A night sky with the Milky Way galaxy visible, and a campfire in the foreground. The Milky Way is a dense band of stars and dust, appearing as a bright, multi-colored streak across the dark sky. The colors range from blue and purple to yellow and orange. The campfire in the foreground is a bright, warm yellow-orange light, illuminating the surrounding rocks and the silhouettes of people sitting around it. The overall scene is a mix of natural beauty and human activity.

On Reframing... and The Digital Campfire

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Looking in new ways informs perspective. Can virtual tools and virtuous thinking lead us in our Kairos moment?

THE QUESTIONS – AND HOW MUCH?

In his legendary poem, Rudyard Kipling poses this classic set of questions known to journalists, scientists and just-plain-curious people around the world as the Six W's. They form the foundation of all human endeavors that seek to collect facts and know the truth. In business settings, I would suggest we need a seventh 'serving man': how much? By its nature, business is always about how much. How much money? How many resources? At what cost and benefit to whom?

For practitioners in the built environment industry, these seven questions are (or should be) the origin of any inquiry. Now, more than ever, the seventh question: 'how much', needs to be interpreted more broadly. More than mere first cost (or benefit) from a singular, self-serving, or project perspective, responsible professionals must ask: what are the upstream and downstream impacts? How much? How does this decision, system, design, or construction proposal affect the community, environment, or society, long term? Armed with this fundamental question set -- the Seven W's -- we can



*I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.*

~Rudyard Kipling, The Elephant's Child

THE SEVEN W'S

refocus the outlooks and outcomes for the problems we solve.

Many design professionals have historically shunned the harder, broader questions. Why? Some are ill-equipped. We may not have been trained to ask them. We want to do (and keep) our 'jobs'. But what are our jobs? What are they worth if they contribute to solving the wrong problem, or answering the wrong question?

What we need now is re-framing. A healthy skepticism and deployment of the boundary-crossing, scale-transcending, game-changing skills we learned in school as designers and builders. And we need to get better at answering: 'how much?' in several ways. First, we must care about the impacts of what we do on a wider scale and spectrum. To do this we need to be better at demonstrating, delivering, and getting rewarded for these more spectral values, services and results. Designers who can leverage their skills against the series of 10X impacts that lie beyond design deserved to be rewarded. In orders of magnitude, construction is 10X design cost. Building energy and operations costs are 10X construction cost over the facility life. The costs of the people and their productivity is 10X more. Finally, the long-term socio-

environmental cost and impact must be 10X that.

We need to get better at asking the right questions in the right way at the right time. Visioning, programming, analysis, options, dialogue, systems thinking – quantifiable with 'how much' – are the skills we need now. There's only one way to describe this process: reframing.

In the Age of Acceleration, as Tom Friedman calls it, we have the 'internet supernova' and 'flow' to move massive amounts of information. In this quickened pace of ever-less time and massive surprises, nothing is more important than asking the right questions, or, asking the ones posed to us in new ways. Kipling's questions are an always-good start, but it's how they are asked that's important.

The notion of frame connotes a border, a portal, a window through which we view a challenge. But how is it viewed? In what context? At what focal length? Any good photographer will tell you: to get good shots, change your perspective. Get closer. Step back. Shoot up. Shoot down. Look backward. Zoom in. Much like photographers, designers, and builders are trained to be better-than-average frame-changers. We're facile at it. We use



it to create art. But to answer all the 7 W's, we need to use this same ability to answer how much. At face, the 7 W's are always the right questions. But it's choosing to move the frame, step closer for a wider shot, or step away for a laser-focused longer view that makes the difference. It's where the value lies.

Let's look in a new way. Let's ask more beautiful questions. Let's put the Seven Serving Men (and Women) to work for us - in wonderful ways. There is no other choice.

RECENT EVENTS

Recent events have brought clarity in surprising ways. The global Covid-19 pandemic has caused many of us to question our priorities and ways of working. We face the conflict of economy vs. health and life. In pre-Covid-19 days, while interviewing more than forty industry experts for my book, *Managing Design* (Wiley, 2019) I was struck by the number of them focused on the idea of reframing. That is, asking the right questions.



Recent events have brought clarity in surprising ways.

Like my book's interviewees, current viral response leaders are seasoned experts, respected in their fields. But to a large degree, they didn't earn their stature playing by the rules. Each of them was skilled at changing perspective, casting convention aside, and seeing anew. When things were right side up, they turned them upside down. Now, faced with no other options in a world that has been upended against our wills, leaders are becoming adept at seeing it in new ways. In building new frames through which to view questions they succeed in finding new answers. When everyone else looks right, they look left. When the madding crowd carries on, or is afraid to, they pause and ask, as Warren Berger put it, a "more beautiful question".

But not all questions are beautiful. Some are brutally ugly in their honesty but need to be asked. How do cope with an

unexpected hidden assailant like a virus? In our quest to carry on, do we sacrifice human life for economic gain? Before and beyond virus conditions are we doing the right thing? Even when we return life as we thought we knew it, or what many are calling "the new normal" should we continue to consume resources at unsustainable rates? Can our planet, systems and humanity tolerate such behavior? Where are like-minded people we can team with to see, listen, and react well to this global correction? Years ago, E.F Schumacher asked questions such as these in his classic 1973 work, *Small is Beautiful*. At our own Design Futures Council conference on Sustainability last November, Jonathan Salk presented us with similar questions from his book, *A New Reality*. These questions demand our attention. So do others that are aggregations, combinations, or variations on conventional wisdom. Other queries

offer beauty by simply looking at the proper scale or direction -- or transcending it.

These are creative leaps. All take contrarian courage.

Reframing is the art of seeing anew and drawing new boundaries within which to focus investigation - a new outlook to catalyze re-visioning. The best of us are good at it. The rest of us should learn. In this time of bigger, more important questions - of personal, firm, professional, and planetary survival, wouldn't it be an advantage to be working on the right problems and seeing in the right ways? In these challenging times, let's ask the right questions, and work together to solve them.

We can't do it the old way - and we certainly can't do it alone.



PERSPECTIVE: SEEING DIFFERENTLY

An old design tenet tells us the process of drawing informs how we see and think. But in a crisis, one of the first casualties is perspective. In times of trouble we often focus only on the now. We think it will be like this forever. We lose perspective.

Digital teleconferencing programs like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, Skype, and Go To Meeting have given us a new lens and a new way of seeing. In her research at Stanford, Kathleen Liston studied the social dynamics and group behavior of teams looking as they huddled over their own data, viewing marked up hard copies - secret, individual, closely held, proprietary notes vs. the dynamics and social outcomes of the entire group focusing on a single set of shared, common data shown live on screen at the front of the room. In the latter case, “our” data, the “team’s” data, (pronoun emphasis intentional) gives rise to a common vision of a single correct, coordinated data set, live edits, shared understanding, consensus and action. We’re “in” our data together. We see and act differently. We reframe. Such is the power of a group videoconference. But there can also be side effects of new ways of seeing. In the case of over-Zooming, participants can suffer from anxiety, eye strain, and emotional fatigue from being “on” and “together” for prolonged periods.

Over my career as an architect I can recall thousands of instances in which the medium influenced the message- and how I saw. I sketched a column grid. A pattern emerged. Seeing it sparked a new idea to explore. Moving the idea outside my head, into my hand, and onto the paper helped me “see” it in more precise physical terms - not just imagine it vaguely. Stepping outside myself to draw on the reactions of a peer or mentor, or to contemplate a new frame such as a detail or budget aspect changed my perspective and advanced the pursuit - diverging it to alternate solutions or narrowing it to reduce options and increase certainty. It is this mysterious inside/outside, think/do, self/others alternation - and the influence of one on the other that’s at the core of reframing. Whether designing, plotting a new strategy, or considering the potential

of a remote working approach, it’s often how we do the looking and seeing that matters.

Covid-19 work from home adaptors to new ways of looking and seeing now use virtual meetings to cope with their essential need to commune and communicate. In these virtual meetings’ gallery views, our faces are more accessible than they were when we met in person. My colleagues are framed, each in a box, each around our new “virtual campfire”. They are seen in a new way, more personally, individually, and intimately, with views inside their homes and personal effects. What’s more, we can now see all participants at once as opposed to only those we were looking at across the conference table in “in person” meetings (formerly known as face-to-face





meetings, a term likely to evolve.) We can see their smiles, emotions and attention levels.

A KAIROS MOMENT... AND “THE DIGITAL CAMPFIRE”

On the same day I began to frame thoughts for this essay, in an internal DesignIntelligence staff Zoom meeting, I was serendipitously made aware of a YouTube video titled Dialogos 4, featuring Guy Sengstock, Jordan Hall, Chris Mastropietro and John Vervaeke, courtesy of colleague Rob Hart. I paraphrase heavily from their discussion, trusting they would delight in my doing so. Their purpose is dialogue. They use techniques like the empathy circle to provoke shared understanding. Their metaphorical parallels add depth to the consideration of how we might see, think, and “meet” in the future.

In contrast to the Greek “Chronos” or chronological sense of time, we now experience a “Kairos” event – an opportune moment in time. Rather than just another point in the chronology, Kairos moments are critical, poignant opportunities to be seized and acted upon. They represent the right time. Here, now, in this context. Now, seeing in our Covid-19 Kairos moment, we see as we do when we sit around campfires. Weaving into the campfire metaphor, our taking the time to lay and build the fire,

then watch it catch, fosters faith.

Think of the shaman and tribe sitting around the campfire. The campfire plays host to dual worlds at once, the darkness and the light; the concrete and the virtual; the interior life of the individual and the communal life of our sociability. As a result, we are both in solitude and in communion at the same time.

Many of us are not trained to deal with solitude. We deny it. The campfire mediates between narrative and reasoning. There's something about the telling of stories and personal intimacy and disclosure that collapses it. The whole point of the campfire is that it's a refuge. People flock to it to escape the isolation. The darker the darkness gets, the more we are drawn to the campfire, to come together, stay warm, stay awake, and tell stories.

In our modern predicament, we feel the need to bring the virtual into reconciliation with the physical. Social interaction now has an added, digitally expressed meaning. On one hand we have biological family, friends, nature, and physicality. On the other hand, we have the digital virtual world

that replaces or enables it. Our new need is to bring those together in a new balance.

Our new digital campfires are not just about the dialogue, they're also about being part of something larger. One informs the other. Circling our new digital campfire, we simultaneously experience ourselves and others while being vulnerable and exposed on screen.

To reconcile this, a philosopher, poet, seer, or leader is needed, but that is disruptive. The notion of Dialogos tries to get us to give birth to a new beauty, a new way, a new world. To listen to it is to honor it. To listen to it to be drawn into it. Socratic self-knowledge moves us into the aspiration to be other than we are.

We've become so accustomed to alienating ourselves into a context that's not of our own making: modern society, complex systems, and inertia, and now a pandemic and economic uncertainty. When our mold or form giver is removed – our status quo or comfort zone – we don't know what to do. At such times, Kairos moments, the Dialogos, the conversation, is exactly the container we

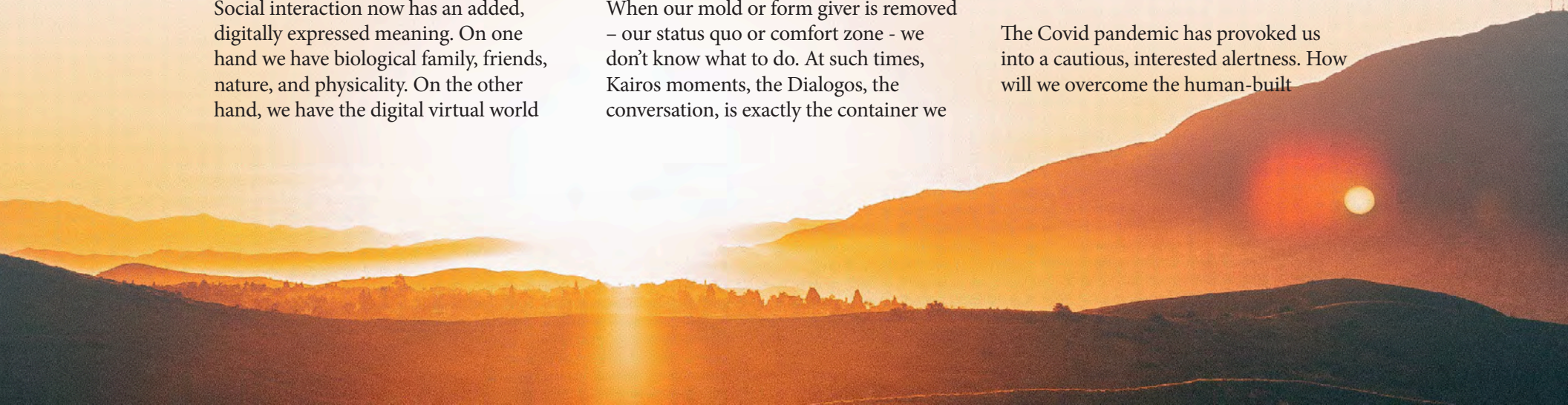
want to be in. The Socratic virtue of being able to move between categories in and out of this discussion around our new campfire is a competitive, adaptive advantage.

The ennui, boredom, and even the horror of being shapeless and alone is unbearable, and so it draws you into the conversation and the social environment. The willingness to admit you're shapeless goes to the question of vulnerability – to flow in and out of various categories to find out who you are in the next moment.

There's a lot of urgency going on, but the last thing we need is a bunch of urgent people. We need rested, wise people, people with perspective, people who have reframed and are ready to lead us to – as Jonathan Salk recently called it in his new book: *The New Reality*.

What can we do right now, that we have faith in? What are the invariants and core principles?

The Covid pandemic has provoked us into a cautious, interested alertness. How will we overcome the human-built



structures we find ourselves engaged with? How will we embrace the nexus between force and flexibility; receptivity and the changing context. Those who want to survive must answer those questions. Will we respond to the invitation to go beyond - into the darkness - to seek clarity and make it beautiful?

We have choices in pondering what is essential. Whether we deploy the Seven Servants to ask the right questions or use new ways of informed seeing and thinking such as our digital campfire to leverage the powers of others - we'll be better for it.

Can we use our new online stoa as great hall for public discourse, to engage in a dialectic - constantly moving between explaining and exemplifying it? A mimesis is needed. Let's come in good faith, even if we disagree, hoping there is the possibility, through dialogue, that you will transform me in some way I could not have anticipated. Let's move from sheltering and bad faith into empathy and action.

By looking anew, we can - and will.

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