[WDO Event: World Industrial Design Day Design Dialogue Vol.2]

Attendees:

Eisuke Tachikawa [Design Strategist, an Associate Professor at Keio University, the founder of NOSIGNER and the President, Japan Industrial Design Association (JIDA)]

Tama Art University: Sebastian O'Halloran, Koichi Shibano, Hinako Kasai

Chiba University: Natsuki Moriyama, Kyosuke Murakami, Tatsuya Suzuki

Musashino Art University: Sung-Min Pyo, Tong Zhou, Taiki Hirakawa

Moderator: Makiko Tsumura (Director, Japan Institute of Design Promotion, WDO Board Member)

Tsumura: Thank you everyone for joining us today.

The World Design Organization (WDO) is an international organization for industrial design, with 180 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 Design 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 shared theme is "Let's talk DIVERSITY", and in Japan, the theme was set as "Designing another future" based on the new values created after the Corona disaster, and we try to think about it through dialogues between students from the three-member universities and a professional designer.

Tachikawa: Greetings, everybody. My name is Tachikawa. I am representative of the NOSIGNER design office, and as noted in the introduction I also have been named chair of the board of JIDA, a founding member of the WDO. I am involved in various design projects, all based on the credo that calls for working only on projects that will create a future that differs from today. I do not want to create anything that is not needed for the future. My aim is to be somebody who creates change at all times. I have described in my book my methodology of "evolutionary thinking" to demonstrate creativity. My work is conscious of uncovering and sorting out relationships that have been ignored through now.

The theme of today's dialogue has been identified as "Designing another future."

Today, the global environment is faced with severe threats in the areas of biodiversity and carbon-dioxide concentrations. Can we expect a bright future if things continue along this trajectory?

I believe that it is a privilege of designers to propose things that differ from the way things are today. I also believe that industrial design needs to transform from its purpose through now of design for industry to the new approach of redesigning industry itself.

During Japan's period of rapid postwar economic growth it was enough merely to design products that would sell. But today, the need has arisen to reconsider the essential value of design itself. A major

turning point like today may provide the chance for designers too to propose the shape that industry should take in the future. This is an opportunity that comes along only once in several decades, and it may be your last chance to change the times.

Have you heard the term "planetary boundaries"? This refers to the boundaries of the planet's natural ability to recover, in terms such as climate and ecosystems in particular. Once these boundaries have been crossed, there will be no way to go back. While the challenges we face are difficult ones, it is vital that design reflect these future conditions on a global scale.

While nobody knows what the future holds, we have proposed this theme to think in practical terms about what steps we should take before it's too late.

Proactive selection of online and offline approaches

Pyo, Musashino Art University: As digitalization advances rapidly, I believe that designers will need to think about interaction between Internet of things (IoT) products and human beings. We will need to design communication across different domains, between machines, between people, and between machines and people. I believe that improving the new online environment also is an important role of designers.

Tachikawa: Certainly it is true that the fusion of UIX and industrial design has advanced. While of course this will become even more important in the future, since there are many people who already are involved in the field I would encourage you to take a look at the works of those who are a step ahead of the pack in that field and consider the next steps even beyond their work.

Shibano, Tama Art University: As the number of online tools and services has increased rapidly, users need to work harder. It is difficult facing so many choices. I believe that it is a role of a designer to sort out the range of choices. I think that there is a need to sort out choices with attention to comfort instead of just efficiency.

Tachikawa: Design is a message expressed in the form of things. The contextual power of design increases as one sorts out a message and ultimately designs it precisely, linking the designer's own message with the final form.

Murakami, Chiba University: As use of online technologies in everyday living advances even further in the future, I think that people will tend increasingly to live solitary lives, since they can exist on their own using various online services. While it had been thought that the shift online would not be likely to advance in creative domains such as design, since they stress incidental chemical reactions, the appearance of services such as Miro has made possible online experiences just like the offline world. It seems to me that as inefficiencies are weeded out and online services are introduced that surpass the offline alternatives, this solitary existence will become more common in creative domains

as well.

Tachikawa: Don't you think that this already is the case? Would you like things to develop in that way?

Murakami: Personally I prefer working offline. But if the experience were largely the same, then I might migrate online too.

Tachikawa: If you are not comfortable with the direction in which things are heading today, consider the possibility of creating another future. You might create a system for increasing the value of working offline. There is a gap between reality and the way you think things should be. Instead of simply thinking about how to adapt to the way in which reality is headed, why not take the opportunity to design the gap between reality and your ideal?

Forecasting and back casting are two ways of looking at the future. Back casting involves focusing on the future and thinking about what is lacking today. Since design is a process of back casting, you should think first of all about the future you want to achieve. It doesn't matter how fantastic it may seem. Nobody knows what the future holds.

Examining oneself and considering others

Kasai, Tama Art University: When thinking about an uncertain and unpredictable future, it is vital to consider diverse points of view instead of just one's own values. Currently I am studying manufacturing from a science-fiction worldview, but the research tends to become abstract. I would like to learn how to create more practical solutions.

Tachikawa: "The future" is too broad as a theme. Incidentally, you might be surprised to learn that the first patent for an electric vehicle was registered during the 1830s. While the motor and wheel were feasible, the lack of a battery prevented the spread of that technology. The ability to produce capable batteries led to major technological innovations. In a case like this, it is the details that bring about a drastic change in the future. You might try, for example, drilling down to a single point that could change the future and then broaden your thinking by building on that. That's a good way to create realistically. My advice to those who will work as designers in the future is that while your clients are a part of an existing industry, the industry as a whole will change as the people in it change. This is why the role of a designer in the future will be to identify and propose forward-looking solutions. You can use the power of clients to change the world.

Seby, Tama Art University: If the role of a designer is to turn chaos, such as the present time, into opportunity, then I believe that a new future can be developed through inclusive design. One example would be design to enable people with impaired vision to live their lives autonomously.

It also seems to me that the level of diversity in the design field in Japan is very low. There are almost no positions set aside for non-Japanese designers, and even if they are hired the separation rate is high because the workplace is unable to adapt to them. I think that the future of design in Japan is not very

promising unless it is able to accept different thinking.

Tachikawa: It is preferable to have numerous points of view. Variation (differentiation from the status quo) is essential to biological evolution, and it is difficult for a homogeneous community to generate innovation. It is unacceptable for things to solidify around the same occupation or the same age range. While Japan is somewhat behind the times, I believe that it is starting to improve.

The subject of devices for people with impaired vision is very interesting. Since the time has come in which we should be able to create such devices, I definitely would like to see their precision improve.

Moriyama, Chiba University: I think that as we have more time to ourselves, we have started to recognize more the importance of thinking about others. It seems to me that the role of design is to make this consciousness visible and give concrete form to the way we want things to be.

Tachikawa: It is a designer's privilege not merely to draw things but to create them. I would encourage you to approach the world with both your skills and your ideas, and polish up your skills as you do so.

Analog experiences enrich people's lives

Hirakawa, Musashino Art University: It seems to me that the rapid progress of digitalization has led to undervaluation of analog experiences. While knowledge may increase with progress in online education, we seem to be overlooking analog experiences and the validation they enable.

Tachikawa: That's an important point. That's why I encourage you to develop the ability when you look at things in this world to describe how they are built. Surprisingly, this is hard to learn in school. The only way to learn it is through actual experience in the field, such as at a factory. Since this ability is essential to become a professional designer, I definitely would encourage you to master it.

Democratization of design

Zhou Musashino Art University: There are many people in the world who will not accept designs that truly have only the bare essentials. It seems to me that we are producing many wasteful things even though what is needed is proper design. Isn't design intended to add value?

Tachikawa: I said at the beginning that we should try to design industry itself. Until now, design has been based on the approach of what kinds of user a design has been intended for. Designing an industry does not refer to design for only the people who we see in front of us now. It also impacts the people of the future. If we think about the people of the future, we will need to think in completely different ways than we have through now. For example, I think that we could personify the ecosystem and treat it as another stakeholder. Although thinking about the future means variation in the themes we address themselves, that too makes this an interesting time to be alive.

Suzuki, Chiba University: Is it not the case that while products designed through now have become widely used, in the future it will be the methods of design that will come into widespread use? If people are able to create anything themselves, then there will be no need for large enterprises. That

would lead to a breakdown of the current structure of society, and as people have more time to themselves they will have to think about what to do with that time. Won't this lead to polarization between those who have creative orientations and those who do not?

Tachikawa: It is said that in today's society we have tens of thousands of possessions in our homes. This is said to be about the same level as that of a king two centuries ago. But despite all of these possessions, we cannot be said to be happy. The gap between rich and poor is expanding as well. We do not need that many things to live our lives. Industrial designers can create things themselves. They can create things that truly satisfy their own intentions. Is not that what leads to true richness? I believe that improving the things around oneself is another role of an industrial designer.

Questions for Mr. Tachikawa

Murakami, Chiba University: Mr. Tachikawa, how do you see the future 100 years from now?

Tachikawa: Let's start by considering the world 100 years ago. The world had overcome war and infectious disease to see the spread of simple designs that could be produced quickly and at low cost, through creativity education as exemplified by Bauhaus. But the result was a century of exploitation of labor, mass waste, and environmental degradation. Although we ourselves are richer, we live in a time of risks equivalent to those of past wars. Design in the future will serve to sound the alarm about these dangers. Issues such as microplastics and CO2 all are matters for industrial design. It is natural that we should consider the future not just 100 years but even 10 years from now. Things are so dangerous now that we might not even have a future 100 years from now? Some argue that we only have 50-60 years left. We should try to avoid a situation in which we have to live underwater, underground, or in outer space 100 years from now. Above all, the pace of change is rapid, as is that of digitalization. I think we live in a time that is hard to predict. Some even argue that digital technologies could help prevent destruction of ecosystems.

Although there is no single answer, it is clear that we cannot continue along the current trajectory. The legendary designers of Bauhaus were able to become legends because they asked questions about uncertain times. Rather than a time in which the world remains unchanged, it is more interesting as a designer to live in a time of numerous challenges, with large-scale changes on the horizon.

Seby, Tama Art University: The practice of living life via screens has become firmly established and widely adopted. Don't you worry that, for example, a part of the population might develop some strange disease a decade from now as a result? We have prioritized convenience over our existing concepts of humanity. How can design of the future and humanity be linked to each other?

Tachikawa: I think the best example is pollution. It is important for designers to start by refusing to do things that they do not think are right. To do no evil. To propose alternatives. Even if it is not possible to make bold changes to the world right away, we might be able to change it a little at a time.

Designers can make the alternatives visible. It is at a time like that in which the world changes. The cause of pollution is the evil of ignorance. We need to propose alternatives for things that people do not yet see as issues (ignorance).

Conclusion

Tachikawa: Thank you for your time today. I took part in this dialogue with the hope that it would provide hints to help all of you to create another future. I believe that what will be in demand from the profession of a designer in the age in which you will create your designs is:

* The ability to propose alternatives to the way things are now

* The ability to complete those alternatives in attractive forms

What's more, it is important for designers to complete their works in attractive forms, and works that achieve such forms can continue to exist for a long while.

It also is important to balance both skill and vision.

In thinking about which future to aim for and the form in which to build it, I hope that you will be certain to do so in ways that embody cool design. Doing so may make it possible to realize things that can continue to exist unchanging for a long time.

I encourage you to aim to be that kind of designer.

The future is uncertain. The ability to create alternatives even amid various restrictions is the ability to question things. Start by answering the questions you ask yourself. Rather than answering questions asked by others, it is more important for you yourselves find your own unique questions in which you can believe.

As you continue to speak up about where the current trajectory leads, and where you want to go instead, you will find people who sympathize with you. I hope you will continue to think about the topics we have spoken about today as well.