# Review of the Design Way: Journal of Design Research

Dr. Terence Love
Curtin University, Perth Western Australia
t.love@love.com.au

## *Overview*

Design Way is a new class of design book that puts forward a broadly-scoped picture of designing described in terms of a coherent body of design theory. Designers, design educators and researchers will find Design Way valuable and useful: full of many conceptual and practical gems. The book is unusual because of the strength of its integrated picture of theories and concepts about design. The chapters flow to address, one after another, many of the key problems of design theory. The book is also unusual because it coherently brings together the qualitative issues that dominate design disciplines based on Art and Architecture, and the quantitative technical approaches typical of the engineering and informatic design disciplines. The authors, Harold and Erik, do this by grounding their concepts and analyses on the rich comprehensive epistemological foundation of Systems concepts.

A major and helpful thread throughout the book is a focus on clarifying terminology. The literatures of Design fields have been troubled for many years by a lack of well justified technical meanings of terms used in design theories and research. The authors of the Design Way break with this tradition and are careful to provide technical definitions of terms. They use this to good effect in building theory by describing why words have been defined in particular ways and what the implications of these definitions are. An example at the start of the first chapter is the way their perspective on defining design shows how many designs have been previously unhelpfully classified as discovery or invention, and offers the basis for arguing that deign activity has historical primacy over other traditions of inquiry such as Art, religion, science and technology.

Harold and Erik also use terminology in a biological fashion as a means of classifying, categorising and dividing elements such as situations, concepts, and activities into lists. This proves a powerful way of mapping the conceptual scenarios of design theory.

The authors are not afraid to challenge existing foundations of design theories. They do this to good effect in proposing that the broad emphasis in the literature on 'problem solving' is unhelpful. In its turn they suggest the idea of 'composition'. In

reading the book, this idea of focussing on 'composition' skill as central to design activity becomes compelling, leaving this reader at least with an enthusiasm for exploring its implications.

The book is broad in its aims and is scope. It is divided effectively into five sections. The first section quickly locates the activity of designing in the context of other human activities and the study of human life. The second section sets out and argues for the specific conceptual foundations on which the authors' model of a Design Way is based. The third section uses this conceptual standpoint to define the core range of practical basic skills needed by those starting off in designing. Section four sets out theory to identify meta-physical skills necessary to ethically using design activity to change human futures. The final section, section five, focuses draws on the analyses of section four to identify higher professional skills required to be possessed by competent designers operating as professionals. Alongside this main theme, these five sections develop a detailed coherent and comprehensive theory foundation that addresses a large number of the many conceptual problems of design research.

The comprehensive and coherent nature of this book makes it well suited as a tertiary design education text for both lecturers and students. The book is useful to design researchers because its scope and conceptual integrity situates it as a classic in design theory. The easily accessible writing style and presentation also means it offers those interested in design an easily accessible and well organised overview to understand what designers do, what underpins their professional activity, and how the human activity of designing is central to the broad sweep of human endeavour.

This review has focused on the role of this book in terms of designing, design education and design research, particularly at a professional level and in undergraduate and postgraduate study. The book has another role, however, in the field of Systems. During the 1960s and 1970s systems research and design research was closely coupled. Since that time, the connections between the fields have become less visible although still strong in e.g. engineering design in aerospace industries. This neglect has resulted in weaknesses of understanding both ways, and the Design Way offers Systems educators, practitioners and researchers a framework for understanding more about the role of designing in developing systems solutions

## *Recommendations*

A 'must have' book for those seriously interested in design, design education and design research. The book is especially suited for tertiary design educators and students in any design-related discipline. It is also likely to be useful to professionals in the large number of disciplines and profession in which designing is undertaken as part of other activities.

The systems foundation used in the book means that it has another role as part of the broader literature of Systems Theory and Systems Research. The combination of a relative neglect of design activity in Systems Disciplines and the centrality of design activity as the reason for their existence means that the Design Way is likely to be an

important reader for those studying the application of Systems theories and methods.

The Design Way is a delight to read and a welcome addition to the Design and Systems bookshelf!