

THE VALUE OF POSTGRADUATE DESIGN STUDIES

A frequent discussion among design educators is the ambiguous response from design practitioners on the value of postgraduate studies. While practitioners are making increasing demands on newly qualified designers in terms of interpersonal, managerial, research and technological skills, many educators feel that little attempt is made by employers to encourage young designers to pursue studies beyond the first qualification.

A seminar on postgraduate design studies held in Pretoria in September 1994, and attended by educators, Masters students, design practitioners and commissioners of design services explored some of the issues surrounding current university courses. Although many current problems were highlighted, the delegates affirmed the value of postgraduate studies and all were in agreement regarding the potential contribution these studies could make to the development of design and individual designers in South Africa.

Employers of designers, from both within and outside the design industry, stressed the changing South African scenario and the skills that would increasingly be needed by designers. These include design management, articulate communication and entrepreneurial skills, and a

strong theoretical grounding. Delegates who were not designers themselves expressed their frustration at the poor research and theoretical foundations of designers and their inability to deal effectively with people outside the creative arena, particularly people in top management structures.

Current students and designers who had considered postgraduate studies questioned the historico-philosophic bias of present courses and identified their need for course content to relate more directly to professional practice. A revision of course structures and formats as well as a more holistic, interdisciplinary and contextualistic approach were called for.

Educators agreed that a re-structuring of courses was necessary to better meet the needs of students and the design industry. A number of possible course options were considered, but the lack of appropriate high level teaching expertise and poor recognition from the industry were viewed as problematic. The Universities of Stellenbosch and Pretoria will be reviewing their Masters programmes in 1995.

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Academic publications are notorious for their lack of attention to visual presentation and design.

One of the original objectives for this journal was to make the content easily accessible and the design visually appealing. It has therefore been extremely gratifying for the editors and designers to receive acknowledgement from the design industry and from their own institution, the University of Pretoria, for the three editions that have so far been published.

Number 1 received a merit award at the First Paper House *Art of Design* competition in June 1994. Number 2 was one of the national finalists that went to San Francisco in August for final adjudication in the *Sappi Designer of the Year* contest. Number 3 was the recipient of one of the eight annual awards made by the University of Pretoria's Marketing Services for outstanding contributions by non-marketing personnel which successfully promoted the University and helped to establish its profile.

The design and production management for all three numbers were undertaken and sponsored by Jacques Lange and Pieter Venter of Blueprint Design in Pretoria. These two designers are also responsible for the design of this edition of *Image & Text*. Their willingness and enthusiasm in giving of their time and energy so generously, must be complimented and commended as an example of commitment to the ideal of nurturing a design dialogue in South Africa.