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The 'Elephant and Castle' statue outside the Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre, photographed in 2007. CC-BY-2.0.

Invited to contribute a short piece of writing to this volume concerned with art in public spaces, I would like to put the D word on the table: *design.* At moments, it can be difficult, and seemingly pointless, to spend time and energy trudging through what graphic designer Michael Rock refers to as those 'murky territories that exist between design and art.'[01] However, in the context of a discussion about practices that intervene in public life (or not), I would like to speculate on how a more open discussion of this distinction might be productive.

In 1992, design scholar Richard Buchanan argued that design was on the verge of becoming something new: 'We have seen design grow from a *trade activity* to a *segmented profession* to a *field for technical research* and what we do now should be recognized as a new *liberal art of technological culture.*'[02] Buchanan expressed an exciting ambition on behalf of a rapidly changing field but through his aspiration for design to transcend its origins, he also implicitly demonstrated an anxiety that its status as a vocation subordinates it to other creative or intellectual practices. In a recent issue of *frieze* magazine, design writer Alice Rawsthorn argues that it can be damaging to think of design in this way: 'Design is not inferior to art, just different.'[03]

Design practice is historically more commercially driven than fine art practice and, generally speaking, it remains true today that designers are more often employed by corporations or clients and more often make objects that are produced at an industrial scale and distributed and valued by a broader marketplace than artists. The image on the wall of a museum is conventionally understood as art while the image on a cereal box in your kitchen cupboard is considered to be design. From the Frankfurt School to the Actor-Network Theorists, more than five decades of cultural studies teach us, of course, that it is just as important to attend critically to kitchen cupboards as it is to museums. However, the power that has been derived from this turn has nourished how we interpret designed objects far more often than our approaches to actually doing design. For many practicing designers, the perception of a hierarchal relationship between design and art continues to weigh.

When we export this discussion to the context of public space however, such distinctions between design and art take on a different significance. Not withstanding the copious, and important, baggage that comes with any attempt to say something meaningful about the idea of the public, particularly in the singular, here I will refer to public space in the

less theorised way it is approached by local government officials, as common spaces such as streets and parks.[04] In this context, designers, in close alignment with the mainstream economy and its associated institutions, shape everything from buildings and gardens to maps, signage, street furniture, advertisements, and clothing. Whether in the form of murals, sculptures, installations, performances or street art, art on the other hand more often seeks to somehow intervene in this established landscape.

Art and design are both invested in the power of making in different ways, and in public space where broader politics are played out, designers and artists face distinct but overlapping struggles. This collection is formulated around questions about the promise and impact of public art, with its editor citing, 'a healthy skepticism of public art's potential to affect social change or enable resistance.' One of the questions on the table about art is how an agenda of social change yields meaningful outcomes when underpinned by such a complicated, and arguably marginal, economy of production and value. Designers, in general, are also motivated by a desire to improve the conditions in which humanity develops, and in this regard are granted wide influence, but at the same time are deeply constrained, by the will of the marketplace at

large. The question of how we perceive and project our understanding of the differences between these two operating positions is important to the future of public space as well as both art and design.

Consider developments such as *Artworks Elephant*, a 'pop-up' environment made out of shipping containers installed temporarily on the former site of the Heygate Estate in Elephant and Castle near Central London.[05] The demolition of the Heygate saw the displacement of more than a thousand tenants of social housing to outer London and beyond in order to set aside land for intensified privately led regeneration with extensive plans for mainly high-end residences for private sale. *Artworks Elephant* is described by its developers as an incubator and offers studio and retail space for start-up and independent designers and other creative businesses. Bloggers and activist groups, representing the views of the displaced residents, have spoken out specifically against what they articulate as a 'has the word "art" in it so it must be good for you' presumption that underlies the project. Indeed, in recent years geographers have become increasingly critical of art as an agent of gentrification.[06]

In labeling *Artworks Elephant* as 'art' the developers are of course claiming an alignment between the profit potential and political ambitions of the broader regeneration scheme and those of a segment of culture celebrated not only for its creativity, but also for its autonomy (even if not always entirely deservedly.) The types of activities supported by Artworks Elephant, are more accurately described as 'design' because they directly service the ambition on the part of developers and local government for Elephant and Castle to become a more efficient engine of economic growth. Both art and design are injured by this conflation. For artists, what's at risk is the perpetuation of a rather passive and impotent understanding of artistic practice and a vulnerability to misinterpretation of intention and impact. For designers, the conflation detracts from the potential to increase the agency and socio-political impact, which requires first and foremost that designers reflect, analyse and value their own position and relationship to markets and institutions.

01   Michael Rock, 'Designer as Author,' in *Multiple Signatures: On Designers, Authors, Readers and Users* (New York: Rissoli, 2013), 45–56.

02   Richard Buchanan, 'Wicked Problems in Design Thinking,' in *Design Issues,* 8(2), 5 1992.

03   Alice Rawsthorn, 'By Design: The Difference Between Disciplines,' in *frieze*, no. 164 (June July August 2014), available at:
http://frieze.com/issue/article/by-design/. Last accessed 25 August 2015.

04   For example, see any number of local government 'Public Realm Strategies,' such as the London Borough of Hackney's, available at:
http://www.hackney.gov.uk/Assets/Documents/Public_Realm_Strategy_A4_27-47.pdf. Last accessed 25 August 2015.

05   Official presentations of *Artworks Elephant* are available on the organisation's own website, available at:
http://www.theartworks-uk.com; and on the Lend Lease and Southwark Council's website, available at:
http://www.elephantandcastle-lendlease.com/meanwhile-uses/artworks-elephant.
For critical reactions to the project, see Dan Hancox, 'Fuck Your Pop-Up Shops,' available at:
http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/shipping-container-elephant-park-dan-hancox; and Paul Coleman,
'Walworth's Little Boxes: Deal or No Deal,' available at:
http://paulcolemanslondon.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/the-artworks-elephant-my-space-pod.html. Links last accessed 25 August 2015.

06   For example, see Andrew Harris, 'Art and Gentrification: Pursuing the Urban Pastoral in Hoxton, London' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37(2), 226–241 2012.