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## **System-Shifting Design: An emerging practice explored**

### **Report summary and reflections on turning into practice**

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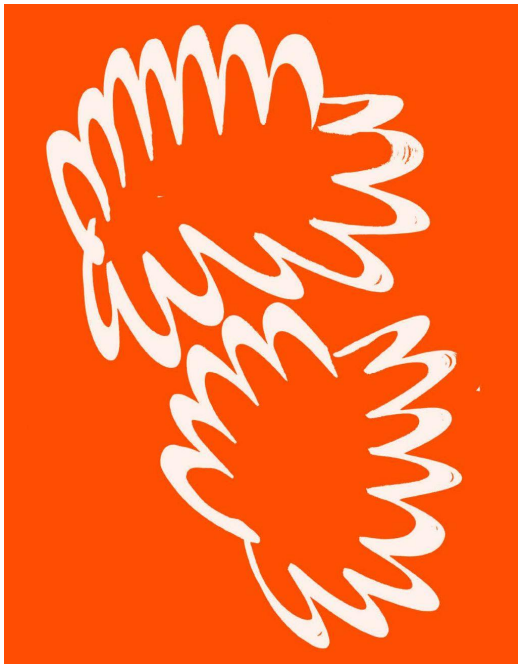
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*System Shifting Design* was published by the Design Council and The Point People in 2021, as an emerging practice observed from designers across the world who are working to deliberately and generatively create new systems of regenerative planetary health. The report starts with a critique of the existing system of design before setting out some characteristics of both 'system conscious design' (designing with an awareness of the wider system in which you are part) and 'system shifting design' (designing to deliberate transition to a new system), and some provocations for how the design system itself needs to change to support this more radical and necessary way of designing. A way of designing that works at the level of deep structures and narrative as well as physical things or spaces, that makes to reveal and invites further possibility rather than purely solving discrete problems, and assembles and provisions collectives of organisations who can shape the transition.

In this paper, the authors reflect on the nine months since publication, how the wider context of design and funding practice has changed, how the report's ideas are being translated into practice and some of the significant challenges with doing so. They observe that while 'system conscious' design is becoming increasingly mainstream, 'system-shifting' design is still emergent, with some important new voices and writing, but significant effort is needed to explain and invest in the deep work needed to change the heart of our current systems.

KEYWORDS: systemic design, system-shifting design, design for planet, design for transition, infrastructuring, provisioning, emergence,

RSD TOPIC(S): Learning & Education, Methods & Methodology



*System Shifting Design*

[Download the report<sup>1</sup>](#)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-work/skills-learning/resources/download-our-systems-shifting-design-report-1/>

## Introduction

*System Shifting Design*, published by The Design Council and The Point People (2021), sets out an emerging practice observed from designers across the world who are working to deliberately and generatively create new systems of planetary health and wellbeing. There has been much discussion about the enormous power of designers to create a more just and regenerative world. We need to redesign almost every aspect of our lives, from the way that we consume, heat our homes, eat, travel and care for each other and non-human nature.

In order to do so, design needs to act differently. In the UK, the Design Council's Design for Planet mission (Design Council, 2021) seeks to support and galvanise the 1.97m strong UK design community to design with the welfare of the planet as a priority. The Design Council has long promoted best practices in design processes and frameworks: the Double Diamond, created in 2005 (Design Council, 2007 p. 6; 2019), is arguably one of the most well-recognised design process models in the world. Given the reach and credibility, there is an opportunity and responsibility for the Design Council to update its thinking and ensure that designers and non-designers have the tools and knowledge needed to design in the way the world now needs.

In the last couple of years, there has been a noticeable and welcome increase in designing for system change. The Systemic Design Association and the Relating Systems Thinking and Design (RSD) symposia have been promoting this type of design for the last decade, and in the last couple of years, the pandemic has made starkly obvious the interconnections that shape our world and the word 'systemic' has entered mainstream design vocabulary. However, it is not yet clear that we have the right ways to design to address complex issues. We have seen many advocating a fusing of design and systems thinking. However, in practice, this too often means taking elements of each and simply merging them together.

*System Shifting Design* argues that 'designing systemically' means both designing with an awareness of the wider system context and perception of interdependence (system conscious design) and with the specific objective of changing a system (system shifting design). We have observed that there is much of the former but far less of the latter. We

need a new practice that transcends rather than merges design and systems thinking and moves us beyond hubristic or rationalist approaches to systems, a mindset of thinking, not doing, and of practices that fix the current rather than create an alternative.

*System Shifting Design* was developed through research conversations with design practitioners over 18 months during the pandemic, some as group sessions, some as 121s,<sup>2</sup> with two synthesis and playback sessions (Figure 1). We also presented early findings at RSD9 (Drew et al., 2020), and the research informed the systemic design framework, which is aimed as an entry-level guide to this way of working, introduced in *Beyond Net Zero: A Systemic Design Approach* (Design Council, 2020).

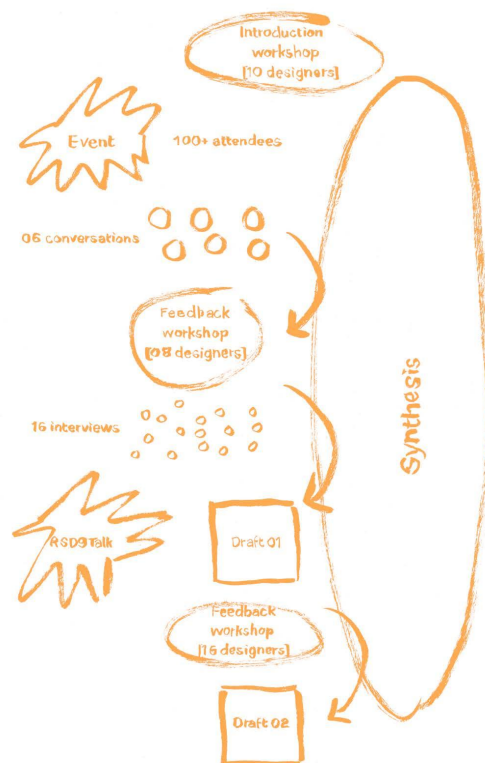


Figure 1: Diagram showing how we created the report (Design Council & The Point People, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> The term 121 refers to a one-to-one meeting initiated when more information is needed and can best be explored through unstructured conversation. A 121 takes place outside the formal data collection process.

## **1)-Critique of characteristics of current design**

The report starts with a critique of the current ways in which design has been valued and, indeed, pitched to commissioners of design.

### **User-centric**

A focus on the end-user has been hugely important in reorienting the activities of commercial and public services to produce real outcomes or benefits to people rather than serving the interests of the organisations involved. However, that can come at the cost of design for sustainable and equitable future systems by prioritising the needs of customers over workers and people over planet. Working with systems requires a focus not on atomised individuals but on the relationships between us all, and not on individual needs alone but on the shared needs of humanity and encompassing all non-human life.

### **Designing out risk**

All innovation is a risk, and a huge part of design's appeal has been as a means of managing that risk, for example, through the strategies designers use to build empathy with end-users and prototype solutions to spot and resolve errors early. However, as design has become widely adopted as part of commercial development, it has also increasingly been shaped into a more reliable, rational and, therefore, incremental process. In order to shift to new systems, we need to evolve practices that further co-design, iterative development and prototyping in service of deeper transformation and towards new, not existing, paradigms.

### **Solution-focused**

Design is billed as creative problem-solving delivering workable solutions to discrete problems. This means the design process is most often taken to be a process of defining – or isolating – a problem and resolving it through a product or service solution, which is seen as the end of the process. Even if the design team goes on to practice continuous improvement, it is carried out with the understanding that the fundamental elements of that solution remain unchanged. As a result, projects are commissioned to fix one bit of

a system in isolation. But the dynamic nature of social systems doesn't lend itself to static solutions, and the unfolding nature of a systemic opportunity means that design work is never 'done'.

## **2)-Proposal for characteristics of future design**

The characteristics described above are no longer adequate for the type of challenges that design is now being asked to address, and the report goes on to propose some alternatives for future practice.

### **Individual to collective, shared or planet-centred.**

Rather than focusing on a specific set of user needs, designers will be working towards humanity's collective potential. Not just humans but all living organisms and materials. Our notion of design and 'designer' will have shifted, democratising what is counted as design, and valuing natural, non-human design. Together, they are making things that can harness and regenerate creative energy, behaviours and resources.

### **Agile to transformative**

Rather than incrementally making a better, smoother, faster version of what we currently have, designers will be imagining alternatives and intentionally designing objects, places, and services that reveal what that could be and will create properties which make it more likely to emerge. To achieve this, commissioners will be demanding new ways to experiment with deeper transformation.

Designers will be taking a more radical and intentional stance on what new systems need to be for – rather than acting as neutral facilitators of user needs. That is not to say that they won't be working with what currently exists. Designers – particularly commercial ones – will be working on a 'twin-track', designing immediate and incremental outputs to build trust and goodwill while raising imagination and awareness of the possibility of alternatives. Commissioners will be asking for this 'double brief'.

### **Problem-solving to possibility-giving**

Designers and commissioners will be in agreement that a problem is never solved, and instead, we need a whole set of interventions to shift to a just, regenerative society. Scaling will be talked about not as one design growing bigger but as an intention diffusing more widely and its roots going deeper.

A new type of 'emergence design' will be formed where designers are working directly on the 'invisible' infrastructure from which imagination and creativity can grow. They will be designing interactions that bring people into new relationships with each other and alternative intentions from which further innovations cascade.

### **Static solutions to dynamic conditions**

Designers will be holding their design briefs in a 'looser' way, applying their skills not to fully defined and discrete problems but to a longer-term process of dynamic change. The 'end form' of the design is now less important than the way in which it encourages conditions for intentional emergence; the 'object' will be the temporary 'things' that are needed to support the transition.

Designers will be engaged in unbuilding (old systems and old assumptions) at the same time as assembling. The intention will be to see how resources (people, expertise, materials) can be re-perceived, reoriented, repurposed, and regenerated – and to understand the emotional change associated with that.

### **3)-The what and how of future design**

To do this, designers will be learning to operate at each level of the system, including the deep code of policy and rules and the meta-level of societal narratives, values and philosophies. They will be connecting innovations together, not just to create new ideas but to strengthen the pressure and opportunity for change. They will need to recognise different theories of transition and create new approaches to change-making through collaboration with much wider expertise related to change, from activism to psychotherapy and storytelling.

We have described these as three themes for future practice:

1. Alternative intentions and deep remaking
2. Emergent possibility and generative plurality
3. Assembling and provisioning the new system

The middle section looks more closely at the specific examples and practices of groups of cutting-edge designers who are starting to work in these ways (providing the ingredients for how we think designers will be acting in the future).

#### **4a)-System-conscious design**

This section starts with setting out the features and approaches that we could call 'system-conscious' design, which we observe to be becoming increasingly mainstream.

##### **Holding the fullest complexity**

Instead of isolating a problem, designers expand the brief, recognising the interrelatedness of different parts of a system and the relationships between them.

##### **Designing for the collective**

Designers see the unit being designed for as explicitly about the collective – neighbourhoods, societies, ecological systems – rather than isolated individuals.

##### **Engaging and convening multiple perspectives**

Recognising that no one has a true picture of the system, designers invite multiple perspectives and bring in marginalised voices from the edge.

##### **Recognising themselves as part of the system**

Recognising their own assumptions, worldview, and impact on the rest of the system by working with others with different perspectives to check their biases.



## **Working with the invisible**

System-conscious designers recognise that the interactions and dynamics between people, things, and environments are just as much the 'material' of systems as those 'material things'.

## **Using prototyping to probe and to form**

Prototyping is often reduced to a means of testing preconceived ideas or validating assumptions. Here, designers are using it earlier to sense-make – probing and provoking a system to reveal where there is resistance or energy for change.

## **Allowing for emergence**

Building the skills and capabilities of others to design and spaces for further creativity.

## **4b)-System-shifting design**

The report then sets out a further set of features and approaches that we believe to be 'system-shifting'. We have divided this out into the 'what' and the 'how'.

### **4B.(I) THE 'WHAT'**

To drive more fundamental system transition, designers make 'things' that:

#### **Challenge the deep structure of a system**

Underpinning every system is a set of beliefs that determines how that system sees its mission and the logic it operates by<sup>3</sup>. In turn, this dictates the design of rules and relationships that determine our behaviour and values and is borne out in – and reinforced by physical objects, spaces, and social practices – what Escobar (2018) calls 'ontological' design. These designers are digging into these deeper layers, the 'deep structure' of a system, and creating something that changes the fundamental purpose of beliefs on which the current system rests.

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<sup>3</sup> For example whether the purpose of a criminal justice system is assumed to be about incarceration or rehabilitation, or a health system about treating illness or promoting wellness, changes the methods it uses

**Work at three levels of a system to drive change**

In addition to developing new, tangible products, services and business models at the micro level, designers are finding ways to contribute to or reinforce broad changes happening at the macro level, for example, by shaping new narratives, paradigms, and values (which some call metadesign); and at the meso level for example by working with policymakers or regulators to design new frameworks, markets or platforms that allow the new system to grow.

**Facilitate a shift in a system's purpose, power, relationships and resource flows**

A new product, place, service or organisational model that, through its design, facilitates a shift in the make-up of a system or allows a new system to form. The most powerful can unlock system change by facilitating one or more of four shifts: purpose, power, resource flows and relationships (Leadbeater & Winhall, 2020).

Each of these shifts combines to have a reinforcing ripple effect on the wider ecosystem. Like a fractal, these can be the smallest possible expression of the new system that can work at different scales and connect with other similar expressions into a bigger narrative.

**Investing in activities that help the system to transition**

These are not solutions per se but innovations or activities that are designed to create conditions conducive to transition. They range from creating and strengthening relationships between diverse or unusual system actors, creating platforms for action, building transitional tools like a new data set that allows something new to be measured and valued, and provisioning and infrastructuring the new system by providing new tools, resources, standards or frameworks for the new system to act and grow (Karasti, 2014).

**Operate together, not as single solutions but complementary elements**

Designers see what they are creating as one part of a bigger ecosystem and work to join the various elements to assemble and connect.

## **4B.(II)THE 'HOW'**

To do that, they:

### **Start from different ways of knowing**

Finding ways to access different philosophies, sources of knowledge, ways of feeling and perceiving, and more-than-human and full-body intelligences, all to shift how they see and experience the world and challenge the assumptions of current Western-dominated and anthropocentric systems. Without appropriating or colonising this knowledge but using it to promote plural ecological and indigenous cultures.

### **Designing from a collective viewpoint**

The starting point of any design work comes from a perception and worldview of interdependence and designing from that position.

### **Taking a stand**

Implicating themselves, and holding on to the radical point of view rather than being a neutral facilitator.

### **Using their design skills propositionally to bring the potential system into being**

Focusing on the potential system over the problem inherent to the current, e.g. not mapping the current system but future states, systemic opportunities, plural worlds. Valuing the role of imagining alternative possibilities through provocation and speculation.

### **Designing-in-action**

Rather than moving between the studio and the field to test things out, these designers are embedding themselves in context and designing in a direct relationship with the world. They make a move, and the world moves back. In this sense, making is a kind of strategy where the resistance of the material – in this case, the dynamics of a situation – is integral to forming the path forward.

**Considering it an unfolding and generative process**

Rather than providing an answer, designing something that is radical or 'over-offers', which opens up an imagination space for others to fill and build on, and embracing plurality.

**Tending to the collective**

Designing in more interdependence, making the collective stronger and investing in the entwinement. For example, a design which deliberately heightens the need for maintenance, for repair, for care, for nurturing and tending to shared resources and spaces.

**Investing in a longer time horizon**

Seeing it as a longer-term mission, changing their role as it progresses, and finding alternatives to a consulting model that allows them to partner with the mission for longer. Building the capacity for an ongoing development process, e.g. for self-development, developing design skills and capacities in communities, building in learning systems, care and maintenance.

**Building a new set of system values into their designs from the beginning**

These values underpin next-generation systems: regenerative, not extractive, decolonial, more-than-human, circular, relational, distributed, participatory etc.

**Collaborating with other disciplines**

Working with people who have something else to offer on how change happens, e.g. activists, journalists and narrative builders, ecologists, artists, entrepreneurs, and philosophers.

### **Seeking shift and depth, not scale**

Scale is not always a means of changing systems. In fact, many innovations get co-opted back into the very systems they set out to change. These designers are experimenting with different ways to grow and deepen their system-shifting impact, not only replicating their designs but infusing their intentions into the world.

### **5)-Challenges with the design system itself**

As well as changes to practice, there are challenges in the deep structure of the design system that needs to change to support designers to design in this new way.

#### **Value of design**

Currently, design is situated within a traditional economic worldview. Quantifiable inputs should lead to quantifiable outputs to ensure a return on investment. This is reinforced by the business models of design and linear theories of change. Design is commissioned as an individual, discrete project. Commissioners tend not to recognise that value is produced over the long-term and is attributable to numerous different efforts. The intelligence generated from this work – in the form of intellectual property – is often held individually rather than shared openly for others to progress it further. The value of intangible assets of design, which often sit at the edges of the scope of the commissioned work: new knowledge, but also the new framing, relationships and goodwill, is not captured, recognised and then further invested in.

#### **Governance**

Governance and regulation vary within design practice, from standards and review processes within architecture, the built environment and advertising to the rules that govern the design commissioner's world, such as health regulation and private shareholder needs. This means that ethics are essentially 'optional' in much design work. This can make it more difficult for those designers wanting to question the brief to ensure that multiple perspectives are included, and the interests of the collective are prioritised over consumer or business needs.

## **6)-Proposals for how the design system needs to change**

The paper ends with a number of speculative provocations for how the design system itself might need to change if it is to support this new type of work.

*A new set of materials and methods* for design that allows designers to work with the 'invisible' materials of policy and paradigms, tools that allow them to make-to-reveal and a language around collective design that is as transformative as user-centred design.

*New types of design assemblies, governance and regulations* for design that includes future generations and non-human stakeholders and deeply consider ethics and non-financial value.

*Different types of design jobs* focus on designing the infrastructure needed for the new system to come into being and build greater interdependence across roles from the outset.

*A new type of award* that makes visible the value that this type of design produces, like new policy, new knowledge and logics, relationships, connections and collective experience, from which innovation emerges.

*A new way of commissioning*, which is both more collaborative and invitational and creates the space for the radical alternatives and designs which 'overshoot' with the promise they unlock further imagination.

*A different type of design leadership* (and indeed a strong infrastructure to support it) which focuses on a curiosity for alternative starting points, is able to work deeply into structures of the existing system and creates the platforms and infrastructure for innovation to emerge.

## 7)-What has happened since and challenges with putting it into practice

We published *System Shifting Design* in October 2021. Since then, the need for this work has become ever more urgent with rising temperatures and inequalities. It underpins much of the deep strategic thinking at the Design Council and its Design for Planet mission. It has influenced and is part of a growing practice around systems transitions and life-centred design. However, this is all still relatively niche and nowhere near the scale needed to address the danger humanity is in. Further work is needed around communication, serious investment in and by organisations for deep transitional work, and growth of design in service of this.

### WIDER CONTEXT

Since we published, there continues to be a small but growing body of thought, writing, practice and funded programmes around design for system transition, for the planet and for the collective. Dr Daniel Christian Wahl was awarded the RSA's 2021 Bicentenary Medal for Regenerative Design,<sup>4</sup> and is part of a MOOC on Designing Resilient Regenerative Systems (Systemic Design Labs, 2022). The idea of non-humans as designers and the idea that we are entwined and not separate from nature is gaining traction, as evidenced by the publication of books across different design disciplines: *Flourish: Design Paradigms for our Planetary Emergency* (Pawlyn & Ichioka, 2022), *Life-Centred Design Guide* (Lutz, 2022), and *Healthy Urbanism* (Pineo, 2022).

Communities are bringing forward alternative perspectives into design, making the creation of plural futures more possible. Futuress<sup>5</sup> is a platform to empower and amplify the voices of womxn, BIPoC, LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees, and others from marginalised backgrounds through connections and education, so they can be at the forefront of designing the future. Efforts to decolonise

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thersa.org/events/2021/12/regenerative-futures>

<sup>5</sup> <https://futuress.org/about/>

design continue, with Professor Dori Tunstall's Respectful Design approach at OCAD University,<sup>6</sup> and the UK-US Decolonising Design Commission.<sup>7</sup>

There is more – but not enough - investment activity around 'transition'. In the UK, a new grant programme was developed at The National Lottery Community Fund, which has long-term, 10-year grants of £5m for system-shifting work (Robinson, 2021). The Transformation Capital Initiative<sup>8</sup> is partnering with several initiatives to change systems. In Canada, the Transition Accelerator<sup>9</sup> has been set up to help communities shift to a green economy in a socially just way.

As well as funding programmes, there is also foundational work to change how funding happens. Rockwool Foundations' System Innovation Initiative<sup>10</sup> has been hosting a series of discussions with groups of investors and funders on new frameworks and vehicles for deploying capital into the development of new systems. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is hosting a new conference about the need for system-shifting funding, philanthropy and investment.<sup>11</sup> And a new community of practice has been created with Philea across Europe, focusing on aspects of system shifting design and how that can be used by funding strategy directors across European foundations.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www2.ocadu.ca/feature/dean-dori-tunstall-on-respectful-design>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.thersa.org/fellowship/news/ddc-members>

<sup>8</sup> <https://transformation.capital/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://transitionaccelerator.ca/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.systeminnovation.org/aboutsii>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/new-frontiers-funding-philanthropy-and-investment>



## The report's influence

The report is part of this growing body and has gained recognition and traction. We have talked about it and shared it on various platforms, including the Systemic Design Association, Service Design Global Conference and Design Council's Expert Communities and Design for Planet festival. Don Norman, the pioneer of user-centred design, has recently published *Design for a Better World*,<sup>12</sup> and praised system shifting design, saying it is both what is needed and applauding its actionable suggestions.

System-Shifting Design is what the world needs right now. Because the world is falling apart, and something has to change. Many people are simply repeating the history of oppression. They remind us of all the injustices in the world, the collapse of the environment and civilization, but they don't bring any actionable suggestions about what we need to do. I am always searching for what we can do. The entire focus of this report is on what we can do. It should be applauded. It should also be critiqued and built upon, as its authors suggest.

Tom Lloyd (RSA, 2021), the current master Royal Designer of Industry, used the work in his inaugural speech.

Jennie Winhall has continued to publish resources on [systeminnovation.org](http://systeminnovation.org) about the importance of redesigning purpose, relationships and resource flows for system transition and has contributed a chapter called "Systemic Perspectives on Service Design" to the *Handbook on Service Design* (Patricio, van der Bijl-Brouwer, Prendiville & Penin, 2023).

## Work at the Design Council

At the Design Council, the practice observed and suggested within the document is being translated into frameworks and programmes. It is not being done wholesale but rather incrementally: taking time to translate elements into a language that works for a wider audience (which is one of the challenges set out below). Some of the ways this has been done are briefly described.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/design-better-world>

## **The Systemic Design Framework**

This is the evolution of the world-famous Double Diamond into a clear and accessible guide to systemic design for those who are new to the subject. Although published before *System Shifting Design*, it draws in many of the concepts explored, such as a principle around 'people and planet-centred', designing at different levels of the system (macro to meso) and opening up the "final" stage of the process to something more open-ended and generative. We are currently producing a toolkit to codify this new approach so it is easy for people to practice it in their work.

## **Design for Planet Festival**

The first flagship event<sup>13</sup> of our new mission took place in November 2022, alongside COP26. The curation exposed some of the ideas held within the *System Shifting Report*, for example, an opening keynote conversation between Indy Johar and Kate Raworth about redesigning the deep structure of the system, talks from Kees Dorst about deep reframing and Tessy Britton about design for wider participation, and a track panel on designing from alternative ways of thinking.

## **Design for Planet Fellows**

Working with Cassie Robinson, the Design Council has brought together eight designers from different disciplines with deep networks into wider professions or ways of thinking to create and weave together a new practice from this diverse knowledge.<sup>14</sup> These will inform the mission-led design taking place at our next Design for Planet festival in November 2022.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.designforplanet.org/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-work/skills-learning/live-learning-projects/design-for-planet-fellows/>

## **Design Value Framework**

As part of the Design Council's Design Economy programme<sup>15</sup> (research and advocacy into the current and future value of design and how to support its regenerative growth), we worked with BOP Consulting<sup>16</sup> & the UAL Social Design Institute<sup>17</sup> to create a Design Value Framework (Design Council, 2022) that measures the wider social, environmental and democratic value of design. Included in this is space for the wider ripple effects of design (the policy, paradigms, relationships etc.) which are less singularly attributable to design or have a direct ROI for the initiator (but great value for society).

## **Designing London's Recovery**

The Design Council worked with 20 innovation teams across three of London's recovery missions: green high streets, thriving communities, and good work for all. System shifting design informed the support for the team to look beyond 'traditional' ways of scaling (i.e. growth in users/customers, increasing profits for shareholders, etc.) and to see their impact as generative.<sup>18</sup> Concretely, this was achieved through a) shifting policy to support new forms of practice to emerge, b) creating new relationships to nurture further innovation, and c) amplifying alternative or undervalued mindsets to help inspire others (Drew, 2022).

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<sup>15</sup> <https://designeconomy.co.uk/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.bop.co.uk/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.arts.ac.uk/u-al-social-design-institute>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/business-and-economy/supporting-londons-sectors/challenge-ldn/designing-londons-recovery>

## **Design Review**

Design Review<sup>19</sup> is a formal process to bring in built environment expertise at different stages of the development and build process. They are required and led by the local council and paid for by the developer. We are developing the next version of this to include a wider set of perspectives and values.

These start to cover some of the speculative provocations around materials and methods, awards and value and governance and regulation. Work on design leadership, contracting, and the jobs market is still to be started (although it in no way has to be led by the Design Council).

## **Challenges and limitations**

The main challenges in putting it into practice have been firstly around awareness and translating it into a series of steps that are accessible for designers, the public sector and businesses, and secondly, having the scope to do the deep work of systemic design. This means being able to challenge the deep structure of the system (particularly where this is beyond the remit of the designer and/or commissioning organisation) and doing the wider infrastructuring work where the value is less visible, attributable and returnable to the investor.

## **Access and translation**

On access and translation, the report 'as is' is not an easy read for many people outside the world of systemic design practice and academia, but who are critical actors (i.e. policymakers, commissioners of design, designers who are new to systemic design and/or designing for the big shifts needed to address the climate crisis). In fairness, the report was not designed nor written for them.

We now need to do this translation work in the right way. We are often asked to simplify or to use words people recognise now, and the temptation is to translate the new language into the language of the current system. However, that would be a mistake as

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-work/partner-projects/design-reviews/>

people may not understand the underlying difference in practice that this entails. A new language signals a new approach. The answer is to deploy an alternative language but clearly explain what we mean, so it is accessible, not simple. Case studies and stories are the best way to do this, so we continue to seek out great examples to show what we mean.

### **Deep, systemic work across organisations**

The work that is needed sits with large institutions, organisations - and those that fund them, with whom designers work. However, for the most part, the vast majority of the work in this space is still what we call 'system conscious' ( working to improve the existing system in an interconnected way), but not 'system shifting' to both imagine radical alternatives and fund the often invisible but transitional activities that pave the way towards them.

There had always been an intention to bring system shifting design into funding practice and started through some of the initiatives noted above. However, in the time that this work was researched and then published, the philanthropic funding community has found itself under increased scrutiny for the wealth accumulation on which it is built and the ways that wealth was accrued. This has required the field to develop more power awareness and has also resulted in a tentativeness for any philanthropic work to 'shape' and 'direct.' This has made the adoption of a system-shifting design practice challenging, despite it being an incredibly rich territory for influencing how transformational change is resourced.

### **The role of designers**

To some extent, the role of the designer is in service to the organisations that need to make this big shift. As we've set out in the report, some designers work as 'visionary propositioner' who self-initiate this work. But many will need to work with the wider system. The role of designers is likely to develop more clearly when roles for organisations become clearer too. In the same way that service design developed alongside the shift to a service economy. We need to do the work of bridging the transition ourselves and highlight ways designers can start working in this way – that isn't a stretch so far that they get lost.

In summary, the report is part of a small but growing body of practice around the design we need to radically reimagine and reshape systems to recreate a regenerative world (Figure 2). More is now needed to communicate these new approaches into the mainstream, being able to bridge between current and new language without losing the essence of what needs to change. And to work with government, funders and institutions to create the right infrastructure for this to happen.

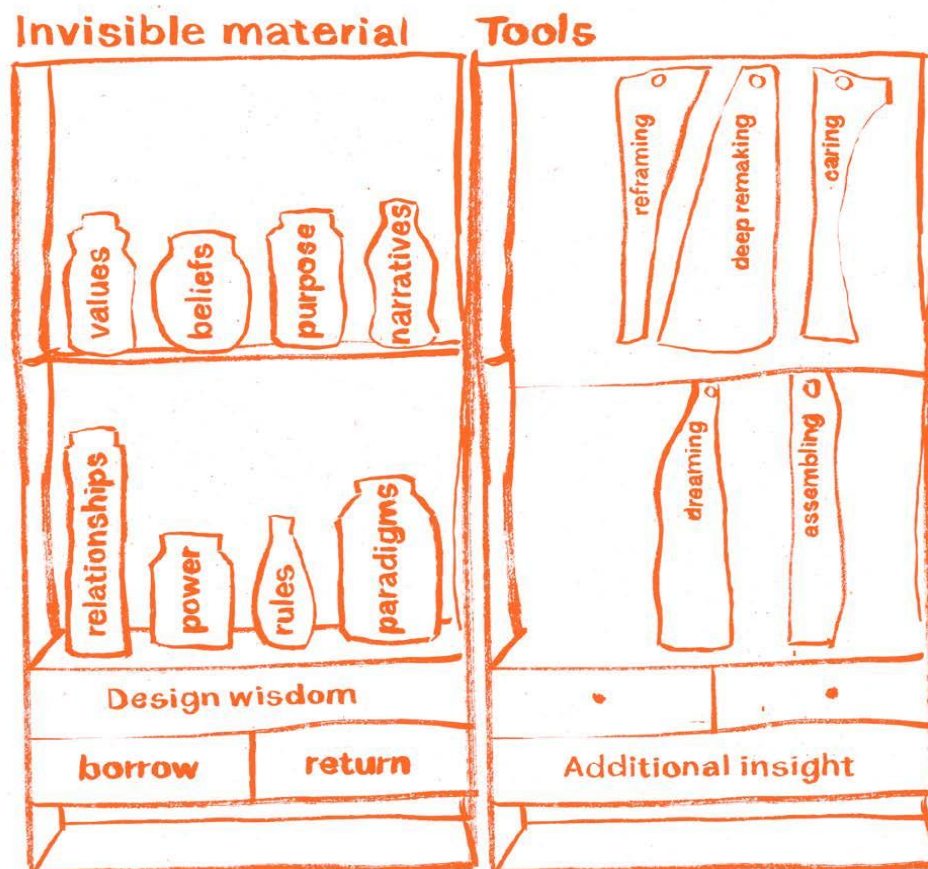


Figure 2. What if these were the materials, tools and knowledge of design? (Drew, Robinson & Winhall, 2021, p. 70).

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