

DESIGN AS POLITICAL PRAXIS: Toward a Cosmopolitical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the political dimension of design through the theoretical debates developed within the seventh Seminar of the Research Group Narrativas em Inovação, Design e Antropologia from the Federal University of Maranhão (NIDA/UFMA), entitled Political Design: Praxis, Intersectionalities, Design and Politics. Drawing on a narrative literature review, the study advances an understanding of design as a political practice that both shapes and is shaped by power relations, colonial legacies, and normative world-making processes. The Seminar was structured into seven meetings organized around three thematic axes—praxis, intersectionalities, and design and politics—and served as a collective space for critical reflection on the role of design in contemporary socio-political challenges. Through a triangulated analysis combining theoretical frameworks, the authors’ reflections, and participants’ perceptions, the paper argues for the politicization of design and for the relevance of cosmopolitical praxis as a means of composing situated, pluriversal worlds with human and more-than-human entities.

Keywords: Cosmopolitical Design, Design and Politics, Political Design.

INTRODUCTION

To think about the relationship between design and politics is not an a priori concern. Design practices and products are shaped by a series of decisions and exclusions that often appear neutral or merely responsive to a logic presented as universal. However, following the Bakhtinian premise that “all discourse is ideological” (Bakhtin, 1981), we understand that every form of communication, material production, and linguistic expression is permeated by power relations, values, beliefs, and regimes of visibility and invisibility.

As an academic field, design is not exempt from the universalist and scientific imperatives that characterize other areas of knowledge. In this regard, we align with Kilomba’s argument that academic knowledge has historically been a space where scientific objectivity, knowledge, and references are directly linked to “racial power and authority” (Kilomba, 2019), as well as to colonial, masculine, cisgender, heterosexual, capitalist, and bourgeois norms. Isabelle Stengers (2017) reflects on how science legitimizes certain categories for thinking about lived worlds while excluding others, operating as a classificatory mode of understanding reality. She proposes cosmopolitics as a way to move beyond politics grounded solely in human democratic institutions, expanding collective world-making to include more-than-human beings.

From this perspective, design cannot be separated from political elaboration, as politics lies at the core of the field itself. This raises a central question: how does the concealment of these relationships serve to privilege what is hegemonic within design?

In a parallel debate, questioning the alignment between the terms design and social—considered outdated by some theoretical groups—reveals the need to distinguish a supposedly “non-social” design from a subfield in which the social is reaffirmed as the central focus of practice. Yet, as Cardoso (2011) asks, “would not all design be social?” Likewise, we ask: would not all design be political?

As a research group, the authors of this article work collaboratively with local productive groups connected to artisanal practices, ancestral knowledge, and relationships with the land, as well as with initiatives developed within academic contexts. These engagements support the construction of materialities by means of designantropologia. This political choice of spelling the names of the fields together reflects the deep intersubjectivity between design and anthropology, in which narratives and practices emerge from shared experiences, epistemologies, and imaginaries (Izidio, Farias, Noronha, 2022).

In contexts of high vulnerability where we conduct research, micro- and macropolitical dynamics often constrain creative practices, imposing limits or even interrupting designantropologia processes (Noronha, Izidio e Portela, 2026, in press). These constraints are particularly evident in unequal power relations embedded in institutional politics, large corporations, or, at the micro level, in the daily subsistence urgencies faced by the communities with whom we research.

The meaning of the political also shifts, as world-making can no longer be limited to the notion of the “subject” inherited from early twenty-first-century cosmopolitanism. Instead, we engage with multiple cosmological worlds, following Nêgo Bispo (2023) and his conception of diversais: the ones that were never colonized and inhabit worlds outside Western cosmology. To account for this engagement, we draw on other formulations of cosmopolitics (Latour, 2004) and understand design as a cosmopolitical activity (Yaneva, 2015), one that remains open to worldly diversity and recognizes the agency of all entities involved in a design project.

Methodologically, this article is based on a narrative literature review, curated by the authors to support the readings discussed during the Seminar. This review provided the theoretical foundation for addressing the questions raised here. The findings are presented through a triangulated analysis that brings together the mobilized theoretical frameworks, the authors’ reflections, and the perceptions of Seminar participants, gathered during the sessions and through a Seminar evaluation form.

Accordingly, the paper is structured as follows: the first section presents the VII Seminar of the Research Group Narratives on Innovation, Design, and Anthropology from the Federal University of Maranhão (NIDA/UFMA), entitled Political Design: Praxis, Intersectionalities, Design and Politics. The second section discusses the texts analyzed during the Seminar. Finally, the article presents reflections generated from these discussions, as well as from participants’ experiences and their dialogues with their own research.

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1. THE SEMINAR POLITICAL DESIGN: PRAXIS, INTERSECTIONALITIES, DESIGN AND POLITICS

The Seventh Seminar of the NIDA/UFMA entitled Political Design: Praxis, Intersectionalities, Design and Politics emerged from the need to broaden our theoretical engagement with politics in order to strengthen the discursive foundations of our research practices. In our everyday work with the groups with whom we conduct research, political issues permeate all processes, whether related to the Solidarity Economy, collaborations with cultural agents, or initiatives connected to institutional gender policies.

Although our ongoing theoretical dialogues already provided important conceptual grounding, we recognized that explicitly bringing together the fields of design and politics—through the proposition of Political Design—was essential to proceed in a coherent and responsible manner. This alignment responds both to our own research demands and to those of our co-researchers, a term we used to emphasize the collaborative nature of participation in co-creation processes within design research and practice.

Based on a narrative literature review, the coordinators of the Seminar selected texts to be discussed across seven meetings, organized into three thematic blocks: praxis, intersectionalities, and design and politics. The first two blocks comprised two meetings each, while the third consisted of three meetings (Table 1).

Table 1: Readings selected and recommended for the Seminar “Political Design”

	Recommended readings	What we sought through these choices
Praxis	Cadernos do Cárcere by Antonio Gramsci (Gramsci, 1999), Pedagogia do Oprimido by Paulo Freire (Freire, 1968) A luta de classes : uma história Política e Filosófica by Domenico Losurdo (Losurdo, 2015).	We intended to rethink our own research praxis. To do so, we deepened notions of praxis through Marxist readings and their contemporary reinterpretations.
Intersectionalities	O pacto da Branquitude by Cida Bento (2022) Manifesto contrassexual: práticas subversivas de identidade sexual by Paul Preciado (2014).	Our selection was grounded in the understanding that political discussion cannot be detached from intersectionality. Studies on race and gender, beyond crossing the group's research agenda, are also fundamental for responding to contemporary political demands.
Design and Politics	What is cosmopolitical design?: design, nature and the built environment by Albená Yaneva and Alejandro Zaera-Polo (2015) A New Political Imagination. Making the case, by Tony Fry and Madina Tlostonova (2021) Decolonizing design through the perspectives of cosmological others: Arguing for an ontological turn in design research and practice by Ahmed Ansari (2019) Comum: ensaio sobre a revolução do século XX, de Pierre Dardot e Christian Laval (2017).	Our selection was grounded in the understanding that political discussion cannot be detached from intersectionality. Studies on race and gender, beyond crossing the group's research agenda, are also fundamental for responding to contemporary political demands.

Held in a hybrid format between January and March 2025, the meetings brought together undergraduate and graduate students, researchers, and professionals from different regions of Brazil and from abroad, totaling 61 registered participants (Figure 1).

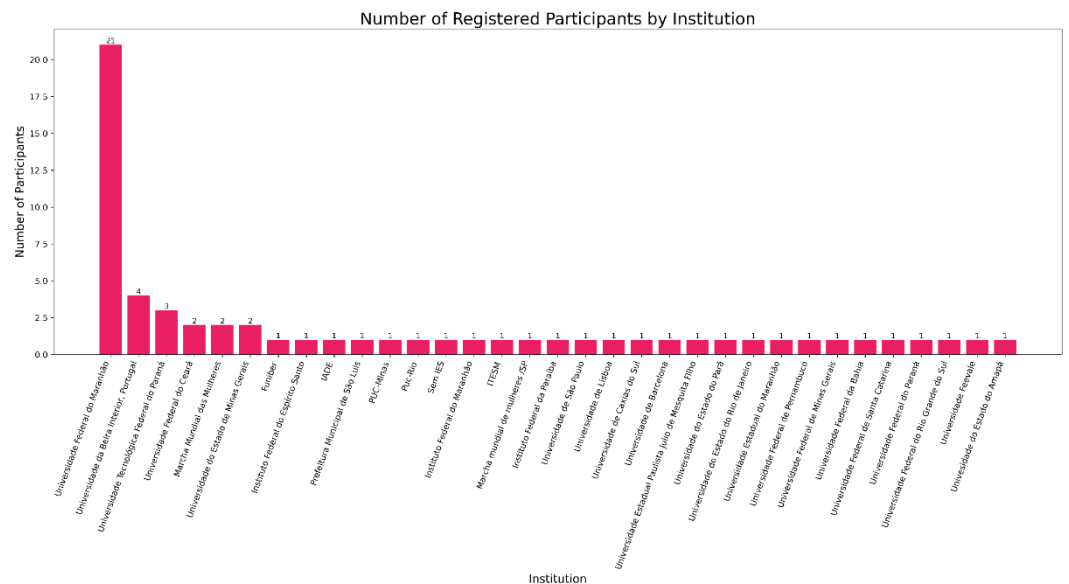


Figure 1. Chart of the institutional affiliations of the Seminar registrations. Source: Registration form

Attendance per session ranged from approximately 15 to 25 participants. Although the number of participants logged into the Google Meet room was consistently higher, active engagement in the discussions was largely concentrated within a more stable core group. Participation rates were not treated as research data in this process.

2. ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN DESIGN AND POLITICS

The choice of *Political Design* as the theme of the Seminar was motivated by the need to critically reflect on our own practices and to expand this debate with those interested not only in participating in design processes, but also in understanding the quality and conditions of such participation. In previous studies, we have emphasized the need to overcome colonial traps embedded in participatory design practices (Noronha, 2022). In this context, we sought to deepen reflections on radical participation in design as a means of minimizing the colonality of power, being, and knowledge.

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2010) argues that colonial practices are reproduced through new centers of power within former colonies, where inequality and strict disciplinary regimes tend to be normalized. While this claim may appear radical, it highlights the everyday imposition and naturalization of the colonality of knowledge, including within design practices and their various collaborative forms.

Building on this discussion, Noronha (2022) addresses the problem of imposing a worldview as both the starting point and the expected outcome of participation. Whether through the development of participatory tools—such as metadesign—or through invitations to participatory groups, design processes often condition other ways of being in the world. This dynamic becomes more pronounced when working with historically marginalized communities, where making and creative practices are frequently constrained by hegemonic modes of world-making.

Paul B. Preciado (2018) reflects on the role of design in the production of worlds and, consequently, of bodies. From this perspective, design functions as a political technology that shapes bodies, subjectivities, and social relations. It is therefore not limited to aesthetic or

functional concerns, but operates as a power apparatus that structures experiences of gender, sexuality, and identity.

In this section, we present the debates raised by the authors discussed throughout the Seminar, articulated through this understanding of design as a political technology. Rather than reiterating critiques of hegemonic narratives, our aim is to explore ways of moving beyond them and to indicate possible pathways toward Political Design.

2.1 Praxis

The Seminar opened with Antonio Gramsci, through the reading of Selections from the Prison Notebooks (Gramsci, 1971), particularly Notes for an Introduction and an Orientation to the Study of Philosophy and the History of Culture. In this text, Gramsci redefines philosophy by bringing it closer to everyday life and social practice. He challenges the elitist notion that philosophy belongs exclusively to professional intellectuals, arguing instead that all people are philosophers insofar as they hold implicit worldviews expressed through language, common sense, popular religion, and daily practices.

This perspective resonates with design theories such as Ezio Manzini's claim that "everyone is a designer" (Manzini, 2015), which distinguishes between diffuse designers, who practice design without formal training, and expert designers, who are institutionally trained. Although we have previously drawn on Gramsci to propose the idea of an "organic designer" (Noronha, 2017), our current research has led us to move away from this framing.

We do not assume that all creative or world-making practices should be understood as design. In our research, we seek both practical and discursive emancipation from design itself. Not every creative practice needs to be classified within the field of design, and naming practices according to their native and autochthonous terms constitutes a countercolonial strategy, as proposed by Nêgo Bispo (2023), one that reappropriates the colonial logic of naming in order to weaken it.

From Gramsci, we also draw on the notion of spontaneous philosophy, embedded in language, beliefs, and habits—in the "natural" ways of life of the masses. This philosophy reflects the social and historical contradictions shaping everyday experience. Such an understanding aligns with the recognition of tacit and traditional forms of knowledge that emerge in participatory design practices open to other cosmologies.

The second text discussed in this block was Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). For Freire, as for Gramsci, knowledge is a tool of liberation, achievable only through critical engagement with reality and through praxis. When design is understood as both language and technology of world-making, valuing diverse forms of knowledge enables a break with the epistemological monoculture produced by colonial histories.

Freire's concept of conscientization—the process through which oppressed subjects become aware of their conditions and act to transform them—resonates with Gramsci's movement from spontaneous philosophy toward a philosophy of praxis: a critical, historically situated worldview produced in concrete contexts.

This discussion was complemented by *Class Struggle: A Political and Philosophical History* by Domenico Losurdo (2015). Losurdo critiques what he calls the idealism of praxis: the belief that revolutionary will alone can transform reality, disregarding historical, economic, cultural,

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and political mediations. His critique echoes Freire's rejection of activism without reflection, which he considers as alienating as verbalism, or discourse without action.

For Losurdo, praxis must be historical and situated rather than universal; non-automatic, since action alone does not ensure transformation; and critical, as even emancipatory actions may reproduce domination if left unquestioned.

These reflections gain further relevance when articulated with decolonial feminist theories. Ochy Curiel (2020) challenges the separation between theory and practice, emphasizing praxis as an ongoing process of action and reflection rooted in the lived experiences and resistances of racialized and marginalized women. From this perspective, decolonization is not an abstract concept but a concrete practice of rupture with colonial norms and structures. This discussion leads us to the second block of the Seminar, which addresses the relationship between praxis and intersectionalities.

2.2 Intersectionalities

This block of readings aimed to deepen the understanding of political praxis in contexts of extreme vulnerability, such as those encountered in our research. We began with Ochy Curiel's (2020) critique of intersectionality, while acknowledging its historical relevance, particularly in Kimberlé Crenshaw's formulation, as a tool to expose overlapping systems of oppression. Curiel challenges the institutionalized and depoliticized uses of intersectionality, often adopted by NGOs, universities, and public policies without confronting the colonial and capitalist structures that sustain inequality.

Rather than treating intersectionality as a logic of inclusion within existing systems, Curiel argues for a politics of rupture and structural transformation. Her position is not oriented toward incorporating Black, lesbian, or Indigenous women into dominant frameworks, but toward dismantling the systems that exclude them. This anti-systemic, anticapitalist, anticolonial, and antipatriarchal stance exceeds the limits of intersectionality as it is commonly mobilized.

From this critical perspective, we chose to retain the category of intersectionality due to its political reach and recognizability, while remaining attentive to the ways emancipatory concepts are co-opted by capitalism (Izidio et al., 2024). The first text discussed in this block was *O pacto da branquitude* by Cida Bento (2022), from which chapters 1, 2, 3, and 5 were analyzed.

Bento introduces the concept of the "narcissistic pact of whiteness" to describe a tacit agreement among white individuals to preserve racial privilege through denial and silence regarding structural racism. This pact operates through fear of difference and the naturalization of the "universal" as white, producing prejudice and regulating social relations (Bento, 2022).

A central target of Bento's critique is meritocracy, understood as an ideology that isolates individual achievement from social history and collective conditions. By disconnecting personal trajectories from structural inequalities, meritocracy reinforces normative standards and legitimizes oppressive systems. At the same time, Bento highlights the role of Black, Indigenous, and quilombola women's movements, which, even when operating within institutional inclusion policies, produce counter-narratives that subvert co-optation from within.

From this standpoint, intersectionality can function as an emancipatory political practice when critically reinterpreted and situated. As Tunstall (2013) also observes in *designantropologia* practices with Indigenous communities, situatedness is essential to resist co-optation and to enable political praxis aimed at rupturing the petrosexoracial system.

The second text discussed in this block was *Technologies of Sex*, from *The Countersexual Manifesto* (Preciado, 2014). In this work, Preciado critiques the naturalization of sex and gender, framing them as historical constructs shaped by technological, political, and economic regimes. This perspective allows us to extend the debate to design as a field implicated in the material production of a world grounded in heteronormativity.

Preciado's notion of countersexuality challenges the pleasure-knowledge regime of modern sexuality by exposing desire and sexual practices as effects of specific sexual technologies. This critique aligns with the countercolonial perspective advanced in the Seminar, aimed at destabilizing binary and heteronormative orders. As Preciado argues, sexuality is not inherent to specific organs but distributed across the body as a whole (Preciado, 2014).

Within this framework, our discussions addressed the commitment of design to normative modes of operation embedded in what Preciado (2023) terms the petrosexoracial system—a technology of power that shapes bodies, desires, and subjectivities through necropolitical governance. Design, understood as a sexual and political technology, has historically rendered other cosmologies invisible, a critique explored in design and gender studies (Durán & Flesler, 2021; Beccari, 2021; Almeida et al., 2024).

In sum, the debates positioned design at the center of processes of world- and body-making, which may either reproduce binary normativity or enable emancipatory materialities. Countercolonial and decolonial critiques of patriarchal universality reinforce the importance of contextuality and situated research as fundamental dimensions of political design praxis.

2.3 Design and Politics

In the third block of the Seminar, we focused on contributions from design theory that explicitly address politics. Four texts structured the discussions. The first was *What Is Cosmopolitical Design? Design, Nature and the Built Environment*, by Albena Yaneva and Alejandro Zaera-Polo, from which we examined the introduction and Chapter 9, authored by Fernando Domínguez Rubio and Uriel Fogué.

The introduction advances the argument that design is not merely a technical or aesthetic activity, but a world-making practice that shapes sensibilities, relations, and modes of existence. This position aligns design with cosmopolitics, understood as care for cohabitation among heterogeneous beings and ways of life. Drawing on Isabelle Stengers, cosmopolitics rejects the idea of a single dominant rationality and calls for attention to multiple agencies, human and non-human. From this perspective, the authors critique hegemonic forms of design historically aligned with capitalism, coloniality, and extractivism, advocating instead for non-hegemonic practices committed to environmental, epistemic, and ontological justice.

In Chapter 9, Domínguez Rubio and Fogué articulate the concepts of enfolding and unfolding. Enfolding refers to design's capacity to inscribe political values and power relations into materials, spaces, and bodies in silent and structural ways, operating at a subpolitical level that shapes conduct without public deliberation. Unfolding, by contrast, emphasizes design's

potential to open new political possibilities by proposing alternative worlds, relations, and entities, thereby expanding the boundaries of what can be considered political.

This approach resonates with Stengers' understanding of cosmopolitics as a practice of multiplying worlds rather than unifying them. The articulation of *cosmo* and *politics* is not conceived as stable or harmonious, but as a process of slowing down and composing worlds collectively, through situated practices that bring together scientific, local, affective, and everyday knowledges.

Another key text in this block was *Decolonizing Design through the Perspectives of Cosmological Others*, by Ahmed Ansari (2019). Ansari argues that modern design is grounded in a Eurocentric epistemology that universalizes particular values and forms of life. By proposing an ontological turn, he calls for engagement with local cosmologies as distinct worlds, rather than as cultural variations of a single model. Design thus becomes a practice of negotiation and cohabitation among ontologically diverse worlds, rather than an instrument of normalization.

We also discussed *A New Political Imagination*, by Tony Fry and Madina Tlostanova (2021), which argues that contemporary politics—particularly in the context of ecological collapse and democratic erosion—has become reactive, instrumental, and incapable of addressing complex, interdependent crises. Trapped within colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist frameworks, traditional political imagination remains limited to substituting ideologies without transforming their foundations.

In contrast, the authors propose a new political imagination grounded in lived practice and attentive to multiple interests, including those of historically dehumanized populations and non-human entities. This is an ontological politics that embraces pluriversality, challenging the universalism of Western modernity by recognizing diverse epistemologies, worldviews, and modes of existence.

The Seminar concluded with the reading of the introduction and first chapter of *Common: On Revolution in the 21st Century*, by Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval (2017). Through an archaeological analysis of the concept of the common, the authors critique its reduction to shared resources or collaborative practices that remain compatible with capital. Instead, they define the common as a political and juridical principle constituted through collective struggle and institutional invention. The common is not given, but produced through praxis, affirming it as a form of collective political action.

3. DEBATES AND SELF-REFLECTIONS

At the end of the Seminar, we sought to understand participants' impressions of the readings and the discussions developed throughout the Seminar. To this end, we distributed a questionnaire via Google Forms with the following questions

- What was your understanding of the relationship between Design and Politics before participating in the Political Design Seminar?
- And after the Political Design Seminar, how do you perceive this relationship?
- Which theoretical contributions do you identify as having most influenced your research after participating in the Seminar?

The responses to these questions echo central issues raised during the Seminar, including the presumed neutrality of the design field, the relevance of political education, and the need for the politicization of design. They also raise a final and pressing concern: once these issues are recognized, how should one act in response? To preserve participants' anonymity, fictitious names were used. The following sections discuss these reflections based on the responses collected.

3.1 Neutrality of the Field

The crystallization of dichotomies—an epistemic legacy of modernity—alongside the colonization of life by capitalist rationality and the formation of subjectivities shaped by capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism, underpins much of contemporary thought. These dynamics culminate in the processes associated with the Anthropocene, which continue to orient our ways of acting in the world. When neutrality and universality are taken as analytical premises, design education and practice remain deeply rooted in modern traditions. As a privileged product of modernity, design has often been guided by these power structures, frequently adopting neutrality as a foundational stance in relation to them.

Understanding how Seminar participants perceived neutrality in design—especially when design encounters other fields of knowledge and generates concrete actions—was therefore central to this analysis. Challenging this assumption represents a first step toward articulating a relationship between design and politics. This concern motivated the question: *What was your understanding of the relationship between Design and Politics before participating in the Political Design Seminar?* Some responses include:

I understood the importance of relating the two disciplines, since design is far from being a neutral field. **(Renata)**

I also understand that researching the relationship between design and politics comes from a desire to understand design as a non-neutral field, analyzing our actions in terms of which discourses we are feeding. This requires deep reflection on the history and philosophy of the field and also on scientific practice itself, on what we understand as science. **(Sofia)**

Several participants already recognized the impossibility of design functioning as a neutral field of knowledge, as well as the need for critical positioning by both the discipline and design professionals in relation to their actions in the world. Others emphasized how participation in the Seminar contributed to developing a more critical understanding of design practice, as expressed below:

The Seminar helped me to understand the value of politicizing our field, not only to break with ideas of neutrality, but, above all, to move toward a new political imagination, which is interested in an everyday politics that calls into the conversation all those who were, and continue to be, excluded from so-called democratic and historical processes. **(Carla)**

It is noteworthy that this response links a critical stance toward non-neutrality with the possibility of fostering a new political imagination capable of impacting everyday life and expanding democratic dialogue. This perception resonates with critiques already established in the field, such as feminist analyses that expose how certain models of design thinking and practice—and their practitioners, often coded as masculine—are legitimized as “good” or “neutral,” while other practices and practitioners are relegated to subordinate positions (Durán & Flesler, 2021). Similarly, critiques of the “pact of whiteness” (Bento, 2022) reveal

how the work and project practices of Black designers are systematically rendered invisible. As Kilomba (2019) argues, when white academics claim neutrality and objectivity, they fail to acknowledge that their discourse is produced from a specific position that is neither neutral nor universal, but rather dominant.

3.2 Politicization of Design and Political Education

The capture of collective desire by capital contributes to the maintenance of established power relations—political, economic, and environmental—within the design field. It is therefore essential to examine the relationship between design, capital, and desire in order to understand how the politicization of design and critical political education may either reproduce or transform these dynamics (Pelbart, 2011).

The Seminar created a space for collective reading and for forging connections between design and other fields, particularly politics. This process was fundamental in fostering critical awareness, both within the research group and among participants. The question *And after the Political Design Seminar, how do you perceive this relationship?* sought to capture how participants related the readings to their prior understandings of design and politics, as well as how the Seminar contributed to their individual research trajectories. Some responses include:

Before the Seminar, my perceptions of Design and Politics were very limited. My understanding did not encompass the issues addressed in the Seminar, much less relate them to Politics. **(Cássia)**

It is one of the questions that has guided my research. My understanding so far is that thinking politics in design implies that the researcher undergoes a process of political education, attempting to conceptualize terms that are very frequently used today but that have sometimes lost the meaning or the force they aimed to have when they first emerged, such as anti-racism, democracy, anti-capitalism, and so on. **(Renata)**

As indicated earlier, the Seminar was conceived as a process of political education and as a search for theoretical grounding capable of supporting a critique of how politics is enacted and conceptualized within design. The responses suggest that this desire was shared by participants, particularly in their interest in expanding knowledge and critically deconstructing concepts that have been co-opted by colonial-capitalist rationalities (Izidio et al., 2024).

Some participants also reported difficulties in addressing contemporary issues and their intersections, as illustrated below:

The dialogues I participated in during the Seminar helped me to see that this is a limitation of the environment in which I am conducting my research and that there are more researchers across the country making the connections that I would like to be making. For example, I investigate some themes that, when analyzed in isolation, find support both in design literature and among professors and advisors:

- design in contemporary artisanal graphic processes
- design allied with education for the training and qualification of young people
- design and responsibility when working with social organizations and communities.

But when I propose crossing these themes, the political and social dimension of design and its relationship with labor becomes evident, and the complexity seems to push away support. There seem to be few people with whom to engage in dialogue about this. **(Cássia)**

This account highlights the Seminar's role as a space of connection among researchers engaged with Design and Politics. It also reinforces our central thesis: if power relations permeate all practices, and if knowledge is inherently intersectional, then design cannot be understood as anything other than political. Moreover, the perceived lack of support for addressing such complexity points to the persistence of pseudo-neutrality within design education and research, as well as to the absence of explicit political positioning among some academics.

Another response reiterates the need for political engagement in design practice and research:

In fact, the Seminar met exactly what I have been seeking to investigate. In my academic bubble, much is said about social sustainability for products and services, but when you delve deeper, you notice a lack of clarity and direction regarding graphic design. I would even say there is a lack of engagement, a more radical stance proportional to the magnitude of the confrontation required in contemporaneity. **(José)**

Design's multidisciplinary and boundary-crossing nature positions it as a field capable of imagining and creating alternative realities (Escobar, 2020). However, taking a political stance within design requires a relational approach grounded in intersubjective engagement with the world. This entails recognizing multiple narratives and challenging linear or single-story frameworks. Such openness to dissensus and ongoing negotiation—aimed at articulating what is possible within what is non-negotiable (Izidio et al., 2024)—often generates discomfort within colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist cultures, including within design itself, as it destabilizes sedimented truths associated with science and the discipline.

3.3 “Ok, We Know All This, but Now What?”: Design as Struggle

I encountered the same doubts and reflections that have emerged throughout my own trajectory. I noticed a great deal of frustration in the conversations, often stopping at the point of “ok, we know all this, but now what?” or the frequent feeling of impotence that comes from knowing all this but being unable to put it into practice, especially when working in the private sector. **(Renata)**

A recurring concern throughout the Seminar—and in other academic and professional spaces frequented by the authors—was a sense of frustration and impotence. Even when recognizing the issues discussed, designers in academia and the market often feel constrained by systems that compel them to reproduce the very oppressions they critique.

This tension is frequently expressed as a dilemma: how can one recognize both the oppressed and the oppressor within oneself (Freire, 1968) while continuing to operate within systems that seek to domesticate subjectivities? This question also emerged during a lecture by one of the authors at an event on Design and Sustainability, when an undergraduate student asked how alternative design practices could be enacted under productivist market logics.

Although no definitive answers were offered, the discussions pointed toward micropolitical actions as possible avenues for resistance. Drawing on Paulo Freire's notion of dialogical action, emancipation is understood as a collective process grounded in listening, horizontality, and ethical-political commitment. Dialogue, in this sense, is not a gesture of concession, but an emancipatory pedagogical practice rooted in humility, mutual learning, recognition of all subjects as historical agents, and trust in collective capacity to confront oppression.

Even when subsistence pressures position designers in subordinate roles within market or academic structures, spaces for micropolitical action remain. Through these practices, it

becomes possible to act—gradually and collectively—toward emancipation and toward the construction of other worlds. This is the ongoing struggle that design must assume if it is to contribute meaningfully to transformative futures.

4. FROM POLITICS TO COSMOPOLITICS: CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Seventh NIDA Seminar articulated a theoretical framework that enabled a critical examination of the relationship between design and politics by challenging the utopia of neutrality in the field, both conceptually and in practice. The discussions revealed a clear need for the politicization of design and for political education. Through an intersectional bibliography, the Seminar fostered critical awareness of research practices and reinforced participants' recognition of the limits imposed by the field's pseudo-neutrality.

In response to the sense of impotence generated by the scale of contemporary crises—particularly those associated with the Anthropocene—the Seminar emphasized micropolitical action as a means of opening fissures within dominant structures. Such action begins with explicit political positioning in relation to research and practice. This requires critical reflection on how designers and researchers have historically constructed their subjectivities, modes of perception, and ways of inhabiting the world. The subjects we become are inseparable from material conditions, knowledge systems, and the organization of labor and its distributions.

Moving forward, we take up the invitation proposed by Stengers (2011) through the concept of cosmopolitics: to slow down action within a paradigm in crisis and to compose worlds collectively through alternative praxis and non-conditioned forms of participation, as cautioned by Rivera Cusicanqui (2010).

In this sense, we conclude by highlighting key propositions for a cosmopolitical design (Yaneva & Zaera-Polo, 2015): recognizing non-human entities as political agents; creating spaces of hesitation rather than immediate solutions; acting within networks of interdependence; and valuing situated, collective, and experimental practices.

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