

About Cover #26

Sobre a Capa #26

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If the will exists among designers, it will surely be possible to reinvent design. If it doesn't, designers will simply remain part of the problem whose solution other professions will need to invent (Margolin, 2002, p. 102).

In a recent article to be presented at R&D Design 2024, we explore the evolving contours of Design and its various definitions. Confronted with the Brazilian scenario of an unregulated professional practice and the perception of an expanding field — both in terms of its disciplines and complexity —, this work revisits the definitions proposed by critics, theorists, and, most importantly, by the field's legitimizing associations. It was by revisiting both these definitions — where mentions of the impact and social responsibility of professional practice were plentiful, as well as the field's orientation toward solving society's complex problems — and the historiography that defines the social orientation of the profession that this cover¹ was conceived.

In the concepts proposed by international associations, such as the World Design Organization² (WDO, 2024), the Design Council UK (2024), and the International Council of Design³ (ICoD, 2024), the holistic analysis of the social context as a constitutive factor of the field was prominently emphasized. Among the definitions and results obtained, the one proposed by ICoD (2024) stands out.

The association, which acknowledges the growing expansion of disciplines and professions within the field, defines Design as both a practical discipline and a field of study, centered on the human being and encompassing functional, cultural, aesthetic, contextual, and social aspects. What stands out, however, is the identification of central and fundamental notions that are common across and unify all practical manifestations of the field. Among these is the holistic analysis of problems — which involves understanding not only their surface aspects but also the productive, cultural, social, and environmental systems in which they are embedded — and the emphasis on human needs and capabilities is identified as a core element in all manifestations of the profession (ICoD, 2024). This unifying concept of Design inspired the creation of this cover, which aims to metaphorically represent the social scenario and its institutional forces, both formal and informal, as essential and constitutive parts of the field of Design.

The analysis of the role, responsibility, and social impact of Design is not, however, a debate that has emerged recently. In the appeals of activist movements such as First

1 Graphic design by Carolina Aranha..

2 Former International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (Icsid).

3 Former International Council of Graphic Design Associations (Icograda).

Things First — from its first edition in 1964 through all subsequent versions, including the most recent in 2020 — and in the theories of academics in the field like Papanek (1985) and Bonsiepe (2013), the urgency of reorienting the field to address social and environmental needs has gained prominence (Papanek, 1985; Bonsiepe, 2013; Poynor, 2021). The very institutionalization and formation of Design are closely tied to its social role. According to Walter Gropius, the Bauhaus aimed to prioritize the promotion of new social structures over the establishment of a formal grammar (Argan, 2005). Likewise, the Ulm School of Design (HfG Ulm), its successor, emerged as a response to the need to rebuild a devastated society, incorporating into its curriculum subjects on politics, culture, and debates about socio-environmental issues and the responsibility of Design (HfG Archiv Ulm, 2024).

Taking into account the historical attribution of the social role of Design, and recognizing the repertoire as a fundamental part of the creation and dissemination of Design products, this cover was conceived as an aesthetic reinterpretation of Vkhutemas (Soviet school of arts, crafts, and technology). The school holds historical relevance and influence that its recognition (or rather, lack thereof) does not do justice to. Its origins precede the world-renowned German Bauhaus school, yet its purposes, productions, and history were until recently almost unknown. The aim of expanding knowledge about this period and this school was part of the reason it was chosen as a visual reference for the cover, instead of other more widely recognized movements. In a society that was largely illiterate, abstraction and visual metaphors became essential tools for artists aligned with the Russian Revolution (including Vkhutemas teachers) to convey their messages to the public. The school's visual language, characterized by a limited color palette — primarily black and red — along with diagonal lines, photomontages, bold typography, and simple geometric shapes, reflected an understanding of social factors and conditions while serving clear social purposes.

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