

Social Design: Design + Community + Social Impact-- The Latest from GOOD Magazine and IDEO

U.S.-Japan Innovators Network

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Report on Public Forum

Written by Katherine Hyde

*Hosts of the U.S.-Japan Innovators Network's symposium **Social Design: Design + Community + Social Impact** held a public forum at Tokyo's International Design Liaison Center on February 8, 2009.*

Speakers:

Max Schorr, Co-Founder and Community Director, GOOD Magazine

Casey Caplowe, Co-Founder and Creative Director, GOOD Magazine

Masaaki Ikeda, Creative Director, Tokyo Changemaker and Eco Plaza

Valerie Casey, Leader, Digital Design Experience, IDEO, & Founder, The Designers Accord

Roundtable Panelists:

Soichi Ueda, Producer, Spaceport Inc.

Kazufumi Nagai, Art Director, HAKUHODO DESIGN

Max Schorr

Casey Caplowe

Valerie Casey

Moderator:

Masaaki Ikeda

PRESENTATIONS:

What is Social Design?

MAX SCHORR

When he and Casey Caplowe were 24 years old and beginning to work together on what would become GOOD Magazine, said **Max Schorr**, it was "a bad time in America"--2004 and 2005, "the middle of the Bush years, and painful for a lot of us, and also hard times in the world" at large.

Environmental and social problems were brought home and brought closer, in part because of the internet. Max and Casey "were still figuring what we wanted to do with our lives when we grew up, but we knew in some way it involved creating social good." And "at the same time, we felt that there was a real need to rebrand the idea of good."

The Do-Gooder Brand

"In America there's a concept of 'do-gooder'" that "was a bad thing for the design world, the worst-branded thing ever," Max said:

"In order to be a do-gooder you couldn't have fun, you couldn't have sex appeal, you couldn't make money, and you probably weren't going to make much results, you were going to go there and do it but nothing was going to happen."

"In America it seems so often that media is either entertaining or relevant," never both, he continued, showing the audience a simple, two-circle Venn diagram. He and Casey hoped to launch a platform that would belong in the middle, that would be both entertaining *and* relevant.

"At the beginning, what they said was you're either pragmatic or idealistic," he said, showing another Venn diagram. "We said that we have to be in the middle; that's the only place."

The Choose Good Campaign

Direct mail, the typical way for an indie magazine to build an audience, appealed neither to Max and Casey's personal taste nor to their pocketbooks. So in 2006, they decided on a Choose Good campaign. "We chose 12 nonprofit organizations that we thought embodied the spirit of GOOD Magazine," including Ashoka, Kiva and Teach for America, "and we said when you subscribe, 100 percent of the money goes to the nonprofit of your choice."

It helped make this whole thing resonate with people, that we were actually walking the walk and not just talking about good.

This was also common sense on some level, because \$20 was what we thought we could charge and we were giving that away for every subscription, but direct mail would cost \$45 [per subscriber acquired], so it was both in line with our business and our values.

They worked in "a teeny little room in the back" at a startup film company in Los Angeles run by one of their best friends, Max said. "People would come into the office and we would make them subscribe and write their names" on a chart posted on the wall. "We probably raised about \$1,000 at that point. It was basically us and our parents. Now, a little over two years later, we've raised over \$1 million, and it's growing." The first issue sold out; besides the print magazine, GOOD has blogs and videos plus real-world events, including a pop-up community center in New York City in December 2007.

Solution < Problem

When social entrepreneur Cameron Sinclair suggested to Max that he should meet Rosanne Haggerty, founder of Common Ground, a nonprofit organization that works to end homelessness, they were both on a visit to Tokyo with the Japan Society.

"I hadn't had a chance to talk to her at all, and then we got stuck in traffic and I asked her a bunch of questions and it blew me away, and I think was one of the embodiments of what we're trying to do with GOOD."

Part of what struck him was the simple concept "Solution < Problem," a solution that's cheaper than the problem, he said. Thus the Common Ground organization gives homeless people "supportive living and services for a lesser cost than to have somebody out on the street. And it's an incredible thing when you can quantify it."

Design and the Jewel

Max showed the audience another math-y illustration, a Cartesian coordinate system with the X-axis graphing Harm versus Social Value (positive social value to the right) and the Y-axis Profit versus Loss (profit above, loss below).

"The question for designers, and a lot of you I know are doing amazing work, is how do you create a jewel, how do you create something special that exists in that top right-hand corner," something that creates social good but also helps businesses sell their products.

"That's the main point of my presentation," he concluded. "When you make it in people's self-interest *and* the common interest, that's when it exists everywhere and it scales."

"It's the Wild West, but it's happening fast," he said.

CASEY CAPLOWE

Casey Caplowe, co-founder of GOOD Magazine, picked up with the idea of collaboration. "It's this idea of You + Us = GOOD," he said. "We are when we work with other people. And that's really what it's all about."

The GOOD media kit says "GOOD is a magazine, website, videos, events, for people who give a damn." The essence is not the products, but the community and the idea.

"We're always asking this question what is good," Casey said.

"Good is fun, good is figuring things out, good is complicated, good is recyclable. So it's a whole bunch of different things to different people, and I think that's important for us, to build this open brand, if you will, that people can read into and make what they want out of it, but it's still very meaningful and a connective idea."

_____ is GOOD

The first GOOD Magazine cover represents this diversity, Casey continued. "We wanted a manifesto on the cover," and though there was some discussion about using a celebrity, as many magazine covers do, that discussion wasn't serious.

"We had always used this term that we're for people who give a damn. And talking around a table, this idea came up of well it's not for design like you give a damn, which is a book that came out right about the same moment. It's not go into politics like you give a damn. It's anything that you want. It's all of these things."

Hence the first *GOOD* cover shows the words "_____ like you give a damn," with a blank line and an instruction for the reader to fill in the line with their own passion.

Each *GOOD* issue includes graphics for an opening theme, spread out over four pages at the beginning of the book. For the first issue, the team worked on the theme "I Heart America"--"we think we love America, we want to love America again; this was in 2006, and it was a challenge to ourselves," Casey said. The Portland, Oregon agency WK12 "came up with an amazing response, which was America, Love It or Fix It," a morphing of the classic phrase "America, Love It or Leave It" to capture an ebullient and activist spirit.

GOOD's infographics are something "we've become known for and had a ton of fun with," he said. With charts and images, they "try to communicate complicated things to people in an easy and fun to understand way," from the "conglomeration of magazines" to "the square footage of all of the Walmarts in the world" ("larger than Manhattan," he said). "It's real people making this, having fun with the information" and helping people understand it better.

The magazine's equation template offers graffiti-like aphorisms such as "Bureaucracy = Paperwork/Work + Politics²" and "Cronyism = Friendship/Qualification + Golf." On the website are blogs, including a new Community blog, and contributor bios. *GOOD* does videos, cartoons (including a series of panels on Darfur), art projects, urban design projects, photography, events and parties.

"These events *are* the people who show up," Casey concluded. "There's something magical that happens when all these people that we've met and we've pulled together because we thought their design was good or the project that they're working on was amazing, and you put them in the same room, and new connections and new ideas start to emerge."

MASAAKI IKEDA

As a springboard for discussion, **Masaaki Ikeda** of Tokyo Changemakers and Eco Plaza shared with the audience an elegant and colorful map created by Shinji Yajima of the Japan Industrial Design Promotion Organization (JIDPO).

History of Social Design in Japan

The map, which Yajima-san has licensed under a Creative Commons license, is titled "Evolution of Social Design in Japan" and traces the history of social design from 1964's First Things First through to the present in five domains: idea, communication, ecology, community and economy.

Early Influences

Masaaki singled out several people on the map as signal influences on his own work. The first was Ryuichi Sakamoto, a composer, producer and keyboardist known to American audiences for "Forbidden Colours," composed for the film *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*, and the score for Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*. Sakamoto-san appears on the map beginning in 1999 with the creative project CODE.

"Leadership is sought after more and more," Masaaki said. "Mr. Obama has now risen to take the helm of the United States and society is about to change greatly under his leadership. So, leadership needs to be fostered in societies going forward."

"Mr. Sakamoto's leadership in his sphere is awesome," he added. "I always half jokingly tell him that he should become our candidate for the governor of Tokyo. And he says you must be kidding." Yet "I think his leadership and his role in this area is unmeasured. It is limitless and it is because of his personality. He has no enemies. On the one hand he can make very extreme comments, but on the other hand he is selected as a key personality for many businesses and their commercials."

Sakamoto-san "doesn't have any conniving strategy," Masaaki said. "I think it is personality that enables him to get away with something like that. . . . Apart from his career in music he is one of the forerunners, a pioneer of social design in Japan."

Two further early influences, Masaaki said, were critic Kojin Karatani, who began the New Associationist Movement, NAM, and worked often with Sakamoto-san, and the British graphic designer Jonathan Barnbrook.

1999

"In 1999 the internet began to penetrate greatly in Japan, so it's a benchmark here," Masaaki continued. That same year, the Third Conference of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol took place in Kyoto. "At that time I was not aware of its significance. I just thought it was a political meeting or something. But actually a lot of movements began and were triggered by the Kyoto COP-3 meeting."

A Rainbow parade, a celebration not a demonstration, was held in Kyoto during the meeting; "let's make the world better, let's stop global warming--that was the main message," he said. "So, people were dancing in the streets, and the young people made a fashion statement and also an appeal to take better care of the earth. This association developed eventually into Earth Day."

Thus "social design, as a trend, began from the Kyoto meeting."

A year earlier, in 1998, Japan had enacted the nonprofit organization law, somewhat on the American model though without the tax benefits for donors that U.S. law provides. "NPOs registered one after another, and that leads up until this present day; I was involved in seven NPOs," Masaaki said.

And 1999 was "the first year where we began to have a community currency" in Japan, a scrip designed for use in a local area and not convertible into the country's official legal tender. Japan's public broadcaster NHK had interviewed German writer Michael Ende at length on the subject, and when the author died shortly thereafter, NHK aired "Ende's Last Message," a program "dedicated to community currency. This was a big hit," he said. "A lot of young people are not aware of what happened at the time, but a lot of people, who are passionate in this movement, recall with nostalgia the community currency" and its symbolism of local ties and local solidarity.

Kojin Karatani, a Hokkaido University professor and publisher of the journal *Critical Space*, "took up issues regarding community and currency," and there was Michael Linton, a Canadian living in Vancouver who created a currency called LETS, for Local Exchange Trading System.

Kohkoku

"In 2001, triggered by all these events, I set up this strange magazine called Kohkoku," Masaaki said. "Social design began to change after we established our magazine—when we first talked about social design, the visual effects were important. But people began to realize, and especially because of Michael Linton, that things did not have to be cosmetically beautiful."

"At the onset of the magazine I introduced Michael Linton's Open Money Manifesto," he said. "He's saying that money creates turmoil in society, but if you make a local or community currency, which is different from normal currency, it can be very useful. And he concludes saying it's just a matter of design, which was awesome to me--just the sentence, 'just a matter of design.'"

In Kohkoku, he campaigned for the restoration of Tokyo's streams and rivers, "covered over and paved over" in decades past, and for the creation of a local currency called earthdaymoney. He and Sakamoto-san urged action to counter the environmental impact of disposable wooden chopsticks.

In spring 2002, Masaaki left Kohkoku, he recounted. Though not involved in Candle Night, a turn-off-the-lights action designed to focus attention on saving energy and preventing global warming in 2003, thereafter he came up with the sprinkling water campaign, whereby "physically you sprinkle water and it prevents the heat island effect in the city. We thought it would be effective as an action—a movement to save energy and to prevent global warming."

moreTrees, Eco Plaza, Tokyo Changemakers

With Sakamoto-san, beginning in 2007, "we began to be involved in the moreTrees movement, to take care of the forest," Masaaki said.

"This is my main work right now in Nagata-cho, the operation and management of the Eco Plaza. I am very blessed, because it is in a public facility in Minato Ward. I have this physical location that I can use to educate, to enlighten, to train people in this area."

At Eco Plaza recently "we had a forest and water meeting--trees and water meeting," he said. "We wanted to bring out the idea of moreTrees. Mr. Sakamoto came and we had a revealing ceremony where the curtain was lifted off a bench" made of wood harvested from a moreTrees forest.

The moreTrees project "owns a forest in Nagata-cho," Masaaki explained. "It is an untouched forest that moreTrees invested in. So, the forest was managed so that they take in more CO2. Part of the young trees must be taken out so that light filters in to make the forest itself more healthy."

Another current project is Tokyo Changemakers, designed to support social entrepreneurs through venture capital funding. Masaaki invited the audience to check out the organization's website for details on a brand-new TCM award competition. "In the future we would like to have a listed exchange with TCM's name, so there will be a market for listing for social entrepreneurs," he concluded.

VALERIE CASEY

Valerie Casey of design firm IDEO, founder of the Designers Accord, spoke on "Creating the Conditions of Positive Impact."

"I deliberately used that phrasing, because the idea that any of us can change anything by ourselves is a simplistic idea; but what we can do is we can take a lot of actions and activities in order to create the conditions that will enable further change to happen," she said.

The Work of IDEO

IDEO was organized some 30 years ago and has eight studios around the world and about 550 people; "we have about 40 design disciplines within our organization, and about 40 nationalities. We do approximately 400 projects a year and it's a very diverse group of problem solvers and thinkers," she said, with many technology projects including the first computer mouse.

For a U.S. healthcare firm, IDEO revamped a standard emergency-room setup by looking to auto-racing for a model:

"We spent a lot of time looking at NASCAR, which is a Formula-1 racing car competition, and we observed the speed and agility of the pit crews. Now, of course, I have no relationship or interest in anything to do with cars, but it's phenomenal, the almost scientific way that they are able to triage cars and set them up," she said.

In the client's ERs, instruments were set up by type along a single wall, whereas the NASCAR pit crews had "multiple wrenches, multiple screwdrivers and things like that in boxes clustered by the kind of activity. So if you have clusters of activities in little kits, you're much more able to triage quickly."

Bank of America asked IDEO to help persuade bank-account customers to put more money into their accounts, Valerie recounted:

We went around and observed this particular segment that we thought would be very rich for this, which was "boomer moms," or busy moms in their 30s, 40s, and 50s. We would interview these women and they would always say that they never saved money, they didn't have a savings account, they only had a checking account.

And we would watch them do their finances and inevitably instead of paying the amount listed on their bill, they would round up to the nearest dollar or the nearest tens of dollars, a couple of dollars here and there, to simplify the math in their checkbooks.

The program IDEO designed "directly took that behavior and figured out that if someone paid with their check card, we would automatically round up the amount of money that they would pay and automatically put it into a savings account," she said.

The result is \$10 billion saved since BofA started the program in 2005, \$1 billion from the rounding-up program. "You don't have to change people's behaviors, you just have to figure out that right behavior to turn slightly awry in order to make a great impact."

"About a third of the work that we do at IDEO is what we would classify as social impact," Valerie said, including a lightweight water pump called the kick-start pump, produced in Kenya. This "is a human-powered water pump that's based on a Stairmaster, stair-climbing interaction," made from all local materials costing about \$150. The pump "goes 18 meters down in the ground and creates enough pressure that water comes up out of the water table and it is able to spray 7 meters out. And so farmers, who were sustenance farmers—growing enough food for their own families—all of a sudden could turn into business people."

"It's probably the ugliest thing that IDEO has ever made, but we couldn't make it beautiful because we had to use materials that were found locally, and you had to be able to weld it with the simplest kind of welding. And in its rawness, it's actually quite amazing to observe."

Design Thinking

In all its work, IDEO tries to use "design thinking," she said. "Every time you design something, you always want to think about the people and how desirable the product is; the business and how viable and sustainable the business is going to be; and the technical issues, how feasible it is, whether it's a

hard product or a physical environment or a website or a social policy or governmental policy. The idea is that you can use the process of design to solve any problem, the most intractable problems."

IDEO also seeks to "use our network" and to embody "a complete open-source philosophy, where we'll share how we did things," successes and failures both.

Often, designers starting out "believe that they're in the business of designing objects," she added. But designers and clients must resist "the tyranny of the iPod, where people are constantly yearning for that next great thing," because "we're actually in the business of creating consequences," and as time passes, "the negative impact of our design goes up," and the negative consequences cumulate.

"Years ago," designers as professionals "were focused on styling, and we gradually adopted the methodologies of design research and what we call at IDEO human factors," Valerie said:

We learned how to be good businesspeople; we learned technology, whether it was mechanical engineering or software engineering; we learned to think about brands and organizational change.

And in that same level, we need to be thinking about sustainability. Max made this point before: we go from green design to design, not wanting to highlight the difference of sustainable design, but actually wanting to think about it on par with quality.

The Designers Accord

"We have an expression at IDEO which is you can do anything, but you can't do everything," Valerie said. At one point a couple of years ago, she wanted to educate herself about sustainability, and "one of the things that caught my attention was this story about giant jellyfish being sighted off the coast of Japan."

"I am a scuba diver, and I went on Google and I looked it up and I found this image, and with all of my ego and pride and frustration, I sent it to everybody I knew, colleagues, clients, my parents, and I was furious and I said we have to do something about it. And someone wrote back to me on email and said you do realize that that was made in Photoshop, that this is a faked image."

The audience broke into giggles.

"And I thought oh God. I was so mortified. And actually there are giant jellyfish, but they are about the size of your torso, they're not this big."

"It was probably the best thing, for me, because I'm not a sustainability expert, but it motivated me to start this thing that said I don't know, and I'm betting that a lot of people in this room don't know, so why don't we try to figure it out together?"

As a beginning, Valerie founded the Designers Accord as "a global coalition of designers, educators and corporate leaders working together to create positive social and environmental impact," she explained.

"It sounds very serious," she commented dryly.

However, "the reason why designers and creative people should be taking on this issue is because we aren't about doom and gloom--we are diehard optimists, and we understand when to inject fun and communication and the right essence of change into this terrible, almost damning topic."

The Designers Accord guidelines speak first "about people and places, so design firms, design schools, corporations, agree to educate their teams and to make their environments sustainable or green."

Next, the guidelines "force everyone who has adopted the Designers Accord to have a conversation about these issues with every client and every customer who walks in their door, which is a difficult thing to do," and so "it's about drawing on the network so that we can live up to this guideline."

"The last thing is that everybody in the Designers Accord agrees to share their best practices, their foibles, their successes, their questions, and their resources, with everyone else. So a very competitive group of people are agreeing to say maybe I know something that you don't know; I'll share it with you; if you build on it, then share it back with me."

The Designers Accord built very slowly in the beginning, she said: "a couple of people in Canada. No offense to the Canadians--and a small design firm in Switzerland. And I think a 15-year-old boy somewhere that I used to babysit for, or something."

"A year ago, 3,500 people," Valerie said, and as of last month, 150,000--"all part of living up to those five guidelines, or living up to them as much as they possibly can. It's pretty incredible."

ROUNDTABLE AND Q&A: The Designer's Mission Today

When WWF, World Wildlife Fund, sought to hire him in 2000 to create some ads, said **Kazufumi Nagai**, Art Director at Hakuodo Design, he accepted not out of great interest in wildlife preservation but because he hoped "to expand my arena of creativity--that I could offer some sharp expression, or edged expression, in such an area."

In 2005 came an invitation from Kohkoku to create a two-page spread for a new Eco Expression publication. "So, then I began to seriously think about myself and the relationship between myself and social subjects and social impact."

Kazufumi used the two pages to offer his services for free to environmental NPOs. "I was quite nervous. Maybe there would be hundreds of entries from NPOs," too many to juggle along with his mainstream clients. However, only four NPOs applied, and he took on all four.

One of the projects was an NPO called Every Day Earth Day, which was looking for ways to support environmental programs already begun, he said.

We decided to host the Eco Japan Cup. We chose the name and designed the mark and logo, and we took out an advertisement on the Eco Japan Cup and created posters. 2008 was the third year we did it. It's going to become quite a major event.

Kazufumi's volunteer projects took up only 5 or 10 percent of his time, and "there were limits to what I could do," he said. "I began to think that design ought to proceed to new fields."

In 2007, he and others at Hakuodo "built a team of about 15 people and launched the Plus Design Project. Simply put, it is social issue plus design. In other words, if there is a subject, we tackle the subject and try to solve the subject through design methodology." The team currently has three initiatives including a collaboration with university students on earthquake preparedness, scheduled to report at a conference in March 2009.

Soichi Ueda of Spaceport Inc. and the Think the Earth project said that part of what led him to work in the field of social design was the 1995 Kobe earthquake.

"I was not there when the earthquake hit, but it's my home," he said. "I walked through the devastated area and I was shocked."

"I felt a lot of things at the time. People through sadness and desperation feel a lot of things. When people build things that are devastated and lost after 20 seconds from the earth shaking, what does this mean?"

"I think the first one or two months a lot of people were devastated. They lost hope. But after a while there's a lot of creativity that emerges. A lot of people work so hard and are reenergized to try to rebuild their home town," Soichi continued.

"Right now we are busy with economic crises and financial crises and a lot of turmoil. So, I think we can learn from the message."

A year after the earthquake, Soichi left his ad agency job. Reflecting on the 1988 book *The Home Planet*, edited by Kevin Kelley with comments and photos by astronauts and others from 14 countries, he began to think about the astronauts' unique luxury:

It was still in the midst of the Cold War. The astronauts--I think they have it easy, because they go to space and they're able to look at Earth from space. Their comments sound so beautiful. But what can we feel even if it's a fraction of what the astronauts feel? What can we feel on our own?

"This led me to think about a watch, because you keep a watch with you most of the time," he said: "If you can look at the Earth every day and if information about the Earth was updated every time" on a watch worn on the wrist, "this is a prototype" for "a desirable type of 21st century." Thus was born the Think the Earth project, whose products, including a watch developed with Seiko in 2001 and a cellphone service that shows weather-satellite pictures of the Earth's cloud cover, are sold online and the proceeds dedicated to environmental causes.

"In a nutshell, a sustainable society--how is this to be achieved?" Soichi asked. "This is one of the central topics of today's discussion."

Right away, he and others working on Think the Earth chose *not* to use the color green, for at the time, NPOs and the environmental movement "were do-gooders," Soichi said, echoing the earlier remarks made by Max Schorr of GOOD Magazine. The image has changed, but "ultimately people should be curious, so how can we use design to trigger people's curiosity, I think that was our primary role."

"I think we are the first generation to take this perspective," the perspective of astronauts circling the Earth and looking at it from space, Soichi concluded. And this means "we are living in a very blessed era."

Over 10 years ago when Soichi began working on Think the Earth, "environmental-movement people were considered watermelons: they were green on the surface, but red on the inside," commented **Masaaki Ikeda**. "We were very nervous about that," about whether eco-consciousness might be viewed as anti-capitalist or akin to Communism, the "red" of the watermelon metaphor. Now, "I think the younger generation have broken through these inhibitions, and so I'm very impressed and moved by that."

"On a personal note, Ueda-san is from Kobe. I was surprised by that. I also originally come from Kobe, and my home was devastated by the earthquake," Masaaki continued. "A lot of people don't have good images of Kobe," and indeed "I did not like Kobe. That's why I escaped Kobe to go to a university in Tokyo. But because of the earthquake, people were made cognizant of the need to help each other sincerely, from the heart. People were very responsive to the earthquake and the devastation."

Masaaki Ikeda asked Valerie Casey:

Am I right that the Aqueduct bicycle can only be used on paved roads, and if so, how can it be improved for use on Africa's many unpaved roads?

The bicycle does work on unpaved roads, but not on "very bad terrain, so you would have to have thicker tires," replied Valerie. The pump "is actually quite affordable, which is the crux of the project, but all of the ruggedizing isn't rugged enough, and the plastic is too expensive."

Through IDEO, multiple organizations are now working to refine it, and in any event "the big takeaway from the Aqueduct is not the solution itself," she added. "The point of it is to say that a small group of people who have a passion around solving a problem can prototype something very quickly and create enough catalyst for corporate backers and other organizations to join forces."

Kazufumi Nagai asked Valerie:

We in creative lines of work tend to be preoccupied by a new thing that's discovered by one business, and to think of patent protection first. But you are speaking about sharing by all parties, which is wonderful and very innovative. What are your views on the mode of sharing?

The model for the Designers Accord is based on "a really awful marketing or business term in the U.S. called co-opetition, which is cooperation plus competition," Valerie Casey replied. This means in essence learning to "identify your competitors and figure out ways to make them your collaborators. That changes the competitive environment and the landscape in which you're operating."

With the Designers Accord, there is information sharing about client projects but it's with the client's consent. At IDEO, Valerie explained, "we get permission in our contracts to talk about projects in terms of the Designers Accord. One of the guidelines advocates for changing your contracts so that if you do a certain amount of travel they will pay offsets, for instance. That is a very basic one. The other thing is that you are saying we're going to share some information—but not proprietary information."

"Industry is actually moving much faster" than the design community, she said, one example being IBM's Eco-Patent Commons for sharing technology on recycling.

Ten years ago, the Designers Accord and GOOD Magazine might not have grown so exponentially. Why is it working now?

"The internet is where we're seeing scale," answered Max. What started as ones and twos has grown "to a million monthly unique visitors, and over 10 million people watched our online videos last year."

At the launch in 2006, "we wanted to just tell people this is a new idea, let's be innovative, let's be creative, we can change the world. And now a couple of years in, people say yeah-yeah, we get that. You don't need to tell us anymore, but what do we *do*?" said Casey. "That's where we see the huge, next level of growth."

Valerie observed: "I actually think, although my accountant wouldn't say this, the recession is probably the best thing that we could have in motivating us to make better change around this." Sustainability is "about being more efficient, and it's about realizing that you can create great opportunities from very little, which is the core of innovation."

Designers "are guilty of designing obsolescence in all the products we create," and the Designers Accord is no exception, she said:

I designed the Designers Accord to be a five-year plan, so at the end of five years we will not have the Designers Accord anymore. It should not have to exist.

This has created a sense of real necessity and speed, and that's why the first year and a half have we've had such aggressive growth, because it's been so important. We only have three and a half more years to make the change that we've set out to do. So, it's an internal competitive metric as well--

--"and I'm very tired," she added with humor.

Soichi Ueda asked:

Up until now designers talked about capitalism: We produce, or we provide a service, which is sold, and companies make profit out of that, and designers' creativity tries to help that process.

Now design is broadening as a concept, and designers are playing roles and using their talents to better society. How do designers inspire people to go out and do specific things to change things for the better?

"I think you have here, in Tokyo, some of the best examples we have seen of the movement," Max said, including the group greenz as well as the web designer Yugo Nakamura, whom he, Casey and Valerie met the day before.

"There has to be a personal reason, a personal satisfaction, a professional satisfaction, and social or cultural satisfaction," Valerie said. Government is essential, "but it's never going to be just government"—witness the UN, which "has failed so extraordinarily in any issue globally over the last few years. It's why the Kyoto Protocol, while so rich and interesting, is failing. It needs a redo."

Ultimately, she added, "to design a system like that, and to enable that system to scale is going to take more models than the models that we have now. It's all about the systems at scale, I think."

Casey Caplowe commented: "I have learned, or come to see, that all of these things--design, business--if you view them as means, not as the ends, we're not trying to start a business to start business, or design to look at design as the ends, but it's a means." Helping the environment is something that takes "a ton of little personal decisions," yet "governments do have to get involved; policy does need to be there."

How does GOOD get revenue? Is it all advertising income?

"We now have a partnership which allows us to also get income from our members, but primarily it's advertising based," Max Schorr answered.

How do you set up a team that keeps creativity and quality on a very high level?

"It's finding and identifying and tapping into people who I think are doing the best work and are the most talented," Casey Caplowe said. "It's sometimes a fun experiment in getting people to do things that they don't normally do," as with GOOD Magazine's layout and design, which are done as they were from the start by a small New York studio known more for graphic and brand design than magazine design. Part of it is "setting a few rules, so that people get to push off something," he added.

Please comment on this visit to Japan and what you've found especially interesting in terms of design.

Muji is one, Valerie Casey said, though not perhaps for the expected reason:

In the U.S., Muji is so fetishized and it's so extraordinarily special. When we talked about the mission here, that was all about the essential, the simple, taking out the clutter, and it was so honest, and it was non-branded, and in the U.S. it is the biggest brand. So, it was an interesting cultural context creating new meaning around a product.

Another "is the ability of people to live so densely here with such civility," she said:

We had the joy of spending some time with an architect yesterday who was designing buildings that were in such small quarters, and in such sensitivity to the human needs that we have within such tight constraints.

And so those environments are places that I would prefer to live than in sprawl.

"If design can make you want to live in a tiny 400 square foot space instead of a 4,000 square foot space, then it's succeeding, because we're all going to have to do that," she concluded.

"There is definitely a whimsy that is great to see in a nice balance," Casey Caplowe said.

How can design be used specifically to help urgent causes?

"The power of imagination is one strength of design, and therefore in your brain you try to simulate what would happen, and then try to imagine the feelings that you would feel, or the problems that you may encounter if that happens," said Kazufumi Nagai.

Kiva.com, the online microlending community, "that's a good project," Soichi Ueda responded. "To make a commitment to that person, it means being connected to the region where that person lives," and when people do that, "if something occurs, then you're more motivated to help that person in that area."

"If you think about the fact that we're all designers," Valerie Casey said, "then you could actually start designing better behaviors all the time, like carrying a water bottle, like reusing a reusable bag, like having a conversation with someone that you may not have had before."

The "tiny, little incremental shifts that aren't as romantic and culturally rewarding in traditional terms as doing huge projects, but they are the things that are going to be *the* most critical things for all of us."

"If you're prepared, you have nothing to fear, is a Japanese adage," Kazufumi said.

What is good, and what is design?

Casey said, "I don't want to suggest that we have the answer. But I think it is a matter of relativity, and I think on one hand good is being better and improving and taking steps forward."

"On the other hand, it is important to recognize that better--being less bad is better, but it still may not be good. Using less trash is better than using more trash, but there's still trash."

"I think design is the thing that will help us get there. It's definitely to me about problem solving, and it is the process of trying to make things better."

"That's a terrible question--two terrible questions," Valerie said with a twinkle.

"I would say that for me good can't be traditionally quantified," she added. "It's relative, but I think its essential quality is open mindedness. And I agree that design is about problem solving as well, but more importantly for me at this moment design means understanding context, the context of every action I take and every action I don't take."

"We have good, because there's bad," reflected Soichi. "But what is good? On a personal note, I think it's linked with motivation." Thus "if people are happy with the work that you do, I think that encourages you to work."

"I'm not qualified to talk about what is design," he added, "but design has something to do with the future--a means to show the future in advance of others."

At art school, people study harmony, Kazufumi said, "and in that word harmony there's the harmony or relationship between client and company and relationship with society and community." Thus for him, design has an implicit social aspect and an aspect of the ideal.

So, our three guest speakers from abroad: Could you give a message to the young aspiring designers in Japan?

"Well, the first thing would be to join the Designers Accord," Valerie said. Then "ask yourself why you really want to be a designer. And if you can figure that out, then you're probably going to be streets ahead of the rest of us, who are designers now," and "you will be so much better poised to make real impact instead of spending your whole career trying to figure it out."

Max reflected, "It's important to do small things with integrity. Make every decision with integrity. And even if nobody is looking, if you do something like that, the power of your example will be strong."

"This idea of good, even as hard as it is to define, it's not something that's a generational thing," he added. "What is so powerful about it is that people of all ages, and all backgrounds, and even competitors, will work together for this thing, because it's greater than each of us."

For young designers starting out, "It's okay to not know why you want to do it, and to go for it and learn along the way and be open to not knowing," Casey said. "To pursue the best and pursue your own potential, wherever that takes you, even if it changes course."