



Update on Designing For The 21st Century

THE AHRC AND EPSRC'S 'Designing for the 21st Century' research initiative is now entering its second phase of research activity. Vicky Hale brings us up to date on the 5 year initiative, which is being run from the University of Dundee, to support interdisciplinary design research in Universities across the UK.

During 2005/2006 twenty one research networks were supported by the scheme, each exploring a different aspect of future design activity.

Professor Tom Inns, Director of the Initiative, worked closely with the design community and the two research councils to establish the Phase 2 Research Project Call for the Initiative. Over 60 applications for Phase 2 projects were submitted in April 2006, 19 were selected for funding by an interdisciplinary commissioning panel in September 2006. The selected projects include investigations into the future of the UK design consultancy industry, research into fashion design, explorations of branded places, research into the design of services and into the design of the 21st Century office environment for elderly workers.

Over the next 2 years Professor Inns and Initiative Co-ordinator Vicky Hale will organise a series of workshops and conferences to support this research activity. The first of

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these activities will take place at the Design Council on 19 March. This introductory workshop will be the first chance for all PI's from the 19 Research groups to come together as part of the formation of a new research community.

'The Initiative can teach us many lessons about how to conduct interdisciplinary research' comments Professor Inns, 'over the last 18 months we have seen research clusters explore common ground and map research opportunities, the Phase 2 grants are supporting a portfolio of projects that take this thinking to the next stage'.

Later in 2007 will see the release of "Designing for the 21st Century: Questions and Insights" edited by Tom Inns and

published by Gower Ashgate. The publication provides an opportunity to bring all the key findings from the 2005 research clusters together in one location. This will provide an invaluable reference source for anyone interested in individual clusters and for those who want to explore the generic drivers of future design activity.

For more information visit: www.design21.dundee.ac.uk

Images taken from "Branded meeting places: Ubiquitous technologies and the design of places for meaningful human encounter." This Research project is based at The University of Edinburgh and is lead by Principal Investigator, Prof Richard Coyne. Prof Coyne ran a successful research cluster during Phase 1 of the Initiative and also received funding for Phase 2 of the Initiative.

► Right: Lunar House, Croydon
Image by Ray Lucas

► Far right: Edinburgh as Non-Place, G8 Summit, Summer of 2005.
Image by Richard Coyne



◀ Snake Robot

Credit Nottingham Trent University
senior technician Chris Forbes

Robotic snake to charm viewers

A TWO-METRE HIGH robotic snake which uses sensors to react to people nearby is being developed by experts at Nottingham Trent University. 'Snake Robot', which is constructed from a series of vertebrae containing pneumatic muscles, detects the mood and movement of its viewer and reacts accordingly.

A diverse team of academics and technical staff is behind the interdisciplinary project, including control technologist Dr Philip Breedon, product designer Jamie Billing and choreographer Dr Sophia Lycouris. The trio are from the university's School of Art and Design and School of Architecture, Design and the Built Environment.

Dr Breedon specialises in control technology in artistic projects and the use of pneumatics which respond through movement in interactive sculptures. Jamie Billing's area of expertise is 'critical' design which exposes rather than conceals the product's technology, and Dr Lycouris is interested in how dynamic changes in physical spaces affect the perception of that space.

Dr Lycouris said: 'This is an elegant robotic structure with human presence and the ability to express its emotions through articulate combinations of snake-like movement.

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Since January 2007, Snake Robot is being further developed as part of the 'Designing for the 21st Century' funding scheme.

The Nottingham Trent University researchers are one of three teams participating in 'Emergent Objects', a portfolio of projects funded by the scheme, and which explores design processes through the lens of performance. It is led by Professor Mick Wallis at the University of Leeds.

Professor Tom Inns, Director of Designing for the 21st Century, said: 'The interdisciplinary project team associated with Snake Robot will establish strategies for linking technology to emotions and human perceptions. This knowledge will support our understanding of designing in the 21st Century.'

The Snake Robot was exhibited for the first time at the GameCity interactive entertainment Festival in Nottingham during October 2006.