

How Does Scientific Publishing Serve the Design Community?

An Interview with Louise Valentine

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Abstract

Design research is an important part of the field of design. It is fundamental to understand the influences and uphold the integrity of the research community and the quality and rigour of research dialogue while respecting diversity. In this interview with Louise Valentine, the paper investigates new trends in publishing or new solutions to improve the reading experience in the digital version. Inclusivity and transparency are key values in the design discipline, not only in geography but also in gender, career stages, and ethnicity. Currently, we are witnessing new formats of papers that are not scientific but have elements of provocation that allow researchers to explore design practices more freely.

Keywords

Scientific publishing

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Community

Research impact

Louise Valentine is a design researcher and the first doctoral student at the University of Dundee to embark on a PhD focusing on the practice of designing and the experience of being a designer (1999). She is author of *Prototype: Design and Craft in the 21st Century* (2013, Bloomsbury) and is currently Editor-in-Chief of *The Design Journal*. Her research focuses on how we communicate design as 1) a concept development process, 2) a concurrent process of learning and problem solving, and 3) a meta-language — specifically, the way a designer uses visual thinking, intuition, and technology to conceive ideas and solve problems. Since then, she has continued to investigate and communicate the value of design (Valentine, 2022) and designer, as well as provide reflections on journal publishing in the design discipline (Atkinson, Valentine & Christer, 2021). She conducts multi and interdisciplinary research into the value of the designer's thinking for social, cultural, and business transformation. Her emphasis is on design for innovation, design management for micro-enterprises, mindfulness, and the value designers and design thinking bring to leadership and performance management in organisations.

LM Innovative forms for publications: in this conversation, we would like to imagine, with you, new publishing trends and opportunities for scientific publications, by exploring your vision for the future. Considering your extensive experience, how was your work influenced by scientific production and publishing management?

LV Publishing is a fundamental part of being a researcher and an academic, and learning to become a researcher was my introduction to scientific publishing. It started with the European Academy of Design (EAD) when I was a young doctoral candidate, trying to understand the research language, community, and culture. In this early stage of my career, doctoral education in design was just really beginning; it was a relatively new and uncommon thing to be involved in. The first conference dedicated to doctoral education in design was in 1998 in Ohio. I vividly remember the importance of that conference and the fourth EAD conference in Portugal, where I learned to appreciate the presence of an international community that would support and mentor me as a young researcher in the design field. I was fascinated by the values that were underpinning the EAD. And that was my introduction to *The Design Journal*, not knowing at the time that the Journal was the parent, and the European Academy of Design was just part of the facilitation of the conversation and a way to link people with publication.

LM Recently, *The Design Journal* underwent a change in its Editorial Management, but furthermore, the audience could highlight a new strategy to expand the dimension of the Journal. Much has changed in terms of publication methods. Several changes have occurred in the Journal's editorial, business, and process models. The management model has changed if we consider this academic scientific Journal a design product. The questions arising out of this new path focus on the management in terms of coordination and new resources. Finally, what do you envision as the future for this Journal?

LV I am trained in design as a designer and as a visual thinker. And this is how I approach the leadership and development of a vision for the Journal, in general. I don't see envisioning as separate from how I design or how I teach, whether the focus is entrepreneurship or design management, or the future of publishing design research. Therefore, it's a design, a call to make things better for people. Publishing has gone through major changes this past decade. The changes have been quick and heavy, and they require a team. We started with regular and consistent communication between Paul Atkinson and me. Over the eight years, we worked together at a natural pace. I am still conscious of the weight of this call to envision because it is a call to redesign a service to the community and the notion of design research leadership in an international context. And it's about understanding it as a legacy: Paul Atkinson and Rachel Cooper were before me. From this point of view, it is easier to understand what leadership means and the service component of the work: it is about respecting the responsibility of publishing as a support infrastructure for your peers and the next generation of design researchers. It is fundamental to understand the influences and uphold the integrity of the design community, and the quality and rigour of the research dialogue, while respecting diversity and removing unintended bias.

LM I agree with you that the idea of serving a community from a service perspective leads to a user-designing vision. And, in fact, do you think that *The Design Journal* could welcome different forms of articles? Several scientific journals have started publishing visual or more interactive articles, not as a textual research product per se, but with a research-oriented approach. What is your opinion on the discussion about these new forms of publications, in which authors are asking to add more data, or attach more information or insert interactive data sets into the article? Do you think that legacy is still meaningful for an academic journal in terms of the editorial process of volumes and issues with corresponding deadlines and reviews, or do you envision a change towards the digital and blended environment, such as a platform providing a continuous publishing process (like the Open Research Europe platform)? In an open platform of this type, it is sometimes very difficult for researchers to give the proper value to an article because they are uncertain of the context in which it has grown. How do we preserve the legacy of academic journals and, at the same time, get engaged in this new publishing trend? Alternative forms of publishing are increasing and creating competition in the field.

LV We consume and learn in many ways, and the question is how we support people, cultures, and universities to make the transition you describe. I think the idea of providing different forms of knowledge to learn from is linked to need; it depends on many things in terms of publishing, including the stage a researcher is at in their career, access to resources, their preferred mode of output or dissemination, and their thinking styles. We have proactively experimented within the EAD space during the conferences and recently in an enforced way due to the pandemic. Like everyone, we were reflecting and rethinking engagement and how to support a dialogue when you are not physically in the same space. As a result, we invited people to deliver their work visually: voice recordings with video

presentations, etc. We all agree that this is a positive change for the design community; it's taken the last twenty years for the research community to become comfortable with writing about a visual discipline and for the design practice to accept that visual thinking is a fundamental part of the discipline. How do we support visual forms of publishing going forward? As an editorial board, choosing to offer it as an option means we must support it. It means ensuring we have the right support systems from Taylor and Francis or all the supporting teams with the Editorial Board. Furthermore: what is the peer review process regarding publishing the visual aspect of articles? I would suggest that this is a hugely contentious issue. I agree with the change you are raising. It requires a different structure and must be communicated meaningfully by showing people where to find signposts for the training and learning how to do this. Or to outsource this format to a business that translates it from the written word to a highly visual story. On a practical level, greater capacity and a larger team are needed. We currently rely on the structure of volumes and issues, and the work becomes available online before it is printed. At the moment, I'm preparing the next volume and what's wonderful about seeing the articles all together is that it represents where the world is in the practice of design and design research. You can see what Brazil is up to or what Australia is doing regarding how it engages with the Aboriginal community. You can see what China's doing in developing its doctoral education and design. You can see what is going on in the UK with fashion sustainability and circularity. This broad range provides a different lens through which to see design and design research and how it sits with other disciplines. Therefore, there is value in having the existing structure to support the community, even though I agree that things are changing. Furthermore, I recently made a point in my editorials to encourage readers to read more than just one paper and understand the entire issue. Looking at the whole picture means understanding the wider international community better; we are often blinkered by what we need to do at one point in time for our self-interest in the research project that we are engaged in. But because of the pandemic, we should allow ourselves to look around a bit longer to see what other projects and other people and their ways of working can do to help what we are trying to do. Our responsibility with academic design research is to respect a quality threshold we are committed to upholding. The notion of excellence is dynamic. Our job is to help people find excellent and the most up-to-date work within that field. So that's what the framework of *The Design Journal*, its tradition, and its future of publishing offers and guarantees.

LM Your answers are deeply connected to readership and the reading experience. In your opinion, is there a way to improve the reading experience in the digital version, not only as a matter of visual design or graphic design but also of organizational knowledge management? We still rely on the linear version of an article, which is translating the paper-printed article into its digital version. Other disciplines, such as the social sciences, are proposing a more user-cen-

tred reading project in which the user can find links, suggested connections, and bookmarks: simply put, they are facilitating and making connections. How can our discipline innovate and participate in bringing proposals to this new vision of readership that matches the reader experience, visual experience and user experience?

LV Reading written language and reading visual language are two different types of reading, and can complement one another. Hence, the written word within research is very important, just as visual thinking in design is critically important. The visual experience is a different narrative with a different form and structure of argument that comes with it. Therefore, the question I'd ask for *The Design Journal* is how we support and remind or give confidence to authors that the practice of design in visual thinking needs to come back to the centre of their work when they are managing and exchanging design knowledge. To encourage authors to put design at the forefront of the research because there is arguably too much emphasis on methods and debates around process. We should also consider the impact on design and how the discipline is benefiting from publishing, through authorship and peer review. There is policy involved, for instance. If we think about the open access model and the cost or fee that comes with this. It is inherently geared toward the wealthy. It is not yet inclusive. This is relevant because publishing research is about providing access so that work can be cited and have an impact. With the Editorial Board, we are still pondering how we can support design researchers to improve citations and publish more consistently. We have observed that many people perceive that the publishing job is complete once their work is printed or made available online: our job is to support and remind them of another important step after publication: growing and managing impact. And, to help them do this, here's the toolkit to make sure their work is regularly promoted, applied, cited and followed up properly. Therefore, now, I am less concerned about the visualization of the journal and more concerned with the inequality of open access and the inadequacy or inefficiency of individual impact management.

LM Impact: you just mentioned a very relevant point in this discussion. Can we advance the idea that the real impact is measured by the results that are reused in producing new knowledge, instead of simple citations of colleagues and articles? This line of reasoning envisions a new process in which authors can build upon another author's article by embedding parts of another article or remixing articles, following a concept of growing knowledge. Of course, there are criticalities in this scenario, but how can we increase, improve and support authors in embedding knowledge from other authors and nurturing collective authorship? Could you imagine this as a way to exploit impact differently and promote the idea of growing knowledge based on exchange and collaboration? A shift from authorship to contributorship could help distinguish each author's contributions, especially for the recognition of early career researchers. Can a well-established journal such as *The Design Journal* pave the way to this change?

LV I agree, impact is way more than citation. As Editor, my responsibility is to understand my community, and the community

is global. For example, I understand that citation is hugely important to colleagues in North America, South America, and Asia; more important in these continents than in Europe. I am aware that it is one major difference between the continents. As an Editorial Board and Journal, we need to understand the nuances better. In 2017 and 2019, we worked with Taylor & Francis to publish the EAD proceedings as a supplement to *The Design Journal* to improve the proceedings' citations. In doing so, we better understand how to serve our community and where design research is. Our EAD authors are cited more regularly because of the connection to the Journal. But publishing an open-access supplement with 300+ articles twice, brought our score down in terms of indexing and impact. It was part of a longer-term strategy and a necessary albeit risky route. It provided an opportunity to prototype a change; to understand how to support further our community, its transnational research potential, and projects.

We are looking at supporting the highly visual dimension of design in *The Design Journal*, but it still represents a small part of the design research community; hence balancing is crucial. The contributorship model is part of the debate about frameworks for research quality. It connects to the excellence issue, and we are with that within *The Design Journal*.

But again, as Editor, I'm serving the design research community globally and contributorship raises another important issue. We work in teams more often on more complex problems and projects. If we're looking to define specific contribution(s), we need to acknowledge that contributions are made individually and as part of a team. There are support roles, lead roles, and facilitation roles. When you're a team member, do you have one role? Are you limited to using one form of intelligence or applying the skillset directly connected with your subject expertise? This is connected to mindset and intentions. Are you a team player, and is innovation an objective or not? How do we define contribution if we tailor this approach to a collaborative transnational project? I see the contributorship model as a different leadership model, and I believe both authorship and contributorship will be part of our future.

LM Recently you declared that you developed a College of Reviewers and training activities. Peer review has always been a concern since it is not rewarded enough, or recognized with credits. Would you introduce the College of Reviewers and place it within the Journal's strategy to better reward your reviewers and provide incentives for their work? I would also like to introduce into this reflection the concept of transparency and open review as an emerging trend.

LV All our peer reviewers can opt-in to be acknowledge for their service to peer review and publishing through Publons. Hence, we offer this to each peer reviewer and it's their responsibility and their decision to do so, or not; this is the level of transparency where it's up to people to showcase their reviews and be recognized. Most important is the con-

sistency of the peer review process. We have established the College of Reviewers as a way of dealing with consistency, quality, reliability, and excellence.

We need consistency within our framework for delivering excellence in design research journals. For this reason, we are connecting each member of the College of Reviewers with mentors. We also want to support early career researchers to understand how to shift from a researcher in a national context to an international one. Again, for us, a key way to develop excellence is to design the supporting infrastructure. Recognising that we need not just people prepared to peer review their specialist field but reviewers who can review the rigour of research methods and argument more generally.

LM Diversity and inclusivity. You declared in your Editorial that the Journal is making a significant effort to embrace and represent the diversity of design cultures around the world. There is widespread concern regarding this topic. There is Western-centric and Anglo-Saxon bias in academic journals, and as a result an underrepresentation of the Global South. Academic knowledge in scientific publishing takes different forms in the Global South. Is this only a question of representation of a wider geographical area or does it also relate to a way of not homologating the articles' structure in the different cultures of scientific knowledge? Moreover, there is a mainstream methodological structure in ways of thinking, producing, and organizing knowledge, mainly Western and Anglo-Saxon.

LV How can we recognize the different cultures of design in an academic scientific journal, not only geographically, but in terms of cultures of thinking as well? The concern is real and challenges the Board regarding how we can offer inclusivity and celebrate diversity without turning into an elitist model of open access. Ultimately, that is one of every editor's biggest responsibilities: what does it mean to lead with inclusivity? What does diversity look like in a global context, where design in each continent and each culture is in very different places? That is a delicate space to navigate. It's not easy because we are not inclusive, and it is hard to admit that we have a long way to go. For example, our Editorial Board reflects how we engage with continents and countries. We have a new call for members to expand the Editorial Board and reflect the world of design research today. As I wrote with Paul Atkinson and Kirsty Christer (2021), the change in the dynamic of authorship and content of *The Design Journal* is significant, and it won't stop. This process will ultimately expose our community to the level of vulnerability necessary for the commitment to remove bias. We should remind ourselves of our values and lead with those throughout the process. Currently, and in general, we are witnessing new formats of papers which feature elements of provocation that allow researchers to explore the design practice more freely. It is a different type of critical conversation and genuinely provides food for thought on how we can do things differently. The vulnerability will come along with publishing differently, similarly to the decision to publish PhD Reports to support the early career research community. We need the community, specifically senior academics and

professional designers, to discuss with great humility, facilitating a conversation beyond themselves. Seeing more diversity across the board in all its facets would be greatly cherished. Do we sufficiently reflect on the different genders within our communities? Does everyone have a voice on the Editorial Board? As designers, we will be exposed to our values and commitments to be inclusive and unbiased, exploring the “behind the scenes” of this complex issue. How do we ensure that we are inclusive and unbiased when developing how to support the community through publishing? That’s a brilliant question.

LM You mentioned the PhD Reports: this is something new and a very innovative format to help early-stage researchers acquire visibility.

LV Thank you. As Editors, we want more researchers to understand scientific publishing better. The PhD Reports affords an opportunity for doctoral researchers to learn independence and leadership; to better understand the responsibilities and processes associated with publishing in a journal. Recently, we have been building on this. The last special issue (*The Design Journal*, Volume 25, Issue 6, 2022) is design-driven entrepreneurship. For the first time, we worked with an early career post-doctoral researcher to develop a special issue that did not result from a conference, a symposium, or a piece of research. Our job was to support the early career researcher to understand publishing. And being the Editor of a special issue is a great commitment, but it provides experience to understand excellence, build your international network and know your discipline differently. Again, our driving purpose is: how do we best serve our community? PhD candidates are one part of our community. We also have early-career researchers, senior researchers, and professorial researchers, and we have teams of researchers working in an interdisciplinary mode. I want to let the community know that I would gladly speak to their local and international community of researchers about publishing because so much has changed. The importance of the impact of design research has increased. The future is to better connect the impact debate with social media to have more open conversations about impact. We should maximise the use of the different social media platforms to keep the discourse engaging and transparent. Whether through LinkedIn, Instagram, or WeChat, we must think differently, not about what we want to do, but about what is needed to support all parts of the community. So, I hope our conversation after today is not just about editing this piece but about what will happen afterward and how it will continue.

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