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CUMULUS THINK TANK
Publication No 4 of
Cumulus the Global Association
of Art and Design
Education and Research



ReVeDA: An investigation of Research by Art, Design, and Media in Cumulus Association

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Education and the Research

ReVeDA: An investigation of Research by Art, Design, and Media in Cumulus Association

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General*
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PART I

Introduction

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ReVeDA Working Group Chairs

Design appears to be a young discipline with a deeply rooted strong propensity for change. Such character is among the main factors of its large-scale success and at the same time it is also what makes it fragile, from a disciplinary point of view. The propensity for change contributes to making design highly adaptable and capable of responding to the complexity of the world we live in; on the other hand, it may trigger a process of recasting its actions, its approaches, renovating its status and questioning every time its disciplinary foundations.

Both the attitude for critical speculation and the practice towards participatory design strongly inspired by social innovation, have revolutionized in depth the character of the designer and his activity, while shifting the perimeter of its action, and re-thinking its own tools. Starting from its definition, the design discipline seems to break away from any form of classification and categorization. Despite the scientific community tried to frame a countless and assorted number of interpretations, it has not yet been possible to attribute a unique common definition, so keeping design as a surprisingly flexible activity including a plurality of ideas, research strategies and actions around the discipline itself.

The interest in investigating the territory of design research comes from the reflection about the epistemological nature of the discipline. Even though research, especially in arts and design, is often led by practice, the matter of research is intimately related with the theoretical speculation about the nature of the discipline, its objectives and impacts on society and the environment.

Since the start of our project, we were conscious that reflecting about design research should mean, at the same time, reflecting about the design discipline. Along with the plan to launch a call for Survey through the Cumulus community to map the main characters of research by art, design and media, we had to face also how to best illustrate their current principal features in design world-wide. ReVeDA should be considered also an infographic project to better understand and know our discipline at present time. Along with the birth of the design methods movement (1962), the scientific debate has focused on analyzing the research methods and approaches. At the same time, the failure to identify a single and unique method for design has increasingly given greater impor-

tance to topics and areas of application rather than to the related methodological aspects. At present, the scientific debate is spreading through a variety of platforms for dissemination such as congresses, research companies, and associations that have shifted the context of sharing for design research.

The mapping activities of ReVeDA were part of such scientific scenario characterized of ever more elusive fields, with the scope of re-questioning on the methods and the approaches through which design moves forward new knowledge and innovation, not only related to the economy and the market, but aimed more broadly at human ecology. Therefore, more than forty years after the conference on "Design, Science, Method" (1980), the purpose of ReVeDA was to start again to reflect about the gnoseological and scientific foundation of our field, and at the same time to record the approaches, the methods and the theories of design and arts research. The outcome was not to originate the ultimate normative model, but to explore the different ways of doing research in a plurality of distinctive contexts and to identify the factors in which the discipline is flourishing at present. The demand to mapping the current research in the field of art and design was therefore mainly driven by the objective to start an updated state of the art and opening a reflection in Cumulus on the emerging directions we are taking for the future.

Since every map is limited to a specific moment of space and time, we were aware of the limits of this project. As a result, ReVeDA is aimed to return a picture of the current global research in Cumulus, as food for thought to follow up with more analysis and reflection on the future of global design research.

The project was born as a Cumulus Working Group to map the current design research developed in more than 340 design schools around the world, that are members of the association. At first, we launched a survey as a tool for investigation, to collect the main descriptive aspects of research in the arts and design. The first mapping phase was characterized by developing the operational survey tool, which was a questionnaire. The drafting, validation and verification phase of the questionnaire was followed by the second phase, related to the dissemination of the questionnaire through a Call for Survey, which was delivered to more than

500 addresses, among which we received 70 research project descriptions from 32 schools located in 22 different countries. The results collected were subsequently processed and returned in a third and final phase for mapping through the development of a project of infographics. Adopting the infographic maps as a tool for reading the quantitative/qualitative data, allowed the possibility of establishing more evident connections and, accordingly, a more accessible analysis of the results of the map.

The book is simply organized into two parts.

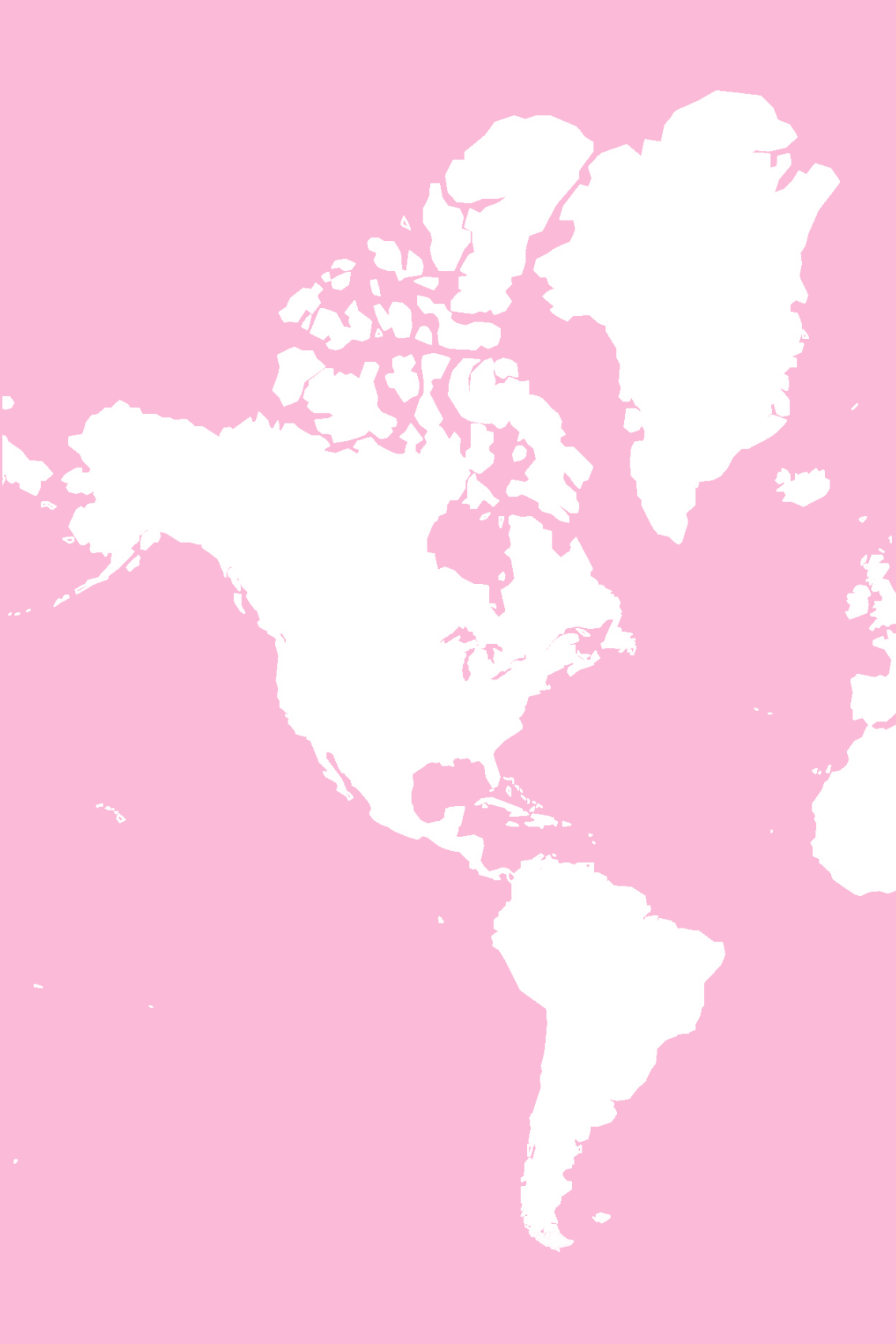
Part I is a collection of short essays of eminent people from the Cumulus community, which were invited to share their vision about the current state of research in art and design.

Part II is the research report of the ReVeDA Cumulus Working Group and it describes the mapping activity (the scope, the methodology and the tools), so displaying the infographic results collected through the Call for Survey within the school members in Cumulus. The infographic project is divided into two sections: the first one is collecting all the research projects participating in the call for survey; the second one shows the synthesis of the results of the questionnaire. The maps are offering a double reading level: the first through the accumulation of data and the second through their synthesis. This choice comes from the awareness of the impossibility to draw a unique, single picture of contemporary research by art and design, but at the same time from the aim to display their main features and peculiarities.

The book is aimed to offer a glimpse on the state of art of the research in art and design as a starting point for future consideration and reflection. We expect that the outcomes of the map will support the development of research projects and networks in Cumulus, and additionally the methods and tools developed for collecting, analyzing, and returning the results will support to future mapping actions, so also becoming a tool for reflection and knowledge. From a broader perspective, the attempt to identify an evolving genuine research picture for design which is respecting diversity and cultures, as well time and places, may drive design investigation towards the common goal of establishing a shared vision and initiate a new dialogue on research within the Cumulus scientific community.

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ReVeDA means Research Vectors in Design and the Arts and started as a Working Group in Cumulus since 2014. The primary aim of ReVeDA is to offer an open space for discussion on research in Design and the Arts, while showcasing experiences developed within the Cumulus Community and locally in the conference hosting institution.

This volume collects the results of the mapping activity promoted by ReVeDA WG with the aim to explore the research in Design, Arts and New Media within the Cumulus members.

Both Art and Design found in the territory of research their common languages of ways of knowing, where often practice led theory. If we compare to other scientific fields, the research through Design, Art and Media has a young history and as a consequence, it has a problematic acknowledgment within the academic institutions and the society. At the same time, a wide demand is emerging to lead innovation and strategies for the development of products and services, both for society and wbusiness. Nevertheless, the research has the opportunity nowadays to give an important support for the solution of complex problems we never faced before.

CUMULUS THINK TANK SERIES

The Cumulus Think Tank publications are created and supported by the Cumulus the International Association of Universities and Colleges of Art, Design and Media. The Cumulus Think Tank is designed to facilitate gathering and sharing of know-how and experience of academics, students and staff in collaboration with partners and other professionals in art, design and media.

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