

# Changing the change

Design Visions, Proposals and Tools

An international conference on the role and potential of design research in the transition towards sustainability

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Organised by Co-ordination of Italian Design Research Doctorates with  
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## Proposals for A Good Life: Senior Thesis Projects from Parsons Product Design (2003-08)

Not *The Good Life*, but *A Good Life*:

What is it? Where is it? Is it found in a world of bliss and plenty, or somewhere more fleeting and bittersweet? Is it guaranteed by agreement and uniformity, or through debate and difference? Is it a melting pot, mosaic, or other? A destination or a memory? Is it aesthetically or ethically centered, or somehow both together? And who shapes this world: the haves, the have-nots, or the "have-mores?" How does such a world make for *A Good Life*, and how might *A Good Life* make, or transform, such a world?

To engage and transform the increasingly non-linear and socially complex "wicked problems" that face humanity, we must re-design how we think. As Ben Lee, Provost of The New School, notes: "Problems such as environmental degradation, sustainability, poverty, financial crises, even democracy, cannot be handled within traditional disciplinary frameworks or national research paradigms." To propose sustainable solutions to these problems *we must also re-think how we design*, working across fields and academies to refocus the mutual influences of design research and practice.

For the past five years, the Parsons Product Design Department has re-considered a "practice oriented education" through the question of what characterizes "A Good Life," and for whom. When the "Change the Change" Conference opens in July 2008, 171 seniors will have developed personal thesis missions in collaboration with Non-profit organizations in New York City and around the world, sharpening professional skills and attitudes with a critical awareness of the design process as a powerful agency for change. In this program, each student identifies a specific problem and develops a comprehensive design strategy that reflects accountability for the impact of his or her product/system, from user scenarios through full life cycle analysis.

Several projects – including a global project for removing landmines and fashion for mastectomy survivors – have quickly garnered recognition (see below and proposed "Visualisations"), demonstrating that design can no longer be viewed as the production of discreet, fetishized objects, assembled by linear thinking in isolation of their extended influences. Pursuit of "A Good Life" raises questions of identity – personal and cultural – as well as issues of sensuality and responsibility, addressing the complex weave of forces engaged in developing any given product or system, locally and globally.

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CAPTION: Hideaki Matsui's "cleanup," completed as a thesis in 2006 for A Good Life 3, received the "Best of Category" in I.D. Magazine's 2007 Student Review. It is a powerful example of creating change in simple ways. In his thesis documentation he writes: "I chose soap as the product to promote the eradication of landmines because people use soap everyday. As someone cleans their hands with the soap, they can help clean the world of landmines."

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Benjamin Lee. "Provost's Convocation Remarks." The New School.  
[www.newschool.edu/admin/convocation/2007/ben\\_lee\\_remarks.html](http://www.newschool.edu/admin/convocation/2007/ben_lee_remarks.html) (September 6, 2007).