

## J.Ive talking

Alas, I can't claim credit for the title of this article. I remember seeing it years ago after a similar talking-heads event to that which took place last month at the Royal Geographical Society with Apple's Senior Vice President of Industrial Design, Jonathan Ive. I thought to myself, back then, 'Blimey, even his name is cool!' Of course, I'd happily give credit to the originator of the previous title, if only I knew who came up with it – answers on a postcard, aka tweet.

The topic of originality didn't specifically come up in the discussion between Ive and Sir Christopher Frayling, the departing Rector of the Royal College of Art, although the need to make things better did. In fact, Ive positively brushed aside the urge to come up with new things. 'New is easy!' he exclaimed with a wry smile on his face, suggesting that he and Frayling could come up with a few new ideas over drinks afterwards. Making things better, as far as he was concerned, was the difficult bit.

In fact Ive brushed quite a lot aside with consummate ease – with the world twittering, he clearly realises the commercial implications of his answers. The surprise of the evening for me, however, was not what he did or didn't say, it was what the esteemed gathering appeared not to have heard. Afterwards, there seemed to be an air of disappointment. The masses appeared to have wanted some preaching from the pulpit of creativity in order to lift the spirits of an 'industry' oft heralded in government circles as the saviour of our economy, but whom are seeing growing competition and a shrinking market.

When asked about the virtues of focus groups, and user research more generally, Ive's answer was so short Frayling had to ask the same question again. Ive repeated himself, 'We don't do it.' adding that they knew their market well enough. Frayling, who earlier in the evening had presided over the Helen Hamlyn Awards presentation, pushed harder to establish the importance of a user-centric design approach – the ethos of contemporary design practice. Ive's reply? That he was indeed passionate about the user, and that as a designer he spends every minute of every day absorbing how people live, operated, use things. That is what designers do, he didn't feel the need for focus groups. I guess he was already in focus. Frayling pushed harder to be reassured at least that Apple tested their ideas on users. 'No,' Ive replied, 'we are confident.'

Further questions rained in from the Internet, Frayling and the floor:

- Form follows function? It depends on what you mean by function.
- Design education? Encourage an obsession with products, teach making skills, and don't tell everyone they have to be a consultant.
- What about consultancy? I can't believe people with so little experience call themselves consultants.
- Why the British are not great innovators? They are.
- What to do about design getting a bad press? Do good design.
- What about bad design? Don't blame the manufacturer.
- How much of the iPhone did you design? The product is part of the whole.

- Did you consider the implication of my children listening to iPods all day long? That is your responsibility as parents.
- What about your design process? We don't waste time doing visuals.

But Frayling had saved the best for last: if I've ruled the world, and could change one thing, what would it be? There was a pause, a chuckle and a short answer. He would be a designer. I guess that wasn't what Frayling expected. He tried again. Still I've insisted that he would be a designer, and do the best he could to make things better. I guess it went over our heads; *I've* changed the world, simply by being a designer – *Jobs* done!

Jim Dawton