The Nature of Design Thinking

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ABSTRACT:
In the last few years, 'Design Thinking' has gained popularity - it is now seen as an exciting new paradigm for dealing with problems in sectors as a far afield as IT, Business, Education and Medicine. This potential success challenges the design research community to provide clear and unambiguous answers to two key questions: 'What is the nature of design thinking?' and 'What could it bring to other professions?'. In this paper we sketch a provisional answer to these questions by first considering the reasoning pattern behind design thinking, and then enriching this picture by linking in key concepts from models of design activity and design thinking that have emerged over the last twenty years of design research.

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On your next design project, think of what you are doing as a dialectic. Define and refine your thesis (concept). Then build a prototype, thinking of it an antithesis of the thesis. Not because it is the opposite, but because it is a reflection in the real world of what was in your head. The antithesis will teach you about the pieces you left out, or the pieces that don’t work the way you thought they would. Next, create a synthesis, which you can then proceed to refine similarly. This kind of overview thinking about the nature of design — that it is iterative, progresses from abstract to concrete — challenges the design research community to provide clear and unambiguous answers to two key questions: "What is the nature of design thinking?" and "What could it bring to other professions?". In this paper we sketch a provisional answer to these questions by first considering the reasoning pattern behind design thinking, and then enriching this picture by linking in key concepts from models of design activity and design thinking that have emerged over the last twenty years of design research. When I apply this way of thinking to interaction design, it offers an interesting view on our current state of web design and web technology: it’s technology because it’s still buggy and its natural tendency is towards seamless integration into our lives. So it’s only natural that it wants to become more mobile, simpler, easier to use, more responsive to and aware of our needs and disappear into the background of our lives. More interesting thoughts arise from comparing nature and technology. When you think about it for a moment, the idea of nature itself becomes relative. More and more what we call nature is actually a simulation of nature. An increasing number of cultivated areas are created to look like real nature.