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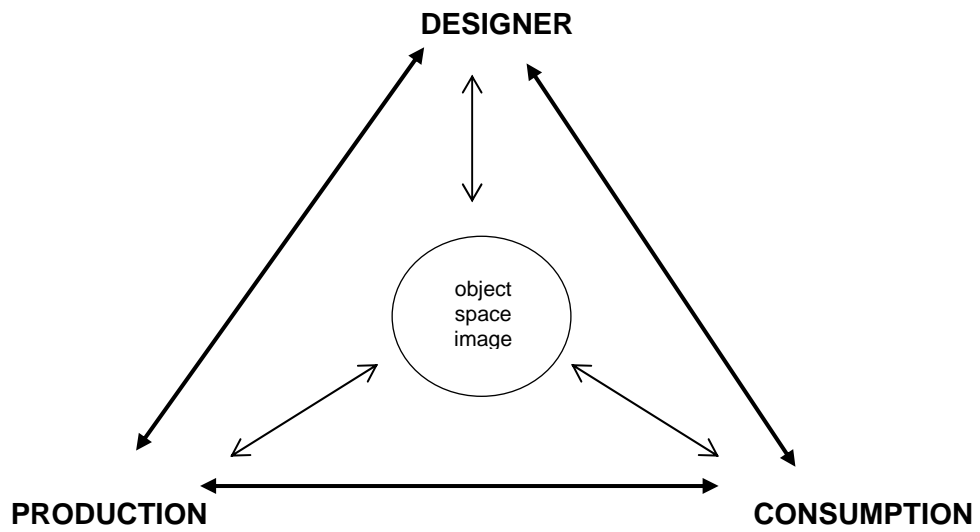
***From singularization to complexity.
From visual culture to design culture.***

The gist of my intervention on 2 July was developed from my forthcoming article, 'From Visual Culture to Design Culture' in Design Issues. In the first instance, it critiqued, perhaps disingenuously, Visual Culture Studies as a 'way of looking'. The dominant transaction of interest is between singularized object and individual viewer, between produced object and consuming subject. Issues of 'scopic regimes', vision, ways of looking, the gaze, semiosis crowd the literature. The 'reading' of the image is a central faculty of the discipline. This ocularcentricism in Visual Culture Studies therefore renders the viewer almost inanimate in relation to the viewed. A sensibility is embedded in its practices whereby things external to the subject are seen, analyzed and contemplated.

By contrast, I take the position that the subject is situated more dynamically within the multiple objects of design. This doesn't necessarily imply that 'we' are overwhelmed by artefactual information. Everyday practice involves negotiating through and between these.

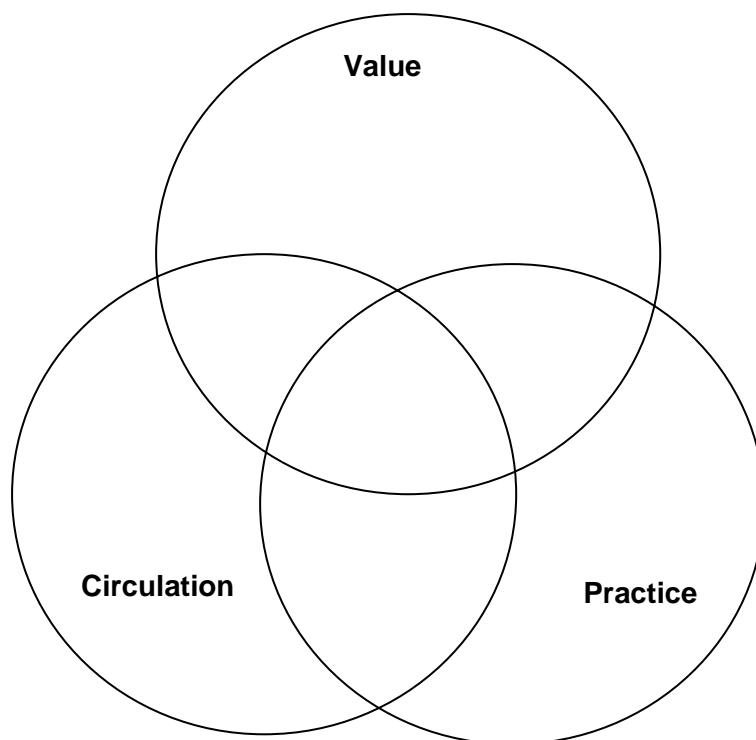
In my book The Culture of Design I kicked off with a conceptual framework as below (Diagram 1). This aimed to convey a sense of interactions between the activities of designers, producers and consumers in fashioning their practices and their artefacts. A revision of this (Diagram 2) seeks to give more a sense of the activities that are embedded in the domains of design culture. It also updates the notion of practice – something that has partly come from, and are with thanks to, the work of Elizabeth Shove and Dale Southerton prior to the 'Consuming and Designing' project.

DIAGRAM 1



Domains of Design Culture

DIAGRAM 2



Domains of Design Culture

Value The designer's role is in the creation of value. This most obviously is commercial value, but may also include social, cultural, environmental, political and symbolic values. Clearly it is not restricted to notions of 'good design' as value. It involves the origination of new products and product forms, but also their value augmentation. An expanded field of activity that orchestrates and coordinates material and non-material processes results. A key feature of this value creation is the reproduction of 'product nodes', whereby cultural information is filtered through a range of platforms and moments. The establishment of multiple coordinates for the networked reproduction of this cultural information might be termed a 'designscape'. Creative action may indeed originate, position and differentiate product forms and 'product nodes' to increase value. But systems of measurement and accountability are also embedded into this domain.

Circulation A range of straightforward elements underpin and shape the productive processes of design culture, including available technologies, environmental and human factors. But non-material elements such as existing knowledge networks, legislation, political pressures, economic fluctuations and fiscal policies are also contextual factors that these draw on. Beyond design manufacture or production issues – whether we are talking about material or information products – 'downstream' flows of product information and distribution are channelled, formatted, interrupted or facilitated to influence their movement and/or reception through the system of provision. Within this, the specificities that create a 'fit' or disjuncture of global/local nexi invariably play crucial roles.

Practice The engagement of design products, processes and systems in everyday life is not merely a function of consumer culture in its traditional sense. Beyond individual, privately-orientated activities of use, ownership and maintenance focused on the domestic sphere, are layers of socially-constituted activities where individuals are carriers of collectively held practices and may comprise sets of conventions and procedures. Alternatively, practice may be conceived as specific types and ranges of activities that Bourdieu termed as 'fields'. Here different practices are governed by their specific, respective rules. Practice involves routinized behaviour that is both individually enacted but also socially observable. Consumption is therefore a part of practice. Things are bought and put to use, environments are visited, websites are perused in fulfilling practice.