

The fluidity in-between... Integrated2013!

The American designer Paul Sahre concluded his spirited presentation at Integrated2011 with a pretty witty remark: *'Design whatever you want!'* He had just finished showing a project for which he and his team had assembled a huge monster truck/hearse – in cardboard, that is. This virtually weightless vehicle was then solemnly carried to the scrapyard where it was destroyed with a single well-aimed blow. It was like witnessing the launch of TBMG's latest CD [the rock band They Might Be Giants]. Or was there more going on? After all, Paul Sahre's design studio is called O.O.P.S. (Office of Paul Sahre). Yet his intervention was far from 'gratuitous', for it allowed Sahre to bring into focus the essential artistic freedom – the inspiring power of 'uselessness': he couldn't have set the tone more clearly.

As an interdisciplinary conference, Integrated logically abstains from focusing on a single central theme. It behaves rather like an intangible colourful fluid that lodges itself between a range of visions and philosophies. It is a forum with high festival content at which speakers can compare their work, design processes, sources of inspiration and methodologies, leaving those present with a sense of 'indigestion' that can be interpreted as: 'Well, I need to catch my breath, but at least I was there'. Integrated is now in its fourth edition and wishes to keep its finger on the pulse by tracking new developments and trends. That is why Integrated is organised every second year, and not annually.

Let's return for a moment to a quote from the previous essay (2011): *'Luckily, we are living in times of crisis, a crisis that works as an irrigation system for seedlings. These seedlings are not growing into a regiment of 'creatives' content to grow in neat rows as and how clients command. These are enthusiastic people who dare to question the question that is put to them, who dig deep enough to find out whether their roots are as they should be: crooked and tortuous. This tortuousness, combined with a sound dose of serendipity, often leads to unique, groundbreaking results ...'*

Yet the blatancy of the trivial nature of escapist wealth, throwaway culture and poverty is increasingly staggering. At Integrated2011 the activist artist Dan Perjovschi showed one of his cartoon-like drawings in which a man snaps *'Less is more!'* at a beggar. Sharp humour avec gêne! The legendary American architect/theoretician Buckminster Fuller also argued in favour of *'doing more with less'* long before it became mainstream. He targeted the material, and not only the design. For Fuller, progress and economic renewal grew out of visionary and activist standpoints. The analysis of his complex body of work would undoubtedly reveal a greater number of clear insights. Because thanks to this opening up of archives, new insights emerge into bodies of ideas, leading curators, critics and graphic designers to commit themselves to make these visible in a relevant and contemporary manner.

But the speed and quantity of information that washes over us every day via all sorts of media also cause countless side effects. On the one hand, they create a sort of non-news which we eagerly extrapolate ourselves. One could see this as an umpteenth attempt to provide 'existential confirmation' of the ego. On the other hand, 'reliable information' can ensure well-founded and nuanced views. And of course our online surfing behaviour also offers up a wealth of information which some media concerns do not always handle with care. Does this form the basis of an even more widespread hegemony, or are these vast concerns (like the last remaining dictatorships) downright 'giants with feet of clay'? For in the meantime the social media, needless to say, have already proven the impact of their sphere of action.

The verticality of disciplines is coming into sharper focus while also becoming increasingly blurred. Differentiation also leads to hybrid forms and as a result it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the original disciplines. The debate about ethics has made a complete comeback. Changing insights emerge and old ones are opened up. New micro- or sub-economies emerge through the blending of new technologies with different thought processes, resulting in solutions for real problems, and not just for products. Terms such as 'social design' crop up. Even though such a term is less relevant (since design would in any case be social) – even if this was less visible within a booming economy, as was the case in the past decades. Diversity is everywhere, as is intercultural influence. A multiform gel is spreading silently and 'chameleon-like' in all directions and across all media forms. Sometimes upright, often opportunistic, not always effective. This distinction is not easy to make. The movement occurs amidst ever-changing synergies and strategies and is therefore also always immediately traced and commented online. Countless microclimates emerge in the 'figuratively' assumed macroclimate, with ditto opportunities, although often on a smaller scale.

Integrated2013 focuses on these evolving positions of artists, architects and designers. How they can be the connecting actors in a virtual network, in the development of a pointed artistic discourse or of solutions for forms of housing, work and leisure, information systems and new utilitarian tools and products. Out of a historical awareness whereby the originality of ideas is recognised and preserved, and forms the inspiration for a solemn and optimistic investment in the future. Even if the towering legs of the giants which we sometimes imagine ourselves to be, are in fact also made of cardboard...

Hugo Puttaert, April 2013 (translation by Patrick Lennon)