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Constructing a Reconstructed Philosophy: A Deweyan Philosophy-through-Design Brian Dixon

This article works outwards from John Dewey's 1920s' proposals for a reconstruction in philosophy and considers this in direct relation to recent advancements in design research practice. In doing so, it first explores the current level of design-philosophy engagement and looks to Dewey's original reconstruction-in-philosophy proposals. Next, it examines the potential of positioning the methodological approach of research through design as a means by which a new design-philosophy horizon-line may be traced. Here, it is suggested that this requires the emergence of a 'designer philosopher' – one who design in relation to and with respect for philosophy.

Keywords: Design Philosophy, Dewey, Philosophy-Through-Design, Design Research

The relationship between design and philosophy can be difficult to define; the two disciplines intersect in a number of different, sometimes complex ways. Most immediately there is design philosophy, a relatively minor sub-field of design studies which seeks to examine how insights relating to design can be derived by philosophically examining the character and qualities of design practice.¹ Then, next to this, there is also philosophically-inspired design work. Here, designers seek to work outwards from an intellectual source point, perhaps problematizing an aspect of contemporary life or tracing a speculative future scenario.² Beyond these two routes, there is also evidence of philosophic work which is notionally directly inspired by design. This is perhaps most pronounced in the area of postphenomenology, which seeks to draw out and define human-technology relations, as well as pose ethical questions regarding design's impact within our lived experience.³

Though these approaches each trace a specific design-philosophy relationship there is, as yet, no deep, direct interweaving of the two domains—design and philosophy cannot be said to cooperatively interact as a joint endeavour and, currently, there is little or no building up or testing of philosophical arguments through design. To say it another way, there is no philosophy *through* design, as such; though as, we will explore below, there are efforts, which push towards it.⁴

Taking this as a starting point, the present article examines the possibility of giving form to a philosophically-bound design agenda, wherein the arc of project work would not be aimed simply at addressing incremental, contextual change, but also towards wider societal transformation at scale. This would not only involve the asking and answering of practical questions with a reporting of the results but also simultaneously involve the asking and answering of *philosophical* questions; again, with a view to reporting the results. In this, I propose it is necessary to scope the potential to engender a new approach to design

¹ See e.g., Pieter Vermaas, Peter Kroes, Andrew Light, and Steven Moore, eds. *Philosophy and Design: From Engineering to Architecture* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008); and Pieter Vermaas and Stéphane Vial, *Advancements in Design Philosophy* (Cham: Springer, 2018).

² The key reference point here is critical design. For an overview see e.g., Matthew Malpass, *Critical Design in Context: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

³ See e.g., Ron L. Wakkary, *Things We Could Design: For More than Human-Centred Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2021).

⁴ This is ultimately located in postphenomenological work. A key reference for the idea is Sabrina Hauser, Doenja Oogjes, Ron Wakkary and Peter-Paul Verbeek, 2018. "An annotated portfolio on doing postphenomenology through research products," in *Proceedings of the 2018 Designing Interactive Systems Conference*, (New York: ACM, 2018): 459-471.

practice, which holds a firm philosophical register but does not function as classic philosophy as such. Rather, it would be a matter of framing deep conceptually and theoretically informed questions in specific relation to the domain of concern (e.g., a social, political or ecological context) and investigate these questions *through* design. Thereafter it would be a matter of progressively formulating a contextually-bound conceptual-theoretical answer. One would, in essence, be responding to practical concerns conceptually-theoretically through an interplay of ideas and world, world and ideas. Here, practicality would guide the intellectual and the intellectual would be bound, irretrievably by practicality. The resultant philosophy-through-design would thus necessarily have to both reference and progress through the world as it progresses.

This proposal derives from the work of the classical pragmatist John Dewey. In referencing Dewey here, I take a somewhat unusual course in surfacing inspirational threads—drawing on his 1920 publication *Reconstruction in Philosophy*,⁵ wherein he argued that the discipline required a radical shift in focus; and the opening chapter of his 1925 publication *Experience and Nature*,⁶ wherein he set out his core existential position. In both, we may find a call for a recalibration of philosophy's agenda and method. Ultimately, in these texts, Dewey is recommending that rather than focusing on the problems of philosophers, philosophy should look to draw inspiration from the experience and problems of everyday men and women. As I will seek to draw out, this broad recommendation holds a design-like orientation in that there is, at the core, the requirement that a deep attentiveness and responsiveness to the world underlie the whole.

The article will proceed as follows. First, I will explore the current level of design-philosophy engagement, looking at both the philosophy of design as well as how philosophy is mobilised in design discourse. From this, I then turn to Dewey's work and introduce his original reconstruction in philosophy proposal, tracing out some of its key aspects. I will then move on to examine the potential of positioning the methodological approach of research through design as a means by which a new design-philosophy horizon-line can be opened up. Here, I suggest that this requires the emergence of a new figure: the designer philosopher – one who designs in relation to and with respect for philosophy. This leads to a final section setting out a novel agenda for design, wherein it is proposed that the notional outcomes of a robust and intellectually-bound design research practice become a conduit by which new philosophic insight can be surfaced, developed and refined, thus mapping a pathway by which a notional *reconstruction* in philosophy might be cooperatively explored via design.

Philosophy and Design Practice and Research

While design philosophy has notionally always existed⁷ the emergence of a dedicated philosophy of design is a far more recent event. Early work here can be traced back to the 1990s and 2000s, when individuals such as Per Galle and colleagues set out to explore the question of the relationship between philosophy and design.⁸ This has progressed over the intervening period, with numerous edited texts now offering a series of varied positions on

⁵ John Dewey, "Reconstruction in Philosophy" in *John Dewey, The Middle Works, 1899–1924, vol. 12 1920, Reconstruction in Philosophy and Essays*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982): 77-201.

⁶ John Dewey, *The Later Works, 1925–1953, vol. 1 1925, Experience and Nature*. ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981).

⁷ I here refer to individual treatises, which ultimately reflect accounts of design practice. An example would be Norman Potter, *What Is a Designer: Things, Places, Messages* (London: Studio Vista, 1969).

⁸ See e.g., Per Galle "Philosophy of design: an editorial introduction," *Design Studies*, 23:3, (2002): 211-218.

the potential of drawing on philosophical theory in the context of design. This includes perspectives relating to such areas as epistemology, ontology, ethics, aesthetics, the design process, and design history.⁹ Recent advances in this area have also seen increasing reference to the wider philosophical canon.¹⁰

In so far as design practice has been inspired by philosophic concerns, the most obvious examples are to be found in the areas of critical design and speculative design. In such cases, design can be seen to ask critical questions concerning matters of social and political concern, and, in this, seeking to shape a material response.¹¹ There is also the important work of the participatory design movement,¹² which has sought to cohere a vision around the political work of Bruno Latour (who examined the potential of an issues-based democracy)¹³ and the emancipatory practice of designing with communities such that they might be enabled to progress a self-determined agenda (e.g., by developing a renewed sense of purpose in a post-industrial situation).¹⁴

In terms of philosophy itself drawing direct insight from design, as noted above, the area of postphenomenology¹⁵ stands out as perhaps the most prominent example. In postphenomenology, we see the opening up a dual aspect with respect to the philosophic consideration of design.¹⁶ First, there is the consideration of technology's impact in and on our experience of the world. This has led to a series of frameworks representing the scope and structure of human-technology-world relations.¹⁷ Alongside this, there is also an increasingly urgent consideration of design's ethical responsibilities in the context of its latter role in shaping our experience.¹⁸

Beyond these three strands—design philosophy, philosophically-inspired design, and 'design-inspired' philosophy—I would here like to open up a further, notional investigative line within the design-philosophy nexus; namely, the philosophic potential of the methodological approach of research through design (RtD), or to be more precise design research which involves practice. While the RtD has historical precedent (e.g., participatory design), its institutionalization in the early 1990s into the 2000s¹⁹ marked the first moment that the design process was properly recognized as a potential method within knowledge production.²⁰ Though RtD offers few prescribed processes or techniques, there are at least

⁹ The most recent important example being Vermass and Vial, *Advancements in Design Philosophy*.

¹⁰ For example, Deleuze's work is drawn upon in Betty Marenko and Jamie Brassett, eds. *Deleuze and Design* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2015).

¹¹ See e.g., Malpass, *Critical Design in Context: History, Theory and Practice*; and Antony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013).

¹² See e.g., Telier, A., (Thomas Binder, Giorgio De Michelis, Pelle Ehn, Giulio Jacucci, Per Linde and Ina Wagner), *Design Things*, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2011).

¹³ See e.g., Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds. *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, ZKM/Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, 2005).

¹⁴ This example is drawn from Chris A. Le Dantec, C. A., and Carl DiSalvo, "Infrastructuring and the formation of publics in participatory design." *Social Studies of Science*, 43:2 (2013): 241-264.

¹⁵ Postphenomenology brings together phenomenological perspectives with pragmatism. The term was first coined by Don Ihde. See e.g., Don Ihde, *Postphenomenology and Technoscience: The Peking University Lectures* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009).

¹⁶ The relationship between design and postphenomenology was first drawn out Peter-Paul Verbeek. See Peter-Paul Verbeek, *What Things Do* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Both Ihde and Verbeek have led on the developments of these frameworks. See Don Ihde, *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990); and Verbeek, *What Things Do*.

¹⁸ Verbeek has been key to the developing this ethical question, with Ron Wakkary carrying this question directly into the design domain. See Verbeek, *What Things Do*; and Wakkary, *Things We Could Design: For More than Human-Centred Worlds*.

¹⁹ See Cameron Tonkinwise "Post-normal design research: The role of practice-based research in the era of neoliberal risk." In Laurene Vaughan, ed. *Practice-based Design Research*. (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2017): 29-39.

²⁰ See e.g., Ilpo Koskinen, John Zimmerman, Thomas Binder, Johan Redström, and Stephan Wensveen, *Design Research through Practice – From the Lab, Field, and Showroom* (Burlington MA: Morgan Kaufmann, 2011); and Laurene Vaughan, *Practice-Based Design Research* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

two strategies by which such research can be conducted.²¹ First, it has been proposed that RtD researchers might import and adapt existing methodological approaches and techniques from such areas as the natural sciences, the social sciences and art.²² Second, some seek to cultivate to a more nativist approach wherein the idea of cycles of ‘design experiments’ form a methodological core guiding the advance of the research.²³

Though not prominent, there has been some consideration of the philosophical within RtD. For example, in explorations of the motivational contexts which underpin such work. Here, it has been noted that a philosophical (as opposed to an empirically-bound interest) may act as a source of inspiration from which such research could commence.²⁴ Others have highlighted how a varied suite of concerns relating to areas such as ethics and technology can act drivers.²⁵ However, despite this clear linkage, philosophical motivations do not necessarily lead to philosophical outcomes. In other words, rarely if at all do RtD researchers set forth philosophical claims. Indeed, the possibility of such an endeavor is contested, with some questioning whether RtD researchers should engage, in depth, with theoretical and philosophical material. The suggestion being that as such a course may be unhelpful and distracting.²⁶ Others take the opposite view and boldly propose a direct relating of RtD approaches to philosophical inquiry.²⁷ This is best exemplified in the work of Everyday Design Studio at Vancouver’s Simon Fraser University. Linking to the postphenomenological agenda noted above, the Studio investigates the complexities of human-technology relations through a process which the group labels ‘material speculation’.²⁸ Here, made-objects allow the team to ask and answer questions in relation to how technologies gives rise to particular patterns of behavior, as well as particular kinds of meaning. For example, one project, entitled Morse Things, focused on a series of internet connected bowls, functioning as an IoT or ‘Internet of Things’ exemplar. The bowls were capable of both communication (i.e., issuing morse code) as well as subtle movement (i.e., a programmed tilting). The bowls were distributed to family homes with the resultant behaviours and meanings monitored and reported upon. The outcome amounts to a form of technological reflection, a consideration of the bowls’ affect (i.e., on behaviors) and how they are perceived (i.e., their meaning for the householders).²⁹

Though such work, reflection and all, is approached as design first and foremost,³⁰ it is possible to see it as functioning as an essentially philosophical endeavour. Though design guides the process it is not the design outcomes, in and of themselves, which matter most here; it is the philosophically-bound insights that yield value and, ultimately, allow the work to be positioned as research. Accordingly, we may here identify a notional model for a

²¹ Dixon, Brian, and Tara French, "Processing the method: Linking Deweyan logic and design-in-research." *Design Studies*, 70 (2020): 100962.

²² This is best demonstrated by Koskenin et al., *Design Research through Practice – From the Lab, Field, and Showroom*.

²³ For a recent contextualisation see Peter Krogh and Ilpo Koskinen, *Drifting by Intention: Four Epistemic Traditions from within Constructive Design* (Cham: Springer, 2020).

²⁴ John Zimmerman and Jodi Forlizzi, "The Role of Design Artifacts in Design Theory Construction." *Artifact* 2:1 (2008): 41-45.

²⁵ Anne Louise Bang, Peter Krogh, Martin Ludvigsen, and Thomas Markussen, "The Role of Hypothesis in Constructive Design Research" (paper presented at the 4th conference of The Art of Research, Helsinki, November, 28-29, 2012).

²⁶ Koskinen et al., *Design Research through Practice – From the Lab, Field, and Showroom*: 199-121.

²⁷ See e.g., Hauser et al., "An annotated portfolio on doing postphenomenology through research products."

²⁸ Ron Wakkary, William Odom, Sabrina Hauser, Garnet Hertz and Henry Lin, "Material speculation: Actual artifacts for critical inquiry." In *Proceedings of The Fifth Decennial Aarhus Conference on Critical Alternatives*, (New York: ACM, 2015): 97-108.

²⁹ See Ron Wakkary Doenja Oogjes, Sabrina Hauser, Henry Lin, Cao, Leo Ma, and Tijs Duel, "Morse Things: A Design Inquiry into the Gap Between Things and Us." In *Proceedings of the 2017 Conference on Designing Interactive Systems* (ACM: New York, 2017): 503– 514.

³⁰ Ron Wakkary, 2022. Teams call with author, May 26 2022.

potential interweaving of RtD and philosophy, a means by which the two can be productively draw together—something we will consider further below.

Having set out the above we will now turn to consider the proposals of the classical pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, which, it will be suggested, allow us to trace a novel philosophical agenda in design.

Dewey's Proposed Reconstruction

Classical pragmatism is perhaps best characterized by its emphasis on, and concern for, the *practical*. There is Charles Sanders Peirce's pragmatic maxim, whereby it proposed that the value of an idea must be directly related to the consequences which attach to it, i.e., what will result from its application in the real world. Linking to this, there is William James's recommendation that theory should be approached not as an end in itself but, rather, as something to be 'put to work' with a view to effecting change. Then, leading on from Peirce and James, there is the philosophy of John Dewey, who sought, above all, to map a philosophical path towards social and political renewal.

For Dewey, the concept of experience was central. It was however approached in non-traditional terms, referring not only to what *happens* to an individual but also what they actively *do*. Equally, it is not only individual but social; we are, on Dewey's account, seen to share experience. Further, it refers not only to the present but also simultaneously all of history, along with the possibilities of the future. In short, Deweyan experience draws everything—the personal, the social, the environment and meaning—all together as one in a complex, interrelating mix.

Leading on from this treatment of experience, Dewey also offers the additional core concept of inquiry, i.e., the process of investigating what is and what could be. He proposes that through appropriately conducted inquiry it is possible to enhance and progress experience, developing both our knowledge, as well as our moral understanding, i.e., knowing what is positive and what is not.

This basic experience-inquiry position may be traced through the many agendas and proposals which he issued over his long career. For example, it underpins his work on democracy, education and ethics, as well as aesthetics, value and religion. It was also how he approached philosophy itself; with his ideas here finding extensive expression in the aforementioned *A Reconstruction in Philosophy* of 1920 and *Experience and Nature* of 1925.

As has been noted, *A Reconstruction* calls for a radical shift in philosophy. The text is intriguing because it was prepared in China, published from a lecture series delivered in Japan in 1919.³¹ It not only marks a point of summation in his thinking up until that date but was also produced as he was coming into direct contact with East Asian culture, philosophy and politics. This was all clearly impactful; of his time in China, Dewey remarked: "Nothing western looks quite the same anymore, and this is as near a renewal of youth as can be hoped for in this world".³²

As a follow-on text, *Experience and Nature*, shows this working through further. It builds on *A Reconstruction* by offering an extended commentary on the direction philosophy

³¹ Dewey was greatly impacted by his visit to Asia, as was his wife and daughters, especially the hospitality of China. This is attested to in all of his biographies. See e.g., Jay Martin, *The Education of John Dewey: A Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002): 303-327 for a recently researched account.

³² John Dewey to John J. Coss, 22 April 1920. Quoted in George Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973): 205.

as a discipline might take.³³ In both cases, the problem, as far as Dewey was concerned, related to the field's undue obsession with the question of epistemology, i.e., the question of what knowledge is and how it is possible to 'know'. This obsession, he argued, had led to a situation where philosophy had 'wandered' from *everyday* experience; that is, how individuals encounter and negotiate the world directly in their own terms.³⁴ Against this, he proposed a reframing of knowledge as the method of 'active control of nature and experience'. He argued that if approached in this way, the 'problem' of knowledge would dissolve and philosophy, in turn, would thus be freed up to attend to more meaningful concerns. This, for Dewey, meant asking questions of 'the great social and moral defects and troubles from which humanity suffers'. The point here would be to work to develop 'a clear idea of better social possibilities'.³⁵

As a means of addressing this, Dewey proposes a methodological turn to experience—which he refers to in *Experience and Nature* as the *denotative method*³⁶. Here, experience would become the primary context for philosophy, with philosophers being required to commit to referencing—or 'pointing to' as Dewey puts it—the things of the world and our interactions therein. The value of such pointing is that one is required to move 'beyond the refinements and elaborations of reflective experience'; that is, the wholly intellectual. Instead, focus must turn to 'the gross and compulsory things of our doings, enjoyments and sufferings' and 'to things that force us to labor, that satisfy needs, that surprise us with beauty'.³⁷ In other words, in order to philosophize would here have to become directly immersed in the stuff of life. Accordingly, following this approach, philosophic processes and outcomes would be linked directly to the happenings and doings of the world. Experience, in turn, would become the first and last word 'in all human inquiries', the space in which questions emerge and eventually find their answer—the space of ultimate accountability. As Dewey put it, in order to 'settle any discussion, still any doubt, answer any question, we must go to the thing pointed to, denoted, and find our answer in that thing'.³⁸

If conducted in this manner, Dewey believes that philosophy could function as a form of 'criticism', becoming the means by which other, disparate individual disciplines (e.g., the sciences) might come together, acting in effect as 'a messenger, a liaison officer' to enable 'the all-around translation from one separated region of experience into another'.³⁹ In this, the field's ultimate aim would be the 'expansion and emancipation of values'⁴⁰ by regulating the 'appreciation of goods and bads'. This, in turn, would support the framing of belief, action and contemplation.⁴¹

While the above may seem abstract, we are in fact being offered a relatively straightforward vision. Philosophy is in need of reconstruction and must return to the

³³ *Experience and Nature* can be understood as a pitch for a novel metaphysics, i.e., a theory of existence. The proposal here was that rather rely on abstract arguments of how reality was structured, philosophers might instead take register of the findings of science and progressively develop a understanding of the general traits of 'what is'.

³⁴ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*. 368.

³⁵ Dewey, "Reconstruction in Philosophy": 150-151.

³⁶ Quite what Dewey was proposing here has confounded commentators and remains difficult to articulate. For a helpful unpacking see Thomas Alexander, *The Human Eros: Eco-ontology and the Aesthetics of Existence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

³⁷ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 375-376.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 372

³⁹ *Ibid*, 306.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 305.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 302.

everyday with a view to addressing pressing social and moral concerns. Experience, broadly conceived, is to become its method. Here, individual, social, environmental happenings and doings act as the source point as the test site for exploring and understanding values. What works and what doesn't is to be registered and accounted for. We are thus, over time, able to develop a clear idea of better social possibilities. Philosophy, in turn, becomes an ultimate form of sense-making, a means of dealing with the world generally as we encounter it, across disciplines, working continually to enhance our collective position. As will be progressed below, the claim made here is that by drawing an explicit link between this proposal and design, we may find a way of operationalizing it.

A Philosophy-through-Design

So, what role might design play here, next to Dewey's proposals? This question raises an issue as, as will likely be apparent, there is no explicit statement being made in relation to anything approximating creativity, let alone design. Indeed, there is little suggestion that of any form of active intervention within the above at all. This is perplexing as, on the face of it, it would appear that Dewey's proposal does require an *active* aspect. Its focus on the human, on experience, on *things*, all suggest a need for activity and engagement of some form. This is further underscored by the proposed reconstruction's notional agenda, i.e., that philosophy should seek to address social and moral ills and, in this, develop a clear idea of better social possibilities. How does one seek to address such problems and develop clear ideas of 'better' possibilities without *doing* something or, if not doing something, then at very least becoming peripherally involved in the contexts and challenges of others?

Of course, one must always act and be involved in some way, even if only minimally and indirectly (e.g., by collecting and analysing data). What is at stake is *how* active or involved one might reasonably expect to be if hoping to achieve the type of reconstruction proposed. To explore the potential of a design angle, as I am here, is to lean towards a more active and involved stance than might otherwise be envisaged. At this end of the scale, one would seek to actually *engage* with a context, get to understand the position of the stakeholders and work with them to explore how a situation might be reorientated and reimagined. The value of such a stance is that the development of 'better' possibilities, social or otherwise, becomes a *live* or *lived* activity, one which can yield immediate results and positively transform the context in question. Equally, the whole becomes a fully evidence-based process—it can be accounted for.

The way in, as I see it, is to be found in the 'pointing' of the denotative method, the act of turning to the world when asking a question. As was outlined, this turning to the world requires that our attention is directed towards *things*, to actual situations. Crucially, for Dewey, this is not just presented as a matter of *formulating* a question, i.e., starting off an inquiry. It is, more importantly, a matter of settling discussion, stilling doubt and *answering* questions—we find both our question and our answer *in* things, approached *through* experience. Again, in this framing, experience is understood not just in passive but *active* terms, not just individually but socially, not just in relation to the 'now' but also as simultaneously drawing in the past and recognising the possibilities of the future. In other words, it is an understanding of experience in which we *do* things, both apart and together, across time, linking to the before and after of the present.

Turning back to the question of how design might play a role here, it is thus proposed that an RtD approach can function as a methodological bridge linking the asking of a question to its answering. This would of course amount to a reconstitution of RtD's ends.

Instead of asking research questions, one would be asking philosophic questions. Instead of research contributions, one would be contributing to philosophy. However, this is about a *reconstruction* of philosophy. Following this strategy, philosophizing would proceed not in removed, abstract terms but rather in involved, *particular* terms leading outwards to the more general. It would hold intellectual bearing and perhaps even traditional philosophic reference, but always in direct relation to the ‘the gross and compulsory things of our doings, enjoyments and sufferings’. Questions would be asked in relation to things-in-experience and sharpened against what is already known, as well as, over time, through the unfolding of the inquiry. Things would be made or remade and tested and retested. In the end, their value would be identified, *denoted*. Philosophizing would thus become a form of creative experimentation.

This gives the denotative method a potential form and so opens up a pathway to a prototypic philosophy-*in-reconstruction*; what I here term a philosophy-through-design. As per Dewey’s proposal, the core aim of a philosophy-through-design would be to address ‘the great social and moral defects and troubles from which humanity suffers’. These thematic would by no means be absolute however. One might for example favour the idea of a political over a moral focus. Equally, there would be the added opportunity to push further and also address more contemporary challenges alongside this—for example, by seeking to devise localised responses to the climate emergency via an ecological thematic focus.

Such a philosophy-through-design would not require that a new philosophic sub-discipline be framed. It would not be a matter of working outwards from philosophy and towards design. Rather, as was stated at the opening, the above is best understood as a call for a novel philosophically-bound design research agenda. Accordingly, in line with the postphenomenological material speculation of the Everyday Design Studio, the work would commence from within design but work outwards towards philosophy, finding its place over time.

This is not to say that a designer would simply commit to undertaking philosophy-through-design without understanding philosophy itself. They would need to hold general competencies in both design *and* philosophy, working from the level of novice to expert over time. The attainment of expertise in philosophy-through-design would result in the emergence of a new type of practitioner—a ‘designer-philosopher’. A designer-philosopher, while neither a designer proper (i.e., not operating in wholly commercial terms) nor a philosopher in the classic sense (i.e., not relying on abstract argument), would work to constantly to draw both disciplines together, engendering a novel philosophy-through-design perspective via their process. They would, in other words, create their discipline while creating.

In the end, following Dewey’s proposals through, the philosophical aspect of a philosophy-through-design would emerge through the proposal’s final element, i.e., the suggestion that philosophy, appropriately positioned, ought to function as a form of ‘criticism’ in which values can be translated between disciplines and experiential domains. This layers in an additional, important function within our tracing of philosophy-through-design. Here, such criticism would guide the asking and answering of philosophy-through-design’s contextual questions. It would require that the process of asking and answering be mapped in some way to the questions and answers of others. The sources could be philosophical (e.g., ethics) or, equally, reference could extend to the concepts and theories of the sciences (e.g., physics, biology), the humanities (e.g., history, language, law), and the

arts (e.g., music, fine art). Such material would need to be reappropriated and reformulated in relation to the concerns of the project context as questions are progressively sharpened and things are made and tested. Through this, as per Dewey, disparate 'regions' of experience would be connected as concepts and theories are brought together in a design process and, accordingly, a contextual understanding of the value of *specific* insights emerges. Here, across multiple inquiries, conducted in different contexts, the value of such insights would be better understood generally. As a part of a longer-term agenda, such efforts would enable the development, 'design' if one will allow, of a rigorously-defined, broader *system* of value, spanning the individual, social and ecological. Through this system or system-in-making, we would have practical pathways (i.e., design-bound pathways) by which our lives, as well as social and ecological processes might be better managed, as we seek to frame belief, action and contemplation. Here, the ultimate worth of a philosophy-through-design can be seen to relate not to the process as such (though contextual transformation is of course worthwhile in itself) but more to the collective weight of the contributions it could eventually yield—we can come to understand ourselves and our situation by design, to *know* value.

From this, I now move to close with a brief a reflection on the proposal.

The Path Ahead

In concluding, it is necessary to address the question of whether or not the philosophical issues that Dewey was highlighting in the 1920s are still relevant problems today. It is reasonable to ask whether or not the discipline still in need of a reconstruction and, if so, whether a reinterpretation of the denotative method, i.e. a notional philosophy-through-design, offers a useful means by which this can achieved.

In response, it must first be acknowledged that the world is obviously a very different place to what it was in the 1920s. Equally, in the intervening century, philosophy has undoubtedly moved on as well. Here, waves of development focusing on concerns such as logic, language, feminism and meaning have progressed the discipline in novel directions that Dewey would not have foreseen. It must be recognised that these directions begin to respond to some of the issues Dewey was raising regarding social/moral challenges. Further, these now carry a long history, (e.g., feminism, both historical and contemporary, sought/seek to address the social and cultural disadvantaging of those who identify as female). Even in Dewey's own time, the Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School were beginning to explore how philosophy might enable social transformation in ways similar to those outlined above.⁴²

Nonetheless, despite these developments, comparisons can be still drawn between the concerns of then and now. It is arguably that philosophy is still asking questions of its relevance and purpose; if anything this is even more pronounced than in the 1920s. Alongside the question of disciplinary relevance, the value and appropriateness of its methods are still contested too. For example, some bemoan the fact that philosophy in its current form seems incapable of adequately responding to the challenges of the twentieth-first century, whether ecological, social or economic. At the center of such agitation, is the idea that philosophy is not practical enough, that it does not have enough real-world bearing. The contemporary solutions proposed undoubtedly vary with some recommending

⁴² See e.g., Rolf Wiggerhaus *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995).

that philosophy realign its focus and modes of argument.⁴³ However, the basic principle that philosophy's outcomes should enhance and enrich experience still holds. Whether or not 'the denotative method' or a philosophy-through-design has ready meaning here is of course questionable but, again, by focusing in on the idea that the field lacks relevance, that it could do more, a reform of both method and outcomes, as is proposed here, offers a possible route for exploration. On this account, Dewey is thus very much still relevant.

Picking up on his called-for reconstruction in the present article, I have set out a vision for a philosophy-through-design, wherein a deep connection would be forged between philosophy and design. Here, it was suggesting that, by drawing on RtD as a methodological bridge in the asking questions and answering of questions, it becomes possible undertake philosophy in reference to things-in-experience. Following Dewey's position, as has been highlighted, experience is here understood as allowing for the active, the social and the cross-temporal (i.e., drawing in the past and future). As such, it is about progressing forms of experimentation in which we act, together and apart, with reference to the past and future. The aim is to work through pressing challenges, which, as discussed, may be social, moral, political or ecological, extending to other domains as appropriate. The outcomes would be philosophical statements in relation to the value of a given approach or thing as established via a questioning, conceptually-theoretically bound design. This will rely in part on the translation of other disciplinary perspectives, whether from the sciences, the humanities or the arts, into the contexts of philosophy-through-design. The task here will be to ensure that a critical mapping of value be established and maintained as inquiry follows inquiry and general thematic understanding deepens. This is a design project its own right and suggests a path by which the field might offer a further contribution.

In setting out the above, it must be clearly stated that design cannot, in and of itself, claim to function as a form of philosophy. It alone cannot mount intellectual arguments. It alone cannot qualify value or work to progressively establish a system of value. This is where the philosophy in a Deweyan philosophy-through-design comes in, through the 'criticism' referred to above. Here, the concerns attached to the asking and answering of questions in philosophy-through-design are extended outwards from the design process and beyond the context of the work being undertaken. It is in this association, this method, that design and philosophy may cooperatively interact as a joint endeavour.

The resultant gain would be threefold. There is the gain of the direct agenda, already described, where values would be denoted and progressively developed as a broader system of values pertaining to domains such as the social, moral, political, ecological, or other depending on the context. Next to this, there is also a specifically philosophical gain; the eventual consolidation of a practically-orientated philosophic method which, if integrated within existing disciplinary methodologies (e.g., critical theory), may allow for the development of novel approaches within the field proper, independent of the development of any philosophy-through-design movement. Finally, and crucially, there is the additional possibility of establishing a more philosophically-fluent approach to design, which, again, could exist independently of a philosophy-through design. A more philosophically-fluent approach to design would hold awareness of how issues—social, moral, political, ecological and so on—have been framed historically, in philosophical literature and, next to this, explore design's potential role *through* design. Here, importantly, design would be empowered to competently and confidently comment on the complexity with which it

⁴³ For an overview of these issues and an example of a proposed solution see Arran Gare *The Philosophical Foundations of Ecological Civilisation: A Manifesto for the Future* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

increasingly deals, thus avoiding the potential for charges of shallowness and superficiality that might otherwise be levelled.

All of this requires dedicated work. Although it may appear frivolous, it is in fact a very necessary, indeed essential project. Our understanding of value and how it relates belief, action, contemplation defines us and how we relate to one another and the world. Nothing less than our present and future is at stake.