
On Tools, Tongues, and Time: Reading the Conditions of Contemporary Practice

Design Dialogue Journal, Volume 3, Issue 1 (2026)

This issue of *Design Dialogue Journal* arrives at a moment when the conditions of design and labour are being renegotiated from several directions at once, and the four contributions gathered here, read together, make that renegotiation visible in ways that no single paper could manage alone. Three of the four pieces converge on a shared and pressing question: what happens to design education, and to the people who pass through it, when generative artificial intelligence becomes an unavoidable feature of the studio. The fourth piece, addressing the lived realities of night shift workers in Kyrenia, sits outside that conversation in its subject matter but not, on closer reading, in its spirit. Each paper in this issue is, in its own register, concerned with how institutions and industries absorb pressures that did not exist, or did not exist at this scale, a few years ago, and what is asked of the people caught inside that absorption.

Mapping a Field in Motion

Aminreza Iranmanesh opens the issue with a bibliometric and thematic review of the AI-in-design-education literature published between 2020 and 2025. Working from a corpus of 114 peer-reviewed articles, the review does what good mapping exercises do: it shows the field its own shape. Eight themes emerge, from curriculum integration to the evolving studio, and the bibliometric layer (motor themes, niche clusters, the keyword factorial analysis) gives that shape empirical weight rather than impressionistic gesture. What distinguishes this review, however, is less its synthesis of what the literature says than its scepticism about how confidently it says it. Iranmanesh observes that the corpus is asymmetrically optimistic: benefits are reported readily, often from short-term and self-reported studies, while harms such as de-skilling, homogenisation, and epistemic dependence are named frequently but tested rarely. The review treats this imbalance itself as a finding, and it is a useful corrective for a field still inclined to mistake enthusiasm for evidence.

From Mapping to Argument

Pooya Lotfabadi's contribution takes up the conceptual ground that Iranmanesh's review surveys and pushes further into argument. Reading generative AI as a structurally different kind of tool, one that participates in the generative phase of design rather than merely executing it, the paper traces how authorship, creativity, and pedagogy are bound together more tightly than the literature usually allows. Its most useful move is refusing the false

binary that still structures much public discussion of AI and creativity. Design creativity, the paper argues, was never primarily about producing novel forms; it is about reframing problems and exercising judgement under uncertainty, capacities that generative systems do not possess and are not on a path to acquiring. What AI changes is where in the design process human effort is needed, not whether it is needed. The paper is equally direct about the costs of getting this transition wrong: a widening gap between practice and education, a homogenisation risk rooted in the training data of the tools themselves, and an access divide that could turn AI fluency into a marker of institutional privilege rather than a democratising force. Read alongside Iranmanesh's review, the two papers form a productive pair: one supplies the field's empirical self-portrait, the other supplies a sustained argument about what that portrait should mean for practice.

The Studio Heard Differently

Shahab Miri's paper on language proficiency in the architecture studio is, on its surface, a departure from the AI conversation. But it belongs in this issue precisely because it asks a parallel question about a different kind of unevenly distributed competence. If generative AI is reshaping who can produce a polished design output and on what terms, the linguistic demands of the studio, crit, and jury have long been doing something similar, quietly sorting students by a competence that has little to do with spatial or material intelligence and a great deal to do with the accident of which language they grew up speaking. The paper's distinction between conversational fluency and the cognitive academic language proficiency that juries and theoretical writing actually demand is a useful one, and its observation that the desk crit is over-relied upon partly because it is more linguistically forgiving than the public jury deserves attention well beyond programmes with large international cohorts. Taken together with the two AI papers, this contribution is a reminder that the studio has always been a site where unequal access to a tool, whether a language or a generative model, can be mistaken for unequal design ability, and that educators carry a continuing responsibility to tell the two apart.

Beyond the Studio

Sajid Ali's study of night shift workers in Kyrenia closes the issue and stands apart from the others in discipline and method. It is, nonetheless, a fitting companion piece. Where the AI-focused papers examine a profession anticipating disruption, this paper documents a workforce already living with the conditions, disrupted sleep, safety risk, thin infrastructure, that round-the-clock service economies impose, and does so in a local context, Northern Cyprus, for which evidence has been genuinely scarce. The thematic synthesis approach, supplemented by illustrative interviews, is appropriately modest about its own limits, and the paper is candid about the gaps it cannot close with the evidence at hand. Its inclusion in this issue broadens the journal's remit in a way worth noting explicitly: design education and design practice do not unfold in isolation from the labour conditions of the places that host them, and a journal concerned with dialogue should periodically make room for work that examines those conditions directly, even when it does not share a method or a literature with its neighbours on the page.

A Shared Caution

If there is a single thread running underneath all four papers, it is a shared wariness of premature confidence. Iranmanesh asks the field to hold its optimism about AI to the same evidentiary standard it applies to its concerns. Lotfabadi argues that the profession is making choices about authorship and pedagogy whose consequences will be difficult to reverse, and that they deserve more deliberate handling than the pace of adoption has so

far allowed. Miri shows that a studio culture built around verbal performance can silently disadvantage capable designers for reasons that have nothing to do with design. And Ali's study, working in a context where data is thin and policy attention thinner still, resists the temptation to overstate what a small, qualitative dataset can support. None of the papers in this issue offers easy resolution, and that restraint is, we think, exactly right for the moment design education and design-adjacent labour now find themselves in.

We are grateful to the authors for the care evident in each contribution, and to the reviewers whose attention sharpened them. We hope readers find in this issue not a settled picture, but a useful set of questions to carry into their own classrooms, studios, and research.

Warm regards,
The Editors
Design Dialogue Journal