



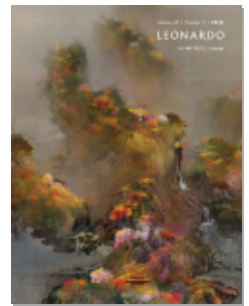
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Make It New: The History of Silicon Valley Design by Barry
M. Katz (review)

Jussi Parikka

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percolate. Chapter 10, “Continuing” looks at how instead of creativity simply stopping at the end of a specific work seeds are sown, so to speak, for future inventions and creations. The abating of the analogical storm is not the end of the storm process. The wind and rain might have ceased but the moisture, and atmospheric pressures involved, are already moving elsewhere and will soon become part of another weather event.

Leski’s use of personal vignettes from inventors and artists is quite extensive; in fact, she is a very good storyteller as well as a technical writer. The book might have been a little humdrum had these gems not been included. She uses these to illustrate the various processes involved in the creation of something new. One of the most interesting is her description of how N. Joseph Woodland “accidentally” discovered (invented) the little black-and-white sticker on everything we buy—the ubiquitous barcode! And yes, she discusses the differences between invention and discovery.

Woodland had been preoccupied with the task of coming up with a way to “encode product data”; he actually quit graduate school to devote himself to the problem. One day he dragged his fingers through the sand and there before him were four lines of varying width; the light bulb went on and the rest, as they say, is history (pp. 26–27). Other brilliant creatives such as Antonio Gaudí, Charles Darwin and Arthur Koestler are also discussed, with extensive quotes from these personalities.

The book does not directly discuss “obsession” to any extent as a characteristic of creative genius; this to my mind would have been a worthwhile inclusion, as quite often it is the “dog at a bone” attitude that finally finds the solution; lesser obsessives give up before achieving their goal. Also, Leski fails to mention or address the problem of getting rid of preconceived ideas in the form of one’s personal style. For example, we all know the general style of a Frank Gehry building. Each building is

unique; however, Gehry clearly does not exclude all preconceived ideas of style when creating a new building, because each building would end up in a very different style. So to me clearing the mind of immediate preconceived ideas is essential, but also clearly, an established creator does not forget their personal style. Perhaps there is room for further investigation into this aspect of the creative process.

The Storm of Creativity is a wonderful addition to the literature on creativity and essential reading for all practitioners in the various genres of invention and discovery. Leski is a teacher of architecture, and as one would expect this little book should be core reading text for all the creative disciplines.

MAKE IT NEW: THE HISTORY OF SILICON VALLEY DESIGN

by Barry M. Katz; Foreword by John Maeda. The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, U.S.A., 2015. 280 pp., illus. Trade, eBook. ISBN: 978-0-262-02963-6; ISBN: 978-0-262-33091-6.

Reviewed by Jussi Parikka, Winchester School of Art/University of Southampton, U.K. Email: <jussi.parikka1976@gmail.com>.

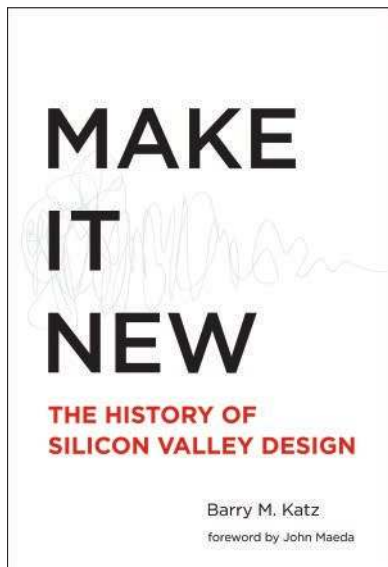
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Now that Silicon Valley machines, software suites and platforms have increasingly crept in as art and design schools’ global infrastructure, it is about time to investigate what the history of design in Silicon Valley is like. Professor Barry M. Katz’s book is a timely—perhaps even overdue—take on the historical development of the appreciation, role and insights of design in some of the key corporations of digital culture. But thankfully it is not merely a corporate or business history. *Make It New* is a very useful work of design history that outlines why it is not sufficient to engage with Silicon Valley based merely on engineering or on marketing, not merely the economic impact or the aura of geniuses that are among the usual narratives one encounters. Katz’s book shows how from a mere

tolerance of designers in technology companies design became gradually recognized as a form of activity and discourse that started to shape not only the corporations or their products but also the wider environment in which digital culture took place. Hence this shift in the focus and importance of design over decades is what enables people like Tim Brown (IDEO) to claim in a much later phase of Silicon Valley design culture that “we are still designing machines but also the ghosts that live inside them” (p. 161).

Katz shows how the many contexts and situations had an impact in reshaping design as field of practice and education. In other words, it was not only design that entered Silicon Valley but Silicon Valley that entered how design was thought of globally. In many of the interesting discussions in the book, he details the work of knowledge exchange, both in the post–World War II situation where German expertise was brought in to assist American work in technology and science, but also the continuous relations between design institutions and Silicon Valley. Furthermore, his book touches on how emerging disciplines become synthesized—for example, interaction design in the midst of the recognition to take into account “human factors.” Indeed, in the 1970s and especially in the 1980s, the “turn” in digital culture and design of interfaces brought to the fore the design task of how to find effective ways to incorporate users into the system. Design became attached not merely to the industrial design of the machine and its interface but also to the wider environment in which they work. For example, Xerox Corporation was very much embedded in this dilemma (pp. 110–111).

Further to a consideration of the environments in which machines were used, this rethinking was crucial in the shift from computers as office equipment to the idea of them becoming integrated in educational institutions and for educational use. This was one of the key questions



in the early Apple Multimedia Lab. Design itself became an interdisciplinary field, or perhaps more accurately a clustering of expertise under a *lab* environment: not merely information, graphic or industrial design, such labs had to also incorporate considerations of anthropometrics, physiology, psychology, sociology, anthropology and even ecology in the activity of design and the projected user/environment of use (p. 115). Beside the activity, Katz gives useful attention to the history of “labs” as sites where the various disciplines met and became operationally part of the corporate design of digital culture. This is an important context for the current considerations of design education and innovation, the spatial sites, which become concrete but also rhetorical markers of interdisciplinarity. Already in 1960, Kermit Seefeld, the chairman of the Industrial Arts Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara, voiced how different traditional and new academic education and scholarly places of activity can be:

The library is thought of as a quiet place, whereas the shops are decidedly noisy; the classroom is clean whereas a lab is dirty; books are read sitting down, whereas we work standing up, with sweat on our brow (p. 126).

Katz’s book includes a whole chapter dedicated to “Designing Designers,” i.e. the design education culture

in the Bay Area. The overview is useful and apt reading even against the backdrop of current discussions in arts and design education (at least in Anglo-American countries). The chapter includes some inspiring accounts on the insufficiency of vocational training (a trend that we recognize in the current anti-intellectual and narrow atmosphere that pertains to design and university education in general). Katz paraphrases here Wolfgang Lederer, a refugee from Europe who started to work at the California College of Arts and Crafts and was later known, for example, for his book design for University of California Press:

To his students he insisted that a diploma is not the academic version of a union card, and that while a coveted position in a corporate art department might await a few lucky graduates, their real goal should be a lifelong process of continuing artistic growth (p. 133).

Of course, such anecdotes don’t cover the whole, wider debates on design becoming an institutionalized part of university training, and Katz is able to offer a good understanding of broader themes, too.

Make It New touches on the shift of design from ergonomics to affect and (algorithmic) sociability (such as the Like button), from things to environments of use, from different spaces of design as practice and education to the spaces in which design is used, and much more. As such it also includes good material for further work for scholars in art, design, critical theory of cognitive capitalism and more. Katz’s book does not itself offer an explicitly critical evaluation of some of the aspects of design—for example, those related to planned obsolescence, the global infrastructures of labor and material sustaining the product design, environmental issues that are merely contained under bland notions of “sustainability”—but for any critical reader wanting to develop more far-reaching theoretical suggestions, this context should nevertheless be

kept in mind when reading the book. *Make It New* delivers well what it sets out to achieve: a well-researched and lucidly written overview of the radical changes in practices and understanding of design in technological culture.

**PAST FUTURES:
SCIENCE FICTION, SPACE
TRAVEL, AND POSTWAR ART
OF THE AMERICAS**

edited by Sarah J. Montross. Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, ME, U.S.A., and The MIT Press, Cambridge MA, U.S.A., 2015. 127 pp., illus. Trade. ISBN: 978-0-262-02902-5.

Reviewed by Malgorzata Sugiera, Jagiellonian University, Poland. Email: <malgorzata.sugiera@uj.edu.pl>.

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This lavishly edited catalogue, fully illustrated with color photographs, was published as a result of the 2015 eponymous exhibition at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, which gathered works by some 20 artists and demonstrated the influence of the successful realization of space travel, with the launch of Sputnik in 1957 and the 1969 Apollo Moon landing as its peaks. Each of the selected artists merged in his/her own way the empirical languages of science and technology with expansive imaginations to develop visual science fiction. Significantly, the artists come not only from the United States but mostly from Latin America, “a region—as the curator of the exhibition and editor of the catalogue Sarah J. Montross emphasizes—that has been stereotyped as primitive, folkloric, or even antitechnological” (p. 16). And yet, as the exhibition fully demonstrated, the explosive growth of the science-fiction genre in film and literature from the 1940s to 1970s influenced not only visual artists in the technologically advanced United States, but also in the less-developed countries of Latin America. Moreover, in this cultural context the main themes of extraterrestrial travel, alien encounters, “new man” as a hybrid of human and machine, and utopian or dystopian futures served to cover