festival. As a Design School, we recognise and value aesthetic responses as much as the more expected text-based methods of analysis and response. So it is for that reason that we have encouraged a range of contributions beyond the expected academic texts to include formats that the researchers believe serve to communicate their work best. This we hope will open up the discussion about the function and value of qualitative forms in the presentation of research and analysis and how that reflects the organisational framework in which the work is produced and showcased.

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References

Schiuma, G. 2011. *The value of arts for business*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

About the Authors

Monica Biagioli is Senior Lecturer in the Design School at London College of Communication and Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. Monica's research and practice examines the use and value of art and design in the organisational context. She conducts workshops internationally including Finland, Spain, Poland, and Italy. Her chapter addressing that work is published in the book *Integrating Art and Creativity into Business Practice* (2017). Upcoming projects involve collaborations in health and applied theatre. Monica is a member of the Photography and the Archive Research Centre and the International Association of Art Critics.

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Nela Milic is a Senior Lecturer in the Design School at London College of Communication. Throughout her career, Nela has delivered creative projects for organisations including the Royal Opera House, Barbican, Arts Council England, John Lewis, Al Jazeera, Campbell Works, Oxo Tower, LIFT festival, and London Film Festival. Nela conducted research for AHRC (Balkanising Taxonomy, Connected Communities, Care for the Future and Art and Reconciliation projects), Gulbenkian Foundation and worked on the project TimeCase: Memory in Action with a Grundtvig grant. She is a reviewer of *Memory Studies* journal and co-chair of Art and Memory Working Group of Memory Studies Association (MSA).