



Editorial: A conversation

As global digital networks increasingly gain traction, the importance of intercultural dialogue and cultural understanding is an imperative for the design community. Recent debates centered around decolonization, norm-critical design and the ethics of new AI machine learning technologies, highlighted the need of reconsidering ways in which we design with communities, and the verbal and nonverbal ways in which diverse cultures behave and interact. Whilst intercultural communication has existed for some time as a subfield of studies (in, for example, business, linguistics and education (Hall 1959, Dahl 2004, Aba 2015, Aman 2017)), it was only recently that it has been underscored in design research as a process for decentering past practices (Tonkenwise 2015; Schultz, et.al 2018). Educator Robert Aman asked: ‘what does one need to know in order to become intercultural?’ (Aman 2017). This raises questions concerning whose knowledge is used to construct and promote design solutions, which currency is in conversations and dialogues, and how we experience intercultural knowledge.

One way of opening a conversation is through academic cultural exchange. During one year, between 2017-2018, the editor of this journal, PhD Cristina Portugal joined our postgraduate community at the Royal College of Art as a postdoctoral candidate. Funded by the Brazilian federal agency CAPES, the main intention was to create opportunities for knowledge exchange between the UK and Brazil, exploring dialogues between PhD students and supervisors, regarding our respective academic approaches to design and interdisciplinary research. So rich were the results that Doctor Portugal invited the research students of the School to contribute with essays focusing in their interdisciplinary research projects, which would coincide with the 25th anniversary of “*Estudos em Design*”.

The journal provided an academic platform for our students to reflect on their work in progress, and to share this with a broader community of design researchers, especially colleagues in Brazil. The selected essays published in this issue form brief snapshots of the work as it was conceived during an early scoping phase of the students’ research. The experience of preparing essays for publication was invaluable. An iterative process of writing, editing, reading, writing and editing again, allowed for deep reflections and,

in turn, a greater consideration about their positions within an emerging academic art and design discourse.

The interdisciplinary nature of the essays contained in this collection aligns with the stated intentions regarding the editorial guidelines of this journal: commitment to the dissemination and strengthening of knowledge in the field of Design: they include Karen Bosy's 'Inside here: daydreaming space and the digital monument', Wenbo Ai's 'A participatory design research method using Chinese character experiments: Using a range of participants to test the potential readability of new characters', Larissa Nowicki's 'On making and reflecting: Anni Albers' theory as the foundation for practice-led research', and Kollontai Cossich Diniz's 'The Monga Show as a speculative-object'. Also, included is an essay by Doctor Cristina Portugal on 'Design in the complex context of media' developed during her time at the RCA.

Alongside essays from our five PhD students, we included an accompanying catalogue for the School's research degrees' 'work in progress' exhibition titled: 'Intentions: Conversations, Experiences and Knowledge' (2017). The exhibition and the resulting publication form yet another kind of platform for students to critically engage and gain feedback by means of public-facing talks and workshops. The programs represented in the exhibition include students from the MRes RCA Communication Design Pathway, MPhil/PhD and our postdoctoral researcher. The exhibition provided a hub of different kinds of activities and naturally extended our hopes for knowledge-sharing in the context of intercultural communication and, externally, for a wider local community. Conversations focused on visual vocabularies, social interactions, augmented behaviors, and digital personas.

Looking back at the events of the 2017/18 academic year, the benefits offered to us by having a postdoctoral researcher from Brazil were abundant. In order to conclude this project, what comes next is a brief email exchange between Doctor Cristina Portugal, editor of '*Estudos em Design*', and myself as her RCA postdoctoral supervisor. Here we reflect upon what was gained from the experience and how this informs an understanding of intercultural communication.

Teal Triggs (TT): It's not often that we get an opportunity to invite a postdoctoral researcher from Brazil to work alongside our community of research students and

supervisors. So thank-you for undertaking the postdoctoral position with us. What attracted you to apply to the RCA?

Cristina Portugal (CP): Thanks, Teal. It is also not often that we, Brazilian researchers, have the opportunity of working as a post-doctoral researcher in RCA, a University named as the number 1 of the world in Arts and Design, in the Ranking of University Affairs of QS World in 2018. There is no doubt that the recognition and excellence of the University was one of the factors motivating me to join as a postdoctoral scholar, besides the similarities of our investigations, which I highlight: visual communication, design criticism, knowledge exchange and information experience design. Also, Teal, you had accepted our invitation in 2015, to be a speaker in our International Congress of Information Design, promoted in Brazil, where we had the honor of welcoming you, contributed to this decision.

From this initial contact and working together during those days in Brazil, I considered the RCA as the best option for my post-doctoral abroad, funded by CAPES.

I am very grateful for you to have accepted to be my supervisor in this project, making possible the research DESIGN AND DIGITAL HUMANITIES, which I consider as a watershed in my trajectory as a researcher in Design.

TT: From my perspective, your placement at the RCA helped us to consolidate our thinking about the ways in which the School's researchers interact with ideas about intercultural communication. And equally, how intercultural communication might be experienced as learners and researchers. We benefited enormously from learning about the traditions and heritage of Brazil as a country, but also the ways in which design, education and media communication, are approached as academic disciplines in the Universities of Brazil.

CP: From the beginning, I was fully engaged with the postgraduate community at the College. I participated in weekly research seminars of the School of Communication called 'Methods of Intent', in order to better understand the ways in which methods and methodologies are taught and developed by PhD students. In addition, MRes/MPhil/PhD students came together as a group to undertake a 'work in progress' exhibition 'Intentions: Conversations, Experiences and Knowledge'. This initiative, of



which I was a part, was to hold an event with the research group having the intention of promoting awareness about the RCA campus in White City but, importantly, fostering an integration between the university and the surrounding community by means of our research projects. The possibility of publishing some of the PhD projects from the exhibition was opportune aiming to extend the discussion into a wider community of Brazilian researchers.

TT: Can you speak about the selection of essays for this special issue of the journal and your role as Editor: perhaps telling us what observations you may have about the role of interdisciplinarity in the School?

CP: The journal “*Estudos em Design*” brings together with the dissemination, democratization and strengthening of the interdisciplinary knowledge promoted in the field of Design and related areas. Regarding the interdisciplinary space in the School of Communication, I mention a Brazilian researcher, Japiassu (1976), who states that: the interdisciplinary space, meaning its true epistemological horizon, cannot be other than the unitary field of the knowledge. This space can never be constituted by the simple addition of all specialties, neither by a synthesis of philosophical order of the specialized knowledge. The foundation of the interdisciplinary space must be searched on the negation and overcoming the disciplinary boundaries.. This special issue edition echoes the words of Japiassu, because they break the disciplinary boundaries, besides breaking cultural boundaries. The interdisciplinary character of the RCA starts with the presence of professors from several areas of knowledge and students from all over the world. The richness of works presented by this group of students coming from Greece, China, Spain, Colombia, Canada, Brazil, United States, UK, Nederland, South Africa among others, is a sample of the wide horizon that grows when we have contact with each one of them. The interdisciplinarity of the School raises an awareness about the dimensions of the world and its diversity asking us to reflect about how much we have to learn about this cultural multiplicity. In order to carry out the works presented here it was necessary not only to break disciplinary boundaries, but also the cultural ones.

TT: Framed within the context of education and digital information, you set yourself the challenge to develop an interactive book for deaf children as one of your main



outcomes from the postdoctoral research. What do you feel that was gained in this research by undertaking the project at the RCA?

CP: The studies carried out in RCA regarding the context of education and digital information, contributed for deepening my investigations that I have been pursuing for many years, which is to search for solutions to create information and communication systems that today are inserted in a virtual space of permanent challenging, demanding update and the development of new ways of configuration. In other words, involving a new language, new elements of projects and new ways of interaction by means of different elements enabled by the use of contemporary technologies. Among them we may highlight the questions of interaction, browsing, hypertextual levels, connectivity, mobility and responsive design, as well as informational, cognitive and project questions that are established in other and new spheres. Those studies made in RCA led me to reflect about the relevance of inserting Design as a creative practice for projects in the growing field of the “Digital Humanities”, which has a growth of research centers, associations, publications, national and international scientific events associated with humanist practices. In my studies, the book project for deaf children is included.

TT: How will you take this learning back to Brazil? What’s next for your research?

CP: The experience that took place between students from different countries and myself has certainly enlivened our global community of researchers. The ability to work alongside people from other countries has been invaluable and influenced my own understanding about research for intercultural communication.

Two projects in particular are worth mentioning following the unfolding of my research made whilst at the RCA. This year I was awarded by the agency of research fostering, CNPq - National Council for Scientific and Technological Development from Brazil, as an “Internship of Research Productivity (PQ)” with the project named “Designing Digital Humanities”. This project is part of the research started in RCA named ““Design * Technology”: Contemporary Design in Digital Environments.’ The project is composed by a series of books bringing didactically the basic concepts, studies and reference content about Design and its relations with Technology and other related areas. Concepts that may be used as the basis for projects of Digital Humanities, considering that those projects involve designers concerned with the symbolic



representation of the language. Reflections and discussions necessary for understanding the social responsibility of designers as producers and creators of information and communication systems will be undertaken, as well as about aesthetic standards that will, certainly, influence the culture and structure of the society.

Besides this I have been working with Karen Bosy, currently a PhD Student who I met during my time at the RCA, and we are developing ‘Seminar collection / means of expression.’. This project consists in developing and inviting artists and designers to create videos representing a discourse using the multiple languages from a digital cup.

Our work was accepted to the Conference EVA London (2019) and considers visualization of diverse media by practitioners using a method of video-making prescribed to express their own practice. Practitioners were invited to contribute represent diverse fields in art and design practice and may usually use other means of expression including text, mark making, object, film and video as well. The aim was to encourage reflection regarding the articulations between the multiple means of expression made available by digital media. A series of videos was produced exploring a subjective discourse where it is possible to perceive this media as an extension of the physical, or an environment where a language can be shared. The method prescribed allows the expression of curiosity, creativity, cooperation and experience of the ludic by enabling each individual to create its own discourse.

TT: Thank-you, again and also, to the students who have participated in this special issue.

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Notes

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