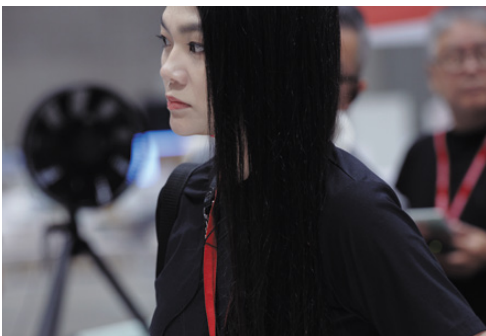
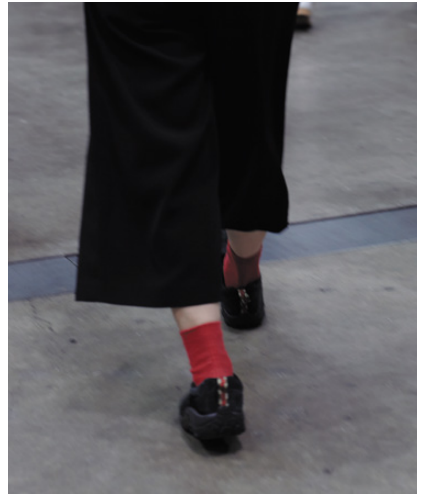


# FOCUSED ISSUES

2024



A Small Step, Design Leaps  
Proposals for Future Design



# INTRODUCTION

The GOOD DESIGN AWARD is the only comprehensive design evaluation and endorsement activity in Japan. During the more than 60 years since the launch of its predecessor, the Good Design Product Selection System, in 1957, we have continued to support social development in Japan, taking on responsibility for the changing role of design in society.

Our Focused Issues activities consider and propose new possibilities for design through the screening for the GOOD DESIGN AWARD.

One of the important roles of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD is to “discover possibilities and issues for future society.” Focused Issues is designed to play this role, with a focus on deepening the critical questions that design must face today.

Focused Issues apprehend and analyze the wave that arises in design each year. While observing the entries, themes are extracted as a summary after the screening is over. **After repeated consideration of the possibilities and of the role and significance of design in future society, the results are presented as a proposal.**

The team in charge of Focused Issues consists of six members: three Focused Issues directors (chairperson and two vice chairpersons) and three Focused Issues researchers consist of external experts. Throughout the months-long screening process, which started with the first screening in June 2024, apart from the regular screening process, they explored the wave by looking at all entries from their own specialties and perspectives.

This report summarizes **the results of lateral discussions looking across the range of screening subjects which took place among the directors/researchers responsible for the Focused Issues at the GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2024.**

**We have compiled six proposals for various stakeholders on what stances and moves are required at present in design, as well as in politics, government, and business.**

We hope this report will naturally inspire you to think of the first action you want to take.

GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2024 Focused Issues Team

# Table of Contents

- 03 2024 Focused Issues Team
- 04 Theme for 2024, “A Small Step, Design Leaps”
- 06 Trends and Directions Identified by the GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2024 Screening Units

## PROPOSALS

- 08 **PROPOSAL 1** Focus on design that begins with individual energy and competency
- 12 **PROPOSAL 2** Foster respect for all natural environments, flora, and fauna
- 16 **PROPOSAL 3** Make the power of involving others and being involved a driving force
- 20 **PROPOSAL 4** Link small challenges under a flexible vision
- 24 **INTERVIEW** Audrey Tang × Naoki Ota  
Collaboration and Co-creation in Design from the Perspective of Plurality
- 26 **PROPOSAL 5** Decolonize the nature–culture–economy ecosystem with inner creativity
- 30 **INTERVIEW** Arturo Escobar × Yutaka Nakamura  
Decolonization of Design in the Context of “Pluriverse”
- 32 **PROPOSAL 6** Start by questioning identities
- 36 **INTERVIEW** Akie Iriyama × Aki Hayashi  
Design as “the formalization of tacit knowledge” in order to boost innovation
- 38 The Process of Six Proposals
- 39 A Small Step You Can Take From Today
- 40 **DISCUSSION** Seiichi Saito × Jin Kuramoto × Yuko Nagayama  
Now, as an opportunity to question our aesthetics.  
Use of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD from now on

## 2024 Focused Issues Team

### FOCUSED ISSUES DIRECTORS



#### Seiichi Saito

**Creative Director**  
Panoramatiks Principal  
GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2024  
Chairperson

Saito studied architectural design at Columbia University with a Master of Science degree in Advanced Architectural Design (MSAAD) and founded Rhizomatiks Inc. (now Abstract Engine Co., Ltd.) in 2006. Chairperson of GOOD DESIGN AWARD from 2023. He is also the president of Abstract Engine Inc. and the EXPO Co-creation Program Director for Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan.



#### Jin Kuramoto

**Product Designer**  
Representative Director,  
JIN KURAMOTO STUDIO Inc.  
GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2024  
Vice Chairperson

Born in 1976. After working at a home appliance manufacturer, he established JIN KURAMOTO STUDIO in 2008. With the approach of communicating the project concept and story through a clear formative expression, he has been involved in the design development of various genres, like furniture, home appliances, eyewear, and automobiles. He has received numerous awards including the iF Design Award, Good Design Award, and Red Dot Design Award. He is a guest professor at Kanazawa College of Art and a part-time lecturer at Musashino Art University and Tokyo University of the Arts.



#### Yuko Nagayama

**Architect**  
Executive Director,  
YUKO NAGAYAMA & ASSOCIATES  
GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2024  
Vice Chairperson

Born in 1975 in Tokyo. After working at Jun Aoki & Associates, established Yuko Nagayama & Associates in 2002. Representative works include "Teshima Yokoo House," "Japan Pavilion for Dubai Expo," "Tokyu Kabukicho Tower," etc. JIA Young Architect Award (2014), Yamanashi Cultural Prize of Architecture, Silver Award, Tokyo Architecture Award (2018), Lighting Design Award Grand Prize (2021), WAF Highly Commended (2022), IF Design Award (2023), etc. Currently, two pavilions for Expo 2025 Osaka/Kansai, Panasonic "Nomo no Kuni" and Woman's Pavilion, TOKYO TORCH Torch Tower are underway.

### FOCUSED ISSUES RESEARCHERS



#### Naoki Ota

**Co-creation Partner**  
New Stories Ltd. CEO

Until 2014, he was a management member of Boston Consulting, overseeing the Technology Group in Asia. From 2015 to 2017, he was an assistant to the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications, working on digital strategy and regional development. In 2018, he launched New Stories Ltd. to create future value leveraging his expertise and network. He helps to create communities that leverage technology.



#### Yutaka Nakamura

**Anthropologist**  
Tama Art University Professor  
Atelier Anthropology LLC CEO  
KESIKI Inc. Design Anthropologist

Nakamura is a cultural anthropologist and a design anthropologist. Professor at Center for Liberal Arts and Sciences, Tama Art University, CEO at Atelier Anthropology and in charge of Insight Design at KESIKI Inc. His research explores social design related to violence and de-violence in "peripheral" spaces, while actively engaging in social implementation with various companies, designers, and business leaders. At Tama Art University, he leads the Circular Office initiative and the Division of Design Anthropology at Tama Design University. Anthropology on Journey [Amerika no Shuen wo Aruku: Tabisuru Jinruigaku], Heibonsya, 2021 [in Japanese], and others.



#### Aki Hayashi

**Editor / Director**  
President of Brand Journalism, Inc.  
Editor-in-Chief of Ambitions  
business magazine

Joined Asahi Shimbun as a reporter in 2009. Appointed Chief Creative Director of HuffPost Japan in 2017. Became Web Editor-in-Chief of Forbes JAPAN in 2018. Joined AlphaDrive Co., Ltd. in 2020, serving as Executive Officer and Editor-in-Chief, as well as Director of NewsPicks for Business. Founded Brand Journalism Co., Ltd. in 2022 and became its CEO. Also serves as the Editor-in-Chief of the business media Ambitions.

# THEME FOR 2024

Theme for 2024

## A Small Step, Design Leaps

### **“A Small Step” – shedding light on the “source” of thoughts and activities**

The theme of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2023, “Design and its Outcome,” focused on the “results” of design.

Moreover, the theme of the 2023 Focused Issues and also of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2024, “Brave Attitude, Organic Design,” paid attention to the “thoughts” and “activities” which are one stage before the “results.”

And now, with the 2024 Focused Issues theme, we aim to shed light on the “source” which is at an even earlier stage than these “thoughts” and “activities.” “A Small Step, Design Leaps” was set as the theme out of this hope.

Designs that revolutionize society are born from “a small step” driven by the enthusiasm of small individuals in organizations or local communities, rather than from the “big needs” driven by the market.

Among the winners of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2024, designs that started from these smallest of signs were conspicuous – designs that were driven by an inner impulse and narrated the background and process development anecdotes in their own words, with “I” as the subject.

The phrase “a small step” was adopted to visualize these simultaneous movements as a wave and increase their number even further from the next fiscal year onwards.



## “Leaps” – getting caught up, growing into a major transformation

The first step is “a small step.”

However, no matter how small in scale the effort may be, the people around it are moved and caught up by its extraordinary energy.

By directly getting involved in this effort or supporting it from behind, they work together to nurture a small step into a big change.

The word “leaps” was added focusing on the transmission of this energy, its power to sweep people along.

From a personal issue to a company issue, from a company issue to a societal issue...

“A small step” takes a tremendous amount of work, but it holds an enormous power which market-driven design can never have.

It does not end with this “small step”, let alone with hammering down this “nail that sticks out,” but leads in the end to a massive shift – this dynamism will surely make the leap to even more organizations and communities.

# TRENDS BY GENRE

## Trends and Directions by the Screening Units

In the screening process of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD, subject entries are examined in “screening units” classified by domain. This section presents Unit Review, extracts of reviews on trends and issues specific to each domain observed throughout the screening process.

### Unit 01 Accessories and Wearables

Some companies demonstrated a new perspective and produced ingenious products by leveraging their unique technology they have accumulated over the years. I also felt that products developed for a small consumer segment not only solved social issues but also won eventual support of many consumers. Meanwhile, some entries focused on addressing environmental or social issues, and the attitude of developing these products is essential in today's world. Yet some entries were too focused on the cause to have the properties that should be sought after – perfection, originality, and beauty – and thus failed to gain high marks.

**Tamae Hirokawa**, Creative Director/Designer

### Unit 02 Personal Care

Care is not something individualistic; it is an inclusive concept that covers relationships with others – caring for, empathizing with, and providing support to them – and, by extension, social responsibility and ethical engagement. Entries that gained high marks this year were developed with an ultimate view to adding richness to individuals and society and building a more humane and sustainable society.

**Gen Suzuki**, Product Designer

### Unit 03 Stationery and Hobbies

Many products were gradually updated versions. Some were based on newly developed materials. Others featured a thought-out manufacturing concept for sustainability that could be achieved with available resources. Even others were designed from a perspective unseen from us and with the social implications of the products fully in mind. For some products such as educational tools from abroad, the screening panel found it easy to screen them in terms of appearance and usability. But they found it difficult to understand why the tools were needed in the first place and in what cultural background they were born.

**Yuma Harada**, Designer

### Unit 04 Household Goods

This year, the total screened items dropped by dozens, a phenomenon that had not been seen in recent years. This may be because although items subject to screening are primarily household goods as end products, peripheral factors, such as initiatives and business models surrounding the products, were also often subject to screening. Recent years have seen a rise in the number of users who value “factors behind the product” as selection criteria. These factors include the place of production, the narrative of product development, and the thought of the manufacturer. Since most household goods belong to a mature category, it is natural for peripherals to become the target of advancement.

**Shuko Yaginuma**, Buyer

### Unit 05 Home Appliances

What caught my attention most was the honest and solid commitment of people involved in designing and making the products to improve on existing products. Designers, for example, were involved in the design of the internal structure as well. This may be difficult to see, but I am sure this must be a major challenge. In the screening process, we had the question of how the conventional term “home appliances” can be paraphrased today. They can be recognized as the providers of home solutions or life solutions.

**Noriko Kawakami**, Journalist

### Unit 06 Audio, Video Equipment

Two major directions have come to the surface and give a glimpse of what will happen to this category. One is the esthetics of “machines that are attractive to operate.” Another major direction is represented by the existence of something that conveys the philosophy of “remaining unchanged.” This philosophy resonates with the perspective of some users who openly appreciate the value of “remaining unchanged” and welcome necessary changes only. It even wins the trust of these users. This process itself represents design. It offers an important perspective in a world of design that requires constant changes.

**Kazushige Miyake**, Designer

### Unit 07 ICT Equipment

There is an emerging movement to challenge the current trend of making products serve more functions, perform more efficiently, and look more luxurious. This movement aims to bravely stop to rethink the trend and seek from scratch what is really needed. The award recipients of this unit share the common attitude of questioning the existing development attitude, taking a fresh look at real, immediate issues, and sincerely exploring the ideals from scratch. It is about time we stop to consider how we should lead technology to our happiness and a better environment we live in.

**Kenta Ono**, Design Researcher/Industrial Designer

### Unit 08 Equipment and Facilities for Manufacturing and Medical Care

Some of this year's entries involve developmental initiatives that lead the times or have the potential to do so. What these development initiatives had in common is that they achieved technological innovations for solving problems and attaining targets by taking novel approaches, rather than building on existing ones. Such endeavor requires the courage of breaking away from fixed ideas, making a shift in thinking, and making a foray into an unknown world without worrying about possible failure. This will pave a new way.

**Shigenori Asakura**, Industrial Designer



## Unit 09 Housing Fixtures

Perhaps because products in this screening unit are often functional members for comfortable living, product performance tends to be prioritized, making it difficult to enhance the external appearance. Still, some of the entries this fiscal year included products that sought after both beauty and performance. As a trend this year, the entries included many fixtures that enhance water performance. Fixtures that utilize natural energy with solar power included outdoor lighting appliances, roll screens, and wave-shaped roof tiles, demonstrating a new movement in this category.

**Noriko Hashida**, Product Designer

## Unit 11 Mobility

We received many solutions, including those from abroad, on land mobility that used electricity as the power source, be it automobiles, motorcycles, or bicycles. These included peripheral products, such as tires exclusively for EVs and charging equipment. I got the impression that the market was becoming increasingly mature. Entry from other industries and the rise of startups and small businesses were ubiquitous. We received solutions for platform type vehicles with an eye on automatic driving. These facts gave me the impression that the mobility industry was expanding even further.

**Kota Nezu**, Creative Communicator

## Unit 13 Housing (Medium to Large Sized Housing Complexes & Cohousing)

Because of the sheer size of housing complexes, we gave special praise to the entries that had bravely tried a new approach despite the difficulty to change, or that challenged the convention, as well as to the entries that would have far-reaching implications for local communities. We received various entries like these that suggested that housing complexes still had room for new attempts. This fact represented a big step forward toward the next era.

**Mari Tochizawa**, Architect

## Unit 15 Public Facilities, Civil Structures, and Landscape

The projects deemed notable in this unit had something in common: a lack of a conventional master plan. Another common feature was that authorities responded flexibly to the loose visions of the actors. The feelings of individuals were conspicuous, which could be described as the impulse to start small or try to do what they could do. The fact remained, however, that the accumulation of such attempts put public space in focus and even solved some of the social issues as a result. This gave hope to this unit, which was concerned with what public space should look like.

**Kentaro Yamazaki**, Architect

## Unit 17 Systems and Services

In addition to entries that tried to solve problems in our daily lives or at work with the help of systems and services, we saw many excellent entries that tried to solve social issues or create new value by designing access to information in domains more adjacent to social infrastructure. Many proposed designs took a second look at the essence of interaction between humans and information and tried to update social rules and norms and even our values. The screening process this year gave me the impression that such designs would form a future trend.

**Hidetomo Nagata**, Strategist

## Unit 19 Initiatives and Activities for the General Public

We would like to point out three trends that were noteworthy this year. First, many projects focused on people who were left out in conventional social structures or support frameworks. The second trend was represented by activities that go across different domains to create new connections. The third trend was represented by activities to provide places to belong. Apart from these trends, projects that provided care for caregivers increased in number. As social issues became complex and multi-layered, the issues that were being addressed, targets, and relationships behind them became more complex and subtle.

**Miyuki Tanaka**, Curator/Producer

## Unit 10 Furniture / Equipment and Facilities for Office and Public Space

Some furniture products were undergoing slow changes as if in step with the advancement of humans. There were others that were expected to follow a similar path although they had a shorter history. In the category of equipment, facilities, and building materials for public spaces, we concluded that an act of good design could be achieved by taking pains to erase the presence or even signs of the object and thus helping creating a rich space.

**Hiroaki Watanabe**, Industrial Designer

## Unit 12 Housing (Detached House and Small Sized Housing Complexes & Cohousing)

The entries were diverse. They included houses provided by house builders, those designed and constructed by housing contractors, those designed by design offices, such small-sized housing complexes as housing for the elderly and rental housing, and overseas housing, for which entries had been increasing in number year by year, as well as housing construction materials. The jury screened with focusing on whether the entries offered a solution to make life and society better in their respective fields. All these entries in the BEST 100 gave a hint of what architecture could do to improve local communities.

**Yui Tezuka**, Architect

## Unit 14 Construction (Industry and Commercial Facilities)

The award winners in this unit can be largely divided into two types. One is of outstanding or original design. The other is of design that is not so strong but will hopefully be imitated elsewhere and become popular eventually. The former can be praised by architecture awards as well, but the latter may be an evaluation criterion unique to the GOOD DESIGN AWARD. Of course, the entries that have both qualities have gained especially high marks.

**Yuri Naruse**, Architect

## Unit 16 Media and Contents

In this year's screening, I felt that media were at a crossroads. Myopic design activity that focuses on appearance or brand image building is now under scrutiny. A real pleasure screening in this unit is encountering designs that convey and communicate the message of say, a decades-old company, in a few seconds based on its uninterrupted corporate and business activities. I am convinced that such designs can serve as a bridgehead for shaping the future for decades to come.

**Wataru Nozaki**, Project Director

## Unit 18 Regional Initiatives and Activities

Many designs in this unit aimed to create flexible and diverse relationships by taking a brave step forward. In view of this year's theme, I describe noteworthy trends this year from two standpoints: 1) Tenacity to deal with issues, and 2) Initiatives that create diverse relationships. A step taken by someone has an unexpected impact on others and eventually creates happiness for someone else. For this very reason, does the GOOD DESIGN AWARD exist. This is what I felt strongly again this year.

**Jun'ya Yamaide**, Artist

The full unit review is available on the official GOOD DESIGN AWARD website.



[www.g-mark.org/en/learn/past-awards/gda-2024/review](http://www.g-mark.org/en/learn/past-awards/gda-2024/review)

# PROPOSAL 1

## Focus on design that begins with individual energy and competency

Good design always involves both product design and concept design. When a design comes to life, it often begins with someone's enthusiasm for an object or a concept, which can drive a team or an organization, bringing a product or service into society. However, to what extent have organizations paid attention to, accommodated, and considered the capabilities and competencies of an individual? It will be important to create a culture that takes notice of possibilities, which sometimes begin with an individual's ideas, awareness, and enthusiasm within organizations engaged in diverse activities. This is my proposal.



### A Continuous Horizon Shaped by Product and Concept Design

When the Good Design Product Selection System, the predecessor of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD, was established in 1957, society sought new tools and welcomed various technologies and materials rushing into our lives. Some of them were taken into society without being fully examined, and many are still in use today. While design was implemented straight into society without any verification during this period, the focus of design was set on objects for a long time.

However, the time came to examine such a trend. Now, society requires broader, more complex designs than before that sometimes look back over the past and incorporate ecosystems including nature and environment as well as humans. At the same time, the term design continues to expand, diversifying into many categories. As a result, some of these flows merged into two large streams: product design and concept design.

Some people took these streams for two opposing things, and others questioned the inclusion of design in social activities and policies. However, considering the trend of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD over the past few years, these large streams have flowed out into a big sea. The sea expanded vastly to the point where it forms a horizon. Concept designs exist among product designs, product designs exist among concept design. Obviously, we should no longer separate these two, because we have already entered an era that design leads humans and

society rather than catching up with social trends like in the past. Today, the boundary between product design and concept design is disappearing. How do we conclude the design sought by society as a result of demands from individuals?

### Ghost of the market

What events or motivations produce new designs? For example, new design is derived out of needs after a series of research and experiments for safety, convenience, and efficiency. It evolves further in view of price, acceptance, and optimization, turns into a tool that many people use, and empowers society and our lives.

Now, the design industry has been matured, and we often forget the moment the prime motivation was born. In particular, the term "market" sounds strange to me, as if our fundamental motivations are turned into ghosts by systematization. There was a tendency to recognize consumers and society as one big group that thought and acted based on similar ideas. However, after the advent of the Internet, we found out that terms for a group of people, such as consumers and citizens, could be divided into diversified categories. I believe that the time has already come for us to take a market for a collective body of individuals rather than just a group.

Meanwhile, for companies that have expertise and intellectual properties for designing tools for society, taking a new direction economically and systematically as a whole company is not easy even though there is a certain need.

On the other hand, startups and small-to-medium-size companies can scale themselves to meet certain product needs but often fail to have adequate manufacturing knowledge and sales methods. Such a circumstance allows a dead space of design to exist, and companies eventually give up on making product design and concept design in demand even though they have considered doing so once.

### **Sending out individuals' competencies to society**

In recent years, the phrase “contributing to problem solving” is commonly used in all fields. But what exactly is the “problem”? While there are large clusters of challenges across a range of sectors, such as declining birthrate, aging population, declining workforce population, and environmental issues, the real challenges vary widely by region, geography, and climate. In recent years, Proof of Concept (PoC) has been exercised in many fields. As a result, we have realized that there is no all-in-one tool to address these issues. Thus we need to make a variety of tools by disassembling society into small segments. That is where design should start from now.

In addition, what we need today to create design is an individual's viewpoint and competency. Up until now, many people have thought that social problems are solved by someone else. They have completely relied on services created by governments and private companies, and if things did not work out, they just had to wait until the problems are cleared. However, they cannot leave everyday challenges in their own lives, such as family caregiving and childcare, to someone else and have to find their own solutions suitable to their lifestyles.

These upstream thoughts and downstream thoughts are about to merge. Society is not something ambiguous, but a chained series of lives. By bringing out our own viewpoints and competencies with this idea in mind, we are changing our society to be a place where all of us can participate and design together in some way, rather than society formed by someone else. Our society needs to be changed. We respect individual perspectives and energy in the company as well as problem awareness of citizens in society. At the same time, we value our own perspectives and abilities more than ever. I want to believe that the design in current demand, which has been a dead space of design, can be accomplished.

For example, the planning of the RESILIENCE PLAYGROUND project was initiated by one of the employees' ideas and passion to make playground equipment for all children, including children requiring medical care. This is a good example of a product focusing on competencies: the company overcame challenges and eventually created these difficult products with understanding

attitude. Hachikuri House was built reflecting the owner's wish to give a connection with environment and people to their child with cerebral palsy. For this reason, product design and concept design are meticulously fused into this house.

Furthermore, PLUG MAGAZINE implements design of the local community through magazine production. The magazine is edited in a meticulous, complex, and beautiful manner, and more than anything, the chief editor's passion keeps on producing competencies filled with love for Okayama. In addition, Furusato Choice Disaster Relief “proxy donation.” The system could not be established without understanding the flow of administrative procedures. This is an excellent design with a smooth multiplication of individual viewpoint, a company that the individual belongs to, and reconstruction in urgent demand.

Lastly, in order to exercise the concept of “looking at design that begins with an individual's passion and competency,” the following questions should be considered first. I would like everyone to start with thinking over these questions.

- 1 Are you considering both product design and concept design?**

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- 2 Are you evaluating the design based on more than just market size?**

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- 3 Do you feel the passion of an individual (or of society as a collective group) in the design?**

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- 4 Can the passion described in 3 continue to motivate the individual or team?**

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- 5 Can the design incorporate the competencies and abilities of individuals?**

*Looking at design that begins with an individual's passion and competency*

## **Commentary: Background of the proposal and related topics**

Responsibility: Editorial Department

### **Product design and concept design**

The boundary between product design and concept design is disappearing – the core observation in this proposal is based on the change in the postwar transition of the design industry in Japan.

When the Good Design Product Selection System, the predecessor of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD, was established in 1957, the focus of design was mainly on objects. Interest in design increased to prevent imitation, then production of quality products gradually became the center of attention as design for export promotion.

Furthermore, in the late 1970s, the focus of design shifted to abundance of mind, rather than simply improving efficiency and convenience through physical fulfillment; many products called “Japan Originals” such as Walkman began to appear. Then, in the 1980s, Japanese products swept the world, and the bubble economy even brought about trade imbalance.

In the 1990s, however, the tide of product design began to change. The bursting of the bubble economy (1991), the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, and the Tokyo subway sarin gas attack (1995) cast doubt on existing values. At the same time, as exemplified by the agreement on the Kyoto Protocol (1997), global environmental issues have attracted increasing attention, creating a trend in the design field to actively address these issues, and terms such as ecology, universal, and sustainable started to appear frequently.

In the 2000s, the rapid development of ICT led to globalization and diversification of values. After the Great East Japan Earthquake (2011), social networking services and smartphones became widespread, and various web services and applications appeared. The phrases of “from objects to ideas” and “from goods to services” became widely common, and design targets expanded beyond physical objects to intangible services and experiences.

### **Individual innovation draws attention**

Recent increase of interest in individual innovations proves the importance of “Looking at design that begins with an individual's passion and competency.”

For example, according to the report of FY 2023 Promotion of New Business Creation by HR of Large Enterprises (Promotion Program for New Business Creation through Creativity Recurrent Education) by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, Japanese enterprises are falling behind other advanced countries in creation of value-added businesses. In light of this situation, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is focusing on (1) research on issues that enable individuals to exercise creativity within organizations, (2) research on creative thinking and attitudes of individuals and teams, and (3) development of educational programs to acquire creative thinking and attitudes. The importance of fostering creativity in working adults is increasing in order to address problems with unclear answers and to create new businesses.

# Pickup GOOD DESIGN

## GOOD DESIGN Selected from the Perspective of PROPOSAL 1



Activity

### RESILIENCE PLAYGROUND PROJECT

A project that transcends the fields of medicine and play equipment to develop “play equipment that anyone can play with, regardless of whether they have a disability.” Focusing on the problem of children receiving medical care who are unable to play even if they want to, JAKUETS have developed three types of play equipment.



Housing

### hachikuri house

For people with disabilities and caregivers, this shared house serves not as an isolated place but as a hub fostering bonds with those sharing similar disabilities and the local community. It provides an inclusive environment for social engagement, including a home care support office, short-stay rooms, and a shared store facing the main street.



Media & Contents

### PLUG MAGAZINE

This regional magazine has been published in Okayama, Japan since 2004. While archiving the here-and-now of communities, its mission is to bring a new approach to regional revitalization as they propose local alternatives. Centered around fashion and culture, they apply a broad media design and unique editing that harmonizes local business, politics, and underground culture in a single issue.



### ふるさとチョイス災害支援

ふるさと納税で被災地を応援

Activity

### furusatochoice saigaishien dairikifu

Furusato Choice Disaster Relief, an online service that accepts donations for disaster-affected municipalities through the hometown tax, has established a “proxy donation” system in which a municipality unaffected by the disaster collects relief donations through the hometown tax on behalf of the affected municipality to reduce the paperwork burden on the affected municipality.

# PROPOSAL 2

## Foster respect for all natural environments, flora, and fauna

Inclusive design has expanded exclusive design intended for limited users to design for everyone. As the establishment of a circular social environment is recognized as a standard theme of society, what is needed now is the further expansion of the concept of “everyone.” Design that fosters respect for all natural environments, flora, and fauna living on the earth, as well as for humans, and that brings new perspectives and ideas will increasingly become important.

### MY PROPOSAL



**Jin Kuramoto**

Vice Chairperson,  
GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2024

### Humans have gone overboard— Inclusive design needs to be expanded now

Looking back on the movement in design in 2024, the passing of Julia Cassim on June 16 was a big incident. She was a key player in promoting and spreading inclusive design – universal design for all people to use including people with disabilities, elderly people, and people from different cultures and languages. In fact, inclusive design has been steadily increasing its presence in the world from the end of the 20th century to today.

I myself have been heavily influenced by the concept of inclusive design. When I visited “Design to Change the World Exhibition” in 2010, I was shocked. Products and services common for those of us living in advanced countries are actually out of reach for 90% of the world’s population, half of whom cannot even secure adequate food, water, or housing. Through this fact, I keenly realized that the design we work on every day only targeted a limited group of people and how exclusive such design was. How can we change design only for 10% of the population close to design for 100%? Since then, I came to design with this question in mind.

However, while working on this year’s Focused Issues, I ended up realizing even this thought was not quite enough: didn’t the “100%” mealy mean 100% of humans, weren’t all our design activities done only for the sake of humans?

In light of an increasing interest in sustainability and

construction of circular society, global issues of the past few years, we saw many entries and award winners that incorporate this concept into their products and services. This fiscal year, many of the designs were produced by taking one step ahead to pay respect to non-human nature, flora and fauna, considering them as their own issues. From general background to individual background We saw many award winning works that took the first step based on their own perspectives beyond the stage of just copying a global trend, questioning themselves, “What action do we take for this trend?” “Why do we have to take this action?” I saw a lot of winners who asked themselves these questions and took their own “first steps.”

Many people must be feeling that human involvement is causing major environmental changes and disasters. In short, humans have gone overboard and made a big mess on the earth. As a result, more and more people are working on designs based on respect (not patronizing kindness) that value all beings equally including nature, animals, and plants.

These experiences changed my understanding of inclusive design. What we have to do now is to expand the scope of the “100%.” In other words, we should pursue inclusive design that includes non-human nature, flora and fauna.

Notable as an example of extended inclusive design, one of this fiscal year’s winners YAMAP Watershed Map

shows respect for the non-human natural environment, flora and fauna. This map expresses places we live in by watersheds based on the flow of water, not by administrative divisions. The aim of this map is to deepen our understanding of disasters by learning more about the natural environment related to our daily lives, as more and more people are moving from mountainous areas to urban areas for human activity. This map is wonderful in that we are gently encouraged to learn instead of receiving a strong warning. Rather than restricting us from certain behavior, it provides us an eye-opening opportunity to learn by using an excellent interface and service. This is a brilliant example of a mixture of product design and concept design.

The Tsuruoka house, which tried to accommodate not only people but also other beings, is an extended and inclusive design. The house pursues a new way of life where plants and animals gather despite the urban location. Moreover, both the architect and the client enjoy the experiment. This house itself may be close to a test case, but it is an initiative encouraging people to realize that there is such a way to interact with nature and that there is such a way to enjoy living.

GREEN AGENDA for BRANZ is another project with similar potential. It is a condominium version of the Tsuruoka house, so to speak. This project is a management plan that contributes to the conservation of urban biodiversity in condominiums. I perceive this condominium as a proposal to enjoy nature with the whole community in a situation where living in urban areas inevitably separates us from the natural environment. This idea satisfies all parties involved: expanded nature attracts worms and insects, children find a new playground, and the developer can reduce management costs.

KONOSHIMA Chemical CO<sub>2</sub> Recycle Production Process also surprised me. The factory is operated with the aim to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the plant by 50% by 2026 and down to 0 by 2030. A mere trend would not be able to make them set such a goal. This project demonstrates the firm determination of the company to take the issue for their own and aim for zero rather than reducing.

### **Create new viewpoints and ideas beyond problem solving**

The effort of inclusive design embraces non-human nature, flora and fauna is still in its infancy. I believe and really hope that such designs will be the norm in the future.

Most importantly, we do not have to stick to problem solving measures. Design should be exercised in order to both address issues and generate new viewpoints and ideas. A change in the viewpoint and idea will make us explore new issues and activate communication.

It is very important to have people involve themselves in actions to generate such new viewpoints and ideas by using various methodologies instead of a unified manner. We are now facing numerous issues related to non-human nature, flora and fauna in which all design related domains are involved. That is why we must bring ourselves to set new goals by changing our base viewpoint and idea instead of addressing individual issues one after another.

In order to encourage more ideas and actions, it is important not only for companies to take on various challenges, but also for the national and local governments to lay the groundwork for such challenges.

Things may not change all at once. But starting with people who realize the importance of extended inclusive design that respects non-human flora, fauna, and the natural environment, start with a little bit of steady work. By doing so, society will be able to take another step forward.

I believe there are quite a few people who agree with this idea. We hope that the emergence of a new inclusive perspective will lead to a change in attitudes about design, planning, development, and legislation that are primarily directed exclusively at humans, and will encourage more people to take an inclusive approach that extends their perspectives to the natural environment, and flora and fauna.

*Fostering respect for all natural environments, and flora and fauna*

## **Commentary: Background of the proposal and related topics**

Responsibility: Editorial Department

### **Circular economy advancing in Japan and overseas**

The circular economy is a recent trend that should be referred to for the social implementation of inclusive design that includes non-human nature, flora and fauna, presented in the proposal.

According to the Ministry of the Environment, the circular economy refers to economic activities, in addition to conventional 3R initiatives, that generate added value through services while reducing resource input and consumption and making effective use of stock. This movement aims to create new value by regarding products and raw materials that have been disposed of in the past economic activities as resources and recycling resources.

The transition to a circular economy is being promoted mainly in Europe. In December 2015, the European Commission adopted the Circular Economy Package, which specifies specific numerical targets such as “recycle 65% of municipal waste and 75% of packaging waste by 2030, and reduce landfill waste of all types by up to 10%.” Reflecting these trends in Europe, Japan is also making progress in its efforts to shift to a circular economy.

Then, what should we do to implement such a circular economy in society and promote inclusive design that “includes non-human nature, flora and fauna” as suggested in the proposal?

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation, a UK foundation with a vision to build a circular economy, has proposed three principles of design that will drive the circular economy. (1) Eliminating waste and pollution, (2) Circulating products and raw materials while maintaining high value, and (3) Reclaiming nature—incorporating these into design forms the basis for promoting the circular economy.

### **Attention to multispecies**

Multispecies is a recent trend that should be referred to in implementing the concept of “fostering respect for all natural environments, flora and fauna, in society” as proposed. Multispecies refers to the symbiosis of multiple species, not only plants and animals but also microbiomes (microbiota, the sum of the microorganisms that live in the human body).

By adopting the concept of multispecies, a new concept called multispecies sustainability has emerged. Multispecies sustainability is a concept proposed to overcome the limitations of the term sustainability that has come into everyday use.

Traditionally, initiatives promoted under the term sustainability have focused on wellbeing for humans. But to address global environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, microplastic pollution, we need to aim for wellbeing for all species, not just humans—the importance of this concept is becoming widely accepted.

Donald Norman, a proponent of the concept of human-centered design, calls for a shift to humanity-centered design in his recent book “DESIGN FOR A BETTER WORLD: Meaningful, Sustainable, Humanity Centered.” In this book, he advocates design that focuses on the ecosystem as a whole, including humans, living things, and the physical environment, which embraces the concept of multispecies.

These multispecies initiatives will serve as precedents and collaborators for the promotion of this proposal, “fostering respect for all natural environments, flora and fauna.”



# Pickup GOOD DESIGN

## GOOD DESIGN Selected from the Perspective of PROPOSAL 2



System & Service

### YAMAP's Watershed Maps in Japan

The "YAMAP Watershed Map" is a map that represents the places where we live not by administrative divisions, but by "watersheds" based on the flow of water. The map visualizes watersheds, which are expanses of land that include mountains, rivers, towns, and oceans. The map is also intended to be used for disaster prevention and mitigation, such as flood control measures for the entire watershed.



Housing

### Tsuruoka house

The Tsuruoka House attempts to allow people and other living organisms to coexist. By designing a harmony of man-made materials and natural life, designers wanted to produce a habitat where humans and other beings can interact in a "me-you" second-person perspective, appreciating each other's blessings.



Housing

### GREEN AGENDA for BRANZ

GREEN AGENDA is a new planting management plan that contributes to the preservation of urban biodiversity. It includes the formulation of a 10-year plan for plantings, which are the foundation of biodiversity, and at the same time, efforts to encourage residents to love greenery, the key to promoting biodiversity. This will create a landscape admired by the people of the city.



Industry & Public Equipment

### KONOSHIMA CO<sub>2</sub> Recycle Production Process

CO<sub>2</sub> recycling manufacturing process aiming for zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This process captures CO<sub>2</sub> emitted from its production equipment to regenerate raw materials for their building material products and magnesium carbonate which is their chemical product. The system launched in 2024 and in 2030 all of CO<sub>2</sub> will be reused and exhausted CO<sub>2</sub> will be turned into zero.

# PROPOSAL 3

## Make the power of involving others and being involved a driving force

A small movement starts from a small insight and by gathering friends around you. This movement evolves into an action that motivates the government and changes public awareness – it is an example of the power of design in action that caught my attention. As shown in such entries, I hope that we can work with the government and the private sector to create a system that encourages a big evolution based on a small insight.

MY PROPOSAL



**Yuko Nagayama**

Vice Chairperson,  
GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2024

While screening this year’s GOOD DESIGN AWARD entries, two key terms came to my mind: force to involve and force to get involved.

It begins with a little idea of someone. The idea becomes the center of a swirl involving those around it. People who get involved become the centers of other swirls and involve those outside them. In the end, these swirls merge into one stream to form a big trend—I saw many proposals that reminded me of this phenomenon.

In FY 2023, I posed a fundamental question, “What is the power of design?” Then, I proceeded with the 2024 screening with a question, “To where is the power of design heading?,” hoping to see further advanced results.

### Great force to involve and force to get involved

As a result, I strongly felt that the power of design, if you have the right vectors, is a great force to involve, and felt moving into a future that has never been possible before.

Hachikuri house, for example. This house was built based on a mother’s wish to give a connection with people to her disabled daughter who loves to interact. This project was launched with a brave attitude to create a new type of facility. The plan was decided to have a shared store and nursing care office on the first floor, a shared house for the disabled on the second floor, a rental house for those who are involved in the facility or want to own one on the third floor, and on top of that, a living space for everyone with a kitchen garden for local residents to use. There has

never been a nursing home with such an inclusive mix of people. The project was carried out through careful discussions between the care provider, helper staff, and Blue Studio, the designer. Blue Studio provided full support and overcame a number of challenges along the way, including financial difficulties. For a client with such great force to involve, there were many people who had jumped into the center of the project with great force to get involved. After that, the cafe owner and the residents have been actively participating in this project with force to get involved. The strong feelings of one person spread to create a facility that had never existed before.

The RESILIENCE PLAYGROUND project, which won the GOOD DESIGN GRAND AWARD, also showed a great sense of engagement and involvement. Many children with severe disabilities requiring medical care have hardly had opportunities to go outside to play, because there is no playground equipment or playgrounds for them to use. One playground equipment designer had doubts about this situation and thought, “I want to make playground equipment that can be used by both children requiring medical care and healthy children.” The designer cooperated with the Orange Kids’ Care Lab., a nursing home for children requiring medical care, and Yuno, a severely disabled person who was involved in this project as an experimenter. Watching Yuno try out her own way of playing with the prototype playground equipment, the designer realized that children, regardless of whether they have a disability or not, naturally have a playful spirit in them, and it is important to draw out their playful spirit rather than create play for them. From then, development

of the product progressed rapidly. Yuno, who had just been involved, became the center of a further whirlwind, then got involved with and propelled the entire project. More than 130 pieces of the completed playground equipment have already been delivered, giving new possibilities to the nature of playground equipment in parks.

Furthermore, CACP “Designing?” This project aims to improve local security by transforming a bicycle parking lot in a decrepit housing complex in a large Chinese city into an attractive community space. Artists and researchers, led by young architects, gathered to discuss with residents what they needed. Eventually, they got the government involved and obtained funding from the government to carry out the project. Now, a similar project is underway using the same method. It is wonderful that there is an initial vision of the way a city should be, that many people are involved in the project, and that in the end, they have changed the mindset of the government which hardly changes, and that they are moving together to realize it.

### **Attractive products get us involved before noticing**

Some product designs made me aware that sometimes an attractive product gets users involved without realizing and makes them part of a big trend that has a huge effect on society.

For example, PureAura, a portable air purifier. This product was created to solve the problem of air pollution in densely populated residential areas where air pollution was high. It is priced at less than \$18, but the fan itself has hospital-grade filters that can reduce PM 2.5 levels by 80%. The body is simple enough for users to assemble and can be fastened with rubber. The bright red body and simple design make it an attractive product. With the easy-to-use sized body, this product can be hung on a wall or put on a table, and is widely used in households. For residents who cannot afford it, donations are made in partnership with organizations. As a result, the air quality of homes improved in this area. At the same time, it tells us the effects of air pollution on the human body and is contributing to changing the local air by means of a small product. This is precisely the force to be exercised by a small product. Users are caught in the act without realizing it and become part of a trend.

The same goes for “SALWAY,” a brand that reprocesses medical devices. Reprocessing is a very steady operation that is rarely exposed, but it is an important task that

supports medical safety. Japan falls behind Europe in reprocessing operations by 20 years. However, this design has contributed greatly to raising awareness of this issue and bottom-up recycling standards. The colorful, fun, eye-catching product design and the sophisticated SALWAY logo on the packaging— this stylish design will naturally change the consciousness of those who use it on a daily basis. The company also has a website to raise awareness of the reprocessing process by educating people about the process and interviewing people involved. As a result, each user will be unwittingly involved and contribute to the bottom-up of the industry. The design sheds light on what is deemed to be a niche, and I felt it was a very good example of a driving force to change awareness towards the issue.

### **In order to enhance force to get involved**

Nowadays, people tend to avoid getting involved in troublesome matters. As a result, many good ideas are left unaccomplished. Coming up with an initial idea is important. But in order to turn such an idea into reality, you need someone to get involved with it. Even the earlier mentioned projects were accomplished by people who were actively involved.

I believe what is needed in this world today is the force to get involved. By fostering the force to get involved, governments and companies may become a big engine for small ideas, push projects forward, and come to fruition. Also, as consumers, we may be able to exercise our force to get involved through the act of choosing a meaningful product.

In any case, by getting involved and taking an issue for our own matter, we ourselves can be a driving force to change.

*Exercise force to involve and force to get involved as a driving force*

## **Commentary: Background of the proposal and related topics**

Responsibility: Editorial Department

### **Authentic leadership: Exposing your true colors**

How can we improve the “force to involve” mentioned in the proposal? As one of the methodologies to answer this question, the concept of authentic leadership, which refers to a leader who can reveal himself in the workplace, gives us an important insight.

Bill George, former CEO of Medtronic, USA, defined authentic leadership in his 2003 book, *Authentic Leadership*: “Authentic leaders use their natural abilities, but they also recognize their shortcomings, and work hard to overcome them.” In other words, rather than perfection, which is often thought of as a characteristic of leaders in general, leaders who build a relationship of trust with those around them by sharing the way they are, who also have flaws, are attracting attention.

Authentic leadership is ethical leadership that is honest with oneself. In recent years, there is increasing interest in servant leadership which refers to a leadership style to serve the others first and then lead them. Understanding these different forms of leadership will lead to further enhancement of the force to involve arising from individuals.

### **The role of the second person: The importance of followership**

On the other hand, the concept of followership, which indicates the significance of followers supporting a leader, is an important reference for increasing force to get involved.

In Derek Shivers’ famous TED Talk “How to Start a Movement,” he talks about the importance of not only being the first person to start a movement, but also the second person to follow. In the study of followership, the term of followership is defined as the willingness of followers to accomplish their own goals by exercising their influence to support their leaders.

In other words, followership, where you follow a leader according to your purpose, is important. This is exactly what “force to get involved” means, which should be taken into consideration when implementing this proposal.

Reference:  
Shimomura, Genji and Kosaka, Michitaka, *Case Study of the Superior Followership of the Service Viewpoint*; *The Journal of Science Policy and Research Management*, 28(3/4), Japan Society for Research Policy and Innovation Management, 2013

# Pickup GOOD DESIGN

## GOOD DESIGN Selected from the Perspective of PROPOSAL 3



Public Facility &  
Civil Structure & Landscape

### CACP“Designing?”

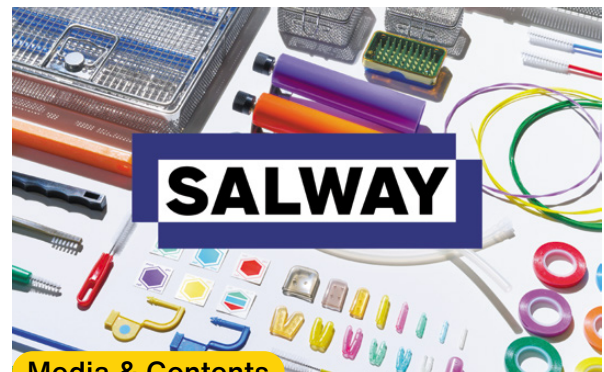
A project designed for aging housing complexes in large cities, where a large influx of population is coming from rural areas. By collaborating with local residents and community organizations, it adopted a simple design approach with minimal investment, transforming abandoned bicycle parking areas into public spaces for the community.



Home Electronics

### PureAura

A mini air purifier designed for tight spaces. It enhances air quality by reducing PM2.5 levels by 80%, meets WHO standards, and runs for 40 hrs on a 10000mAh power bank. Its compact design allows for discreet placement or wall mounting, optimizing space and ensuring effectiveness. It combines affordability with innovative technology to improve urban living conditions.



Media & Contents

### SALWAY

The brand that covers the products for reprocessing of medical devices in medical facilities. Reprocessing is cleaning and sterilization of reusable medical devices, and plays an important role for the safety of medical services. The goal is to lead the current situations of reprocessing operations in Japan to the European standard because Japan is 20 years behind Europe in this field.

# PROPOSAL 4

## Link small challenges under a flexible vision

Climate change, disparity, solitariness, school absenteeism, immigrants – we have increasingly faced problems around us, where we have little information and no idea what to do or what is right. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to define goals and roles, manage the progress of plans, and take action. When design shapes the future, there is a flexible vision to make observations and take action beyond the boundaries of products and services or the public and private sectors, where a small challenge can expand while transforming at times.

MY PROPOSAL

Naoki Ota
Focused Issues Researcher, GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2024

### “Surprise me. But don’t catch me off guard.”

Since 2000, we have been hearing more and more about the term “wicked problems.” A wicked problem refers to a problem that is difficult to build consensus because of complex information. Inequality, climate change, loneliness, immigration, truancy, and many other social challenges are examples of wicked problems.

It has become clear that a tree-like decomposition method known as element reduction does not work well for these challenges. An example of a solution using the element reduction method is increasing sales and reducing cost in order to raise profit margins. This method facilitates setting goals and drafting plans, and is highly reproducible no matter who uses it or where it is used. One characteristic is that, when considering the relationship between profit margins and the number of companies, it forms a normal distribution (a symmetrical bell-shaped distribution centered around the mean) <sup>1</sup>.

But can we solve wicked problems with the same method? For example, how many factors can “loneliness” be classified into? The sense of loneliness widely vary depending on each individual’s way of thinking. In one study, the researcher asked participants to name people who they could count on. When we analyzed the relationship between the number of times people were named and the number of people, it formed a power law distribution (a distribution in which the median and mode are on the left edge of the distribution, in contrast to a normal distribution in which the distribution is symmetrical).

As I went through each of the more than 5,000 entries, the first impression that came to me was the spread of effective solutions for wicked problems. However, I felt that many businesses are proceeding with their projects while experiencing dilemmas as organizations, and local people are accustomed to the element reduction approach. “Surprise me. But don’t catch me off guard.”<sup>2</sup> – This phrase sums up the dilemma succinctly. What approach should we take to effectively address wicked problems? In addition, what challenges will we face in doing so?

### A big event happens by chance

First of all, what is the “first step” in this year’s Focused Issues theme, “A Small Step, Design Leaps”? Let’s have a look at this year’s award-winning works.

The IKEBUKURO LIVING LOOP project aims to transform roads and parks that have not been visited by many locals and visitors into places where people can relax, like living rooms. Local groups began working to restore connections between people and gradually expanded the use of the facilities, resulting in major changes of roads and parks.

The BABAKKAWA URBAN DESIGN PROJECT is also a road-related project. At a meeting of local business owners, a proposal was born to make Babakkawa Street an attractive place where people could interact with the flow of water and nature. More than 30 landowners

surrounding the 200 meter stretch of road agreed to the project, and local residents joined in the effort to create a fun way to spend time on the streets.

Here, I review the two distributions mentioned earlier. A distribution of a wicked problem cannot be described with the idea of average or typical.

If there is an average or certain type, you can assume what users need and address the issue with a customized plan. However, most wicked problems do not go along with an aim and plan based on a rough assumption. The “first step” may or may not be a big hit, but it comes from the energy of a person, or in some cases, a person who wants to make something for themselves. “A big event happens by chance” —this is what we should keep in mind when taking an action on a wicked problem.

### **Major change led by a soft vision**

One of the purposes of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD is to admire the seeds of social change. When we try to grow the seeds of social change, we should be aware of two things: changes do not arise from a group of people who know each other very well, and seeking a correct answer makes business characteristics mediocre. To avoid these two pitfalls, you should be careful with horizontal development. It is natural for many companies to think, “We want to do the same thing,” after seeing an innovative business. They already know the right answer so only need to calculate backwards to determine a plan and proceed systematically. But they can never make a change with this approach when the business is dealing with a wicked problem.

“Imitating just by looking at the outside doesn’t always work,” said Jun Aoki, the director of the IKEBUKURO LIVING LOOP project. Toshima City, where Minami Ikebukuro Park is located, has fewer parks than other areas. Therefore, the road was regarded as a space that could be used for purposes other than transportation. Shin Higeta, producer of the BABAKKAWA URBAN DESIGN PROJECT, said that the reason why people are able to make trial and error in the use of space is “because Gunma has a culture that accepts fluid human interaction.”

When the seeds of change sprout and grow, there are more rules other than the previously mentioned two pitfalls—changes arise from weak ties, and an unexpected future is generated from the penny drops rather than a correct answer.

First, strong connections are characterized by frequent contact and close values. The company and its business partners are typically strong. Weak ties are relationships in which there are relatively few such connections. It has become clear that ideas and information useful for inno-

vation come from weak ties<sup>3</sup>. In the situation of “the penny drops rather than a correct answer,” the general direction gradually becomes clear after you take a first action, and then it takes shape. When you are inexperienced, the penny drops triggered by an action may lead to a big change<sup>4</sup>.

I often hear people say that they understand what others say but cannot do it. To solve this problem, I want to emphasize a soft vision. It is not a goal you can quantify with market research or track with KPIs. It is a story you can tell in a few minutes. This creates connections that cross barriers and serves as a guide for trial and error.

PLUG MAGAZINE is a magazine rooted in Okayama. Surprisingly, the mix of local political and business leaders, opinion leaders, and street youth appears in one book. According to chief editor Yusuke Yamamoto, what is even more wonderful is that these weak ties are shedding light on local preferable alternatives and are creating unexpected regional futures in Okayama.

### **First, change the time and location**

What exactly should we start with? If this is what you think, try changing the time and location. I assume you see many people and visit many places every day. I want you to see them not only as a flow of actions, but as an accumulation of actions. Then you can find the impetus to create innovation.

The world of design, big and small, is getting more and more complicated. In addition, you may often feel that divisions are deepening. What is behind the GOOD DESIGN AWARD is its ability to translate complexity and division into multiple meanings and to bring about innovation in meaning from new connections.

- 1 See Chapter 4 “Creating networks—How people are connected” of Solving the knotty problem together (Edited by Takuo Dome, Goro Yamazaki; Sekaishiso-sha) However, loneliness is not the only theme for the analysis and research in this book.
- 2 Designing With—in Public Organizations: Building Bridges Between Public Sector Innovators and Designers (André Schaminée, BNN, Inc.) systematically and concretely explains the friction and breakthrough between the ideal form of design (thinking) and traditional organizations.
- 3 See “Weak ties trigger innovations” in Chapter 25 ‘Strength of weak ties theory’ of Management Theories of the Global Standard (Akie Iriyama, Diamond, Inc.).
- 4 See “‘The future can be created’ is not foolish” in Chapter 23 ‘Sensemaking Theory’ of Management Theories of the Global Standard (Akie Iriyama, Diamond, Inc.).

*Connect small challenges under a soft vision*

## **Commentary: Background of the proposal and related topics**

Responsibility: Editorial Department

### **What is a wicked problem?**

A wicked problem mentioned in the proposal is a concept that has been attracting attention in various fields in recent years when considering how to solve social issues.

Inequality, climate change, loneliness, immigration, and school truancy—we face a multitude of challenges. Of those, a wicked problem refers to a problem that cannot be clearly formulated or tested for solutions, and which makes it difficult to incorporate possible solutions into planning. The terminology was suggested by Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber in their 1973 paper, “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning.”

According to Rittel and Webber, a wicked problem is at the opposite pole from a tame problem that science deals with. They go so far as to say that most social issues cannot be framed as “tame” and “The search for scientific bases for confronting problems of social policy is bound to fail, because of the nature of these problems.”

Design may be of help in solving these wicked problems. Design researcher Richard Buchanan argues that one way to deal with wicked problems is through design thinking. In the words of philosopher and design researcher Toru Koga, design is not “linear technology that directly affects a cause of a problem,” but is “more concerned with the overall consideration of the context in which technology works and the overall consideration of improving the relationship between humans and technology so that it can serve its original purpose.”

### **Why weak ties matter**

The “weak ties” mentioned in the proposal can be an important way to deal with wicked problems.

Weak ties refer to an acquaintance of an acquaintance or a casual acquaintance. In a 1973 paper titled “The Strength of Weak Ties,” sociologist Mark Granovetter wrote about the concept of the strength of weak ties. According to the paper, “Moderate face-to-face relationships are more likely to provide useful information than close social connections such as family, romantic partners, or close friends.”

It is not those with strong connections—people who are in frequent contact, spend a lot of time with each other, or have similar values—who bring in new ideas, but the people who have weak ties with each other. Try to look at people you meet every day as an accumulation of opportunities rather than just acquaintances. You may find a breakthrough in a tricky problem by doing so.

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Rittel, H.W.J., Webber, M.M.(1973)Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. Policy Sci 4, 155–169.  
Buchanan, R. (1992) Wicked Problems in Design Thinking, Design Issues, 8, pp.5-21.  
Toru Koga, Essential Concepts: wicked problems, Center for Design Fundamentals Research, <https://www.cdf.design.kyushu-u.ac.jp/lexicon/142/> (Ref. 2024-12-18)  
Granovetter, Mark S.(1973)“The Strength of Weak Ties.” American Journal of Sociology, vol. 78, no. 6, pp. 1360–80. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2776392>. Accessed 18 Dec. 2024



# Pickup GOOD DESIGN

## GOOD DESIGN Selected from the Perspective of PROPOSAL 4

Public Facility &  
Civil Structure & Landscape

### IKEBUKURO LIVING LOOP

This is a project aimed at expanding the flow of people and neighborhood communities throughout the area while utilizing the Green Avenue at the east exit of Ikebukuro Station, the gateway to Ikebukuro in Toshima Ward. By reimagining the street as 'the living room of the town,' it has been transformed into a space where communication and challenges emerge through collaboration with local residents and businesses.



Public Facility &  
Civil Structure & Landscape

### BABAOKAWA URBAN DESIGN PROJECT

The project to revitalize the downtown area of Maebashi City with donations from local volunteers, focused on the existence of a waterway. While the postwar urbanization transformed the area into a car-centered town, the waterway that remained in the target area is redefined as an environmental device for the town, and is restored as a safe and comfortable infrastructure.

# INTERVIEW 1

## Collaboration and Co-creation in Design from the Perspective of Plurality

Audrey Tang and Naoki Ota



Naoki Ota, a Focused Issues researcher, presented the proposal “Create a chain of small challenges under a flexible vision” for fiscal 2024. To delve deeper into the concept, he reached out to Audrey Tang, Taiwan’s first Digital Minister, for a dialogue.

### Audrey Tang

Former Digital Minister of Taiwan (Cabinet Minister). Born in Taipei, Taiwan in 1981. At the Tsai Ing-wen administration, at the age of 35, the youngest ever, she was appointed to the Executive Yuan (Cabinet) as Digital Minister, and was responsible for leading open government, social innovation, and youth engagement across departments.

### Unrevised rules are like rituals or myths

**Ota(O):** Today, connecting with each other, we are able to make small changes to rules at any time. And those small changes can lead to big changes. Yet, many people consider following the rules the most important or never imagine possibilities that changes bring.

**Tang(T):** If rules are not revised, they would become something like rituals or myths. It’s like this situation: Everyone there can speak English, so they can communicate in English. But if they don’t know the others speak English, they won’t speak English there unless somebody suggests it.

I think the government is concerned whether changing rules really leads to more people participating in the public sector. Once it is clear that a rule change benefits only a specific group, it’s hard to reverse, especially

if private organizations or groups are in charge of the project. In addition, for many large-scale top-down construction projects, it is often impossible to revise the rules later.

Therefore, I think we should adopt what I call “Free the Future.” It’s about creating an environment where the next generation can act with greater flexibility and mobility. This would make it easier for many public services to change rules.

### The new norm of collaboration in the post-Internet generation

**O:** Based on the trends in the award-winning works, the Focused Issues team of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD in fiscal 2024 has set the theme, “A Small Step, Design Leaps.” The theme reflects a perspective that new designs often start with individual ideas rather than big ideas led by market demand.

**T:** Thanks to the Internet, now individuals with various ideas can connect with stakeholders, much more effectively than in top-down organizations. I mean, the reversal of the organizing principles due to digital technology can be a big contributing factor.

Especially for generations who grew up with the Internet and are familiar with online games like World of Warcraft and Minecraft, collaborating with people far away is an everyday activity. This shift in norms, where sharing values and collaborating with strangers have become common, is as significant as the changes in technology.

When I was young, my parents told me not to ride in a stranger’s car or stay at a stranger’s house, but now Uber and Airbnb are accepted as common services. Everything is organized around this new principle: strangers with shared values co-create something.

## “Plurality,” a thought that transforms conflict into co-creation

**O:** In your book published in 2024, you proposed a vision called “Plurality” (a word meaning “pluralism” and “diversity”).

**T:** The idea of “Plurality” is simple. Basically, I believe conflicts arising from diversity are features, not bugs. Conflict can be turned into co-creation. “Plurality” is an idea for achieving it with digital technology.

One of the key technologies for such co-creation is “Civic Tech.” (Editor’s note: Initiatives and technologies that enable citizens to solve local problems, utilizing digital technology) If this idea spreads, everyone can become a designer to create a better future. In an emergency like a disaster, utilizing technology can help us stay calm, bring together human energy, and come up with solutions. If more and more people gain access to those tools, it will support and enhance diversity.

In recent years, AI has also become increasingly useful as a translation tool. Until now, not so many people may have been able to draw a detailed picture of their vision. I guess most people were better at speaking

or writing about it. But now, generative AI can beautifully turn your vision and ideas into pictures and diagrams. If more people start to use this translation tool in the future, we will be able to build better collaborative relationships across different modalities and cultures.

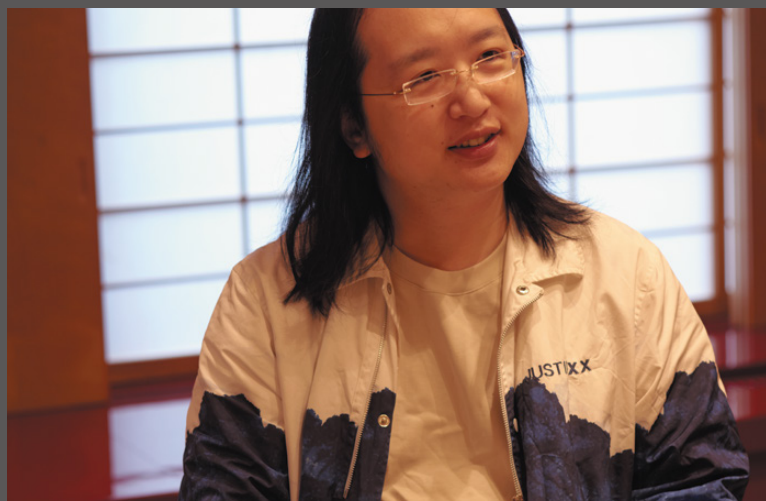
**O:** That’s a highly innovative shift in perspective, addressing not only behavior but also mindset. Earlier, we discussed factors that make diversity challenging, and the idea that “Plurality” can turn conflict into the energy for co-creation is truly remarkable. That said, if we were to intentionally consider the potential side effects or pitfalls associated with co-creation, what might they be?

**T:** Accessibility would be a classic issue. Even if we had a digital democracy platform, it would be meaningless if one-third to half of the population didn’t have access to the necessary devices. In this situation, people are divided into the “co-creative class” and the “non-co-creative class.” That’s why it’s important to always have the perspective that we might be leaving someone behind.

**O:** Your view is really encouraging me, as Japan has clearly been losing ground in many ways. But, what you said makes me believe that we can create the future by turning conflict and challenges into energy.

**T:** I believe that Japan has one of the world’s best capabilities when it comes to fostering relationships between communities. Even in the event of a disaster, no one wants to profit from it. Even the largest corporations cannot survive in Japanese society if they are perceived as selfish.

That’s why Japan aligns well with my idea of “Plurality.” “Plurality” has the potential to be a collaborative force for social cohesion and consensus, ensuring that no one is left behind.



# PROPOSAL 5

## Decolonize the nature-culture-economy ecosystem with inner creativity

There have been numerous thinkers who criticized modern epistemology/ontology, which separates nature and culture, and attempted to integrate them. However, it is rather the separation of culture and economy that is of concern in the business field. Nevertheless, some award-winning works have realized the inseparability of nature, culture, and economy in design, challenging this willful yet naturalized separation. I would like to enhance the collaboration between researchers (especially in the humanities) and businesses to expand these efforts to decolonize the original ecosystem in other domains.

### MY PROPOSAL



**Yutaka Nakamura**

Focused Issues Researcher,  
GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2024

### Creativity is defined arbitrarily

The TOKYO CREATIVE REPORT 2023 by Panoramatik and SIGNING reveals interesting survey results relating to creativity among residents of five cities: Tokyo, New York, London, Paris, and Milan (November 2022). While Tokyo ranked second on the list of the most creative cities, only 22% of Tokyo residents answered “Yes” to the question “Do you consider yourself creative?”

Similarly, in a survey of high school students of Japan, China, South Korea, and U.S., many students answered “No” to the question “Do you think you can change this society using your ability?” For example, the report describes, “83.0% of Japanese high school students answered ‘Strongly agree’ or ‘Agree’ to the description ‘I personally cannot influence the government’s decisions,’ reaching the highest among the four countries”<sup>1</sup>.

Of course, these statistical results cannot be taken literally. Firstly, these answers are influenced by the social and cultural backgrounds of participants. The questionnaire is not open to the public, and thus the exact translation is unknown. However, for example, there are cultural translation discrepancies between the question in Japanese language asking whether you think you are creative and the translated version of the question. Secondly, as mentioned in the TOKYO CREATIVE REPORT, the judgment on what is considered “creative”—that is, what is considered “non-creative”—is left to individual discretion to a great extent.

Perhaps urban dwellers in the developed world consider fancy restaurants, fashion, and art to be creative, and many working designers spend most of their time in similar urban settings. Just like myself. I do not want to criticize that per se, but it is important to note that centering on that aesthetic aspect alone raises the risk of overlooking the creativity generated in the Global South, in non-metropolitan areas, and in rural areas.

### Toward decolonization of design

No matter how wonderful a design or system is, it will become colonialistic when it overlooks and overwrites the indigenous aesthetics that are generated and rooted in the area. In the English-speaking world, discussions on this point are proceeding under the keyword “decolonization of design”<sup>2</sup>. Through this movement attempting to address the issue of power held by design, it has been pointed out that design reflects and at the same time reinforces power disparities between nations, races, ethnicities, classes, and genders.

The word “decolonization” is rarely heard in the Japanese design world. However, this does not mean that problems discussed under this term, such as power disparities, do not exist in the Japanese-speaking world. One example of this year’s efforts to address and overcome these issues was the RESILIENCE PLAYGROUND project by JAKUETS Inc. This playground equipment led by Hiroyuki Tajima is outstanding for the following point: he realized that children with severe disabilities, who were thought to be the most distant from play, were actually playing in

their own ways, and he came up with a way to support their play. Moreover, this project is produced for not only children requiring medical care but for all people to use<sup>3</sup>.

The goodness of social inclusion can be a terrible misstep if it overlooks the intrinsic nature of each individual. Assimilationism is a typical example. However, Tajima's project shows the possibility of creating designs that are neither discriminatory nor assimilatory, by taking inspiration from differences themselves rather than erasing them.

Like JAKUETS, ukihanotakara's Baachan Business (granny business) is a project that focuses on the intrinsic creativity of individuals. While the extremely low birthrate and the aging of society are being discussed as a social issue, the focus of criticism turned to aging and the elderly themselves, and the term "old harm" was coined. Mitsuru Okuma, head of ukihanotakara, affirms. "I dislike the expression 'old harm.'" <sup>4</sup>.

Okuma envisioned his business from the moment he realized the creativity of grandmothers who had helped him in times of crisis. His business was initially criticized, but he says the project is now moving national policy. This is because it is not only the elderly themselves but also all members of society, including young people and the working population, who can be aided by the elderly working vigorously and participating in society<sup>5</sup>.

The success or failure of a project should not be measured only by short-term revenue, which is easier to quantify, Okuma said. This is because, even if their working hours are short, and even if their hourly wages are below the minimum wage, their motivation lies in the universal, natural ecosystem of relationships where their creativity makes people smile and appreciate their efforts. In that regard, Okuma said, it is time to review laws and systems related to employment insurance and wages.

The women farmers japan (wofa), run by Kanako Sato, is another project focused on creativity that is often overlooked in local communities. When Sato was a university student, she was inspired by Sadako Ogata's activities and learned about conflict resolution and assistance to developing countries. She went to Tokamachi City in Niigata Prefecture, which was considered a depopulated settlement, as a volunteer for reconstruction after the Chuetsu Earthquake. But, "There were adults staying down to earth and working on what really mattered. There was no limitation." Sato wanted to become such an adult, so she turned down a job offer at an advertising agency, moved there, and started farming. However, as she experienced marriage and child-rearing, she was no longer able to express herself as she used to, and began to have doubts. "How do women farmers live?"<sup>6</sup>

As Sato listened to the women's stories, she realized that they had the same sense of challenges as women had 20 years earlier. Then, she took time to think about measures with other women. Even casual behavior that men take for granted can be risky for women. It reminds me of the depth of the creativity that leads to concrete initiatives rather than lamenting that.

### **Toward a nature-culture-economy ecosystem**

What these award winning works have in common is that they all recognize intrinsic creativity and work on it while rethinking it. It is also about inner creativity, putting culture at the center and reconnecting it to nature and economics.

Putting nature at the center looks good and nature-friendly, but such a system does not take root among people. On the other hand, if you put the economy at the center, the system will destroy nature and impoverish people, and this too will not last.

Therefore, it is important to put culture at the center. Among the winners that were not mentioned this time, there were several works that had this tendency.

Putting culture at the center means putting humanity at the center while avoiding the arrogance of anthropocentrism. Culture precedes politics, economics, science, and technology, and is generated when people try to continue their life activities collectively. In our busy days, let us listen to the words of poets, the cries of street people, the voices of birds, insects, and plants, and then reconsider the position of our culture. Let's create our nostalgic future by asking what the human condition is.

1. [https://www.niye.go.jp/pdf/210622\\_02.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.niye.go.jp/pdf/210622_02.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)
2. Refer to the following. Tunstall, Elizabeth (dori). 2020. "Decolonizing Design/Innovation: Design Anthropology, Critical Anthropology, and Indigenous Knowledge." In *Design Anthropology*, 232–50. Routledge; Tunstall, Elizabeth (Dori). 2023. *Decolonizing Design: A Cultural Justice Guidebook* (English Edition). MIT Press. Kindle edition.
3. From an interview with Hiroyuki Tajima, November 12, 2024
4. From GOOD DESIGN BEST 100 Presentation
5. From an interview with Mitsuru Okuma, November 17, 2024
6. From an interview with Kanako Sato, November 24, 2024

*Decolonize the nature-culture-economy ecosystem with inner creativity*

## **Commentary: Background of the proposal and related topics**

Responsibility: Editorial Department

### **What is the “decolonization of design”?**

Decolonization, which is an important keyword in this proposal, is a topic whose importance has been recognized and discussed in Japan and abroad in recent years.

European countries have a history of building culture and prosperity on colonization, and their designs have also been shaped by some white men, mainly based on Western values. Reflection on design under these Western-centric values is what “decolonization of design” means.

Decolonizing Design was one of the themes of the 2022 annual design conference “Design Matters” in Copenhagen, Denmark. At the conference, the Netherlands-based type studio Typotheque announced the Syllabics font-family of Canadian indigenous characters and changed the Syllabics font standard to support efforts to restore and preserve indigenous languages in North America.

In addition, a discussion of “decolonization of design” is represented by the book “Designs for a Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds” by the anthropologist Arturo Escobar, whose translation was published in 2024 from BNN, Inc. In this book, Escobar proposes “Transition from ‘one world’ with Western-centric ‘one culture’ to ‘pluralistic world’ with ‘many cultures’.”

This “decolonization of design” is an essential concept for Japanese designers.

### **Region and design**

Local design provides a guideline for the nature-culture-economy ecosystem presented in this proposal.

As mentioned repeatedly in the dialogue (see p. 36) that complements this proposal, the state of vernacular design in regions has been drawing attention in Japan.

For example, in 2022, “Interesting Regions Have Interesting Designers - Region x Design Practice” (Gakugei Shuppansha) edited by Naohiro Niiyama and Daisuke Sakamoto was published. Focusing on the activities of 21 designers who are active in various parts of Japan, they weave their own words from different points of view, such as how they became designers and why they became involved with local communities. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is also working to promote design in local governments by advancing a variety of design policies, including human resource development, matching support, consultation and development support, and market development support. The GOOD DESIGN AWARD is no exception. In recent years, design that contributes to the sustainable development of local communities and the revitalization of the economy has attracted particular attention.

This type of vernacular design can serve as a guideline for social implementation of the nature-culture-economy ecosystem.

# Pickup GOOD DESIGN

## GOOD DESIGN Selected from the Perspective of PROPOSAL 5

### Activity

#### women farmers japan

This agricultural corporation is a group of small farmers. They are applying for a system that crosses both community and business design. Through the cultivation, processing, and sale of sweet potatoes and the operation of a community of women farmers, they are taking on the challenge of supporting the self-reliance of rural women and solving the problems of agriculture.



### Activity

#### baachanshinbun, baachanmeshi

Grandma Business A company where grandmothers over 75 work. Creating purpose and income for grandmothers through work. It aims to extend healthy life expectancy through work and economic activity, contribute to the prevention of nursing care and dementia, and reduce social security costs. Converting the strengths and characteristics of grandmothers into products and services.

# INTERVIEW 2

## Decolonization of Design in the Context of “Pluriverse”

Arturo Escobar and Yutaka Nakamura

Yutaka Nakamura, a Focused Issues Researcher, presented “Decolonizing the nature-culture-economy ecosystem with inner creativity” as his recommendations for FY2024. To further deepen the recommendations, we approached Arturo Escobar, an anthropologist and also the author of “Designs for the Pluriverse”, which was translated into Japanese in 2024 and caused a stir, for a dialogue.



### Why has “Economy” become separated and viewed as special?

**Nakamura(N):** I put forward a proposal in the 2024 GOOD DESIGN AWARD Focused Issues, “Decolonizing the nature-culture-economy ecosystem with inner creativity.” Decolonizing design is a key issue in the proposal—how to move away from structures where design reflects and even reinforces power gaps between nations, races, ethnic groups, classes, and genders. Among this year’s GOOD DESIGN AWARD winners, in particular, RESILIENCE PLAYGROUND PROJECT, baachan business (grandma business), and women farmers japan are trying to reconstruct and integrate in their own way the “culture” and “economy,” which are often divided in the business world.

And the “Pluriverse” described in Designs for the Pluriverse is not limited to the traditional values of Western-centrism, colonialism, and capitalism, but represents an attitude of looking at other worlds that are

also numerous and interconnected. What specific strategies can be used to overcome the challenges of bridging dominant design paradigms with localized and vernacular forms of knowledge?

**Escobar(E):** We should start with how modern behavior, knowledge, and ways of being and doing were defined. Since the invention of the capitalist system, the economy has been rapidly rationalized. At some point in Western history, reality as a whole became fragmented. In other words, it fragmented what should actually be one continuous reality – economy, politics, religion, culture, society, and the individual – as if they were separate.

Modern economists and business models operate on the assumption that the individual is the consumer and that the economy is one and driven by markets. But in a vernacular community, such purpose doesn’t make much sense.

However, there are ways to resist that trend, like these three examples

introduced this time. There are many languages, concepts, and methodologies that allow us to think about the economy from a different perspective, such as ecological economics, the Circular Economy, the Regenerative Economy, Feminist Economics, and social and solidarity economies. One of my favorite studies is by Australian geographer and feminist geographer Katherine Gibson and North American geographer Julie A. Graham. What they did was build a framework for what they call the diverse economy. It is a framework and methodology to understand the economy as made up of capitalist, alternative capitalist, and non-capitalist economic practices. They call it “Post-capitalist Framework” or “Post-capitalist Politics.”

### Can design lead to “Pluriversalizing the economy”?

**N:** Modern corporate society is basically based on the economic view you described, and if you have a more alternative view of the market, like the vernacular economy or ecological economy, it is very difficult to have a



dialogue with a corporate society that is framed in a modernist way.

**E:** That's right. I call what Gibson-Graham were trying to do "Pluriversalizing the economy". I mean, I want to question the ontological naturalness of the modern economy as the only way to understand the economy. I would like to question the fact that Western modern economic understanding is taken for granted as the only possible one, or at least the best one.

**N:** Even though the tide of globalization is interfering with local economies and forcing the whole planet under the umbrella of classical and modern economic views, I think that there is also a possibility, especially for vernacular knowledge, as a form of animism. Latin America, for example, embraces spiritualism with its own sense, and I think it's rooted in their daily lives, their daily routines, their actions and their habits. There are similarities in Japan, which is why the concept of the "Pluriverse" that you propose is easily accepted by those who were born and raised in the country.

**E:** We need to think about what these spiritual worldviews, cosmologies, and ontologies mean today. You can ask theoretical questions, or you can ask questions that lead to practical applications. What would happen to design if we take as a starting point the premise and spiritual worldview that the whole world is alive?

Buen Vivir (Good Living) for these communities should incorporate not only material and economic aspects, but also spiritual, cultural, ecological, mental, ancestral, and community perspectives. This is a cosmic or worldview different from the economic mindset that prevails today. This kind of "Relational Ontology" is observed in various parts of the world.

## Design anthropology paves the way to "decolonization"

**N:** Profitability and efficiency still come first in the business environment. But I think design can provide an alternative for transition. For example, a linguistic approach is only one way to persuade people to change their behavior. But I think that design itself can persuade modern thinkers nonverbally, not just through sight, but also through other senses, to help them actually shape economic alternatives. This is because design contains nonverbal characteristics that take us outside of a logocentric understanding. I suppose design could work directly on habitus, which Pierre Bourdieu once defined as the "unconscious." How do you think relational thinking can be incorporated into the design process to promote economic alternatives?

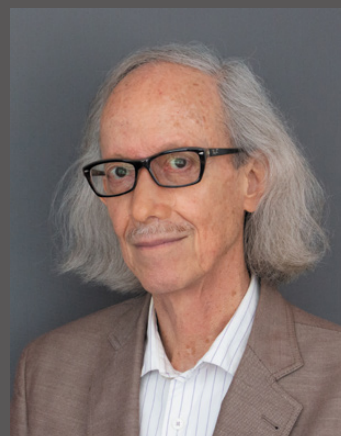
**E:** I think first and foremost that we should have the willingness to rethink the historical and ontological mandates of growth, profit, efficiency, and the individual. Field of alternative economics from a design perspective is growing.

I also think that there is a growing movement to question the fundamental principles of economics. I believe that it is important to think at the regional level and to investigate how by working together local economies can foster larger economies from the bottom up.

**N:** As a last question, can you talk about decolonization efforts? Colonialism has been a problem for many years, and I think that dynamics is probably still going on. Given the criticism toward traditional development models, do you think that design anthropology can contribute to decolonization in the field of design itself?

**E:** I think so. But perhaps the uniqueness of design anthropology lies in its insistence on decolonizing both design and anthropology. Anthropology has not yet been completely decolonized as an academic discipline. Decolonization cannot be accomplished only theoretically, it has to be pursued through engagement in practice. In this sense, design also offers anthropology the possibility to engage in practices that transcend subject-object relationships. The power of design anthropology is not to objectify its subjects.

**N:** Multimodal anthropology, anthropology of response, business anthropology, and multispecies anthropology in recent years seem to be attempts to explore alternative forms of knowledge beyond the Western forms of knowledge, particularly the production of representational knowledge. But as you point out, most of them are still in the academic world. It seems to me that new practices arise when a relationship is created between design and anthropology that goes beyond the superficial fusion of the two and shakes their respective unconscious assumptions and methods.



**Arturo Escobar**

Anthropologist born in Colombia in 1951. Professor Emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (USA), with a concurrent appointment as professor in the doctoral program in Environmental Sciences at Universidad del Valle in Cali, Colombia.

# PROPOSAL 6

## Start by questioning identities

What am I? Since the pandemic has reset values and markets, there must be times when you ask yourself or your company the question mentioned above in every industry. Now that there is no guarantee that the existing markets and established occupations will last forever, small yet courageous innovations can take shape by questioning your own existence value, asking “What am I (are we)?” Design that redefines your own existence, starting by embracing identity crisis, is recommended.

MY PROPOSAL

<b>Aki Hayashi</b>
Focused Issues Researcher, GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2024

These days, we feel that times are complex and uncertain. With the pandemic and the rapid growth of generative AI, many people may have asked themselves this question again. “What on earth do I live for?” “What is the job or activity that I really need to do?”

Companies and organizations are beginning to reconsider their raison d’etre. In 2019, the Business Roundtable, an association of major U.S. corporate executives, reviewed its shareholder first policy and declared stakeholder capitalism that respects the interests of a wide range of stakeholders, including employees and local communities. At the 2020 World Economic Forum in Davos, the concept of “purpose management,” in which companies conduct business based on their raison d’etre, purpose, and mission, spread around the world. A number of Japanese companies were also making efforts to formulate PMVV (Purpose Mission Vision Values) and to disseminate PMVV internally and externally.

“Who we are and what we exist for.” At the beginning of the 2020s, both individuals and companies experienced a shakeup in their identities and reconsidered their raison d’etre. I think that the influence is also manifested in business and design.

### From corporate subject to individual subject

After following the screening process for two years, I felt that applicants had shifted their focus from corporate to individual subject. The total number of stories and narratives with “I” as the subject has increased. This is a trend brought out by the FY 2024 theme “Brave Attitude, Organic Design.” Questions about identity are important for individuals and companies to shift to more substantive activities than before and can be a driving force for innovation and change. I have

came up with such a hypothesis. The process of “positive identity crisis,” in which people seek new possibilities while reexamining or expanding their own raison d’etre, is effective in breaking through the sense of stagnation that surrounds business and society. I examine my hypothesis by reviewing this year’s award winning cases from here.

### **Self-transcendental approach of Toyota’s structural design studio**

Geological Design, a project by structural design studio led by Koichi Daigaku of Toyota Motor Corporation, was selected as one of the top 100 projects. Mr. Daigaku joined the company as an engineer, working on the structural design of automobiles, as well as developing patented technologies and publishing papers on them. Gradually, he began to think about the car as a whole, and his self-perception changed from being an automotive engineer to being a “person who is responsible for manufacturing of cars and items.”

Mr. Daigaku has started a project to reduce the weight and number of parts of automobiles in order to take the environment into consideration. During a tour of a final disposal site for automobiles, he heard that a large amount of the glass was discarded rather than recycled and thought, “we can’t stay like this.” “It’s too late to aim for zero waste when it comes time to dispose of waste. In order to recycle and upcycle everything, we have to manufacture products on the premise of disposal.” By organizing teams inside and outside the company, he is promoting “creation of vehicles and co-workers for the complete recycling of resources.” In addition to economic and technological axes, he redefines manufacturing in terms of the environment. “We have been developing a design to reduce weight without losing performance, like when we train the core while dieting.” Structures designed with this thought are also used in popular models.

Toyota, which manufactures 10 million cars a year, has taken on the challenge of “manufacturing with no parts to discard.” The impact on the industry has been significant, and the collaboration with local arts and crafts has been highly praised.

### **Seeking best natural ingredients throughout Japan and developing more than 100 types of domestic cosmetic ingredients**

The Furusato Genki Project was started by Satoshi Yamazaki, CEO of Saticine Medical Co., Ltd., which develops and manufactures cosmetics by OEM, to develop high-performance cosmetic ingredients from domestic natural ingredients. It has been selected as one of this year's GOOD DESIGN BEST 100.

Over the past 15 years, the company has developed more than 100 kinds of ingredients, including extracts from Tamatsukuri Onsen in Matsue City, Shimane Prefecture, white loquat leaves, and genboku green tea extract, and has shipped more than 27 million blended products annually. They also share the stories of local producers to help revitalize local communities.

At the beginning of the project, there was a clear division of labor between the developer and the raw material manufacturer, and it is unusual for the developer to handle raw materials as well. As a result of this project, the company experienced the adversity of cutting off the supply of raw materials from raw material manufacturers who accused the company of invading non-aggression territory. “There were several years when I felt alone,” says Mr. Yamazaki.

What supported Saticine Medical in such tough circumstances was the corporate philosophy of “providing optimal beauty to as many women as possible” and the self-awareness of being a technical group that heals and solves skin problems. The expansion of demand for domestic safe and reliable materials, transparency, and traceability led to the company's growth. The company has broken new ground by taking a step forward with a vision that goes beyond that of original equipment manufacturers of cosmetics.

### **PLUG is a social movement that transcends magazines**

The GOOD DESIGN GOLD AWARD winner PLUG Magazine originated in Okayama Prefecture. Each issue prints 50,000 copies and literally connects local youth and leaders, fashion, and culture with the world of politics, administration, and business through the management of events and awards, creating new possibilities.

It has been 20 years since the first issue of the magazine was launched, in 2004. Led by the Chief Editor, Yusuke Yamamoto, who had no previous editing experience, the magazine was started by 5 volunteers who were former high school mates. The cover of the first issue was a photo of the then mayor of Okayama riding a Vespa on the main street in a black suit and a hat styled in homage to Yusaku Matsuda. “I believe in the strength of physical things. I want to make real things that will last through the ages.” While stimulating

local consumption, the company collected up to 60 million yen worth of advertisement charge per issue. While many magazines are facing the fate of discontinuation or suspension, this magazine aims to create a social movement that transcends media and pursues social significance while also establishing itself as a magazine business.

Mr. Yamamoto thinks himself to be an activist, not an editor. “I am a peaceful activist who loves clothes. Our mission is to discover and deliver new value in the Okayama region.”

### **Canon's evolving identity and design for value creation**

In FY 2024, the Canon Group received 12 GOOD DESIGN AWARDS, of which 5 were selected as the BEST 100. The nanoimprint lithography equipment FPA -1200NZ 2C and the semiconductor and electronic component manufacturing equipment series Adastra received the GOLD AWARD and were highly evaluated. We interviewed Yoshifumi Ishikawa, Director of the Canon Design Center.

Canon has expanded its business domain from business-to-consumer products such as cameras to business-to-business products such as semiconductor manufacturing systems and medical equipment. In the process of expanding and redefining Canon's evolving identity, design that depicts and shapes the future has become a driving force for increasing corporate value.

According to Mr. Ishikawa, design not only enhances aesthetics, but also reduces the burden on users and plays an important role in improving efficiency and motivation. It also has the effect of visually conveying the company's contribution to society and industry as well as its corporate stance. In the semiconductor manufacturing equipment, movement of the persons in clean suits is observed, and a contrivance is devised to reduce the burden on the site.

Adastra is a product of Canon Anelva, which joined the group in an M&A deal. Design played an important role in the corporate integration, starting with the unification of business cards and corporate identity. “Adastra, developed in cooperation and respecting each other's cultures and strengths, is a design that combines the industrial design Canon has cultivated over many years with a new perspective gained through M&A.” Mr. Ishikawa said. It became a symbol of corporate integration and new value creation through design.

### **The first step in redefining self-awareness**

What these companies have in common is that they ask the question “Who are we?,” and as a result, they choose to take a step forward and challenge themselves.

Through actively doubting and questioning identity, we are seeing the possibility of new design and value creation more and more clearly. I hope that this will be an opportunity for anyone to freely redefine their identity and embark on a new path, without being bound by their past perceptions of themselves and others.

*Start by questioning identities*

## **Commentary: Background of the proposal and related topics**

Responsibility: Editorial Department

### **From “shareholder first” to “stakeholder capitalism”**

As mentioned at the beginning of this proposal, there is a movement to review the shareholder first management policy that has long been part of the code of conduct for U.S. companies.

The shareholder-first principle is the idea that corporate management should act to maximize benefits of shareholders. In response, in 2019, the Business Roundtable, an organization of top U.S. corporate executives, declared “stakeholder capitalism,” the idea that companies should benefit all stakeholders who influence their activities.

One of the reasons for announcing a review of the shareholder first policy is the growing demand for companies to expand their responsibilities towards addressing serious disparities. “As the inequality between rich and poor widens in the United States, a focus on all stakeholders leads to a healthier economy,” said Jamie Dimon, chairperson and CEO of JPMorgan Chase & Co.

Behind this proposal is a shift in the values of the global business community. Such a change in values is an essential precondition in order to exercise a “positive identity crisis.”

### **Reconstructing corporate identity**

One of the most popular ways for companies to practice an “active identity crisis” is to reformulate their corporate identity.

At the GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2024, several works were highly evaluated in recognition of reformulation of their corporate identity. Even large, old companies are increasingly being asked to redefine their corporate identity amid changes in values and the external environment.

It is not just about reinventing a logo or renewing mission vision values. Mr. Yuki Anzai, a researcher on methodologies to enhance creativity of people and organizations, argues that a project to renew corporate identity will fail if it is promoted simply as a project to renew the image superficially. On the other hand, if a project is promoted with the awareness that corporate identity is the heart of an organization, it can become an organizational development project with a high ROI that reforms the foundation of corporate innovation.

In this way, it can be said that rethinking corporate identity beyond the superficial is an important approach to the “positive identity crisis” described in this proposal.

Reference:  
Yuki Anzai, Nine Pitfalls in *Renewing Corporate Identity*, CULTIBASE, <https://www.cultibase.jp/articles/550> (Reference 2024-12-18)

# Pickup GOOD DESIGN

## GOOD DESIGN Selected from the Perspective of PROPOSAL 6



### Activity

## Geological Design

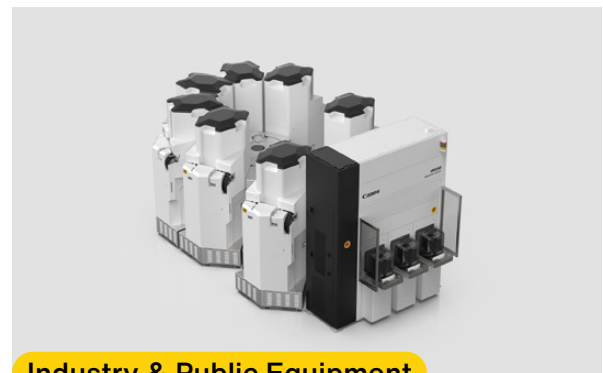
This aims for a completely circular approach to manufacturing, with no waste produced. It promotes both 'car manufacturing' and 'community building.' In car manufacturing, the focus is on further weight reduction with the goal of cutting down on waste and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. For community building, the initiative works beyond industry boundaries, collaborating with traditional crafts, art, and local communities to expand its network.



### Health & Beauty

## Furusato Genki Project

In this project, they visit producers all over Japan who use specialized farming and fishing methods, and develop highly functional cosmetic ingredients from superior domestic natural materials. By promoting cosmetics that use these ingredients, they aim to get consumers interested in the ingredients and the region, which will lead to regional revitalization.



### Industry & Public Equipment

## Adastra

A semiconductor manufacturing system that realizes nano-level thin film coating technology in a "Space/Energy saving", which demands both productivity and environmental friendliness. It will contribute to the semiconductor industry by supporting various film materials, along with reducing physical and learning load through redesigned workflow.

# INTERVIEW 3

## Design as “the formalization of tacit knowledge” in order to boost innovation

Akie Iriyama and Aki Hayashi



Aki Hayashi, a Focused Issues Researcher, made the proposal “Start by questioning identity” as a 2024 proposal for future design. It was Akie Iriyama, a professor at Waseda Business School (Graduate School of Business and Finance) and a management scholar, that Hayashi asked to talk with her in order to deepen the proposal further.

### Akie Iriyama

Professor at Waseda University Business School (Graduate School of Business and Finance). Specializing in business administration, he has published numerous papers in leading international academic journals on management. His books, *The World's Most Advanced Management Studies You Can't Learn in Business School* and *World-Class Management Theories*, have become bestsellers.

### Have Japanese companies really become unable to create innovation?

**Hayashi(H):** I think we've been hearing for a long time that Japanese companies have become unable to create innovation. However, since being involved with the GOOD DESIGN AWARD, I've seen the power of design behind some examples which give hints of a breakthrough. For example, Canon, which received 12 GOOD DESIGN AWARDS as a group and two GOLD AWARDS with its Semiconductor Production Equipment in 2024, and Panasonic's LAMDASH PALM IN Shaver (hereinafter, “Lamdash”), which received a GOLD AWARD in 2023, are good examples.

**Iriyama(I):** I've got LAMDASH with me today!

**H:** Oh, really?!

**I:** I use it daily, and I feel that it's really great. It was my best purchase in the past two years. I don't have time these days, so most of my trips are by

taxi. If the driver is a man, I ask permission and then shave in the taxi. At times like this, LAMDASH is compact, easy to carry around, stylish, and has five blades so you can shave without problems. I've been using it regularly for two years, ever since I thought that it was a good item.

**H:** I heard that one of the designers working directly on LAMDASH was the initiator and turned it into a commercial product while convincing the company. The success of LAMDASH brought greater recognition of the power of design, and I think it also served as a catalyst for corporate change.

**I:** This is totally “innovation,” isn't it? However, rather than there being a technical invention, the point was the redesign of the joint mechanism. Also, I personally like the fact that they bit the bullet and made the connector format USB Type-C. There's nothing more wasteful than buying disposable batteries, so I think it's also revolutionary in that respect.

**H:** I also heard that design plays an important role in the process of

integrating companies purchased through mergers and acquisitions at Canon, a group I mentioned earlier. I feel that the role of design in Japanese companies' efforts to innovate and transform themselves is an important one.

### Design is the ultimate “formalization of tacit knowledge”

**I:** I understand design as “the formalization of tacit knowledge.” This idea comes from the “SECI Model” put forward by Ikujiro Nonaka, a professor in Hitotsubashi University's graduate school.

**H:** This is a model used as a basic theory of knowledge management in the broad sense, isn't it? It's a framework that converts tacit knowledge, such as the knowledge and experience possessed by individuals, into formal knowledge, which is then shared and managed by the entire organization and combined to create new knowledge.

**I:** That's right. If the various senses in the human mind are represented as

an iceberg, most of the visible parts are explicit knowledge. Below the waterline lie many unspoken and unformed parts: in other words, tacit knowledge lies dormant.

In that sense, I think of design as the ultimate formalization of tacit knowledge. No matter how much you may think inside your head “I wish there were something like this,” it remains just a feeling. So it’s design which embodies something that has never been done before.

However, many Japanese companies are struggling to formalize tacit knowledge. To begin with, they no longer know what they want to do. This is probably why design thinking, a method of identifying business problems from the user’s point of view and coming up with solutions, attracted attention for a while.

**H:** Was LAMDASH, for example, a kind of tacit knowledge given a form?

**I:** I don’t know how the designer actually came up with the proposal, but I think there was an initial idea along the lines of “Wouldn’t it be good not to have a handle? Isn’t this fine as it is?” I think the words used to describe design always come out after tacit knowledge becomes formal knowledge.

Design in the business-to-business domain, where innovation is expected  
Hayashi: I have some GOOD DESIGN AWARD winning designs on which I would like you to make a few comments. For example, in 2023 Toyota’s new Prius was a candidate for the



GRAND PRIZE, and some of award-winning works were related to automobiles. However, in 2024, one of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD BEST 100 was “Geological Design,” a car-making process aimed at achieving a complete recycling of resources. They had apparently been working on it for about 10 years. I felt that these changing trends should be closely watched when predicting the future of the industry.

**I:** It’s a great idea, isn’t it? In particular, the fact that they had been working on it for 10 years was wonderful, so I wish they could have won it 10 years ago... Recycling is now becoming the norm in the clothing world. I hope there will soon be designs that make cars entirely out of organic materials.

**H:** Incidentally, this year’s GRAND AWARD went to the “RESILIENCE PLAYGROUND Project,” which developed “play equipment on which anyone can play regardless of disability,” cutting across the fields of medicine and play equipment. At first, it was a project started by young employees on a small budget.

**I:** Universal play equipment that allows able-bodied children to play together with disabled children is great, isn’t it! Personally, I would like them to make play equipment on which adults can also play to the full going forward. I think that the only play equipment with which adults have the opportunity to come in contact in parks at the moment is equipment which are used for health purposes, such as one from which elderly people can hang down. Parks are places which are open to a wide range of people, not only children but also adults. I think it would be good to have a worldview in which adults, too, can play.

**H:** Or take the GOLD AWARD winning semiconductor manufacturing equipment “Adastra.” Canon Anelva, which won the award, was



originally a subsidiary of NEC, but entered the Canon group through a merger and acquisition. From then on, it inherited Canon’s DNA, including in terms of design. In fact, I’ve heard that the integration process started with creating the business card design. This is an example of design playing a major role in the semiconductor sector, which is expected to grow in Japan.

**I:** In the coming years, the age of the Internet of Things will accelerate further, and objects and the digital will merge. As a result, innovations will occur one after another in domains such as factories, distribution, and medical care, in which physical limitations have been difficult to overcome until now.

**H:** One of the 2024 GOOD DESIGN AWARD winners which gave a hint of this was the Swap Refrigerated Van Body refrigeration truck, in which the driver’s cab and the cargo bed can be separated. Pre-cooling the cargo bed and loading and unloading frozen cargo can be done in advance in the warehouse, allowing drivers to focus their working hours on driving duties, thereby ameliorating long working hours and contributing to improved transportation efficiency.

Or take the GOLD AWARD winning Rapyuta ASRS automated storage and retrieval system. It is anchorless and can be assembled like blocks, making it possible to install automated storage and retrieval in existing warehouses without stopping operations.

# PROCESS

## Six Proposals in the Making

We have presented the six Proposals in the previous pages. These proposals were written through a number of discussions and hearings over 6 months, concurrently with the screening process of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2024. This section provides background information on the activities of the Focused Issues Team up to the creation of the six proposals.



GOOD DESIGN AWARD	2024	Focused Issues
Application Period	April	
	May	
1st Screening	June	Form the team
2nd Screening BEST 100 Special Screening	July	Observe and discuss screening entries in a cross-sectional manner
	August	
	September	
Award Announcement	October	Determine the theme for proposals
	November	Review and discuss proposals
	December	Prepare proposals through interviews with award winners and external experts
	January	
	February	Present proposals



# A Small Step You Can Take From Today

There are various ways to practice “A Small Step, Design Leaps.”  
Might I suggest you take a step in your own backyard to indulge your inspiration?

	You can listen to the voice within as well as considering marketability and sociability.
	You can think from an individual perspective as well as a corporate perspective.
	You can start with your strengths and interests.
	You do not have to separate objects and concepts in design.
	You can challenge conventional commonsense or what is considered normal.
	You do not have to be tied to the type of business you have.
	You can go forward if you have a single reason to try even when there are countless reasons not to.
	Even the smallest step can be a starting point to significantly change society.
	Your vision does not have to be inflexible. Try creating a flexible vision.
	If you stop planning or managing progress, the way you take action may change.
	You can charge ahead on your own.
	You can tactfully involve people around you.
	Even if those around you challenge you, try reaching out the wider society.
	It might be interesting to actively get involved before criticizing or nitpicking people or products that have taken a step.
	Listen to the voices of animals and plants as well as those of humans.
	Inclusive design is not just for humans.
	Try considering nature, culture, and economy without distinguishing between them.

# DISCUSSION

Now, as an opportunity to question our aesthetics.  
Use of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD from now on



## Accelerating fusion of product design and concept design

**The GOOD DESIGN AWARD 2024 was held under the theme of “Brave Attitude, Organic Design.” Did you notice any sign of change while the three of you looked at the winning designs as Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and Focused Issues Director?**

**Saito(S):** In relation to “A Small Step, Design Leaps,” which was set as the theme for the 2024 Focused Issues, I feel that we have entered a phase that goes one step beyond “Problem Solving.” In recent years, there have been an increasing number of initiatives in Japan, often referred to as an advanced country with many chal-

lenges, with the mission of pinpointing solutions to issues such as the declining birthrate, aging population, and declining working population. Of course, this movement is necessary. But I think this year, rather than simply starting with problem solving, there have been an increased number of initiatives in which changes are made starting from an individual perspective with energy, followed by spreading that energy to the team.

Also, as I have felt over the past few years, the gap between product design and concept design has been narrowing. Objects are surrounded by ideas, and ideas are surrounded by objects. We are no longer in the period that these two are recognized

separately. Thus, many award winning works had the boundary between these two fading away.

**Kuramoto(K):** In contrast to the traditional forecast approach to product and project development, in which existing elemental technologies and human resources are utilized to modify products, a backcast approach to product development for change in the future society is now required. For example, when we change the model of a certain product, we have no choice but to consider what kind of future the change will lead to, or more specifically, what kind of mission we should have—I heard such comments from some of the award winners. I think

this is precisely why “product design” and “concept design” are becoming mutually integrated. I feel that the GOOD DESIGN AWARD is becoming a place where we can become aware of future society. For instance, it now can be an opportunity for an ordinary engineer comes to have a socially active or managerial perspective.

**Nagayama(N):** Not only the product itself, but also its backstory is being examined. For example, the grand prize-winning RESILIENCE PLAYGROUND Project (see p. 11) has a backstory that resonates with many people: “We want to remove barriers in society that prevent people from playing even though they want to.” I feel that the winners commonly understand the importance of carefully conveying such background.

### How to involve a prominent jump

***In light of these changes in the number of entries and winners, are there any issues that the GOOD DESIGN AWARD should address in the future?***

**S:** In the future, I think we need to make the GOOD DESIGN AWARD a place where we can fulfil new expectations and provide new usages of the award.

Listening to Mr. Kuramoto and Mr. Nagayama, I realized that the role of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD and how it is used by applicants are changing with the times. The predecessor of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD started as a certification system, then became an award, and now it is becoming more than an award.

Award winners often tell me that it is difficult to set KPIs for design, and it is difficult to judge whether a design is good or bad simply by sales, market share, or production costs. The GOOD DESIGN AWARD is one of the objective evaluation axes. In addition, as Mr. Kuramoto mentioned earlier, it is an opportunity to discuss

and sort out what contribution we should make not only to the company but also to society in light of the theme of the year.

**K:** By clearly pointing out the way of design that the GOOD DESIGN AWARD evaluates, combined with the fact that the field of design is more and more expanding these days, an increasing number of people, not only professional designers, can practice design.

However, on the other hand, the potential of design has weakened a little by becoming overly methodical. Among the entries and award winning works, the number of well-balanced and wonderful works is increasing. But the number of award winning works that break through and open up a new world is decreasing. For example, compared to the times when the entertainment robot Aibo first came out, we have fewer opportunities to see entries and winners that have outstanding novelty in terms of planning and story as well as a very high level of product design perfection.

Perhaps we have a social network environment now in which we can send out our own information, and we no longer feel the need to apply for the GOOD DESIGN AWARD.

**N:** That’s a really difficult point. It is a good thing that an increased number of people are now aware of what is appreciated. But, because the trend within winning titles has set in a similar direction, role-model type entries increased, and thus we see fewer entries and winners that surprise people with big jumps.

From now on, the challenge for us will be how to increase the number of entries with outstanding originality that can lead to the advancement of design itself, even if they do not meet some of the required elements.

### Continuing to expand the scope of design

***Bearing in mind the future challenges discussed here, what is your message for the design industry and society as a whole in 2025?***

**S:** It is true that the GOOD DESIGN AWARD has entered a mature stage. There may be an increasing number of cases with outstanding designs that people avoid applying, because they are difficult to be evaluated within the framework of a theme and thus are unlikely to be awarded.

However, the strength of the GOOD DESIGN AWARD lies in the continued effort to broaden the scope of design. The direction of the current winners is not fixed at all, and we keep changing the evaluation criteria through many discussions every year. I will be happy if you apply even if your entry doesn’t necessarily match the direction of the theme. As I mentioned earlier, just organizing your efforts through the eye of design would be a good reason to use this award.

**K:** It’s a very good thing that more people understand the knowledge of design. That’s why we can take a step further and say that what design originally asked is aesthetics. I hope you will use the GOOD DESIGN AWARD as an opportunity to broaden your thinking not only from an artistic point of view, but also from a moral and social sense of beauty, and to deepen your understanding of what is required today.

**N:** Aesthetics is a very good word. Of course, aesthetics change little by little with the times. I think it’s interesting that the GOOD DESIGN AWARD reveals the cross-section of values for which we can say, “This is a good idea,” for each year. I sincerely hope that more works created under the aesthetics of “this is what we value now” will be entered in the future. In the end, from the aspect of design, I think it will lead to energizing society as a whole.

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