

Designs of the South(s), Designs-other, the designs from and to other worlds

By:

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Justification

In an era of crisis within crises (planetary, civilizational, social, educational, personal), in which crises overlap one another, it is necessary to configure realities based on more than one way of prefiguring future worlds, as decisions of meaning and memory traces that determine the anticipation and the power of being of things. Each human group tries to materialize and express interactions among themselves and with their environment in particular ways. The south, or the souths in plural, and the associated theories and approaches, for several decades, beyond the relations of knowledge-power between cardinal points, have brought together in different fields of knowledge (sociology, anthropology, arts, communication) an accumulation of thoughts and actions attentive to modes and ways of enacting¹ life, which move away from all mono-cultural and monological prescriptions and proscriptions.

¹ In 1991, the Chilean biologist Francisco Varela, together with Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, introduced the notion of enaction to describe the idea of cognition as a dynamic process that exists in the body in which the knowing organism produces (brings to be) his world through a sensorimotor coupling with the environment (Varela, Thompson, y Rosch, 1991/2018). The concept is used frequently within the autonomous design approaches by Arturo Escobar.

In 2021, it is evident that a transnational space is emerging, anchored primarily, but not exclusively, in the Global South, that problematizes the rootedness of a new design in global historical relations of power and domination, exploring the various ways in which the terms of the relationship between design and the histories of colonialism and imperialism, its functioning within the modern context/colonial matrix of power, geopolitics of knowledge (Eurocentrism), racism, and patriarchal capitalist colonial modernity (Escobar 2018).

Within this transnational field of critical design studies, the so-called designs of the south(s) (Gutiérrez, 2015, Álvarez and Gutiérrez, 2017) and those characterized as designs-other (Gutiérrez, 2020), among other inquiries, are beginning to be present.

In the first instance, the approach of the designs of the south(s), starts from the south, as a polysemic term and extends to think beyond its singularity, the idea of souths in plural, outside of a fixed, singular or essential south: souths as scenarios where, by virtue of coexistence with need, exchange and mutual aid and repair cultures thrive (Fry, 2017); or, souths where scarcity and complexity of existence, determine the subsistence of polytechnical skills without delivering human adaptive wealth to professional and consumerist specialization (Álvarez and Gutiérrez, 2017); or souths located outside places identified with the geographical south, to put a case in scenarios such as East Asia where, as Fujita (2016) reminds us, even from and within modernity (or as a reaction to it) since the nineteenth century hundreds of millions of people, refer to design and practice it, without using that word and from communicative codes that drink in traditions older than the West, with terms such as: sheji in Chinese or sekkei in Japanese.

From different epistemologies and divergent ontologies, the prefigurative, political and cultural articulations of the South evoke much more than particular territories, we do not speak here under any circumstances only of geographical Souths -but above all of epistemological and ontological Souths, like everything placed below, behind or beside any prevailing order-, but neither does it necessarily allude with

souths to those places that have suffered the suffering of external civilizational orders, but rather it points with this term to what describes nuanced processes of recognition and interaction and encounter between interconnected cultural links in deep and varied ways (Papastergiadis, 2017).

In the souths, what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls a craftsmanship of practices would take place, there where the logic is not mechanical, and the processes, material tools and methodologies mark some conditions, but a margin of creative freedom is left free, in the framework of which repetition is seen as creation and the rules and methodologies mark some conditions, but a margin of creative freedom is left free, in the framework of which repetition is seen as creation and the rules and methodologies can and usually are modified and readapted when not frankly disobeyed (Santos, 2018).

The souths comprise heterogeneous positions and dispositions of feeling, thought and action, polycardinal (a term to account for the movement from and towards all senses and proposed by Alfredo Gutiérrez instead of not Western), which originate in other pasts and allow opting for different future alternatives (Gutiérrez, 2021a). From within the Academy the design of the south, or the designs of the south, would designate attention and interest to each aspect devalued, misunderstood or denied by the dominant modern or non-modern construction of meaning, and also attention to how each of those aspects placed in second place was constructed as such or before whom and why it assumed that secondary role. As a combination housed in a sort of atlas (historical, geographical, political), the designs of the south speak of what was left out or left behind in the maps of design and of the memories that the official histories of the discipline ignore, do not remember or, even worse, cannot see (Gutiérrez, 2021b); In this way, due to their subalternized or relegated condition, even the creative practices of Arctic peoples, inhabitants of the northernmost territories of the planet, such as the Yupik (Russia), the Inuit (Alaska, Canada, Greenland), and the Saami (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia), etc., could be

studied as designs of the South, even though their neighborhood is the geographical area of the North Pole.

Secondly, the "other designs", would account for an approach to those "others" of design as it has been projected in a dominant and universal way: as a specific form of human agency and its artifactual expression. The Other here is design in its difference before and after its current manifestation (Fry, 2003).

An eventual starting point for the consideration of designs-other is that the field of design, with its designation and recognition within an academic and disciplinary jurisdiction, and in its diverse professions, derives from an etymology that fixes its origin as design in languages and histories that in the contemporary context describe its beginnings and evolution, in diverse versions consigned in a theoretical body expressed in foundational chronicles that nourish the narrative that supports the disciplines and professions of design all over the planet. Much of the design literature recognized within this disciplinary jurisdiction refers to the work of institutions, practitioners and thinkers from certain geographic locations and specific socio-cultural positions, especially from Western Europe, to whom it assigns the role of pioneers, in all their professional and academic specialties, which perhaps entails more than one bias and exclusion.

The hypothesis here is that the design cultivated, consecrated and disseminated by the academy, is susceptible, feeding the forms of narrating, and relating of those customs and traditions coming from those worlds on the planet where the majority of human beings live (the worlds of meaning of extra-European languages, the worlds of meaning of the popular classes, the worlds of meaning of diverse genders, the worlds of meaning of native peoples, the worlds of meaning of activist groups, etc.), to nurture in turn and in a more comprehensive way, enter into dialogue with horizons of creative meaning of other human groups, which it cannot aspire to include within its own selfhood as design (since they neither recognize themselves nor are design), but with which the design or designs have to coexist in relation.

These "designs-other" would come from the characteristic knowledge of the way in which the resurgence has occurred, on the part of many peoples with their own right to specific contextual wisdoms, of their own ways of arranging and materializing their worlds; in fact, something that occurs through the voices and thoughts of the so-called (through generalization) indigenous peoples and popular groups of all continents, whose ancient presence makes itself heard and felt in new ways. These dynamics pretend to be recognized in their variety, and with their own names, without being devoured under the general and homogenizing denomination of craft, or adjectivized as design (indigenous, popular, vernacular), while they are employed, applied and lived by peoples who claim their right to build their maps or to do without them (at least as far as the hegemonic cartographic order of the world is concerned), without the usual cardinal structure and moving away from the most dominant part of the Euromodern tradition (Gutiérrez, 2015).

This means recognizing practices similar to, but at the same time different from design and separating from that denomination (design), to exhibit an eccentricity, distancing or alternative to the canonical origins and presence of design in any part of the planet, and to follow multiple paths different by etymology, epistemology, history, terminology to the current associated practices that accompany design in all its academic and disciplinary expressions.

In the case of designs-other, "other" is not just another adjective to add to reinforce the already established legitimacy of the field of design, but something else, something different even divergent from the field, not locatable within it, a group of practices that, although they do something similar or comparable to design, are "where design is not" (Gutiérrez, 2015).

By virtue of the above, the dominant modality of the human is questioned, which was designed with and by the same logic that governs Eurocentric design (almost always, the only one), and these other designs would support the realization of other

modalities of the human, or of the inter-being or other, oxymoron, habitual forms of the unusual. Thus, a pristine "human design" common to the whole species becomes controversial, while the resurgence of "designs-other" based on extra-academic, extra-disciplinary and extra-Western knowledge, provides means to scrutinize the artifactual production of a hegemonic human type legitimized as a basic condition of a hierarchy that breaks the communality of existence (Gutiérrez, 2015).

Therefore, it is very important to keep in mind that these designs-other are not in any case other designs, since they cannot be reduced to the master reference of the already known design, nor be exemplified, nor derive their explanatory center from it, they cannot be defined from historical narratives and consecrated definitions already made (exemplary), therefore they are non-exemplary (Rosa, 2015).

Approaching such designs-other demands other ways of making history, not necessarily linear, history-others with approaches such as the transitional design histories postulated by Maria Göransdotter, transitional histories which do not provide solid foundations or explanations of what design is or has been. Instead, they aim to make conceptual moves that support the development of design practices capable of interacting with a complex "now" and uncertain futures. The aim is to support the realization of conceptual movements by using historical perspectives to explore whether it is possible to see, think and design in other ways (Göransdotter, 2020).

In this way, it is pertinent to open space for stories and concepts that situate the political significance of design beyond the context of a Eurocentric design discourse (Kiem, 2017), and of design itself, stories-others to de-marginalize certain spaces, ideas, and actors, even ways of narrating and contributing to the intercultural modification of relations between centers and peripheries.

Even if expressed from Latin America, Africa or Asia, the proposal goes beyond the mere affirmation that if it is about design, here (wherever it is here) we had also done

something, outside of Europe, since such affirmation, on the one hand, supports the capture of artifacts, words, customs and traditions of many peoples in the world, customs and traditions of many peoples within a Euromodern academic historical path that is alien to them, while, on the other hand, it demands to be confronted to evidence the amount of erasure and ignorance that inclusion establishes, since the inclusion of the other, within the same, is a way of classifying, suppressing, colonizing and dissolving the other in a self-absorption that does not value it as other. The idea with this in mind is to arrange a conscious encounter of the untranslatable and incommensurable, as symmetrical as possible between the already established tradition of design and even more than its others, those (knowledges, doings, practices) for whom design is the other.

Call for papers

The event in its different strands and topics invites to present works, from inside or outside the academy that consider and involve approaches related to the encounter between the disciplinary academic design and ways of making sense of things, from lineages of knowledge of the south (or the souths) as umbrella term to designate etymologies, wisdoms, dynamics, and different and divergent paths to those of the body of authors and canonical theories in the academic and professional fields of design from approaches to material, graphic, architectural, interactive expressions, etc., that take place in recognition of the designs of the souths, which can be considered within the mainstream as more or less classic designs originated in some south (geographical, epistemological, etc.), which can be considered within the mainstream as more or less classic designs originated in some south (geographical, epistemological, ethnoracial, etc.) but above all, as ways of doing that are proper to the disciplinary exteriors (activist, political, popular, declaredly polycardinal or non-Western) and situate them in constructive symmetry with the disciplinary interiors. The theme of the designs of the souths calls for research works or creations related to the histories and narratives of alternatives to design (rather than alternative designs) based on the epistemologies of the South, Southern theories, theories from

the South, decolonial, disruptive and declassified thoughts and positions, in and from anywhere on the planet.

Likewise, we invite you to present, from inside or outside the academy, approaches to design-other, as ways of making sense of processes of arrangement, prefiguration and materialization that, although they may be related to it, do not have the known design as an obligatory referent, nor are they submitted to it as an explanatory center, nor are they constituted as "other cases of...", nor do they contribute new adjectives to add, reinforcing it, to the noun design. The call in this sense is to present reflections and experiences with practices for which design is the other, and not "designs of others", since the latter would capture the otherness, once again, within what is known. Also, we invite the presentation of projects and experiences, stories linked to practices, staged within traditions and customs, that being other, in the visual, the material, the symbolic, should also be (as stories, chronicles and ways of referring to the history of design-others), the object of stories-other, different and divergent, experimental, to open the way to the encounter between the historical narratives of design already consolidated with those of design-other told as the other in terms of the others. The purpose is to gather experiences that allow us to review from the other side, from the specificity of each indigenous people, of each vernacular, exoticized, popular or colloquial community, the ways in, and the logics and agendas under which until the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century the history of design has been designed.

Apart from what has been mentioned so far, the event invites to problematize in relation to design thematic aspects such as ethnicity, gender, spirituality, location, class, politics, those spaces where exteriority or otherness invite to dispense with the name of Design, activisms, the technological extra-academic technological, the extra-institutional, the subversive, the insurgent, the ideas of the South and the souths in global terms, to review that which escapes even the idea of the Global South. The souths, as centers or as peripheries, the places of enunciation, when the event is held in Colombia, and in Latin America, how is Euromodern and North

Atlantic design contemplated, studied, and speculated about from other places and cultures? How is this proposal or other similar ones seen from Western Europe or the United States? Finally, how are the themes of the local, the south or otherness treated in design training programs? What disciplinary knowledge or not can establish conversation with design?

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