SPECIAL ARTICLE

Autonomous design and the emergent transnational critical design studies field

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Introduction

This paper examines the seeming repositioning of design as a central domain of thought and action concerned with the meaning and production of socionatural life. It suggests that critical design studies are being actively reconstituted –perhaps more clearly than many social and human sciences and professional fields—as a key space for thinking about life and its defense from increasingly devastating anthropogenic forces. There is a hopeful recognition of the multidimensional character of design as material, cultural, epistemic, political, and ontological, all at once. Design, in short, is being acknowledged as a decisive world-making practice, even if often found wanting in this regard. The mood seems to be settling in, at least among a small but possibly growing number of design theorists and practitioners, for playing a more self-aware, and constructive, role in the making and unmaking of worlds.

This means that the political character of design is being more readily acknowledged. New design lexicons and visions are being proposed as a result. The first part of this paper summarizes some of these trends, including the uneven but increasingly intersecting geographies from which they arise. Together, they are seen as constituting a transnational discursive formation of critical design studies. The second part shows the tensions, but also potential synergies and bridges, between approaches stemming from the Global South and those from the Global North, broadly speaking. The third part, finally, tackles the question of the relation between design and autonomy, examining autonomous design as a particular proposal within the transnational critical design studies field. While the analysis is offered as a hypothesis more than as a thoroughly substantiated argumentation, the paper hopes to contribute performatively to constructive articulations of the emergent trends.

On critical design studies as an inter-epistemic and pluriversal conversation

I believe we are witnessing a significant reorientation of design theory and practice at present, and this issue of SDRJ is an instantiation of this auspicious moment. I am not suggesting that previous moments in design history have been immune to change; however, the current phase exhibits features that make this moment particularly transformative, theoretically, practically, and politically. I would highlight three of them:

(i) The growing willingness on the part of a number of designers worldwide, although largely anchored in the

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Andrea Botero commented *"Design, in short, […] of worlds"*:
I have always struggled with this tension between talking about design as a specific activity or a category (as opposed to other activities) and then also thinking on the variety of ways that word-making happens, so not only the "European" understanding of what it is to design. Is the intention of plurality against the objective of finding something common upon which we can all discuss? Or is the dichotomy a false one and I just complicate myself unnecessarily?

Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero answered:
Andrea, perhaps what is common here is the diversity of the often-irreconcilable ways, in which different people immersed in different contexts and cultures, realize different ways of prefiguring and configuring their environments in what we might call: "designs".

Andrea Botero answered:
I mean it also in a very pragmatic way. Let's say I want to explain what my expertise is. I am not an Anthropologist, nor a sociologist, I identify partly with being a designer… So does one explain that across different realities? I feel social sciences have it easy in this way.

Chiara Del Gaudio replied:
Probably we should discuss what world-making is. Considering that probably there are several different perspectives on this, each perspective should then clarify if design has (or may have) the role of a world-making activity. Plus… is dichotomy something we look for?

Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero commented *"design"*:
For me, this also means touching the untouched word "design" and looking for its equivalents in various civilization paths.

Anthony Fry commented "an emerging civilization":
But in conditions of fracturing and destruction.

Global North, to engage more deeply than ever with the interrelated crises of climate, energy, poverty, inequality, and meaning and the momentous questions they pose. These questions go well beyond the concern with the disappearance of species and the increasingly destructive effects of climate change, to involve the disruption of basic human sociality, the breakdown of social relations, the proliferation of wars and violence, massive displacement of peoples and nonhumans, abhorrent inequality, intensifying forms of intolerance, and the difficulty young people face today in crafting lives of meaning. I believe many designers are alert to this suffering and devastation and genuinely attuned to the Earth and to the fate of their fellow humans. They are more inclined than ever to consider design as central to the crisis and hence that it may be a crucial factor in confronting it imaginatively and effectively. Notions such as design for social innovation (Manzini, 2015), transition design (e.g., Irwin *et al.*, 2015), design towards Sustainment (Fry, 2012, 2017a; Fry *et al.*, 2015), and redesigning the human are perhaps the most compelling expressions of this critical awareness and disposition.

Related claims call for a more explicit engagement between design and a host of important issues, including democracy, the speculative imagination, activism, expanding design spaces to include heterogeneous communities and temporalities, and collaborative and participatory design, among other appeals.[1] As Manzini unabashedly —and rightly, in my opinion—puts it, at stake in these new design orientations is nothing less than an emerging civilization. Design, succinctly, is about future-making (Yelavich and Adams, 2014). It is, at least potentially, about laying down conditions for post-capitalist, post-patriarchal, and post-human societies, or social systems that nurture a responsible anthropocentrism beyond the modern human. It is, finally about philosophical and political discourses on design through which design itself is redesigned (Krippendorff, 1995; Marenko and Brassett, 2015).

(ii) The emergence of a transnational space, anchored chiefly but not exclusively in the Global South, that problematizes anew design's embeddedness in global historical relations of power and domination, variously explored in terms of design's relation to histories of colonialism and imperialism, its functioning within the modern/colonial matrix of power, the geopolitics of knowledge (eurocentrism), racism, and patriarchal capitalist colonial modernity. This second feature is attested by novel framings of design praxes, such as those going on under the rubrics of decolonial design (Schultz, 2017; Schultz *et al.*, 2018); designs of, for, by and from the South (Gutiérrez, 2015a, 2015b; Ansari, 2016; Fry, 2017b; Escobar, 2017)[2]; design by other names; the decolonization of design (Tunstall, 2013; Ansari, 2016; Tlostanova, 2017;

Vásquez, 2017); indigenous and multicultural design and visual sovereignty[3]; alter-design (López-Garay and Lopera, 2017); design in the borderlands (Kalantidou and Fry, 2014); and autonomous design (Escobar, 2018). It should be stressed that these trends often overlap; they are diverse and heterogeneous, in some cases even within each trend.[4] Taken as a whole, however, they can be seen as decentering design from Eurocentric accounts of the field, resituating it within larger histories of modernity and coloniality; making visible previously hidden or suppressed design histories and practices; redirecting design ontologically towards decolonial and pluriversal visions; and, very tellingly, addressing the implications of these repositioning of design for design education. Attention is also paid in some of these tendencies to questions of care and repair; opening up multiple futures attuned to diverse temporalities and worldviews; imagining concrete decolonial

Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero replied:
Dear Tony as you think the new civilization that is emerging everywhere is flawed and characterized by defuturing conditions everywhere in a more or less similar way? There are no environments or places for you where samples show an escape route? a more hopeful one, I mean.

Anthony Fry answered:
Alfredo, we need action not hope. The condition of defuturing is relative: some places are better than others. There are fragments out of which affirmative change can be built, and
change communities can be created, as Arturo indicates. But even so the de-futuring impetus of the global power blocs is massive, and dangers grow.
It is not that 'we' are heading for a disaster but rather we are in and of it (part of what is fracturing is our species as the still dominantly Eurocentric debate on the post-human evidences). Action means not being defeated by this situation but resisting without romantic illusions. It means 'digging where we stand' - and for us this mean resisting design in the service of negation and making it a more important force of and for sustaining change. So for me autonomous design represents a rupture with design as a service, design education and design thinking/theory as it constitutes a division of knowledge and a restrictive practice. To confront the forces of negation design has to be an expansive praxis exercised with courage.

Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero replied:
I understand and this idea of action instead of hope, well, there is a word that Colombian author Adolfo Alban Achinte uses that comes to my mind on reading your words, as a more action-imbued version of resistance, born of communal struggles of resistance by peoples of the black and indigenous communities in the Colombian Pacific coast, that is re-existence" (similar perhaps to redirective practices I have read about in your books).. Resistance as re-existence that is what it must be or could be in autonomous design ways.

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[1] See Escobar (2018) for a fuller treatment and references on these trends. On design and democracy, see the ardent plea to the design community by Manzini and Margolin (2017), in DESIS Network, "Democracy and Design: what do you think?", as well as Virginia Tassinari's talks on "Regenerating Democracy", DESIS Philosophy talks (http://www.desis-philosophytalks.org/).
[2] See also the 2017 special issue of *Design Philosophy Papers*, 15(1).
[3] See, for instance, the work of the Lakota-Dakota graphic designer, Sadie Red King, available at: https://www.sadieredwing.com/ .
[4] For instance, there is a clear overlap between those trends using a decolonial framework and the decolonization of design. On decolonial design see the 2018 special issues of *Design and Culture*, 10(1) and the group's website (http://www.decolonisingdesign.com/). There is a related but independent efforts at decolonizing design that appeal to other subaltern experiences and concepts, particularly indigenous and Afro-diasporic, such as the work of Tori Tunstall and Sadie Red Wing; see for instance Tori Tunstall, Decolonizing Design Lecture Series, University of Minnesota College of Design, Nov 15, 2017 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEUyGrgqaAM), and Respectful design, (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sES-VWI5aAHA&list=PLh-_JsB24Hqz3Y3U3Z992-UDmg5zhU7-K). There is also overlap between decolonial design and design for/by the Global South. On the latter, see the special issue of Design Philosophy Papers, 15(1), edited by Tony Fry.

design projects; and conceptualizing design epistemologies arising from multiple ontologies beyond the dualisms inhabiting the dominant forms of modernity.

(iii) As a consequence of the previous two processes, one can posit the existence of a transnational critical design studies field; it is not farfetched to state that this nascent field is inter-epistemic and inter-cultural (one could even argue: inter-ontological); in other words —and this is one its most promising developments—critical design studies has ceased to be an intra-European conversation, in the onto-epistemic sense of the term (that is, one that remains confined within the configurations of knowledge and worldviews stemming from the European historical experience); it is becoming pluriversal.

In sum, what we are witnessing is the emergence of a domain of thought and action in which design might function as a political technology for a better, *and different*, world, or worlds. These trends reveal an open ended attitude towards critique, reflected in a willingness to entertain radical ideas for the transformation of design (again, this issue of *SDRJ* being a case in point); they infuse design with a more explicit sense of politics, even a radical politics in some cases; and they question anew readily accepted design solutions to contemporary problems, such as those on offer by mainstream discourses of development, sustainability, the green economy, social entrepreneurship, human-centered design, smart cities, technological singularities, and so forth.

As a discursive formation, this transnational field may be characterized provisionally in terms of three interrelated processes: interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary forms of knowledge, including newcomers in design studies, such as anthropology, geography, political philosophy, feminist and critical race theory, and political ecology, plus unprecedented engagements between long-standing design fields, such as architecture, and these other newly design-related disciplines; new forms of subjectivity that widen significantly the positions available to design subjects; and relations of power that regulate, albeit in shifting manners, the practices within the field.

Bridging design discourses in the Global South/East with those from the Global North/West

Adopting the nomenclature suggested by Pakistani design theorist and activist Ahmed Ansari (2016), I suggest that there is a rapprochement between design discourses in the Global South/East with those from the Global North/West. While there are convergences and potential synergies, the tensions between the two discursive fields should not be underestimated. As Ansari puts it (2016, p. 3), "[f]ew texts within the lexicon of design studies or history have dealt with the question of what design *in* and *of* the Global South/East is and could be". His call is for "a hybrid design that navigates, negotiates and bridges North/West and South/East without asserting any kind of either/or hierarchy between the two" —in other words, design conversations that do not privilege either design history a priori, albeit acknowledging the Northern/Western coloniality of design knowledge (p. 4). In what follows, I discuss three

thorny questions that often muddle this conversation, while making it perhaps more stimulating even as it stalls: the question of modernity; the location of the designer; and the understanding of the communal.

The understanding of modernity. The Latin American decolonial perspective is one of the most radical critiques of Western modernity to emerge in a long time. It posits the existence of radical difference in relation to dominant forms of Euro-modernity. Less known in critical design circles are the arguments in the nascent field of political ontology. A key idea here is that dominant and subaltern worlds can be partially connected, even co-produce each other, while remaining distinct; said otherwise, worlds can be part of each other and radically different at the same time. The decolonial notions of "exteriority" and "border epistemologies" (e.g., Mignolo, 2000, 2011) and the political ontology notions of partial connections and of the "ontological excess" that subaltern worlds continue to exhibit in relation to dominant worlds are important in this regard. However, they are easily misunderstood as being against modernity, or as applying only to indigenous peoples. Neither of these claims is correct. At stake here, or crucial relevance for design, are the existence of worlds that do not abide completely by the separation between humans and non-humans, even if the divide is also present in many of their practices (de la Cadena, 2015; Blaser, 2013, 2016; Escobar, 2018).

Arturo Escobar added:
This is very rich discussion, and I am sorry to come in late... Beginning with Andrea's question, whether a pluriversal approach (or radical multiplicity) makes speaking of a shared world or common goals obsolete, or whether both notions can be held together in tension. Marisol de la Cadena often cites Isabelle Stenger's concept of "interests in common that are not [ontologically] the same interests". There are multiple ways of worlding, partially connected to each other, which does not mean all worlds are the same. Worlds can be within each other and yet be radically different (e.g., all worlds exist within some version of modernity, yet this does not make them all just modern). ... Panikkar's notion of homeomorphic equivalents (I hope I am getting this right, Alfredo) provides a partial way out, including whether "design" itself can be thought about in terms of a family of such equivalents, or many "designs by other names". Finally, I really like Tony's notion of resistance without romanticism as "digging where we stand", and from there both negate design as defuturing and affirm it as Sustainment.

Chiara Del Gaudio said:
I wanted to rewrite Fry's comment as "working towards fracturing and destruction" and to stress the opportunities (for resistance) emerging from a specific way of practising fracturing and destruction through design. Just thoughts...

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Chiara Del Gaudio commented on "This second feature is attested by novel framings of design praxes":
Sometimes I wonder if these novel framings of design praxes at the end do not contribute (or belong to) to the same discourse of the patriarchal capitalist colonial modernity, or to the next matrix of power that we cannot currently see.
[yeah, it sounds a bit pessimistic, but I usually try to tension every point of view and understanding to go further with the process of understanding itself].

While it is true that critics of modernity sometimes homogenize the modern experience, failing to see the plurality that inhabits it, it is also the case that moderns, whether in the Global North or the Global South and including those on the Left, have a hard time facing the ontological challenge posed by the idea of the end of modernity as a civilizational project; it induces a type of fright that is deeply unsettling. Inter-epistemic design conversations need to articulate this civilizational anxiety in effective ways. After all, many other worlds have had to exist with the fright, if not the reality, of their vanquishing. An important strategy by non-dominant or alternative modern worlds would be to *effectively activate* their specific critique of the dominant modernity, which would place them in the position of fellow travelers, not enemies, of those who uphold more explicitly the possibility of a pluriverse of social formations beyond modernity. Something similar could be said about the notion of change of civilizational model. This concept needs to deconstruct the dominance of Western civilization, pluralize critically other existing or potential civilizational models in open-ended ways, and be open to considering anew the critical retrieval of the history-making potential of multiple traditions, including the non-dominant traditions that have existed within the West itself.

The identification of the epistemic location of the designer. Critical perspectives from the Global South/East share with feminist theory their decided emphasis on the situated character of all knowledge, against the claims of neutrality based on Universal Science (Hardin, 2018). For decolonial theorist María Lugones (2010a, 2010b), subaltern peoples always inhabit a "fractured locus" of enunciation. This politics of location is often found excessively politicized by scholars anchored in Northern/Western onto-epistemic locations, for whom the analysis of their own location would entail a deep understanding of eurocentrism and a decentering of all forms of modernity. At the same time, scholars and activists occupying Southern/Eastern positions (myself included) at times fall into the trap of limiting the complexity of their own historical positionalities or the hybrid historicity of those groups with whom they work. Effective inter-epistemic dialogues across the entire range of positionalities requires more clarity and debate on these issues, including an ethics of generous listening and mutual care.

Understandings of community and the communal. Many transition narratives today acknowledge the deleterious effects of intensified liberal individualism and the spread of this model to most corners of the world via capitalist-induced consumption. Next to the relocalization of activities such as food, energy, transportation, and housing to the extent possible,[5] transition visions emphasize the need to re-communalize social life, taking nonhumans explicitly into account. In Latin America, new languages of the communal, such as *comunalidad*, aim to reinvigorate debates on the communal dimension of all social life (e.g., Escobar, 2018, p. 176-185). Yet each society, perhaps even each locality or region, has to invent a practice of the communal that might work best for them. Appeals to the communal are often resisted because they might resuscitate old ghosts thought long-ago discarded in some societies, such as the impingement on the rights of the individual, negative aspects of so-called traditional communities (including the predominance of elders and men), and so forth. But this needs not be the case. In fact, recent debates in Latin America envision post-patriarchal, non-liberal, post-capitalist and place-based but not place-bound forms of community.

Worldwide, groups need to grapple with the re/constitution of the communal in a pluriversal manner; they need to do so in ways appropriate to the specific conjuncture in which they are enmeshed within a domineering globalization. Manzini's call in this issue for a new view of communities, understood as open-ended spaces where individuals participate from their position of autonomy in conversations about possibilities, with an eye towards designing coalitions, is an instance of constructive rethinking of communities appropriate to a particular social and onto-epistemic formation. In his view, these communities imply forms of cosmopolitan localism coupled with distributed meshworked agencies (2015).

These are just three of the areas of tension but also potential synergies that inhabit the transnational critical

Alfredo Gutiérrez Borrero commented on "designs of, for, by and from the South":
Good to read included here the idea of "Design of the South". I think that the "for", "by" and "from" the south, although they are valuable, leave the issue a little more in the geographic south or at least in a pre-given south. The preposition "of" instead, would allude (for me) also to the fact that there is value in the south itself (or souths in plural, because they are many of them) as an artifact that can be made. I am very interested on ways to examine also how the south itself has been designed and built as an artifact or device like the bottom, the underside, the other, etc. Because, you know, if we understand that it has been designed, we can contribute to it being designed otherwise.

Arturo Escobar answered:
I think you are absolutely right, Alfredo. I like "of" and thinking about how "South" itself is an artifact of design. I followed Tony's formulation and added "from", if I recall correctly, but "of" makes a lot of sense.

Ann Light commented on "At stake here, […] in many of their practices":
May I ask for clarification? I am put in mind of the work of Tsing and Haraway. It would be interesting to understand how you mean this distinct from those discussions of companion species and so on. Is this also about recognising something common across all living species?

Andrea Botero answered:
The work of Tsing and Haraway resonates with that of Marisol de La Cadena, that Arturo quotes here. She has a very interesting take on - very compatible or complementary IMHO - to that of Tsing and Haraway but her material is from ways of life in the Andes.

Anthony Fry commented on "Next to the relocalization […] on the communal dimension of all social life":
I have a concern called community that touches much (but not all) of what has been said.

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[5] See, for instance, Manzini's helpful concept of SLOC (small, local, open, connected) scenarios (2015, p. 178-182), but also the Transition Town Movement.

design studies field. There are other important areas that are beyond the scope of this paper, such as contrasting views of power and politics; the interplay between reformist and radical alternatives; the role of non-humans in design frameworks; the tension between secularism, religion, and novel forms of earth spirituality, still scantly discussed in all-too-secular design and academic circles; the role of non-experts; and so forth. In the last part of the paper, I explore a few of these open questions by discussing a current that brings the relation between design and politics to the fore, namely, the proposals for autonomous design that are at the heart of this special issue.

On bringing together design and autonomy[6]

The idea of bringing together design and autonomy is not readily apparent. Is autonomous design not an oxymoron? To posit the idea credibly requires seeing anew design's dependence on modernist unsustainable and defuturing practices and redirecting it towards collective world-making projects, in all of their heterogeneity and contradictions. Design for autonomy thus springs out of an ontological design framework; it is centered on the struggles of communities and social movements in defense of their territories and worlds from the ravages of neoliberal globalization. Thinking ontologically about the current conjuncture implies examining the contemporary crisis as the result of deeply entrenched ways of being, knowing, and doing and their instantiation by patriarchal capitalist modernity; conversely, it implies nourishing design's potentiality to support subaltern struggles for autonomy, by opening up design to rationalities and practices attuned to the *relational* dimension of life, particularly those present among groups engaged in territorial struggles against extractive globalization. From this perspective, what we are witnessing is a veritable political activation of relationality. Relationality is also present, in the last instance, in the Earth itself, in the endless and ceaselessly changing weave of life on which all life depends.

The basic insight of autonomous design is seemingly straightforward: that every community practices the design of itself. This was certainly the case with traditional communities (they produced the norms by which they lived their lives largely endogenously), as it is today with many communities, in both the Global South and the Global North, that are thrown into the need of designing themselves in the face of ever-deepening manifestations of the crises and the inescapable techno-economic mediation of their worlds. If we accept the thesis —voiced by social movement activists, transition visionaries, and some designers—that the current crises point at a deeper civilizational crisis, autonomously designing new forms of life appears to many communities as an eminently feasible, perhaps unavoidable, theoretico-political project; for some, it is even a question of their survival as distinct worlds.

Theoretically, the question of autonomy in relation to design can be grounded in the view, articulated by Maturana and Varela (1980, 1987), that autonomy is the most fundamental feature of the living; in these authors' jargon, autonomy is the key to the *autopoiesis* or self-creation of living systems. This proposition serves as partial anchor for autonomous design. As Varela says, "[i]n fact, the key to autonomy is that a living system finds its way into the next moment by acting appropriately out of its own resources (Varela, 1999, p. 11). This resonates with Gustavo Esteva's definition of autonomy, based on the Zapatista experience, as the ability to create the conditions that enable communities to change their norms from within, or the ability to change traditions traditionally (2005, 2015). It involves the defense of some practices, the abandonment or transformation of others, and the invention of new ones.

The autonomous design framework may be considered a Latin American contribution to the transnational conversation on design sketched above. There is a range of forms of autonomous thought in Latin America at present. Together with the re-crafting of communal forms of knowing~being~doing, these notions —*autonomía* and *comunalidad*— may be seen as laying down the ground for an autonomous design thought. The emergent concept of Buen Vivir (good living or collective wellbeing) as

There is the community of service who have nothing in common other than subordination to a client. There is also a community of transition that wish design to be an agency in the service of community. But community has not escaped the ravages of the unsustainable or idealised fabrication via what Carl Schmitt called 'political romanticism.' And then there is what Jean-Luc Nancy called the 'inoperative community' (the community of modernity), which has two Others: (i) the community of the residual indigenous and is of another cosmology wherein the translatability of community comes into question, and (ii) the community of the informal lodged in survival. Finally (not really finally as we are aspiring to occupy the pluriverse) there is the community of 'design after design' that is not trying to find a place in any 'design' practice, discipline or sub-discipline but to be liberated (cf Enrique Dussel) from its defuturing Eurocentrically biased oppressive force. This is my take/extension of autonomous design. Here the design/designing that crosses the divide of restrictive design (of design education, service, practice and the restrictive economy) into the general world of design and its actual condition of pervasive exchange (as with Bataille's move from the restrictive the general economy).
Here is but a fragment of complexity, but one that nonetheless aims to answer a question posed by Andrea (what other than design needs to be freed from a prison-house) - community.

Arturo Escobar answered:
"Design after design"... I like that. Could we perhaps paraphrase J.K. Gibson-Graham, and speak of "The end of design (as we knew it)"? This would entail both a displacement of design around a certain kind of modernity (patriarchal/eurocentric/colonial) and open up the project --which I believe many critical design thinkers are doing-- of reframing design as always diverse within itself, precisely because it's always connected with multiple ways of worlding.

Anthony Fry answered:
In my view the difference between "design after design"

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[6] This section draws from Escobar (2018), especially chapter 6. See this book for an extended list of references.

an alternative *to* development is an expressions of such thought, and so are the *planes de vida* (life projects) being crafted by some indigenous, Afrodescendant, and peasant groups, and in some urban spaces. Experiences embodying the search for autonomy can be witnessed in many corners of the subcontinent where brutal forms of extractive globalization are taking place: in struggles for the defense of seeds, commons, mountains, forests, wetlands, lakes and rivers; in actions against white/mestizo and patriarchal rule; in urban experiments with art, digital technologies, neo-shamanic movements, urban gardens. Taken as a whole, these expressions of multiple collective wills manifest the unwavering conviction that another world is possible.

A fundamental aspect of autonomous design is the rethinking of the communal, in vogue in critical circles in Latin America and in transition movements in Europe. The realization of the communal can be said to be the most fundamental goal of autonomous design. Communal thought is perhaps most developed in Mexico, based on the experiences of social movements in Oaxaca and Chiapas. For Esteva, *la comunalidad* (the condition of being communal) "constitutes the core of the horizon of intelligibility of Meso-American cultures... it is the condition that inspires communalitarian existence, that which makes transparent the act of living; it is a central category in personal and communitarian life, its most fundamental *vivencia*, or experience" (n.d., p. 1).

It is important to mention that that in the context of many grassroots communities any type of design would take place under conditions of ontological occupation. But it is precisely in those cases where the idea if autonomy is flourishing and where the hypothesis of design for autonomy takes on meaning. Autonomía often has a decided territorial and place-based dimension; this applies to rural, urban, forest and all kinds of territories in different ways. The place-based dimension of autonomía often entails the primacy of decision making by women, who are historically more likely than men to resist heteronomous pressures on the territories and resources and to defend collective ways of being. There is often, in autonomía-oriented movements, the drive to re/generate people's spaces, their cultures and communities and to reclaim the commons. It could be said that autonomía is another name for people's dignity and for conviviality; at its best, *autonomía is a theory and practice of inter-existence and inter-being, a design for the pluriverse*.

From this brief theoretico-political discussion we can propose the following elements for thinking about autonomous design. Autonomy-oriented design:

- Has at its main goal the realization of the communal, understood as the creation of the conditions for the community's ongoing self-creation and successful coupling with their 'increasingly globalized' environments.
- Embraces ancestrality, as it emanates from the history of the relational worlds in question, and futurality, as a statement about futures for communal realizations.
- Privileges design interventions that foster non-liberal, non-state centered, and non-capitalist forms of organization.

- Creates auspicious spaces for the life projects of communities and the creation of convivial societies.
- Always considers the community's engagement with heteronomous social actors and technologies (including markets, digital technologies, extractive operations, and so forth) from the perspective of the preservation and enhancement of the community's autopoiesis.
- Takes seriously the demerging design imperatives of place-building, re-localization, renewed attention to materiality and non-humans, and the creation of inter-epistemic collaborative organizations.
- Gives particular attention to the role of commoning in the realization of the communal; it devises effective means to foster diverse economies (social and solidarity economies, alternative capitalist and non-capitalist economies).
- Articulates with the South American trends towards Buen Vivir and the Rights of Nature and with related trends elsewhere (e.g., degrowth, commons, postdevelopment).
- Fosters pluriversal openings; it is, to this extent, a form of design for the pluriverse, for the flourishing of life on the planet.
- Creates spaces for strengthening the connection between the realization of the communal and the Earth

and "the end of design as we know it" is the former designates an imperative while the latter names a condition.

Ann Light commented on "Worldwide, groups need to grapple with the re/constitution of the communal in a pluriversal manner":
This is clearly distinct from nationalist populism, but it would be interesting to have the characteristics that make it so elucidated at a time when return to community is being linked with narrow conceptions of inclusion.

Andrea Botero answered to Ann Light:
I think Ezio seems to be thinking about those when he talks in his contribution when he talks about communities of hate and fear. Tina and Alfred expanded a bit on the difference they see (see footnote 13 in their piece).

Arturo Escobar answered:
I'll have to look at that (hopefully). Caution is surely to be exercised in all invocations of community and the communal. Such invocations always need to be done in anti-essentialist, historicized, and decolonial manners.

Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero commented on "The basic insight of autonomous design is seemingly straightforward: that every community practices the design of itself":
As I told you in Aotearoa (New Zealand) Maori scholar Johnson Witehira told me about the convenience of using the term "customary" instead of traditional in order to escape the agendas that anchor indigenous people to the past denying them the right to be in their own present.

Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero commented on "to change traditions traditionally":
Following Johnson Witehira advice an alternative version to Esteva's idea could be: 'Change customs customarily'.

Andrea Botero answered:
Change habits, habitually :)?

(its relational weave at every place and everywhere), in ways that enable humans to re-learn to dwell in the planet in mutually enhancing manners with non-humans.

• Takes seriously the inquiry into, and design of, borderlands as the spaces par excellence where novel understandings and practices of design from ontological and autonomous perspectives might most effectively and radically take place.

Conceived in this fashion, autonomous design can be considered a response to the urge for innovation and for the creation of new forms of life arising from the struggles, forms of counter-power, and life projects of politically activated relational ontologies.

Conclusion

As a theoretico-political proposal, autonomous design may be considered as a particular trend within the emergent transnational critical design studies field. It suggests that design can be creatively reappropriated by subaltern communities in support of their struggles to strengthen their autonomy and perform their life projects, and that designers can play constructive roles in the ontological and political reorientation of design as an element in struggles for autonomy.

To restate the question in a way that might apply to communities and social groups in many parts of the world: How do we make effective weavings and foster mutually enhancing entanglements of worlds in the face of the catastrophe visited upon the planet by the current global capitalist world order? Earth's territories, including cities, is where we, humans and not, go on weaving life together. Design can thus become an open invitation for us all to become mindful and effective weavers of the mesh of life. To do so, design needs to contribute to create conditions that dampen our compulsion to think and act like modern individuals in favor of an ethics of autonomous inter-existence, albeit without negating our capacity to operate in modern worlds at the same time --this, too, might be a question of survival. This entails designs that foster convivial reconstruction beyond the cultures of expertise and that promote a pluriverse of partially connected worlds in which all worlds strive for justice and craft autonomous relational ways of being, while respecting the ability of other worlds to do the same. This is a vision for sustaining the pluriverse.

Coda

In mid-April, 2014, Francia Márquez, one of the struggle to defense the Afro-Colombian community of La Toma in Colombia's southwest against aggressive illegal gold mining, penned two brave and lucid open letters to the government and the public at large. "Everything we have lived", she said in her first letter, "has been for the love for our territories, the love we feel when we see germinate the plantain, when we have a sunny fishing day, of knowing your family is close by... our land is the place where we dream of our future with dignity. Perhaps that's why they [armed actors, including the army, paramilitaries, and guerrillas] persecute us, because we want a life of autonomy and not of dependency."[7]

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Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero added:
Or change changes, changingly? And design design desiningly? LoL, but I think the jokes show ways.

Andrea Botero commented on "autonomous design":
The autonomous vehicle crowd seems to have got a hold on the imagination of this 2 concepts... I wonder if some people might read this proposal with a bias from that discussion... a risk not sure how small.

Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero answered:
It is an interesting counterpoint, although the idea of autonomous vehicles, could also relate to animism in design.

Ann Light added:
Yes, I discuss this issue with the term in my discussion piece, below. I move in circles where autonomous means free of human interference!

Andrea Botero replied:
Yes, I think a lot of people will have trouble with this combination of words. They will think on autonomous and not autonomía.

Arturo Escobar answered:
The difference between autonomous in the modernist sense (from Kant to liberalism and neoliberalism), always tied to the individual, on the one hand, and autonomia as a politicized expression of inter-existence is a stark one... Now, Ann's comment makes me think of yet another meaning, perhaps more linked to technics...

Barbara Szaniecki commented on the overall paper:
The mapping of a transnational field of critical design studies is very welcome. The constitution of this field occurs with both synergies and tensions. The three points presented seem to me to be very important: the understanding of modernity; the identification of the epistemic location of the designer; understandings of community and the communal. I also identify a lot with Part Three of the article - On bringing

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together design and autonomy - because here you bring to the fore an issue that does not always appear in scholarly articles: the struggles. The approximation between design and autonomy is not without struggles. For me, it is no small thing that the article is concluded with "struggles for autonomy" because it is no accident that the problem of heteronomy is present in many of the reflections presented here.

To conclude, I do not know if this is a question, perhaps just a comment about the constitution of this transnational field of critical design studies, also taking into account the South/East x North/West relation: I have great difficulty writing in English... Writing in Spanish or Portuguese limits the scope of our exchanges but writing in English, taking into account that language is not absolutely neutral, reduces the prospects of autonomy. Each time I come across this difficulty, I think we should think more about the University itself and the more basic structures of knowledge production in order to constitute a real Pluriversity.

Andrea Botero answered to Barbara Szaniecki:
This issue of language and translations was definitely something very much at stake in the selection of the research papers. The fact that we are doing it in English does limit some things and make others possible. Not easy. Thanks for raising this Barbara.

Arturo Escobar answered to Barbara Szaniecki:
Thanks for the comment, Barbara. Indeed, it's not common to connect design explicitly with political struggles. And your idea of a Pluriversity is very well taken, and design as central part of it...

Barbara Szaniecki answered to Andrea Botero:
Yes, Andrea, not easy at all :) an important issue. I've been at a LASA event once, they accept 3 languages: English of course, but also Portuguese and Spanish. Let's think about it.