On decolonizing design

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ABSTRACT

Design is regarded in the article as an ontological instrument that is able to transform the social and cultural reality, and model human experience, subjectivity and environment. I focus on the intersections between Tony Fry's understanding of ontological design and the decolonial interpretation of modernity/coloniality as an overall design determining relation between the world, the things and the humans. The article attempts to draw a division between the positive (re-existent) and negative (defuturing) ontological designs. It addresses the coloniality of design that is control and disciplining of our perception and interpretation of the world, of other beings and things according to certain legitimized principles. The coloniality of design has accompanied the predominant modern universalist utopias such as Marxism or Liberalism and has been resisted internally and externally through various manifestations of border thinking and existence. I analyze Fry's concept of defuturing in relation to the decolonial concept of pluriversality. This allows to address in more detail the dynamic correlational principle as central to decolonial ontological design. Among specific decolonial tools of positive ontological design I focus on Sumak Kawsay, Earth Democracy, and a few more specific initiatives originating in the indigenous social movements from Eurasian borderlands. The article also addresses decolonizing of the affective sphere as ground for a positive ontological design. Finally I argue for the necessity of provincializing the Western/Northern design and allowing the decolonial design in the Global South develop its positive border "both and" positionality, a negotiating transcultural stance starting from the local geopolitics and corpo-politics put into dialogue and dispute with the modern/colonial defuturing design premises.

Design as a positive and negative ontological tool

Understood not merely in relation to its applied and technological facets, but rather as a powerful ontological tool capable of transforming the social and cultural reality, and modeling human experience, subjectivity and life style, and environment and social events, design is clearly one of the spheres in which ontology, epistemology and axiology intersect in a dynamic and creative way. Design in/by the Global South seen through a decolonial lens critically engages with issues of temporal-spatial coloniality and the corpo-political and geopolitical dimensions of knowledge, being and perception that form the concrete material,

and biographical, historical and local/spatial conditions of subjectivity production or design of the self. These anchors also happen to be the core elements of ontological design as defined by Tony Fry: 'Ontological design at its most general is a way of understanding the dynamic designing relations between the world, things and human beings' (Fry 2017).

It seems, however, that design has always been ontological, though this has not always been admitted by those who attempt to control design of the world and of humans. Modernity/coloniality as an overall design remains reluctant to discuss its principles, preferring to present them as natural, given by god, or rational and therefore sacred. This clearly avoids addressing the gist of the problem, while concentrating on various applied and incidental details such as technological gadgets. Calling design 'ontological,' then, may not be enough to bring us closer to the goal of decolonizing design. Ontological design can cause 'defuturing,' which Fry defines as 'a condition of mind and action that materially erodes (un-measurably) planetary finite time, thus gathering and designating the negation of "the being of time," which is equally the taking away of our future' (Fry 2011, 21), as much as it can serve as a tool of decolonial resurgence. It can, in other words, bring a positive or a negative – or futureless – ontology.

Modernity/coloniality as a total design

The fundamental relations between people, the world and things, have until recently been defined within the frame of normalized modernity/coloniality through its vectoral time and progressivist teleology; the rigid and absurdly rationalized managerial strategies applied to the spheres of knowledge and subjectivity production; the preference of urbanism over rurality; and the sanctification of technological development and applied forms of ecology aiming only at nature's preservation for its more successful exploitation in the future, the cult of the future and the dismissal of the negatively marked traditional past, particularly if this is a spatially alien past, with regular lapses into exoticism and antiquarianism.

The modern/colonial design is a perfect and pure manifestation of modernity's objectifying principle of perception and interpretation of the world, of other human and nonhuman beings, of manmade objects and knowledge. Decolonial thinker Santiago Castro-Gómez called it 'the hubris of the zero point' (Castro-Gómez 2005), meaning that the sensing and thinking subject, which is Western/Northern by default, occupies a delocalized and disembodied vantage point that eliminates other possible ways to produce, transmit and represent knowledge, allowing for a worldview to be built on a rigid essentialist modern/colonial model that hides its locality and represents itself as universal and natural or, in Neil Curtis' formulation, 'views the established beliefs and institutions of our modern heritage as not only real but true, and not only true but good' (Curtis 2012, 74). Decolonizing design, then, requires problematizing the affective and conceptual operations that form the basis of our relations with the world, and questioning the essentialist or instrumentalist approaches that have been naturalized previously.

Modernity/coloniality was designed in such a way that it has not allowed much space outside its metaphysics of the presence and of the present, which is, by definition, superfluous and denies the temporal dimension understood not as a frozen negative tradition, but as a dynamic and multiple past that radically and critically affects the present and allows for depth and complexity. Modern universalist utopias, such as Marxism or Neoliberalism, marked by distinct providential and messianic drives to build a new world and a new way

of life, and nurture a new human being, have striven for overall design of the world and the people according to certain schemes of social – if not overtly biological – engineering. The actual design strategies have long tuned in to a medium of major social transformations and shaping of new identities and subjectivities. The aesthetic counterparts of these (by now failed) ontological designs were also invariably universalist and homogenizing, pre-scribing certain rigid aesthetic principles and hence affecting and dismissing all others. Among such aesthetic trends and principles one could name the beauty of utility, the organic ideal, relational aesthetics, and boutique multiculturalism with its appropriation or commer-cialization of difference.

Coloniality of design and border thinking as a decolonial revolt

Take, for instance, the early Soviet constructivists' utopian dictate of designing an ideal com-munal environment that would then shape – through a set of specific controlled rituals – a perfect human being who is forced to be happy in a certain, prescribed way. In this rather extreme case, interior space entirely predetermined the patterns and timing of behavior and lifestyle. No wonder today's remnants of constructivist apartment complexes are often redesigned by their rebelling inhabitants through a refusal to spend most of their lives in predesigned public spaces, such as communal cafeterias and shared washrooms and solar-iums. These citizens are building private bathrooms, kitchens and balconies inside their failed communist utopian cells, thus reacting against this enforced collectivity.

On the other hand, in non-European Soviet colonies people reacted decolonially to the Bolsheviks' attempts to impose their specific modernity onto the local communities with their own axiological and epistemic ideals and ways of inhabiting physical and social space and time. For example, Central Asians refused to move to the Soviet multistoried apartment blocks because for centuries they were used to living on the ground, which had an ecological, economic and spiritual explanation (the Earth and ancestral support, specific agricultural patterns, and being adjusted to the seismically unstable zone). Forced to move into apart-ment blocks, these people managed to create negotiating communal spaces from below in the shared yards of socialist housing, which retained similar social functions to those of their previous lifestyle outside of Soviet modernity.

For better or worse, the Marxist ideal human being has never been successfully engi-neered. However, the winning neoliberal ideal consumer and an utterly fragmented subject alienated from the world and their own self – a consumer who lives in the eternal present and whose sphere of desire is completely colonized – has successfully emerged both in its Northern version and its many Southern varieties of second-hand modernity/coloniality. The latter would be grounded in the mimicry principle, imitating the shell and not the core, or repeating the rhetoric of modernity while ignoring its logic of coloniality. Anything that falls through these schemes is delegitimated as old-fashioned, traditional and nonmodern.

Coloniality of design is a control and disciplining of our perception and interpretation of the world, of other human and nonhuman beings and things according to certain legitimized principles. It is a set of specific ontological, epistemic and axiological notions imposed force-fully onto the whole world, including its peripheral and semiperipheral spaces in which alternative versions of life, social structures, environmental models or aesthetic principles have been invariably dismissed.

Border thinking and border perception originating on these fringes of modernity are marked by double consciousness, multiple optics and many-valued logic, and can potentially lead to a more radical rethinking of design, to its decolonization as an overall perceptive mechanism hiding its locality behind false universalism. Decolonial options rooted in border thinking and border epistemology can be tools to further lead design into its ontological, rather than applied, dimensions and focusing on the critique of our perception as colonized by the modern/Western-centric axiology. However, it is important to clearly see the difference between borders as boundaries that are policed on national, transnational and global levels, that strive to fix and preserve the previous state of modernity and are to be crossed to gain belonging to some desired community, and borders as decolonial creative spaces and human conditions that can act as tools for designing the transmodern – that is, other than modern, overcoming modernity (Dussel 2002) – patterns and alternative multiple realities. Borders as boundaries are needed for manipulating public affects in order to create a semblance of solid ground and stability for the larger groups of people, such as nations, which are then consolidated through negative identification to hide their imminent futureless destiny.

Defuturing and decolonial pluriversality

The modern/colonial false universalism as a manifestation of modernity's totality has been questioned both from its inside, in various postmodernist paradigms, and, more radically, from the underside of modernity, or the sphere of exteriority in the formulation of another decolonial philosopher, Enrique Dussel (1996). Yet the human species, in spite of our mutual dehumanizing tactics and growing economic and social asymmetries, still share some elements of our ontological condition and some challenges, which, in the decolonial option, are referred to as pluriversal rather than universal. Unfortunately, most of these elements and challenges today are negative, as opposed to the lighter side of modernity's original universalist formulations that nevertheless always excluded some groups. They are negative in the sense that they describe the conditions of lack, loss, void or, in Fry's terms, the defuturing tendencies.

Defuturing is indeed a universal condition, but the way we experience it is pluriversal. The decolonial concept of pluriversality differs from 'situated knowledges' (Haraway 1991) as it entails a coexistence, correlation and interaction of many intersecting nonabstract universal and countless options grounded in the geopolitics and corpopolitics of knowledge, being and perception, reinstating the experiential nature of knowledge and the origin of any theory in the human life-world. These options communicate with each other instead of promoting one abstract universal good for all. They intersect sometimes inside our bodies and selves, and each locus of intersection in an option. Pluriversal critique targets not the concrete constellations of race, gender and class but rather the aberration of the universal as such. And here it is important to detect the hidden impulses and threads uniting different local histories in modernity/coloniality without making any far-fetched homogenizing conclusions. Decolonial pluriversality is decentered and stresses the provinciality of the universalized Western concepts by constantly juxtaposing them with their incommensurable non-Western parallels and opposites.

Yet this negative universality of the imminent common doom requires us all to start designing an alternative multiple transmodern consensus for the future of our planet that would be grounded in the ethics of life-salvation in all its forms, rather than its appropriation

and exploitation as is the case today. In Enrique Dussel's approach, the predominant political will to power should change to the will to life (Dussel 2008, 78), and this shift can and should be initiated as much in politics as in design or, in Fry's definition, in design as politics (Fry 2011). Here, the principle of dynamic relationality, which is the anchor of most indigenous cosmologies in the world, would be crucial. This is relationality in and with the present but also with the past or, in decolonial terms, a radical return. Decolonial design, then, would not be a mere tool of modeling the environment so that it can model the human being. Rather, it would be a creative and dynamic reflection and realization of the people's forgotten and discarded needs, wishes and longings, which 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.

Radical return and correlationism as decolonial designing strategies

This radical return to the past disrupts the hegemony of modernity, to quote Zapatistas through Rolando Vázquez (2015). In Amerindian tempolocal model the past is in front of us, rather than behind. It is not frozen and dead, closed or shelved. It is a temporality that we know, in contrast with the unknown future, and this awareness is radically affecting our lives, offering a well of alternatives and giving us strength to live in the present and build our future. Such a radical delinking from the dogmas of neoliberal, socialist or nationalist (and other standpoint) modern/colonial discourses would have to be grounded not only in the acceptance of the right to difference but may be more radical, in a decolonial vein, in seeing relationality in ontology and ethics as a necessary condition for the possibility of any differ-ence in the world consisting of many worlds that are dynamically correlational and grounded in the major principle of interdependence of everything alive on Earth (Shiva 2005, 341). Such a shift in understanding of the world's design would require a turn to the 'obedient power' (Dussel 2008, 26–7), which can only exist in the form of relation, as a necessary requirement for bringing the current 'defuturing' tendencies to a halt.

In this sense, it is important that Fry reflects on Walter Mignolo's reformulation of the Cartesian 'Cogito ergo sum' into 'I am where I think' (Fry 2017), and suggests that the opposite is true as well. The accent on mutual dynamic relations between the subject, the context and the knowledge – or, in our case, the reciprocity – of design as a product of specific environment and epistemology, and also a tool for their shaping, is another way of reinstating the all-penetrating correlationism as the major positive ontological design principle. If we follow this, we would need to acknowledge the ontological presence of other beings, not necessarily human, with a right to have a decent life.

Obviously, design not only materializes various human needs but also embodies our spiritual values, the zeitgeist of different époques, while at the same time synthesizing new cultural, moral and social values. Of course, what is meant here is not as naïve and progres-sivist as the late-nineteenth-century social environmental designing of educational projects, when it was believed that the properly constructed environment can educate migrants or minorities into being proper citizens (Pyne 2010). Rather, it is a question of offering people some positive creative options of ontological design, possibly grounded in transmodern ethics, ontology, epistemology and aesthetics. This design would deautomatize the natu-ralized notions of modernity/coloniality as a negative design that first promises a happy

future and then makes this impossible for the majority of people, for nature, for our planet. It is a design grounded in the economy of happiness, meaning, first of all, an emotionally and spiritually plentiful and fulfilling life, rather than individual material success and ruthless competition with others for this success. But it is also inevitably a life interconnected with other lives through a mutual responsibility for still making our future possible by challenging global coloniality in its many different versions. Well-known examples include the Amerindian concept of *Sumak Kawsay* and Vandana Shiva's Earth Democracy, to which I will turn below.

Sumak Kawsay as a positive ontology

In Kechua language, *Sumak Kawsay* means to live in harmony and plenitude (not material), and participate in a vital cosmic collectivity; that is to say, in close relation with nature (Vazquez 2012, 243). This has nothing to do with sustainable development in the Western understanding, as *Sumak Kawsay* is opposed to modernization, progress and development in agonistic forms that have led to today's global demise. A plentiful and harmonious life is not that of the rampant consumer for whom material well-being and possessing objects is the only criterion of happiness. The Amerindian idea of good life is grounded in equity, participative democracy and defense of biodiversity as the necessary conditions of individual and social welfare. The *Kawsay* principle is an inextricable link between being, existence and human agency. It is a principle of privileging life seen as a relation, and not as an essence over any institutions; of building knowledge not outside of being but through the practice of communitarian learning as a constant and open process based on complexity and relationism, complementarity and reciprocity; subject–subject relations instead of fragmentation; critical and creative understanding integrated into wisdom (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012). *Sumak Kawsay* offers the grounds for well-being, happiness and the good qualities of life such as freedom, autonomy, coexistence and social inclusion, although, strictly speaking, there is no such concept as exclusion in the Andean cosmology, for exclusion requires objectification, which is not possible in the Andean system of interacting subjects rather than passive objects. The subject–object relation cannot even be expressed linguistically. These standards root the idea of life-in-plenitude in collective and personal moral, rather than material, grounds, shifting the emphasis from material to social relations and solidarity that includes humans and other living beings and nature.

Earth Democracy as an ontologically positive design

In her turn, Vandana Shiva links Earth Democracy to the Indian concept of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* – the earth family or the community of all beings supported by the earth (Shiva 2005, 1). Earth democracy as a democracy of life is opposed to the death democracy as a product of corporate globalization turning life itself into a corporate property. Shiva proposes nothing other than the Indian principle of correlationism – so hum – 'you are, therefore I am' (2005, 140). Earth Democracy is a positive form of globalization, a view to be found in the majority of indigenous cosmologies from the Himalayas to Amazonia and Altay, and a growing political and social movement for justice and sustainability, against seeing our planet as a huge supermarket – in fact, a movement for sustaining life as such. Shiva understands sustainability differently from the Western concept of sustainable development, which still sacrifices life to fetishized growth as the typical virus of modernity. Rather, Shiva is opting for the stable

constellation of economic organizations in which nature's economy is the most important, with a sustenance economy built on top of nature's economy, while the market economy that today destroys the life of the planet in the name of sustainable development (of corporations – not people or other forms of life) is subservient to the first two (Shiva 2005, 52).

Positive design ontologies from Eurasian borderlands

Earth Democracy and *Sumak Kawsay* are rather well-known examples of alterglobal ecosophical thinking and agency. However, there are also hundreds of smaller local movements reemerging today in various (often obscure for the Western/Northern audience) spaces, such as Altai, West Siberia, and the Caucasus or Baikal region. Indigenous social movements in these spaces are combining ecological and spiritual recovery agendas. For instance, they oppose oil and gas companies attempting to build new massive pipelines across the sacred territories of these ethnic and religious groups, and thereby threatening the ecological and social balance of the region (the Telengits Small-numbered People Association Ere Chui actively protested against the Gazprom project on the permafrost Ukok and the Golden Mountains, a UNESCO World Heritage Site) (The Altay Project 2017). A similar ecological-cum-spiritual concern and activism was caused by a recent project to flood huge areas in Siberia in order to build hydroelectric plants on Shilka and Angara to sell electricity to China (Rivers without Boundaries 2011). If implemented, this would have destroyed the hydra-system of the Siberian rivers – one of the most powerful sources of fresh water on Earth. However, it would also have destroyed the remaining villages and towns and forced people to move, not to mention decimating local lifestyles and cultural heritage.

Another nascent example of the local ecosophic – or 'deep ecological' to use the term introduced by Norwegian thinker Arne Naess (Drengson and Devall 2008) – movements in Eurasia is the Western Caucasus yet humble efforts to revive such indigenous economic (in the original meaning of economy as a way of managing the household instead of financial speculations) forms as pomiculture. These indigenous forms of folk fruit-breeding, which had reached their climax in the late eighteenth century, were almost completely lost as a result of the brutal Russian colonization accompanied by the massive destruction of abundant forests, the abandonment of gardens and the loss of most indigenous fruit varieties. Later, the enforced Soviet industrialization and collectivization added to the demise of the age-old local forms of fruit tree breeding and the corresponding gardening style called forest-gardens (Daurov 2011). The latter meant that Circassians were expected each time they went to the forest to graft the wild fruit trees that were abundant in the region, which is the birthplace of many wild fruit varieties, using grafts from their own gardens. This practice, similarly to Earth Democracy and other examples given above, was clearly an expression of a specific Circassian cosmology and ethics in which the tree of life was a central code while the human being was responsible for a careful preservation and multiplication of life in all its manifestations – human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate – and, in a way, for making forests a semblance of the Edenic garden.

Instead of drawing a sharp boundary between the domesticated garden as the human space and the wild forest as a space hostile to humans, Circassians attempted to merge these in a subtle and correlational way that would not be harmful for nature and would reinstate the unity of the people and the world, their existence in and through each other. In fact, the

Circassians were domesticating the forest without destroying its complex and fragile balance, so that any wayfarer could always take a rest under a tree and still his hunger with its fruit.

Personally, I remember from my childhood spent in the foothills of the Caucasus such 200-year-old trees still to be seen in the remaining forests otherwise gone wild. These trees had also gone wild, but continued to bare abundant fruit; elderly people still remembered the Circassian names of these unique and rapidly disappearing varieties. Today, there is an ongoing scientific project to recreate the Circassian forest gardens in one of the Western Caucasus republics. Importantly, this project is being conducted by the local university and seeks to establish and develop wider contacts with the local community so that the resurrected fruit varieties will find their way back to the Circassian gardens. However, there are also plans to make it part of a larger eco- and ethno-park, with arts and craft shops and other tourist attractions. Clearly, it is very difficult not to let this slide into another completely commercial project (Naslediye 2015).

What is urgently needed today to make our mutual future still possible is to nurture and endorse such burgeoning projects, which are seemingly isolated but are in fact interconnected by the threads of their other-than-modern positionalities, and to pay attention precisely to their dynamic connections, intersections and nodes, rather than their individual differences. This could potentially lead to a positive ontology of interconnections between everything and everyone on earth. Such intersections would be linked by the ethics of deep coalitions, rather than modern/colonial agonistics. This sort of design is not prescribing the norm but rather providing a chance to grow to the remnants of alternative knowledge and ways of life preserved at the fringes of modernity, and particularly in those spaces where it has been stubbornly opposed (for instance, in postcolonial countries and regions) and where it is now creating more and more waves of social exclusion (such as refugee camps).

Decolonial aesthesis as ground for a positive ontological design

In contrast with the predominant exclusively functionalist and over-rational technocratic design models, a decolonial design would have to address more carefully and critically the realm of affect, and hence aesthesis understood in a particular way. Decolonization of the affective sphere and liberating aesthesis from the limitations of modern/colonial aesthetics is crucial for the future if we are ever to have one. Aesthesis literally means an ability to perceive through the senses, and the process of sensual perception itself – visual, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, etc. With the emergence of the explicit aesthetics, aesthesis was subsumed as part of the wider process of colonization of being, knowledge and perception. This has led to very strict formulations of what is beautiful and sublime, good and evil, functional and useless, and to the emergence of particular canonical structures, genealogies and taxonomies, cultivating taste preferences and always othering anything that fell through the coarse sieve of the normative Western/Northern aesthetics while presenting its local affective experience as universal.

Positioned at the intersection of ontology and epistemology, aesthesis produces and regulates sensations and is therefore linked with the body as an imperfect instrument of perception that mediates our cognition. Our bodies adapt to spaces through collective and personal local histories. Setting aesthesis free lets us delink from the dominant politics of knowledge, being and perception, which is grounded in the suppression of geohistorical dimensions of affects and corporalities. Decolonial aesthesis grows out of the geopolitical

and corpo-political position of the outside created from the inside, liberating us from the total control over sensations to which our bodies react (Mignolo 2011). To do this, it is necessary to decolonize knowledge regulating aesthesis, and also subjectivities that are controlled by the modern/colonial Western/Northern aesthetics. Only then will it become possible to shift from the negative ontological designs of contemporaneity to a positive, creative and life-asserting 're-existence', in the words of Colombian artist and decolonial theorist Adolfo Albán Achinte (2009).

Albán Achinte (2009) explains that when a human being exists in the core of the colonial matrix as an other with no rights, for such a person an inclusion and an active reworking of odors, tastes, colors and sounds of his/her ancestors and remaking of systematically negated forms of interactions with the world, of being and perception, become a necessity, a sensual response of resistance and building of one's own existence anew and in defiance to coloniality. Re-existence then becomes an effective decolonial strategy (re)creating positive life models, sensations and worlds that help in overcoming the injustice and imperfection of this present world.

Re-existence as a positive ontological design is far from any primordialist call to go back to some essentialized and constructed authenticity. For example, decolonial designers would not urge anyone to return to huts and dugouts, although some of their design principles, as well as the accompanying lifestyle models, might be useful in the creolized decolonial design projects based on diatopical or multispatial hermeneutics (Panikkar 1975) and transcultural (Ortiz 1995) dialogues. Rather, what is meant here is a way of contemporarily reliving the main elements of erased and distorted indigenous (or any other discarded by modernity) axiological systems while taking into account the temporal lag and the struggles and oppositions, the compromises and the losses that have taken place within it. In this repetition with variation there is always a stable core, but also, necessarily, a creative element of difference and change. The native tradition, then, is taken out of the museum or archive and put into a dialogue and heated argument with modernity. Decolonial aesthesis lets our sensations, and consequently assumptions formed on their basis, move beyond the normative models of truth, beauty and goodness, be they Western or native.

Why participation is not enough

In a number of mainstream design philosophic models created in, for and with the North in mind, one of the central tasks is the liberation of design from the dictate of the mass and passive consumption patterns of thoughtless individuals through making design more concrete, selective and targeted at particular groups of people (Sanders and Stappers 2012). This is connected with the ongoing implementation of participative approaches, which are to be found not only in design but also in social sciences and art (Bourriaud 2002). Presumably, participative relational methods allow people to become independent and creative in their choices and find other meanings in their lives than simple consumption. However, very often they just create a semblance of freedom, creativity and choice and are immediately usurped as effective tools of coloniality of design, distracting attention from the real and grim defuturing tendencies.

Therefore, participative approaches as such are not enough for decolonial design. It is crucial not to just give voice to or include the other in a certain prescribed and restricted way and then appropriate the elements of their culture and lifestyle as decorative elements

devoid of meaning, but rather to change the whole logic in which anyone can be made into an other to begin with. This indeed means provincializing the Western/Northern design by rejecting its universalist claims and stopping to teach and preach it to the people of the Global South or the blurred areas in between, for whom this design has nothing to do with their real experience, while its principles would always be attempting to control and colonize their perception and thinking. Decolonial design in the Global South would mean taking a positive border 'both-and' positionality, a negotiating transcultural stance starting from the local geopolitics and corpo-politics of knowledge, perception and being, rather than from any universalized and disembodied Western/Northern technological or naturalized onto-logical perspective, and then formulating any design decisions in a complex dialogue and dispute with these modern/colonial premises.

Conclusion: Decolonial design as a means of potentiation

One of the urgent problems today is the question of agency and its limitations, and the means of decolonial potentiation through changing of our thinking, optics, perception and ultimately existence, and thus allowing us to glimpse beyond the global neoliberal design. Design in the more narrow and conventional sense of creation or construction of objects, environments, systems, etc., remains one of the few areas in which such potentiation is still possible as design mediates political and social movements and agendas through aesthetic means. Yet, taking into account the persistence of power asymmetries, the unfortunate nature of decision making in the contemporary world and the predominance of negative ontological designing, it would hardly be possible to turn the tide in the direction of nur-turing any effective alter-global solidarities or ethos grounded in care and responsibility and in the will to life rather than will to power, before all the points of nonreturn are passed.

Do we then sit in our hands and wait for the world to disappear? This is also an option among other options, including more positive and constructive yet obviously utopian and stubborn efforts to continue infiltrating modernity/coloniality with more and more hotbeds of decolonial design. Even being aware of their futility, at least in the near future, we can and probably should continue these efforts, which in itself would be a realization of increased maturity and responsibility of the people for the world, for ourselves and for the very pos-sibility of any future.

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