Abstract: Our interest in design is divided into two: practical interest and cognitive interest. While practical interest focuses on producing the outcome by designing, cognitive interest seeks understanding of design through insight into design. In other words, the former generates a product; and the latter leads to understanding. They are two different approaches to design; yet, they have in common in that both are seeking to promote design. Therefore, having a clear understanding of what practical and cognitive interests are about and what they are seeking to achieve is important to enrich the world of design. The enlargement of meaning of design these days demonstrates the growing importance of matters regarding cognition of design. Knowing ‘what is design’ is increasingly becoming important to determine the scope and direction of design practice. Better practice comes from better knowledge, since we practice to the extent of what we know. Design is no exception in this.

Key Word: Practical interest, Cognitive interest, How to design, What to design, What is design

1. Practical Interest and Cognitive Interest

Our interest in design is divided into two: practical interest and cognitive interest. While practical interest focuses on producing the outcome by designing, cognitive interest seeks understanding of design through insight into design. In other words, the former generates a product; and the latter leads to understanding. They are two different approaches to design; yet, they have in common in that both are seeking to promote design. Therefore, having a clear understanding of what practical and cognitive interests are about and what they are seeking to achieve is important to enrich the world of design.

In fact, separation of practice and cognition as unique characteristics of human capacity has existed from ancient times. According to the concepts of Aristotle, cognitive interest falls into ‘theoria’; while practical interest falls into ‘poiesis’-in that this is poetic practice rather than ethical one. They had different characteristics and aims. In reality, however, they were neither separable nor conflicting with each other. It is important to realize, on the contrary, that they both are combined in practical terms on a higher level.

In the design sector, however, ‘cognitive interest’ has not received its due attention, which stems from a deep-rooted stereotype regarding design only as a practical activity. Some tend to regard cognitive interest in design as having nothing to do with practice, or even further, as doing harm to it. This phenomenon seems to demonstrate what the lack of cognitive interest in design results in. Design, of course, starts from practical interest like many other spheres of human lives. However, once reaching to a certain stage, practical interest will lead to cognitive interest. In this respect, the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel noted, "the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk".

2. From ‘scientific design’ to ‘science of design’

In discussing relations between practice and cognition in design, questions arise as to whether it should be ‘cognition for practice’ or ‘cognition for cognition per se’. However, this approach rather simplifies the matter. This is because, in relation to practice, the significance of cognition ultimately depends on how to set the level on which practice operates. In addition, overview of the history of study of design reveals interest in design has shifted from practice to cognition. Nigel Cross observed that study of design has moved from ‘scientific design’ to ‘design science’ and to ‘science of design’. ‘Scientific design’ should be seen as a means for design practice, so this can be regarded as a stage of practical interest, which transforms toward cognitive interest with ‘design science’.

The reason behind this transition of interest in the study of design lies, in part, in the development of the design sector itself and also lies in social, cultural changes. These days, in fact, design is not only a matter of production; this is also an issue of whether it is received broadly among the public and further, an issue of social, cultural implications. And this does not mean reduction of practice but enlargement of cognition. This can be also explained by looking at how issues design has focused on have changed. Put it simply, issues regarding design are thought to have shifted from ‘how to design’ through ‘what to design’ to ‘what is design’. ‘How to design’ can be seen as a stage exploring how to design products in what ways in the industrialization age. On the other hand, ‘what to design’ indicates designing which is creates and selective due to technological innovations and social changes. In the electronic age, for example, we should design products never existed before and make visible what is not seen. Sony Walkman addressed the issue of ‘what to design’ in a quite creative way.
3. Importance of ‘what is design’

Today, even further, however, the issue of ‘what is design’ has become important, which signifies the advent of an era where cognition of design determines practice. This shows design is increasingly becoming difficult to define, which also indicates ‘know-what’ in design is becoming important as much as ‘know-how’. This era we are living in is called the third mechanical age, or information age. Now, it is becoming clearer that it is knowledge and social process that determine design. As mentioned above, it does not need to separate practice from cognition in design nor see them as conflicting with each other. In fact, many thinkers since ancient times have emphasized integration of practice and cognition, which, however, is possible based on clear understanding of practice and cognition. The combination of those two aspects is a task involving practice on another level, and in fact, cognition, in itself, is a part of practice in the view of Louis Althusser.

The enlargement of meaning of design these days demonstrates the growing importance of matters regarding cognition of design. Knowing ‘what is design’ is increasingly becoming important to determine the scope and direction of design practice. Better practice comes from better knowledge, since we practice to the extent of we know. Design is no exception in this.

4. References