

World Industrial Design Day 2020 Design Dialogue Minute

Tsumura: Thank you everyone for joining us today.

The World Design Organization (WDO) is an international organization for industrial design, with 173 member organizations from around 40 countries and regions of the world. There five members from Japan are Tama Art University, Chiba University, Musashino Art University, the Japan Industrial Designers' Association, and the Japan Institute of Design Promotion.

Today, June 29th, is the anniversary of the establishment of the WDO, and this date has been designated as World Industrial Design Day, with various events being carried out around the globe to celebrate this anniversary. This year's theme is "Design For Everyday Life" and this was carried out as our first attempt to have a discussion between students from the three universities of our Japanese members and professional designers, to consider what this theme means to us in Japan, and address the subject of how to design for society and everyday living from here on, while taking the coronavirus crisis into account.

Tanaka: Thank you to all the students for taking part today. I would also like to thank the many people from WDO member organizations and other people involved for attending today. Up to now, we haven't been able to hold this type of Japanese WDO event, so in a sense you could say this is also a product of the coronavirus crisis. Thank you all for your time today.

Theme of the Talk

"Design during the time of a turning point"

First, please talk in turn for 2-3 minutes about the contents of the reports we received beforehand. Mr. Tanaka will then give us his comments in regard to that.

(Each student presents a preliminary report based on the message below from Mr. Tanaka)

The current coronavirus crisis presents a challenge to modern capitalism, and it could even be said to be the end of a "grand narrative." It's a time which has clearly seen the start of a rapid transition from a 20th century model (large cities, big companies, mass production, material culture, mechanical technology) to a 21st model (local communities, venture, optimization, spiritual culture, digital technology). At this historic turning point, I would like to think together about where humanity is going next and what design should do at that time.

[What seems natural stops seeming so - the surfacing of concealed problems]

Tama Art - Ito: The spread of the coronavirus led to me surprising myself. I became scared from the middle of February because of the lack of masks and sanitizing solutions in shops. I

was surprised when I realized that I had unconsciously made my own rule that only white, disposable store bought items counted as masks. This was probably due to the accumulation of information that I'd heard around me from an early age, and accepting it without questioning or examining it for myself. I think that there is an aspect of design that actualizes rules that people unconsciously make. Rules are originally made for a purpose, but I think here are some rules that remain despite losing their original meaning. I think design isn't just for designers, but something that lots of people should learn about.

Tanaka: I think that the coronavirus has provided people with an opportunity to reexamine common practices. Design involves making something new, and this includes an aspect of negating past practices. It's important to consider this new state of affairs from a design perspective. There have also been other times for reexamining things. Recent examples include the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011 and, before that, the Great Hanshin Earthquake. These major events provide us with an opportunity to realize that things we thought were natural are not necessarily so. Thinking about where we go from there is today's subject. With masks too, there have been designers that have been inspired by this situation to devise and create their own ideas, and have come up with items like face shields. This type of thing is also one part of being a designer.

[Designers' responsibility in creating the future]

Tama Art - Mizoguchi: I feel that as the world has become increasingly complicated, it's become so that you don't know what kind of person the design is going to extend to, or in what way it's going to be used.

An example of this is eco-friendly bags. Although they help reduce plastic waste, a lot of energy is consumed in making eco bags, and it takes a fair amount of time to recover that expenditure. Eco bags are handed out at events, but I wonder if they are really distributed with the assumption that they will be used for a long time, and I feel doubtful that making those bags is part of designing. Is it okay to say that is "eco friendly?" Surely you have to include how something is made to say it is "eco friendly." I think that designers are making things irresponsibly if they don't consider things to that extent.

Tanaka: That relates to the previous conversation which indicated what seems natural is not. It leads to a variety of problems if you ask whether it is truly environmentally friendly if you consider the whole world. I think you referred to the design of something for a particular area or community in the report you submitted beforehand, right?

Mizoguchi: When I think on a global scale, I feel a sense of crisis that we won't be able to support any further increases in population. I think there is a need to make it easier to see how things are made and what route they take to arrive in our hands. Unless we do that, I don't

think we'll be able to realize that we're using too much energy and too many resources. I thought we could think about dividing places into regions and communities, to make easily understandable units.

Tanaka: How do you think this relates to the context of the coronavirus?

Mizoguchi: I heard a story that in America a meat processing plant was forced to shut down due to the coronavirus, which halted its distribution. I thought that if one place ceased production, after that they would all shut down, so that would be a starting point for raising awareness of the issues.

Tanaka: One of the things this crisis has helped us understand is the limits of globalization. Various things are interconnected. People are now able to move around freely, but it could also be said that this contributed to the current spread of infection. It's important to see problems from an objective and holistic perspective.

Tama Art - Otsuka: Due to the coronavirus crisis, I realized that it's a waste of time trying to predict the future. Isn't it pointless to plan on the basis of assumptions that may collapse at any time? Designers shouldn't try to predict the future, but there is a need for them to try and shape the future, by setting up a clear vision and working towards achieving it. Today I hope we can talk about what we students can all do as we study design.

Tanaka: The job of design is to create the future. Mr. Otsuka says that predicting the future is pointless, and maybe thought that you can't, but in practice we are constantly making predictions. However, now something has occurred that everyone thought would never happen. So, it's important to have a purpose when you make a prediction. Syd Mead is famous as the technical designer for the film Blade Runner, and he said, "I'm not saying the future will be like this, but I thought that this was the future that everyone wanted to see, and expressed that." The film expresses a fairly dark future, but really he was a person who wanted to depict a bright future. There are some things that can't be predicted, but predictions have to be made. In addition, you should have a mind to create the type of future you want. Design is the expression of intentions. It's important that you consider how to create your wishes, and in which direction you should go.

It's interesting that these preliminary assignments have revealed the character of the students from Tama Art, Musashino Art, and Chiba University.

I felt the common feature of the Tama Art students was a realization that "things that were accepted as common sense up to now are not necessarily so." I want them to treasure this as it's a good starting point for looking at what's coming next.

The Musashino Art students had a common theme of asking what they could do specifically with the conventional way of design used up to now, so now let's go onto the Musashino Art students.

[Changes in the way we think about the “home space”]

Musashino Art - I: The coronavirus has changed the way I think about my home space. It's become necessary that the house should be not just a place of rest and relaxation, but also a classroom and a workshop. I've had to change things like the furniture and where I put it. Like this, what items each home should naturally have might also change. It's changed a lot even for me, who lives by myself, so I imagine it has had an even bigger effect on families with children. I wonder if there are things that can offer solutions, and I'd like to talk with everyone about that.

Tanaka: This also links back to the earlier conversation about changes to everyday life. I think that digitalization has been the big change this time. Lessons, work and even today's session are all being carried out online. This would have been unthinkable in the 20th century. Even at some point of time from last year, no one would have been able to predict this. It has led to changes in the way that we think about space and land. The realization that people don't always have to gather in an office leads to the idea that you don't always need to have offices in city centers. In regard to houses you hear stories that desks and chairs have been selling well because of the coronavirus. People didn't have home office spaces in their houses, but they had to make one somehow or other. Among those who couldn't manage that, there were even some who worked inside their car. There has truly been a transformation in ways of thinking about living spaces.

[Replacing the value of “sharing”]

Musashino Art - Okada: I would like to talk about how cars may have to change after the coronavirus. Up to now it has been considered that the future of mobility has two directions, opposite to each other, with one direction being the promotion of public transportation that enables seamless movement, with various things being connected and shared, and the other direction being an emphasis on the hobby aspect of “loving cars!” However, the coronavirus has made me think we have to reevaluate our ways of thinking regarding sharing. Not knowing who has used it before makes people more likely to avoid car sharing, as tightly enclosed spaces like the inside of a car can be potential sources of cluster infections, and this leads to people being deprived of a means of transport and may lead to movement being restricted. A keyword for future mobility was CASE (Connected, Autonomous, Shared, Electric) and maybe now we need to omit the Shared part and enhance the value of mobility with the rest, but I wonder if we have to discard sharing completely. Now when you look at what is being shared, it's understood that things out in the open air (not enclosed) like scooters are not a problem. In the case, if you can make open-air cars that aren't enclosed spaces, not only will cars be able

to connect together on the net, but people will also be able to connect together in real life. I think that this may lead to new ideas of richness.

Tanaka: That's a very important point of view. Especially regarding connections between people, which the Chiba University students also wrote about, and leads to a discussion about how standards of living will change in the future.

In regard to the safety and security of sharing, I think it might be better to divide the issue up a little into current problems and future concerns. One option is to make various things contactless, and it's also possible to think about ways of cleaning by installing various types of equipment, like in Europe's public toilets that have automatic seat cleaners that clean everything once with steaming hot water after the person has entered. You also can't completely discard sharing from the environmental perspective. I don't think sharing is over simply because it's dangerous. It's important to consider how people connect with each other.

[Recognizing anew the value of things that can only be done offline]

Musashino Art - Ishimine: Personally, I didn't feel particularly inconvenienced during the time we had to stay indoors. However, when the state of emergency declaration was rescinded and we could go out again, I realized once again how inconvenient it was not being able to go out. I didn't think it was inconvenient as I was used to shopping and talking with friends on the Internet, but when I was actually able to meet people again by going back to school and my part time job, I once again experienced "reality." Why is that? I think that it's because my generation thinks of being online as natural, and up to now I had unconsciously forgotten how I engage with people offline. I think I didn't realize that being online is actually rather stressful as I rely on social media and worry about comments from other people.

Up to now the balance between offline life and online life had been maintained, but that balance was lost because we could communicate only online (during the stay-at-home period). In terms of product design, I think we should design products that can be enjoyed in offline private spaces and private time.

Tanaka: This touches on the subject that we have to think about the most today. There are two sides, online and offline, Tangible (things you can touch) and Intangible (digital), and therefore the way things are used is changing. From here on I think this is what will change the most.

Before we get into the main topic, are there any questions about what we've covered so far?

Chiba University - Sato: With the talk of people's values changing, do you think design will follow these changes in people's values? Or will design change people's values? This time it was coronavirus. What do you think changes values?

Tama Art - Otsuka: It's possible that there are various triggers for the moment values change,

I don't think there is really a definitive rule. Don't we have to ascertain what it is each time it happens?

Tanaka: Changes in the surrounding environment play a big part in helping us to realize our values. A designer's job involves proposing new values, but they are also influenced by the size of changes in their surroundings. We've talked largely about how Japan has had to change its daily lifestyle due to the coronavirus, but in Italy many people have died. Japan has managed to keep the death rate at a relatively low level, but in Italy many people had to confront a situation where they didn't have enough coffins and they couldn't see the people dying in person. This pandemic has been said by many to be the worst tragedy since the Second World War, and it has even led to discussions that ask if humanity can go onto the next stage when we overcome it. I think that design should try to grasp the changes, consider what is the best thing to do, and create a direction that we want to go in and should go in.

Chiba University - Nakamura: I think that from here on real experiences will be valued even more highly than they were before. Up to now, many people have recognized the value of being present and enjoying the atmosphere of events like classical concerts and sports games, and have paid amounts of money that reflect that worth.

Before the coronavirus, there wasn't actually much resistance to meeting up in person, but being able to do an experience in various ways, like online or remotely, I think made people think twice before taking action to gain the real experience. Nevertheless people still want to take the trouble to experience things directly, and I think things that enable that choice will become accepted as having even more value than before. There is a need from here on for design to be more aware of issues like which is more suitable or communicates more easily, between real experiences and online.

[Active selection of "online" and "offline"]

Chiba University - Sato: From here on users will be able to choose the best one from both digital and real versions in their daily lives. I think the design of products and services will involve increasing the ways of realizing this. Manufacturing in the 20th century moved from real to digital, and the trend was to make things easier and more convenient. Digital is easy and convenient, and has the value of being accessible anytime, anywhere and to everyone, while reality is time consuming and troublesome but it has the value of being once in a lifetime encounters that you can experience with five senses.

Because of the coronavirus, we've come to understand that you can even have personal experiences digitally that are better than average, so hereafter I think individuals will be able to actively choose which experiences they want to be digital and which ones they want to be real. Therefore, the aim of design should be to design things that let you feel the merit of real

characteristics, rather than increasing things that are easy and reasonable.

Tanaka: The objects of industrial design have also largely changed from tangible objects to intangible ones.

There is also a trend to consider the value of real things.

Chiba University - Takahashi: Life changed completely because of the coronavirus. We went from “going” to work and school to “working from home” and “online lessons.” We realized that under such circumstances surprisingly we were able to establish daily lifestyles. There were also movements to “return to life before coronavirus” for going to work and school, due to the lifting of the emergency measures. From here on the “online daily life” that permeated society due to coronavirus, and the “previous daily life” will coexist together. I think there will be a diversification in the choices for ways of working, ways of studying, and ways of living. A wider range of choices is a good thing. “Everyone having to be online” is not the same situation as individuals choosing to do so because they like it. In the future, a digital divide and communication gap might arise. People who like being online may possibly suffer disadvantages. I think coexistence may be difficult. The role of design in the future will be to help form new choices for the the new lifestyle that has arisen from the coronavirus.

Tanaka: So, have you thought that there are disadvantages for people who choose to be online up to now?

Takahashi: I hadn't thought about it up to now but, for example, if you could choose between online and offline lessons, I think that maybe online would be disadvantageous.

Tanaka: Up to now they have always been offline, but now there has been a tremendous increase of online ones. It was thought that this would probably happen sometime in the 21st century, but it took place in a few short months.

We're embarking on a discussion of what should be called today's main topic of “online” and “offline,” but I think that a society in favor of people who are usually online would be formed. Especially if people are mainly online in the world, relationships with other people will become important. There's meaning in meeting in person. What do you think about the merits of taking the trouble to choose analog/real experience and the convenience of digital?

In a society that is mainly online, how to carry forward analog things is one of the design challenges we are going to face. If you don't go to school and chat with your friends, will you lose your friends? Zoom meetings like this one that we're currently participating in may not be the ideal form. In the future it may be possible to make them 3D.

Musashino Art - Ishimine: If you're talking with a large number of people offline, you can have a one-to-one conversation with the person next to you, but you can't do that online.

Tanaka: It's possible that the chat function is a substitute for that to some extent. However, what I find difficult about web meetings is that you can't make eye contact. When you're

typing your chat, you can't hear half the conversation. In this way, it will be interesting from here on to think about designs that create experiences similar to real life sensations.

We're in an age where reality and digital are side by side with the same weight. Does everyone think that everything being digital is okay? Or are real experiences also important after all?

Musashino Art - Okada: I'm not satisfied with digital. Even for today, I think that there are many ways we could have a richer experience if we could actually meet, and it would be easier to speak. There is an aspect that making things digital makes them convenient, but I sometimes wonder if it's good to say "it's become convenient." For example, even in design work there are certain things that can only be achieved by working in a group. I think working digitally doesn't allow you to harness that "group power."

Tanaka: It's important to try and write out as much as you can think of about what the merits of meeting up in person are. Conversely, there is also a need to think about whether it's possible to incorporate the same merits of people meeting up in person into a digital form, when people connect digitally. For when you're thinking of new tools for communication.

Musashino Art - Ishimine: There are benefits to digitalization. Increased efficiency and no need to travel. It is incredibly powerful when searching for information. However, when it comes to creative work, like when you have to invent something from nothing, I feel it's still not possible to do digitally.

Tanaka: So for things like brainstorming, is the real world still better?

Ishimine: It is awkward online. Because online meetings or work have transmission time delays, while there are many things, such as eye movements, which you can gain from communication outside of the words in face-to-face situations.

Tanaka: Maybe that should be a starting point to ask if there is a meeting system that enables brainstorming. A meeting system with a device that enables eye contact is conceivable.

One more important factor is the ability to create shared feelings. For example, public viewings can be watched digitally, but being together involves real people. I think creating shared feelings in digital tools will be one of the challenges of the future. It's possible that things like avatars may be utilized. However, there are still some things that can't be done only online, so we can learn from thinking about the differences between the two.

Tama Art - Ito: Online is a blessing for people who aren't good at speaking. As offline they are usually interrupted by someone when they are halfway through. But online "unexpected things" are less likely to happen. You can't expect to get the same kind of excitement that can occur from being in a classroom. Take today for example, if we were onsite we could do things like have personal chats after the meeting.

Tanaka: That awareness is important. There's a "blank space" in people's relationships that

is difficult to create digitally. It's impossible if you only have things that start and finish on time. However, there are also cases where chat continues even after online meetings are over. Not everyone is used to digital yet, and it may be possible to think of new ways of using it

Tama Art - Mizoguchi: Although there is a trend to make real communication in digital spaces, is there also maybe a need to sort out things that have become too complex, such as returning to practices like local production for local consumption?

Tanaka: I think it's more a matter of finding out what is most important, rather than going back. I think it's about discovering what the real thing is and what is the ideal form, after the digital wave has crashed in.

Tama Art - Otsuka: I have a feeling that if we do things digitally that we've always done offline, and that becomes normal everyday life, we'll lose the importance of offline life that we've taken great pains to understand. "Discontent" from being online will also become the essence of offline meetings. It will also lead to the extension of conversations.

Tanaka: Of course, I don't think it should all be like that. It's not that the current online situation is ideal, so I think you should think about how to use it. What's important is being aware of the important part of analog's value. I think that what you feel when you come into contact with analog is the essential part. For instance, it's good that you can improve work efficiency by going digital, but after you've improved it, it's important to identify what is left. Important things remain. It's necessary to extend that.

[Conclusion]

Tanaka: Up to now, major societal events have been accompanied by changes in values. While society may seem the same as yesterday, it is no longer so. The role of design is the "creation of a better society," and this hasn't changed since the advent of modern design. So, what is better? First, let's try and look at society objectively. Try and consider what it is? We may get an answer by repeatedly thinking about what making certain things better than yesterday involves.

Through today's online discussion I was able to feel exactly how comfortable and uncomfortable it can be. I wrote in my opening message that this might be the end of a grand narrative that has continued from the 20th century, and with the current coronavirus crisis we have been able to overcome time and space quite easily. With the empty offices due to their employees working from home, many business people have thought about moving to places with much lower land prices. A switch from large cities to local regions is occurring, as big companies are reevaluating their concentration in large city centers. From here on, **things that can be done digitally won't have to be done**, such as traveling to work or meetings, **which will lead to a world where you can live in a way that suits you best, focusing on what you want.**

And then our subject becomes **“how can design provide values?”** From here on it's also time to consider if we really need to make things faster, farther and in large quantities. And, as a final place to return to, issues of the “heart” was also a topic today. The time has come to think about the spiritual culture of the era.

In addition, the topic of SDGs is also important when considering the future, although we didn't cover it today. There are also many other subjects that don't necessarily spring to mind in Japan, like refugees and terrorism, but now is a time for design to show what society should essentially be like. Moreover, it was said that the subject of design is changing from items to things, but on the other hand software can't exist without hardware. Surely we won't lose the good aspects of hardware. We have to think about what is truly necessary in our future lives and the future era.

Currently, the role of design is changing dramatically. In the middle of a wide area, it's important that we objectively identify ourselves in terms of where we stand and what we're going to look at. Good luck everyone!