

Editorial

2007 was the Year of Design. This journal is therefore late with its celebration of design. Not that this matters.

Last year when I visited New York I viewed a major exhibition on design in the American Museum. What struck me was the section captions: Design as empathy; Design as Intuition; Design as Inspiration, and Nature as the Best Designer. I was most intrigued by the first and last sections and decided to send a “Call for papers” on those two topics in order to compile another thematic issue of the SAJAH. What I stated under the first theme was basically inspired by the caption of the first section at the American Museum: “Design has a wide range of implications, but we will limit our focus to its human qualities, especially empathy, which may be defined as the ability to have compassion for and an understanding of the thoughts, feelings, and state of another being.” The alternative as nature as the best designer I thought would be self-evident.

During the course of my research into the subject, I realised how many-faceted design actually is. Undeniably, it is also influenced by the intuition of the designer as well as his or her inspiration. I found, however, that the influence of empathy implies more than compassion as a motivation for altruistic and humanistic design. It requires wisdom to actually make life better for all people and adjusted the following quote from Karel Čapek’s *Apocryphal Stories* to illustrate my insight: “cleverness is a gift or talent; reason is a quality or strength, but wisdom is a virtue”. If “design as empathy” is substituted for the word “wisdom”, the quotation could be adjusted to read: “intuition is a gift or talent; inspiration is a quality or strength, but design as empathy is a virtue”.

Louis Kahn (in John Lobell, *Between Silence and Light*, 1979) said: “You cannot design anything without nature helping you”. Few architects will disagree that they can learn much about the general principles of tectonics from nature. However, as one may gather from Gert van Tonder’s article, the design of Zen gardens imposes a mental order on nature.

I wish to thank all the authors who ventured to contribute their research to this thematic issue dealing with the shaping of environments (especially in the present South African context) and artefacts with the emphasis on human qualities. Hopefully design as a theme will gain in importance in future issues of this journal.

E.A. Maré