

A Political Lexicon of Design

All entries listed exist within a relational design matrix, which would be formed differentially according to place, time, context and project. They invite being brought to a project as the project demands to be viewed and made relational. The list is open to incremental additions.

Anthropocene

The anthropocene has been named as the emergent epoch and denotes the moment when the Earth's climatic, geological and ecosystems became critically impacted by human activity. The actual moment when this commenced is contested, but is often cited as the arrival of the industrial revolution in the late 18th century. The Anthropocene was preceded by the Holocene, which commenced at the end of the last ice age almost 12,000 years ago, marking the history of our species' development that was initiated with settlement, agriculture and the creation of basic technologies.

[Marks a new design epoch]

Autonomous design

Autonomous design is an idea influenced by the concept of autopoiesis introduced by the Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela in the early 1970s to name a system capable of reproducing and maintaining itself. So framed it names design activity created by a collective within a community for the community as a means of inscribing its conditions of ongoing continuity. Community so characterised can be understood either in the socio-cultural sense of a grouping bonded by beliefs, values and history, or as a collective of practitioners working independently from the dominant political, economic and professional structures.

[A new direction and counter force to service design]

Border thinking

Border thinking is a form of epistemological resistance in the service of decoloniality aiming to transform dominant forms of knowledge by non-Eurocentric subaltern subjectivities acting in borderland spaces of betweenness that divide the afterlife of modernity and coloniality. Intrinsically deconstructive, border thinking is predicated upon the disclosure of the foundational placement of thought rendered sensible by its epistemological enactment and interpretative action. As such it brings us to confront the knowing of the ground of our knowledge and how such acquired knowing names what we think, see, hear and understand. By implication border thinking breaks out of

disciplinary boundaries, it crosses borders, is nomadic – as such it is (a) thinking along, within and about borders rather than a thinking of them. This means it cannot be fixed and ‘held in place’, rather it is an individual and collective movement between one mode of being, world, and thinking and another.

[A key design concept in the context of design in the global South]

Chronophobia

It was Friedrich Nietzsche who bonded *Chrono* (time) to *phobia* (fear) so as to define the fear of time as a human quality. It is evident in two ways: fear of the future and a linked inability to think futurality; and, living with an illusion of permanence. What connects these two expressions of fear is the mortality of our being and the way that ‘being toward death’ throws us into a continual present. In conditions of increasing unsustainability, chronophobia represent a substantial obstacle to acting with urgency and forethought so as to secure more viable futures.

[A fear to be designed against]

Defuturing

Defuturing names any actions by individuals, material or immaterial objects, organisations or systems that negate our future as a species and the life of all in the biosphere upon which we depend. Underscoring the concept of defuturing is the recognition that life on this planet, including our own is finite - it has a limit. The more the actions of our species deplete natural resources, reduce biodiversity, pollute atmosphere, oceans, and rivers and in so doing damage aquatic and terrestrial ecologies; the more that unsustainable values, desires and modes of behaviour are inculcated, the closer the finitudinal limit of our existence becomes, thus the less time our short-lived species has. Consider, *Homo sapiens* has been around for a mere few hundred thousand years whereas the dinosaurs roamed the planet for some 150 million years.

[A negative of design practice to be designed against]

Decoloniality

Decoloniality is a theory and critical practice that in large part emerged out of Latin America, now become global, and taking on forms particular to the conditions of place. It is neither decolonisation nor post-colonialism, rather it arrived out of a critique of and a resistance to the colonial ‘darker side’ of modernity as it was continued by the ongoing epistemological power of Eurocentric knowledge. By implication this means that the decolonisation of a nation marked by the withdrawal of the colonial power was not complete. An ontologically designing cognitive presence remained and continued. The objective of decoloniality, is to disconnect from this apparatus, which is a process of working towards a liberation of mind over time. The idea of decoloniality enables a radical revision of the history of once colonised people, drawing attention not just to the physical destruction of people but also to the destruction of a great deal their

traditional knowledge; decoloniality is futural, as such it directly links to *border thinking*. As situated knowledge and practice, it has potential as a future-making hybrid epistemology – a critically selective ‘fit-for-use’ appropriation of Western knowledge being brought together with a recovery and remaking of indigenous knowledge.

[The key design objective of design in the Global South]

Design-in-time

‘Design-in-time’ names both a methodology and an imperative. The methodology is based on designing from knowledge gained from researching the future (recognising the future is not a void but populated by problems cast into it from actions of the past - ecological destruction, loss of biodiversity, climate change, unsustainable industries, the afterlife of colonialism and wars are just a few obvious examples). It follows that designing in the present be based upon designing back from the projected endpoint of a structure, system or product, and what it can be expected to cope with over its design life: these become determinate factors at the moment of design. As for the imperative, it implies designing with a sense of urgency in acknowledgement that our life as a species is facing critical conditions that threaten the quality and viability of life itself.

[A key to futural design]

Event

Philosophically, 'event' is a diversely defined and complex concept that at its most basic understands all that is, be it inanimate or animate, as an occurrence in the medium of time. From the perspective of design – everything brought into existence by design is an event in itself while also potentially being generative of events in its own right. Taking this thinking to another level and scale of complexity, one can understand the city as a designed AND designing event. It never ceases to change over the entirety of its existence. It even retains the prospect of an event in its seeming disappearance, for it awaits the event of its archaeological discovery.

[A vital figure in the reconceptualization of design]

Elimination Design

The assumed logic of design is that it is directive of a process of bringing things into being. Elimination design clearly brings this logic into question by recognising that there are many harmful things that need to be designed out of existence: things that harm the ecologies that we and other life-forms depend upon; that destroy environments, damage physical and mental health; squander natural resources and so on. Elimination design cannot be delivered by a universal method rather each identified task requires the creation of a specific strategy. This may be an act of actual physical removal, but it could equally be the destruction of a desire, need or value.

[A key practice to develop]

Eurocentrism

Eurocentrism names the universalization of the Western mind that commenced with European colonial expansion. It enfolds European thinking pre and post the Enlightenment - the latter including the contribution of North America. Eurocentric thought is based upon assumptions of the universal applicability of its concepts; it has thereby naturalised the 'logic' of modernity and its later incarnation as 'global development.' Eurocentric thinking is structural in that it is enacted in situations of political and economic domination over non-Europeans (i.e., colonialism) and it is frequently mobilised unknowingly by coloniser and colonised subjects as taken-for-granted categories of thinking. This means that Eurocentrism has acted at the meta-level of epistemological colonialism (which is colonialism post decolonisation). Consequently it has been deeply implicated in an endless process of the destruction of the authority, content and memory of indigenous knowledge. Thus Eurocentrism directly links to cultural defuturing, decoloniality and border thinking.

[A basic knowledge in the emancipation of design]

Futuring

Futuring is a critical practice without anything like a consensual meaning. It is used for example by 'futurologists' to name what are often speculative technocentric futures; likewise it is used to name foresight thinking. Brought to design and architecture, and informed by a non-linear understanding of time, futuring is a way of thinking futures (as well as futural action) that recognises and engages defuturing forces that negate the future for life as it is now known. At the same time, 'futuring' recognises that the future is an obstacle course filled with 'things' thrown into it from the past that constantly arrive in the present. Beyond these two critical perspectives, futuring is also about designing the ontological quality of a designed thing so that it performatively has a futuring effect over a protracted design life.

[The key design imperative]

Gathering

Gathering here is being brought within the orbit of critical practices. Importantly it brings together two understandings of 'gather' – to bring together and to comprehend. Such a unification of action and thought is expressed and grounded in the Indo-European root of 'leg' as it means 'to collect', this seen in the Greek '*legein*' and the Latin '*legere*' - the scattered thus becomes ordered, unified, (re)counted, spoken and thereafter reflected upon, hence the link to the law of reasoned process (*logos*). So understood, gathering therefore prefigures relational thought and 'operationalizes' it in forms (including designed forms) that make it present and active.

[A useful concept]

Human (the)

All cultures once created their own cosmology within which a specific understanding of their own being was constituted. Consequently this being is not necessarily based on the same characteristics of individuated or collective anthropocentric identity. Thus the distinction between the culturally constructed humanness of the human existing together with their biological animality was not initially universal, but was made so, in the name of 'civilisation.' This by the imposition of modernity and thereafter the Enlightenment knowledge upon Others. That many other cultures did not make the same distinction between animality and their own being was given no status, value or right to exist. Many indigenous cultures still live with the aftermath of this history. Yet in many cases retaining a trace and sense of difference. In our current epoch, rather than difference continuing to disappear it is actually arriving and increasing: this not because new cosmologies are arriving but because our species is fragmenting. At one extreme are the abandoned people of refuge, in and beyond 'bio-politically populations of 'the camps,' at the other are the techno-colonised cultures of the 'hyper-digitised natives' who are becoming classified a post-human. So in sum there are those residual 'Others' who deem themselves as being other than human and there is the plurality of humanness. See also *posthuman*.

[A key observation linked to: anthropocentrism, humanism, universal design, hyper-consumerism, globalisation, development which are all subcategories implicit in the of violence design]

Logos

Many disciplines lay claim to the meaning of *logos*. However, the approach to this key ancient Greek term to be taken here comes from the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus for whom it took the form of an ordered account, the structure of knowing, and as this a directive force. Thereafter logos became understood as underscoring logic linked to the rise of reason/reasoned argument. What a reflection on *logos* exposes is that 'reason' and the thinking that was predicated upon it, became, especially during, and as result of the, Enlightenment, a normative form of thought and elemental to the universalization of Eurocentrism. Put more directly, reason needs to be understood to be political and more than just a mode of cognition, this because it carried values and a system of belief based upon it being superiority to all other ways of thinking. As such needs to be viewed as problematic.

[Important in the unthinking of design thinking]

Metrofitting

Retrofitting refers to the refurbishment of existing buildings to improve their environmental performance, such as introducing materials or systems to reduce their energy consumption. Metrofitting takes this action up to an urban scale, but it is much more than this, as it is not merely an instrumental technical exercise. Metrofitting centres on remaking and repairing the constituent elements of a city. This means addressing a city as material fabric, as relationally

connected operational and social systems, as a cultural environment, and as a designed (informally and formally) designing event that enfolds it's the everyday life from its rise, development and eventual decline. Metrofitting fundamentally acknowledges the imperative of 'dealing with what already exists' rather the production of the new, which is the dominant approach of architectural and urban design. It also based upon 'designing in time' – which means once commenced it is a project without an end.

[A key design strategy in transforming unsustainable urban environments]

Modernity

Early modernity, as linked to the early Renaissance and an overcoming of the 'dark ages' arrived as a nascent idea of making the world modern, not least by bringing 'civilisation' via colonial conquest to the Godless. Its 'dark side' thus travelled with its ascent. By the time of late modernity, marked by the coming of the Industrial Revolution in the final decades of the 18th century, the technological means to fully impose the design paradigm the West on the rest of the world, had started to arrive. The elimination of the resistance and suppression of indigenous populations, the extraction of material and human resources, the imposition of European legal, social, educational, and political systems all created conditions that prefigured the continuity of colonialism post C20th so-called decolonisation. This move from colonialism to neo-colonialism was informed by modernisation and development theory, and supported by aid. The projection of consumer-based modernity as superior to traditional ways of life and practices was (and is) a form of epistemological colonialism. Rather than the West moderating its excesses, it exported them and sought to expand its markets by 'designing for the poor' and creating new forms of unsustainable dependence. This was no way to emancipate the designated Other and establish conditions of social equity.

[Its afterlife is a central problematic for design]

Naturalised artificial

There is a division between nature as 'that which is given' and nature as an idea projected upon it. Within Western thinking, over many centuries, there has persisted the idea of nature as that which has not been altered by human actions, that which is pure and uncontaminated. On this basis a distinction has been drawn between the natural and the artificial: the artificial (the synthetic compound, the process of 'human' invention) is posed as the other of the natural. This is linked with romanticist assertions of nature as pristine and unchanging, which is at odds with the conceptualizations of palaeontology (and other earth and biological sciences) of nature as dynamic. In the latter view, human actions have always impacted upon nature, humans have always taken and transformed the raw materials of nature to feed, clothe and shelter themselves. Thus there is no moment or state of pure nature, humans have always dwelt within the naturalised artificial. The implications of the naturalised artificial (as the base condition of earthly

existence) have become starker as increasingly humans have intentionally and unintentionally introduced substances into the natural environment that have contaminated it. Some of these pollutants are biologically accommodated: others do immediate or long-term harm that 'alters the course of nature.' But many things beyond 'our' actions over time have done this: extinction events and the Ice Age outstrip the duration of our negative impacts. However, what is new is our engineering with/of natural processes by design. While we have intervened for millennia in natural evolutionary processes (by breeding qualities into and out of animals, by creating plant species, by eliminating species) it is only recently that there has been engineered intervention into the very code of life (DNA), taking our intervention to another level, one that is already being transgressed with projects for the creation of manufactured organisms. Remembering that life itself came out of a chemical soup, one could say the circle has fully turned, except it is 'us' at the wheel.' There is no pure uncontaminated nature or clear distinction between the natural and the artificial, the naturalised artificial is the norm.

[A figure of thought that counters thinking with redundant ideas]

Ontological design

Ontological design is both a way of understanding and of practicing design. Starting from an understanding of the ontological as concerned with the nature of being and becoming, ontological design emphasises and focuses upon how a designed thing is understood as performative in its becoming. Thus the thingness of a pen is writing, a chopper chopping, a knife cutting – this goes from the simplest to the most complex things. From this understanding the primary concern of designing shifts to what the designed object (material or immaterial) performatively brings into being, and with what consequence. At the most basic, consequence is viewed as sustaining or unsustaining, futuring of defuturing.

[key to understanding the agency of design]

Postdevelopment

Within Development Studies it has becoming increasingly recognised that a great deal of activity conducted in the name of development has been impositional, destructive and defuturing. The issue here is that development was, and still is not, either generated by the people to be developed nor is it neutral. Rather 'development' is a contemporary registration of a long history leading from *modernity* to modernisation theory to the designation of *undeveloped* people as *underdeveloped* – according to Eurocentric norms. Responding to this, postdevelopment sets out to assist in establishing the conditions out of which another path to a viable future is created, this by indigenous people of the Global South. It follows that postdevelopment directly connects to *decoloniality* and *border thinking*.

[the future of development and related design]s

Posthuman

The term does not have one meaning, and the meanings that do exist are fluid, which means that as circumstances change so might they. One meaning comes out of critical humanism that sees the posthuman as 'the more human' human (kinder, more considerate of others, less aggressive, etc.). The problem is that this view stands on the Eurocentrically designated notion of our species as universal, which it is not. Another meaning goes to the instrumentalisation of 'our' being (in diversity) whereby the posthuman names something other than 'human', for example, the cyborg. The most extreme position is the embracement of the posthuman as freed from the condition of biological dependence to become fully technological. Here the brain is embedded within a technology and the body is dispensed with. The 'logic' of this position is that this is how 'we' have a future in a world made unsustainable in which we would be unable to survive. See also *human*.
[A critical design issue]

Prefiguration

Prefiguration names the essence of design as integral to the cognitive condition of our species being, irrespective of geo-cultures or other differences. The ability to prefigure realised as an envisioned effect, affect or object is actually a characteristic that partly defines what we are. It is design as an intuitive thought process that goes ahead of design as a conscious act. It puts the what is to be designed before the act(ion) of design. As this it is situated imagination with intent to create irrespective of medium or material dimension. As this it is a conscious reaction to a subjective or objective need to bring some 'thing,' aesthetically or functionally (or both) into being.

[A basic design concept]

Psychopower

In the inequity of the current post-industrial age of the digital empire and hyper-consumption, consumer classes of privilege are being collectivised and managed as market nodes via regimes of what Bernard Stiegler has call psychopower, this by the enhanced agency of desire in environments of signs (semiosphere). Unlike earlier modes of consumer culture 'psychopower managed consumerism' is supported by a companion technology - psychotechnology. Essentially technology and mind have been fused as the result of, and with, a directive power. Such power embraces technology of the image, information and (a)social media to accelerate consumerism and the standardisation of choice traded off against common interests and sustain-able futures. Psychopower, via psychotechnologies, is a delimiting of consciousness within the sphere of consumption and is an employed inductive process that is without limit: children, and the world's poor are no exception, and are targeted with products specifically for them. Stiegler argues that developing a psychopolitics to counter this technoculture negates memory and colonises cultures.
[A key issue for contemporary design politics]

Redirective practice

Redirective practice is post the disciplinary divisions of design knowledge. Politically it seeks to remake the ground and content of one's own knowledge. Even more fundamentally it implies an ontological transformation of what it means to be a designer in order to constitute a commonality of intent across different practices that aim to contribute to the development of Sustainment. In so doing it understands that the divisions of knowledge that underpin most practices are a product of the de-relationalisation of knowledge that was especially advanced and empowered by the Enlightenment. Thus in our difference we can all become redirective practitioners. From the perspective of design and architecture redirective practice has a transformative agenda directed at modes of 'design beyond design.' Central to the agenda is a continued development of ontological design as a designing of the designed and as an implicit feature of the practice of redirective practice as design redesigned – thus both the agency and agent of design become transformed.

[A key practice in the future of design]

Relationality

Relationality is a key transformative design principle able to inform how one understands design's inter-related connections across space and the impact of design over time. It has been viewed as defining the place of design within the dynamic of autopoiesis (a contained network of processes of production), and conversely in relation to allopoiesis (a created agent that arrives outside a system that has the ability to transform it). Likewise, a philosophical understanding of relationality has significant political implications for design. For instance: Heidegger's relational ontology places being in an inter-subjective context; Whitehead's view of process relations, philosophy of organisms and environmental thinking folds into ecological relationality; Foucault's exposition of power as relationally distributed; Luhmann's view of relationality essential sees it as a relation of elements; and, Deleuze and Guattari's theory of assemblage not only provides an analytic basis for design enquiry but assists the complexification of the field of effects of ontological design. What an attachment to such thinking makes clear is that the political agency of design is multidirectional and has the ability to destabilise the given order of things - this by bringing things into being that do not respect the given 'structural divisions of the unsustainable status quo.'

[A key concept in understanding design and agency]

Remaking/unmaking

Dealing with a world being made unsustainable requires dealing with what is, be it: modes of thought, theories of knowledge, professional and creative practices, institutions, industries, government, systems, products or services. Such listing will include much that needs to be

eliminated, and it can come in two forms: destruction or unmaking. Unmaking does not only mean the disassembly of an object or structure to recover material to reuse. It also means unmaking values, habits, beliefs, affiliations, and knowledge that obstruct acting against the unsustainable and acting for sustainment. Likewise, remaking is not just about repair, retrofitting, or adaptive reuse. It is also about remaking cultures of learning, social ecologies, relations to sustaining traditions of the past, and more. Both practices beg recognition and development.

[A key practice in the future of design]

Sustainment

Sustainment is not 'sustainability' (with its propensity to sustain the unsustainable). Rather Sustainment (or 'the Sustainment') is a vital intellectual and pragmatic project of discovery marking a vital turn to an other kind of earthly habitation and understanding. One that recognises not only the need for a dramatic reduction in damage to the environments and ecologies of our and other beings, but also that global inequity and conflict are both defuturing forces, and that viable social ecologies are essential to futuring. Sustainment so understood also has to be a decolonial project more than equal to 'the Enlightenment'. For this ambition to be realised there is a need to understand that our species is intrinsically anthropocentric and if 'we' are to be futural this has to be transcended. The advancement of the Sustainment depends upon establishing an incremental non-Eurocentric process of thought and action directed toward praxis devoid of idealism, utopias and a propensity for auto-destructive acquisitiveness. Crucially, Sustainment can offer a common concern, interest and project overarching all political, ethnic and religious differences.

[The overarching imperative]

Unlearning

Learning to understand Sustainment, how to be sustain-able, to be able to be futural, and to be a redirective practitioner all require unlearning of what has been learnt. Dominantly what has been learnt is how to think Eurocentrically and how *not* to act, dream and desire in the service of the sustainable. What has been learnt is a product of informal and formal education – again dominantly, 'we' (that is most of us), have been educated in error by educators who were educated likewise. This process shows no major signs of ending. What this means is obviously that, via education at all levels, learners are inducted into ways of thinking, skills, professional practices, and domains of knowledge that equip them to maintain the structural continuity of the status quo.

[A key practice in the future of design]

Unstaging

Unstaging is a nascent concept that refers to a process of de-legitimation by performative means. It was created in response to the ineffectuality of the discourse of peace to prevent or end war. 'Unstaging war' recognises that idealist appeals to peace have very little agency in this current age in which the boundaries of war are no longer clear. War is still conventionally waged, but now it is mostly asymmetrical, without rules and distinctions between combatants and civilians. War now lacks identifiable beginning and end, or specific location; it can take distributed forms; it can be in cyberspace; it can be visible and invisible.

[A critical concept to develop]