



## Design and the Global South

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## Design and the Global South

This special issue of *Design Philosophy Papers* (DPP) marks the coming of a concern with decoloniality by thinkers of the Global South. Decoloniality names an active process of (re)making that acknowledges the nonarrival of a postcolonial condition; it exposes the indivisible relation between modernity and colonialism, and it is, implicitly and explicitly, a critique of the epistemological foundation of postcolonial studies.

There is a growing community of critical design thinkers of the global South who recognize how design, as delivered by design education and professional practice, constituted in the service of colonialism, is deeply embedded in a Eurocentric epistemological foundation. The project, and its implicit claim of the universalism of design, is now contested and the process of de-globalization of design can be said to have begun.

As noted above, decoloniality is not just a description, a new label: there is an imperative to advance *practices* of decoloniality. One of these is by the constitution of a conceptual and practical borderland wherein the continued agency of enduring forms of colonial power meet a counterforce of not mere resistance, but generative of another kind of otherness. At the epicenter of this force is a dynamic of critical appropriation from the historicity of colonially imposed Eurocentric thought, which is linked to the revalorization of discredited or despised forms of knowledge of the colonized.

The issue of decolonization has been more recently taken up by design thinkers of the North. That the discussion has started is extremely important, but the level of discussion is still insufficiently informed by the context from which it comes. Moreover, the reception to it has been disappointing. Rather than embarking on a critique of this moment and its actors, what this issue of *DPP* sets out to do is contribute material to move the discussion forward, while both in the North and South recognizing that the geography of placement no longer holds, and neither does the geometry of the center and periphery. Many of the voices that speak here have a proximity to Latin America. The perspectives presented clearly do not speak for the South as a whole, but what they hopefully do is to put another wedge in the crack opening in the edifice of the hegemonic design discourse of the North and add to the space in which other voices can speak.

The way the issue came about was very simple. An extended, broadly based essay was written by Tony Fry to scope those relevant and relational issues in which design in/for the South is situated. This was no more than a first pass to critique and elaborate. A number of people known to be concerned with issues of design and decoloniality were then invited to write a direct or indirect response to this essay in whatever way they liked. What resulted is before you here in this issue of the journal. The issue has two aims: first, to contribute to development of the still inchoate relation between decoloniality and design as an acknowledged and developing field of inquiry and action. And second, to lay down another marker that communicates to the design community at large that the days of the hegemonic Eurocentric epistemological dominance of design are numbered.

As would be expected, the responses to Fry's paper are diverse, offer a range of perspectives, and move between varied levels of focus. Arturo Escobar divides his paper into two parts, the first revisiting the 'main elements' of what Fry proposes. His second part extends the argument

by putting forward a subset of the case for design by/for *and from* the global South design. In so doing, Escobar sets out to bring together his thinking on the 'autonomy and design, drawing on the conceptualization and struggles for autonomy by some Latin American social movements.' Madina Tlostanova expands Fry's critique of modernity and then brings together ontological and decolonial design, and thereby makes the case for an understanding and approach to design that goes beyond environmental and consequential human transformation. Design so characterized is powerfully presented as 'a creative and dynamic reflection and realization of the people's forgotten and discarded needs, wishes, and longings that would be inevitably linked to the local cosmologies, ethics and systems of knowledge seen not as the dead and museumized past, or as a conservative fundamentalist dystopia, but as a living and breathing present and a promise for the future.'

Hernán López-Garay and Daniel Lopera Molano set out to add to the 'conversation' sparked by Fry's paper. In particular, what they show is the existence of the 'driving forces' of the dialectical tension between what they call design and *alter design*, which they describe as having to do, in one direction, 'with *defuturing* and *sustainability*,' and, in the other, with 'care, dwelling, and *Sumak Kawsay*' (a term that in Quechua, a language spoken in the Andean countries of South America, literally means 'good living').

Juan Carlos Garzon again builds on the critique of Fry's and other papers, arguing that the kind of thinking and perspectives being outlined beg to 'be integrated in curriculums around the world.' He then more specifically explores a relation between design, animism, and spirit to open a new path of potential development by and from the South. Offering a variant on Tlostanova's view of indigenous contributions to the futuring of design, he sees the potential of the relation he considers as able to advance a located and 'profound understanding' of the symbolic exchange.

Recognizing life in an age at the end of fixed correlation between people and geography, Rolando Vazquez responds to Fry's invitation for contributors to address the question of the colonial difference that marks the 'South' as distinct from the 'North.' Adding to the critique of geography, he pays specific attention to the distinction 'as an anthropocentric mode of steering the anthropocene towards earthlessness and worldlessness; that is, not only as a period of human influence over earth but as a time of earth devastation and "defuturing."' As Vazquez makes clear, 'the loss of nonanthropocentric worlds' equally means 'the loss of the diversity of relational worlds.'

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