

Should designers design?

Design as a practice of judgment.

SESSION 08
09.21.26

Workhorse Collective

ART 418 · Fall 2026

Name Abraham Garcia
Email abe@wrkhrs.co

Meets Mon + Wed, 1:30 to 2:50
Today Session 08 · 09.21.2026

What is design?

What are we doing when we design something?

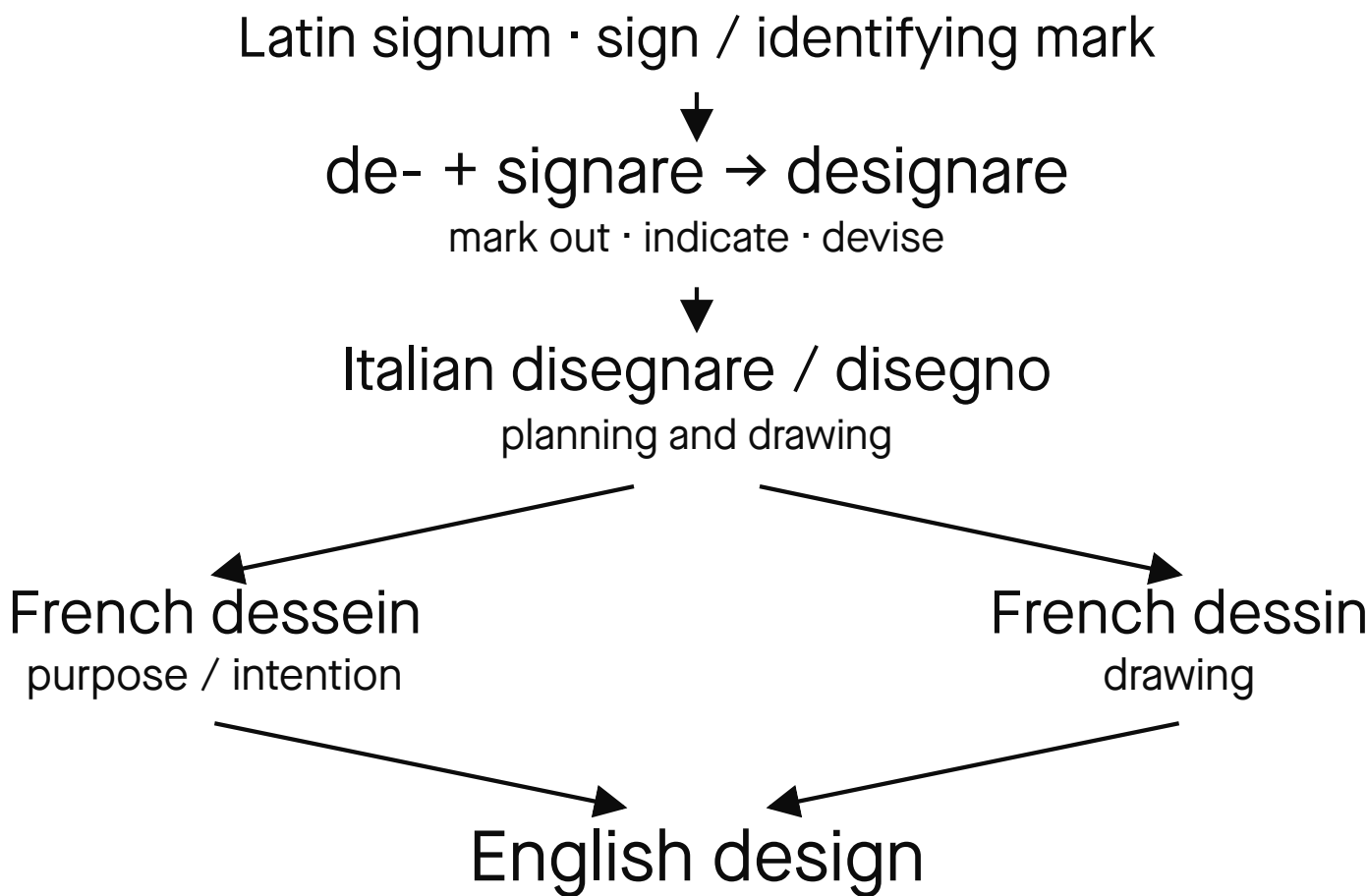
Design

Begin with the word · Dictionary senses, paraphrased

As a noun	A plan or intention; the arrangement of elements; a pattern or proposed form.
As a verb	To conceive or develop something for a purpose or effect.
Our starting definition	Design gives form to a purpose under particular conditions, with consequences for others.
A question to carry	Who chooses that purpose, and how could making change it?

Design holds intention and drawing together

Current meanings · Word history · A definition to test



Current use

Planning, pattern, purpose, and form.

Working definition

A purpose takes form; the form can change what we intend.

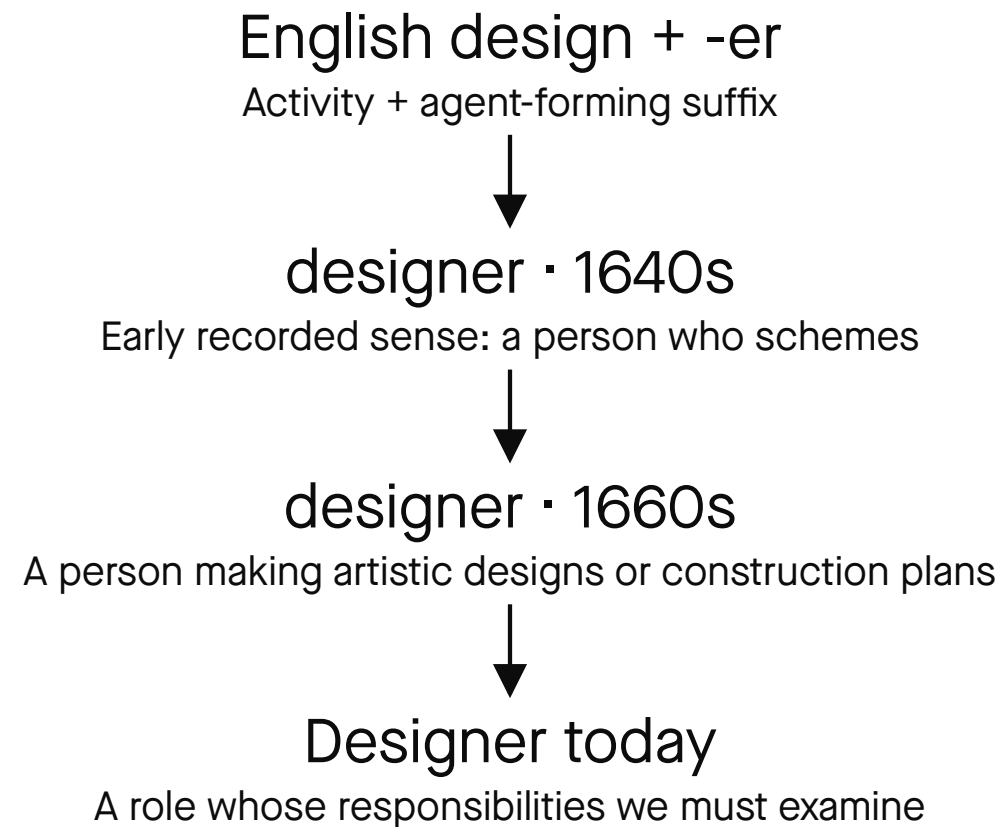
English: making/shaping in the late 1300s; planning in the 1540s; noun in the 1580s; drawing in the 1630s.

What is a designer?

Given that account of design, what does a designer do?

Designer: from the activity to the role

Current meanings · Word history · A definition to test



Current use

Someone who conceives or develops designs.

Working definition

A designer gives form to intentions and takes responsibility for decisions that affect others.

The history names an agent. It does not establish the boundaries or ethics of the profession.

“A designer’s work starts way before a single pixel gets placed and ends way after the last one is locked in place.”

DESIGN IS A JOB · P. 10

MM

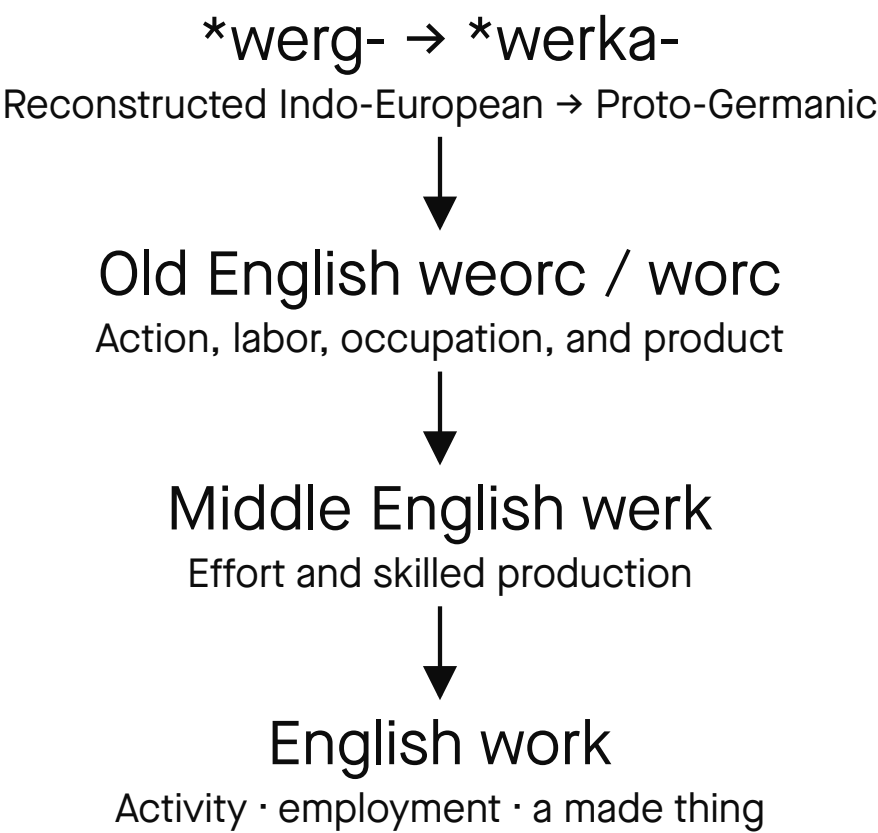
Mike Monteiro

American designer. Co-founded the design studio Mule.

Hall, p. 76: “You define the human world, one object or system at a time.”

Work names the activity and its result

Current meanings · Word history · A definition to test



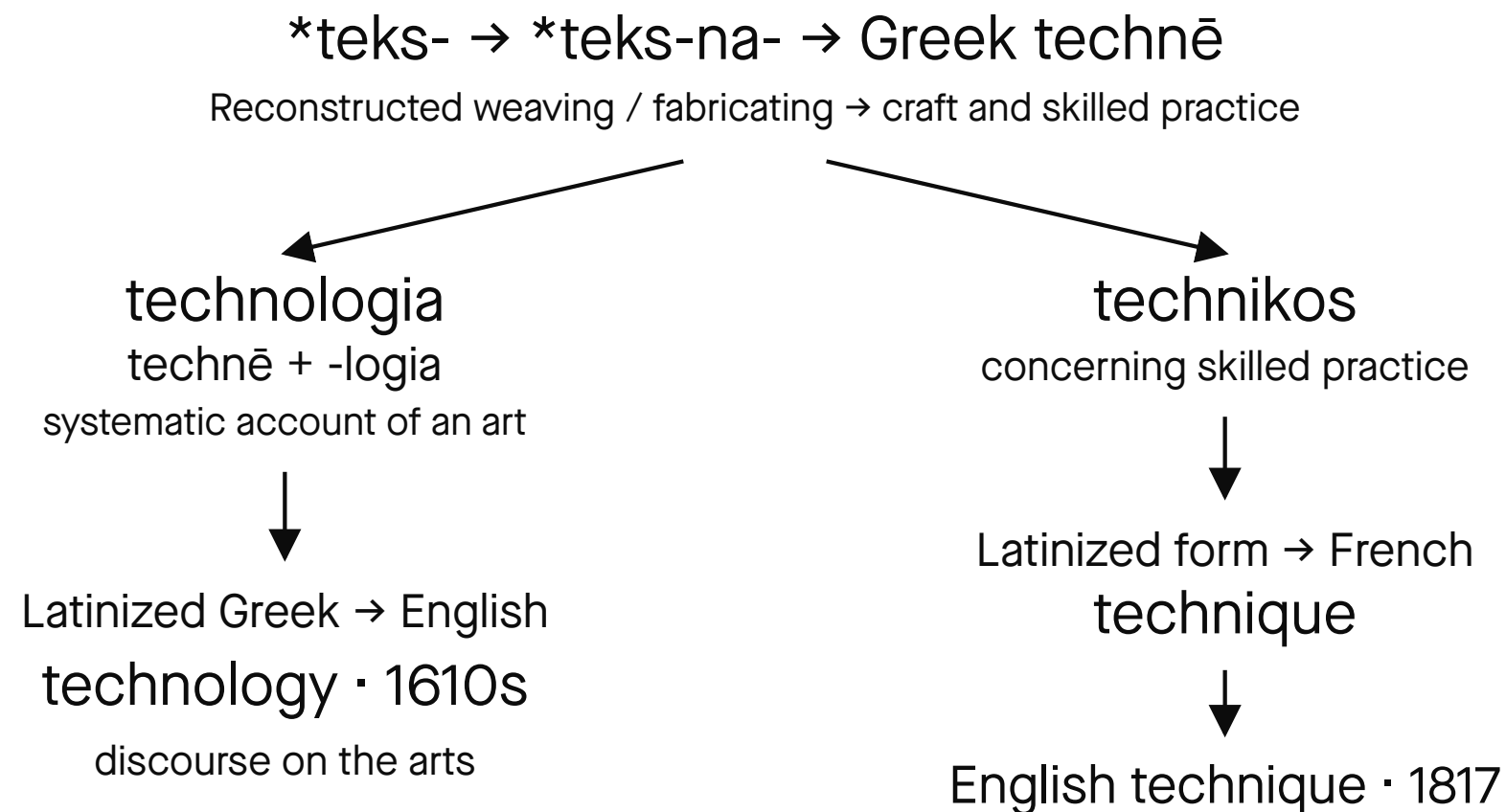
Current use
Effort toward an end, employment, a task, or something produced.

Working definition
Work is the activity through which we make or sustain something; it also names the result.

Labor as a measurable commodity is recorded around 1300. “Out of work” appears in the 1590s.

Technology and technique share a root

Current meanings · Word history · A definition to test



Current use

Technology: practical knowledge and its tools or systems. Technique: a practiced method of doing something.

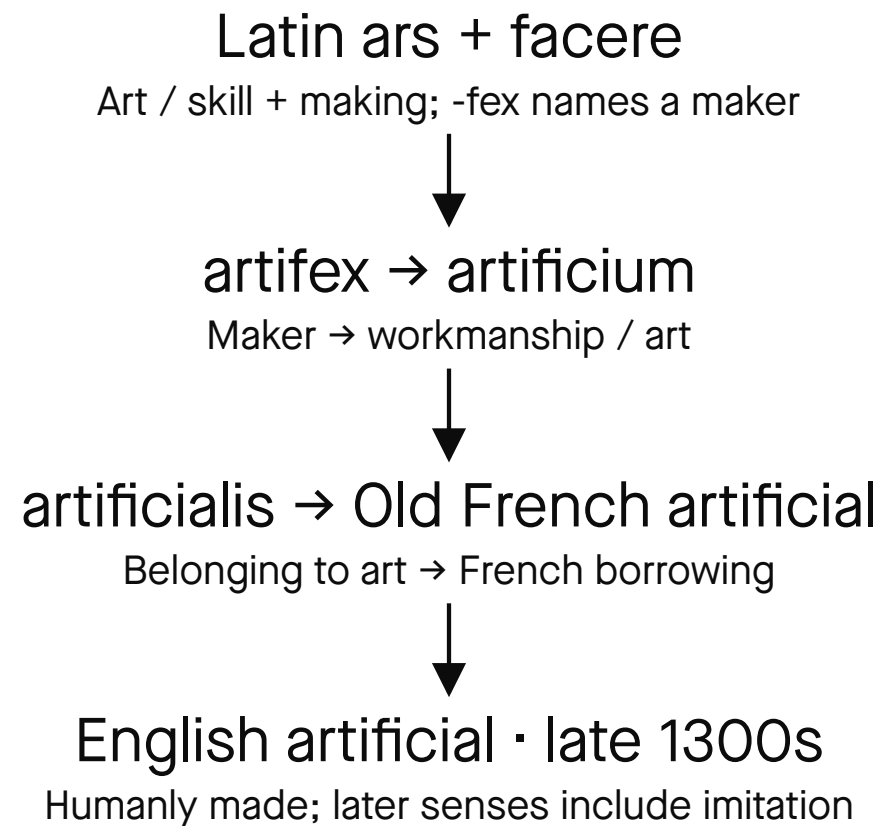
Working definition

Technology is the tools and systems for doing something. Technique is the practiced skill of doing it.

Technology acquired mechanical and industrial senses by 1859. Technique entered English through discussion of artistic execution.

Artificial begins in skilled making

Current meanings · Word history · A definition to test



Current use

Made through human activity; also simulated, contrived, or insincere in particular uses.

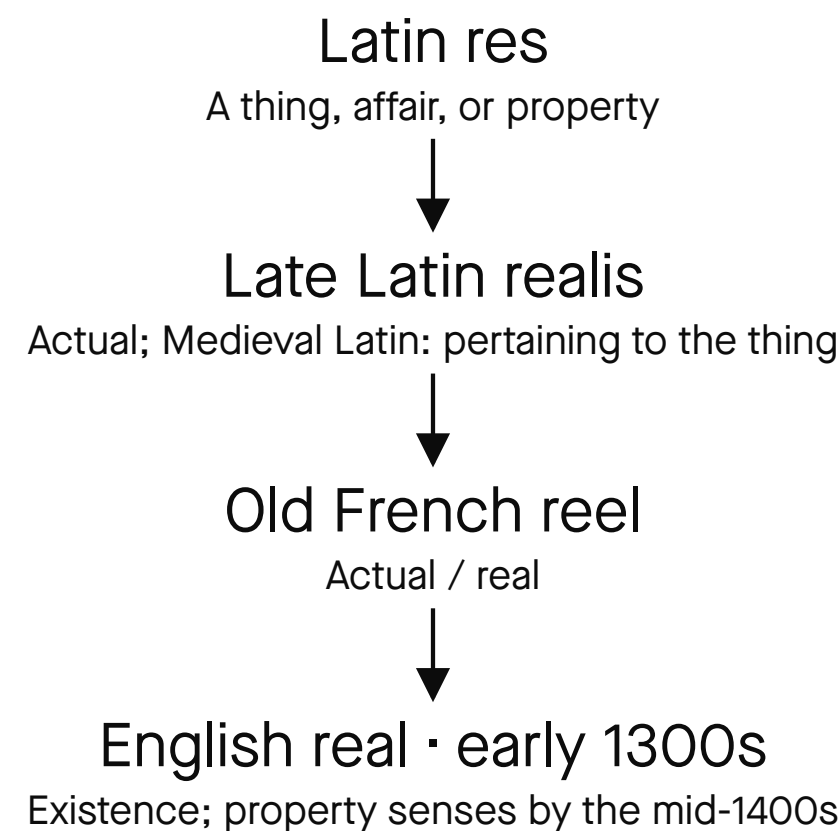
Working definition

Artificial describes how something is made or how it relates to what occurs naturally.

Human workmanship: early 1400s. Imitation: 1500s. Insincerity: 1590s; fictitiousness: 1640s.

Real moves from things to authenticity

Current meanings · Word history · A definition to test



Current use

Actually existing or occurring; also genuine or authentic.

Working definition

Ask what actually exists. Then ask, separately, what a picture or a demo of it claims.

“Genuine” is recorded in the 1550s. An artificial thing can exist and have real effects.

A made thing can have real consequences

Four questions we should keep separate

ORIGIN How was it made? A prototype is constructed.	EXISTENCE What is actually there? A working interface can be encountered.
EVIDENCE What does it establish? A simulated interview supplies no participant testimony.	CONSEQUENCES What happens when people use it? A design can affect access, trust, and behavior.

So a convincing mockup still has to say what evidence stands behind it.

Who decides

Who gets to determine the purpose?

A client commissions work that a designer interprets, while other people live with the result.

Designer as author

Michael Rock · Added context · Paraphrase

The appeal	Authorship offers designers a claim to agency and to meaning in their work.
The difficulty	Design is often collaborative and commissioned. A singular author can obscure how the work is made.
Rock’s complication	Interpretation and formal treatment also produce meaning. Designers can act as translators or performers.
Return to Wild	If content, form, and production become less separate, how should credit and authority change?

What are you claiming to author?

Use one decision from your current project

PURPOSE	Who decided what the project should accomplish?
CONTENT	Whose knowledge or experience gives it substance?
FORM	How do selection, sequence, and emphasis change its meaning?
PRODUCTION	Who and what make the result possible?
RECEPTION	What can the audience interpret differently?

Name a contribution you can explain. Identify someone whose contribution your account leaves out.

Does shipping change who designs?

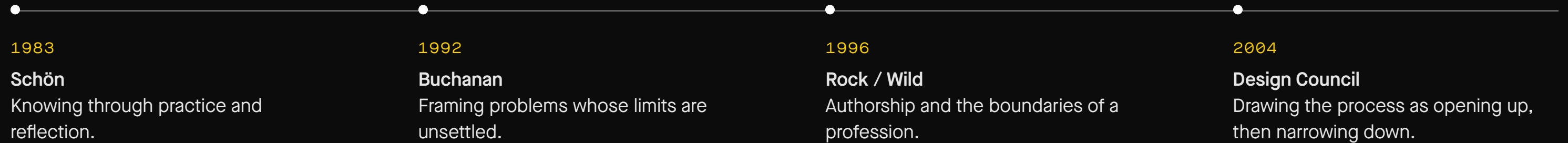
What happens when the person planning the work can also bring it into use?

A changing division of work

Wild and Soleio · Definitions and source positions

Wild · Emigre 39	The professional role took shape as planning and form-giving separated from content and production. New media can alter those boundaries. <i>Paraphrase.</i>
Soleio · episode framing	“Why the future belongs to designers who can ship” <i>Dive Club’s published episode description, not a transcript quote.</i>
Our comparison	Greater ability to produce can change who controls decisions and how people collaborate. Does that also change what the designer is responsible for?

Different accounts of what designers know and do



THESE POSITIONS COEXIST. EACH HELPS US ASK A DIFFERENT QUESTION.

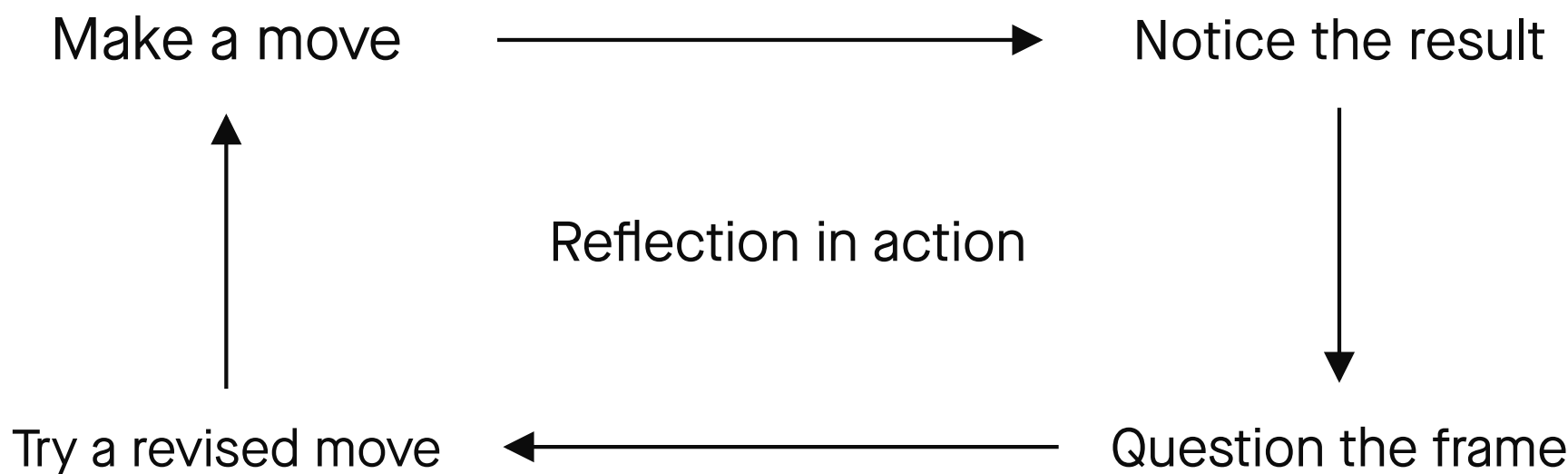
The brief is already a design decision

Buchanan · Wicked problems · Paraphrase

An unsettled problem	Design problems often have no definitive formulation. Their boundaries and relevant conditions require judgment.
A different brief	“Build a campus events app” becomes “Help commuters find events they can attend.”
What changes	Research may now examine schedules, transport, and belonging. An app becomes one possible response.
Connection to Hall	Whose experience would change the way you frame the problem?

Making can change the question

Schön · Reflection in action · A classroom application



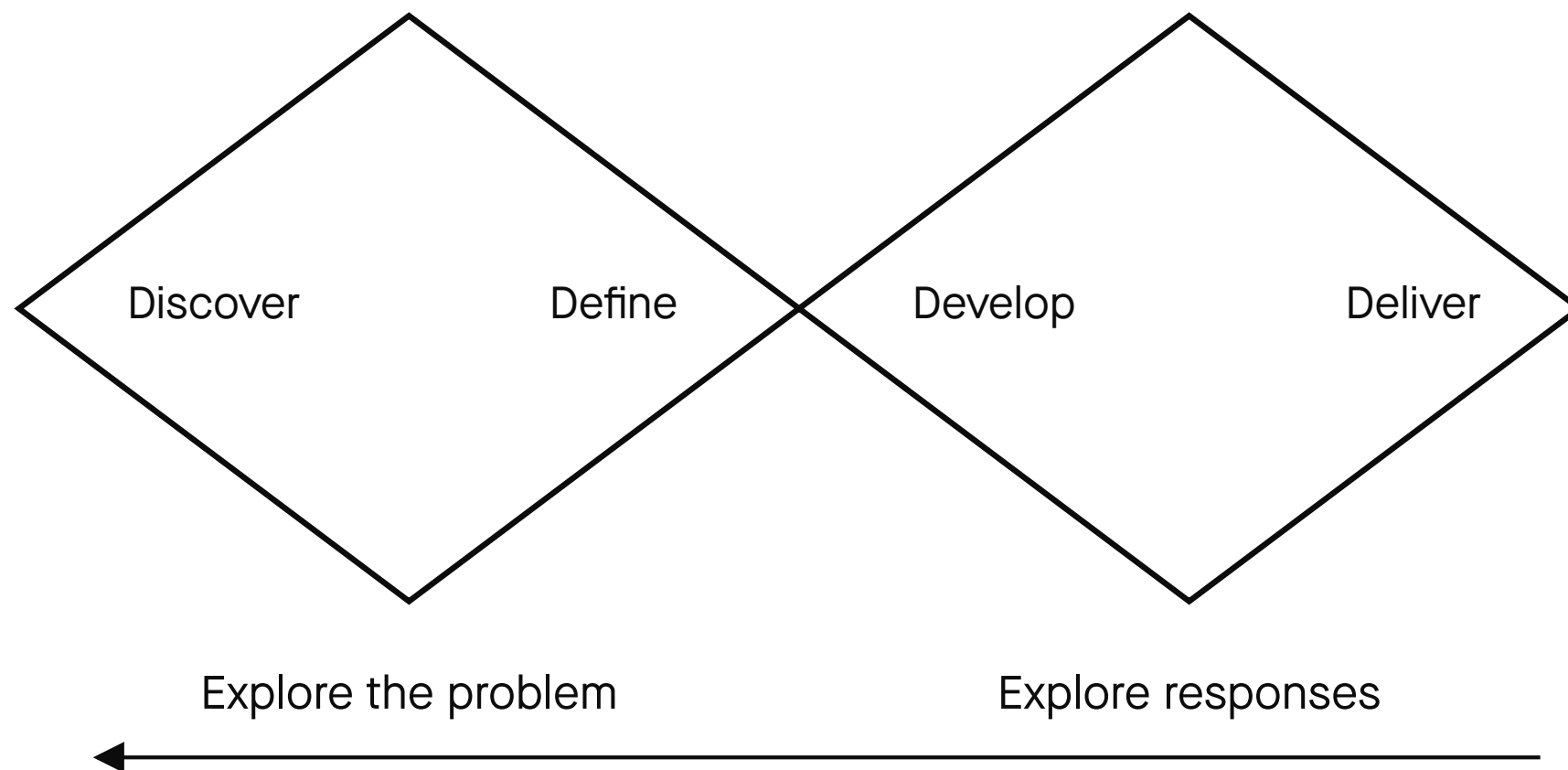
A sketch can expose an assumption you could not see in the brief.

In your project, what did making teach you that planning alone had missed?

Bring this to Wen’s emphasis on craft and judgment. What would you need to notice before changing a method?

The double diamond draws the process so a team can see where it is

Design Council · Double Diamond



Expand the possibilities, then make a reasoned choice. Test what the choice makes possible.

The Council includes early making, collaboration, and returns to the problem.

Which part would change under Wen's account? Which obligation to learn would remain?

What exactly is dead?

What does Wen mean by “process,” and would Monteiro or Hall disagree?

Method still requires judgment

Process · Definitions and source positions

Monteiro · p. 6	“a methodical process that can be repeated time and time again” <i>His alternative to relying on instinct alone.</i>
Hall · p. 86	An interview guide works “more as a checklist than as a script.”
Wen · paraphrase	Hatch frames the talk as a challenge to rigid process under changed working conditions, with greater emphasis on craft and judgment.
A possible reading	These positions may differ over how to organize the work while sharing concern for the quality of decisions. Test this against the talk. <i>Seminar interpretation.</i>

Our argument

A design takes a position.

What it makes easy, hard, or impossible shows what its designer thinks should happen.

The same brief can produce different commitments.

A public library asks us to design room booking.

PROPOSAL A · ADVANCE BOOKING Every room is reserved online. A phone confirms entry. The service is organized around people who can plan ahead and use the required device.	PROPOSAL B · MIXED ACCESS Some rooms remain available for walk-ins, with booking help at the desk. The service makes room for unplanned visits and people who need another way in.
WHAT A COMMITS US TO Predictable reservations become the priority. We need to investigate who loses access under those conditions.	WHAT B COMMITS US TO Multiple routes to access become the priority. We must resolve competing demands on rooms and staff time.

The brief leaves a decision open: whose circumstances will the service accommodate?

Craft is how the position reaches someone.

The commitment has to survive the details.

HIERARCHY

A walk-in option buried below the booking button can disappear in practice.

LANGUAGE

“No availability” and “Ask at the desk” describe different possibilities.

INTERACTION

The route to help must work for someone who cannot complete the online form.

JUDGMENT

Making and observing the service let us test whether the form carries our intention.

Our argument

If we can make more, we have more to judge.

When AI speeds production, we still have to decide which possibilities deserve to become part of someone's life.

“you are responsible for the work you put into the world.”

MIKE MONTEIRO · *DESIGN IS A JOB* · P. 9

Our claim: a designer’s account of authorship must include what they chose and what happened when others encountered it.

Responsibility is shared with collaborators and institutions. We still have to explain our part.

Who gives the designer the authority to decide?

A position has to remain answerable to other people.

The objection	Calling something “worth making” can turn the designer’s preferences into rules for everyone else.
Our response	People affected by a decision need a meaningful way to shape it and contest it. The designer’s expertise is one contribution to that process.
What follows	We should make the reasons for a decision visible and be prepared to revise the work. Some briefs deserve to be challenged before they are fulfilled.

Design gives form to what we believe is worth making.

A designer must be able to explain that belief and answer to the people who live with the result.

The assigned conversation

For reference after the discussion.

Lorraine Wild

[That Was Then, and This Is Now: But What Is Next?](#)

Emigre 39, 1996. Return to our first reading.

Soleio

[The Rise of Designers Who Ship](#)

Jenny Wen

[The design process is dead. Why designers can no longer trust it.](#)

Mike Monteiro

Design Is a Job, chapters 1 and 2.

Opening: chapter 1, printed pages 5 to 10 in the assigned PDF.

[The author's chapter 1 excerpt](#)

Erika Hall

Just Enough Research, chapter 5: User Research.

Chapter 5, especially printed pages 76, 77, and 84 to 86.

Word histories

Origins inform the questions. Our definitions remain open to revision.

Design and work	Design · Work
Technology	Technology · Technique
Artificial and real	Artificial · Real
Thomas Moore	Thomas Moore on Meaningful Work Audio program. Instructor context on work and vocation.

Present-day meanings

A way to connect our definitions · Open to revision

Design	American Heritage Dictionary · design
Work	American Heritage Dictionary · work
Technology	American Heritage Dictionary · technology
Artificial	American Heritage Dictionary · artificial
Real	American Heritage Dictionary · real

Research behind the questions

For reference after the discussion.

Use and learning	HEPI / Kortext · Student Generative AI Survey 2026
Student experiences	Jisc · Student perceptions of AI 2025
Use and feelings	Gallup / Walton Family Foundation / GSV · Gen Z survey, 2026
Education and careers	Lumina Foundation / Gallup · College students, 2026
Learning experiments	Bastani et al. · High-school mathematics, 2025 Kestin et al. · College physics, 2025

Theory added to the conversation

Reference · Instructor context

Authorship

Michael Rock · Designer as Author
1996 argument; 2013 adaptation on 2×4.

Problem framing

Richard Buchanan · Wicked Problems in Design Thinking
Design Issues 8(2), 1992, pp. 5 to 21.

Reflective practice

Donald Schön · The Reflective Practitioner
1983; publisher overview and chapter 3.

Design thinking

Design Council · Framework for Innovation
Double Diamond launched in 2004. Iteration is explicit.
