

Preface – Roundtable Discussion – (Summary)

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Amid the global pandemic, the evolution of the internet environment has gathered significant speed, creating ever more opportunities to watch videos made by others, and to release, share and, when necessary, immediately translate excellent posts, reports or even academic papers written anywhere around the world, giving us easy access to knowledge and diverse forms of expression. Even with complex issues relating to the environment, energy, international conflicts or the coronavirus pandemic, to name a few examples, through the internet we can exchange views and deepen our mutual understanding, thereby spreading sound reasoning in a global context. Stated another way, it seems that the world, which used to speak only in terms of “I,” today is coming to speak in terms of “we.” Many people are beginning to realize that we are doomed to go nowhere unless we think in terms of “we,” transcending generations as well as peer connections. This is surely where the world is headed in the post-pandemic future. At the same time, however, though we seem to be interconnected through the internet, in reality no one is looking out for us, and we are all becoming more isolated than before, which is a major problem, too.

The Japanese Government, even in dealing with something as scientific as the coronavirus pandemic, tends to give short shrift to the opinions of experts. Several years ago, when the emblem of the Tokyo Olympics was chosen, the design industry became embroiled in the controversy, with the result that society as a whole now pays extremely little heed to the specialized nature of design. Also, although compared to 10 or 20 years ago it seems that today more people, and particularly the younger generations, recognize the importance of design and show interest in it, when it comes to knowing what design is all about, there is still a complete lack of understanding. Some design – advertising, for example – is aimed at attracting notice, while other design is meant to perform an inherent function when needed but normally blends inconspicuously into the fabric of everyday life. The latter type of design is generally not thought of as design – and herein lies a profound problem. What JAGDA needs to do is to indicate to the world, in clearly recognizable ways, how design functions within society, and what will be possible and be guaranteed when the services of a professional designer are engaged.

One conceivable way of doing that would be to hold exhibitions that enable design’s special nature to be expressed in a common venue. As an example, holding a large exhibition, at a public space such as an art gallery, on the theme of “identification,” having 40 or so VI designs created in the past by JAGDA members displayed all together, each on a substantial scale. By showing what constitutes “visual identification” and inducing people to think VI is something that can be created only by a professional designer, people’s awareness would likely change. Another conceivable way would be to create content integrating displayed graphics with videos of the designers explaining their works, and to share this content over the internet, etc. If such things were recognized and used as outstanding references by local governments and the like, for which there are few successful cases, this should lead to nurturing the values inherent to each region.

In recent times we hear a great deal about the corporate need to put into words such concepts as their “purpose,” “mission,” “vision” and “values,” as exemplified by use of the term “purpose brand-

ing.” In reality, however, many companies have only a vague definition of their business philosophy, and resultingly their logomarks are vague as well. It’s by putting a philosophy into clear words and visualizing it that a clearly defined world is created and strengthened. In order to put our graphic skills to use, at times we need to think retroactively and consider a company’s philosophy or organizational approach, and then think about how to frame it graphically. It’s important to do a solid job on what we have been hired for, but we should ponder what the client’s business philosophy is and, sometimes, offer our opinion or advice and, after refining the message, create a symbol that reflects the meaning for the company, to achieve the optimal design. It is a broad scope such as this that constitutes the graphic design of today.

In the past several years, JAGDA has been undertaking new activities and strengthened its voice as an organization. For example, this year the organization’s name is being changed from the Japan Graphic Designers Association to the Japan Graphic Design Association; bodies are being increased within the organization to consider new issues relating to regions, education and the like; and we are making frequent approaches to local government bodies and other hosts of competitions thought to be improper. Last autumn, we conducted a questionnaire survey of JAGDA members that yielded rather shocking results. Seventy percent of respondents said their work volume had decreased under the pandemic. Forty-four percent said their annual income was less than 5 million yen, while 16% earned under 3 million yen. Although the number of members surveyed was 500 – about 15% of JAGDA’s full membership – the results indicate that many members are facing harsh realities. JAGDA, as a “public interest incorporated association,” needs to carry out activities based on a firm grasp of this situation. For example, one objective is to revise design fee standards, and we will exchange views, together with clients and designers, as to what thinking should be behind the setting of design fees in the first place. Also, management capability is needed to prevent designers from being disposable, and we will organize course programs and the like on a regular basis and create various settings in which members can learn from each other. In addition, JAGDA might possibly assist in providing matching services to SMEs that recognize the importance of design but don’t know how to search for a designer. There should still be quite a few things that JAGDA, as an organization, can do.

Opinions also vary concerning the number of members, but it is better for membership to be of a certain volume from the standpoints of offering up views to society and securing funds to carry out the organization’s activities. At the same time, one of the attractions of JAGDA is the influence it wields, and this could possibly diminish if the number of members were to increase beyond reason. However, if, as a result of the organization’s name change, outstanding individuals involved in graphic design who until now have hesitated to join were to become members, as membership expands we believe that the organization’s influence would actually strengthen. For example, if product designers and people involved with the internet who have a sense for graphic design were to join JAGDA, numerous occasions could be created where members could elevate each other based around graphic design, such as through lectures or symposiums. Today such occasions are surprisingly missing. By a stroke of good timing perhaps, Ryoji Tanaka’s winning of this year’s Yusaku Kamekura Design Award may be seen as symbolic of changing times in which graphic design and the digital world have grown closer. The term “digital native” has been around a long time already. Today, we will continue to consider what we can do for this generation so that they can use JAGDA as a useful platform for improving the environment surrounding people involved in design and, eventually, the environment of the world at large.