

Amplifying the politics in Service Design¹

Yoko Akama ^{a*} | Ann Light ^b | Shana Agid ^c

^a RMIT University, School of Design: Melbourne, Australia.

^b University of Sussex: UK and Malmö University: Sweden.

^c Parsons School of Design, The New School: New York, United States.

* Corresponding author: yoko.akama@rmit.edu.au

ABSTRACT

Witnessing the speed of growth and reach in demand for service design (SD) confronts us to ask what neoliberal forces are behind this acceleration? Can services, systems and structures *really* improve at this velocity; what are we eroding and ignoring in turn? Pausing to ask about the direction and effect of change is critical to recognising SD's implication in the status quo. This paper calls for a reflexive methodology of noticing precedents that are quotidian and dystopian to show how dominant logics of SD commodify social practices of relating and organizing. By slowing down to attend, listen and reflect, our approaches reveal existing rituals, values, nuances and commitments that teach us what an apolitical SD fails to see. Rather than adding aspirational methods, this paper calls for greater attention to the political in SD practice, sharing paths of resistance and reorientation toward ethical, transformative, self-determined service design work and learning.

Keywords: Politics, Power, Ethics, Feminism, Anthropology, Reflexivity

EXPOSING UNSETTLING POLITICS

The ballooning field and industry of Service Design (SD) is alarming to many of us in SD who are invested in social change. Calls to confront neoliberal and colonial forces have become more urgent in SD's research conference and publications. In *ServDes.2020*, scholars presented decolonising (Akama et al., 2022; West, 2020) and Indigenous-led designing (Sheehan & Schultz, 2021; Sosa, 2020) and argued for concerted vigilance for worldviews and practices that are eroded by apolitical tendencies in SD. Following this precedent, *ServDes.2023* asked, *what does it mean to serve and what are the implications of this "service" in SD?* Historically, to be of service was to be a servant and subservient to a master. At *ServDes.2023*, power asymmetries, including racial, gendered and economic structures of servitude, became the focus of important discussions around care, labour, justice, freedom, work, and relationships to more-than-humans (Maffei & Del Gaudio, 2023; Penin & Santos Dias Barreto, 2023; Santos, 2023). Yet, power literacy remains inadequate in SD, even as new voices push for new commitments and approaches.

SD's mission to 'solve' problems through 'alternative' system designs, often with insufficient regard for socio-political contexts or long-term effects, is an ideological and pragmatic legacy of its disciplinary parent, *Dominant Design* (Akama, 2021). Dominant Design centralizes power through modern 'one world-world' logics (Escobar, 2010), facilitating capital and

¹ This paper was initially published in the proceedings of the ServDes.2023 Conference - *Entanglements and Flows. Service Encounters and Meanings*, which took place at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, from July 11 to 14, 2023. This is a revised and improved version of the paper based on the feedback received at the event.

colonial forces. Rails of free market capitalism have been deeply sunk into global structures (Costanza-Chock, 2020; Stern & Siegelbaum, 2019), ensuring that any design work that does not take issue with this relationship contributes to its persistence. Dominant Design frameworks are fundamental to SD hallmarks, which fuel the field's acceleration, like the Service Blueprint, invented by Shostack (1984), which lionises growth and market success. It's an exemplar of McDonaldisation (Julier, 2017) showing how to seamlessly design ways that workers follow system commands and customer responses. Likewise, the Service Dominant Logic from service marketing and operations management has been a core theory and practice in SD; its 'co-creation of value' (Vargo & Lush, 2015) is firmly within a capitalist market frame. These scriptures carry the baggage of rigidity, rationality, universality and individualism (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2020). Casting a critical light on the origins and effect of these ubiquitous methods and logics reveals that they bequeath neoliberal values to products, systems, structures and experiences, designing the world through its design. We refer to these legacies and ongoing practices of SD as Dominant SD.

This growth is a construct of the Enlightenment, focused on 'progress' and 'development', which have created the unsustainable mess we are in (Kallis et al., 2015), and raising key questions for SD. Identifying structural conditions of this kind, which occlude reflexivity and power literacies, is an important step (Hay & Vink, 2023; Goodwill et al., 2021) to understanding the dynamic, intersectional positionalities of those involved in social change, including designer-researchers ourselves. In this way, we start to see SD as an activity in context, both historically and in terms of its current commitments, rather than a string of isolated neutral incidents protected by the rhetoric of the creative industries. This provokes us to ask how people's entanglements with power, space and one another that are everywhere *outside* SD might rework the established theories and practices *of* SD, to amplify ethical and political questions.

1. POLITICAL CONTRIBUTION AND METHODOLOGY

Our contribution is a reflexive methodology for amplifying the political in SD, offered as questions for provoking personal and collective reflection on ethical practice. These aim to engage those who can recognise their own participation in Dominant SD, and those who are trying to 'do good'. Reflexively asking critical questions is a start in attending to shifting asymmetries in relation to the often complex positionalities of participants (including the designer-researcher) nested within dynamic socio-economic structures. These questions could include, for example: 'What and when is a service? As defined by whom?' and 'How are your design practice and designed outcomes engaging with power, including your own?' Our approach is informed by feminist anthropology, humanities and social science research that engages with systems of power and relation (Hartman, 2008; Gordon, 1997). It is a 'how' of engaging critically with disciplinary practices in SD. Through this methodology, we offer a path of resistance to (and reorientation from) Dominant SD.

The co-authors have selected noteworthy examples from their localities to attend to the nuances of connecting, sharing and organizing: neighbourly relations, customs of hosting, and organizing around shared experiences and needs, all of which are increasingly subject to designing services. There have always been varied, informal ways of doing things – what Gutiérrez Borrero (2020) calls 'designs with other names'. We focus on these small movements as a way of showing what socio-cultural obligations, assets and structures are altered and flattened when the bulldozer of Dominant SD comes through. We note that

community organizers have been working with design by another name for many years as part of the diversity of everyday orchestrating that people do to get things done (Courpasson, 2017; Light & Miskelly, 2008). These sit alongside other socially-oriented SD, like designing for and with movements of freedom (e.g. Siqueria & Amstel, 2023), and using SD to engage limits of public systems with real human consequences (Martinez et al., 2023).

In revealing lived experiences that exceed or precede the presumed ‘expertise’ of Dominant SD, we show how to disrupt SD’s overt pragmatism. However, recognising and revaluing quotidian *designs with other names* is a double-edged sword. We heed Gutiérrez’ (2020) reminder not to collapse ‘ingenuity’ into everyday practices, with systematised, operationalised, and enhanced ‘service quality’. The mantra of customer-centricity can privilege those already privileged, at the expense of others. This is the cruel ‘line of visibility’ of Service Blueprints that deliberately conceals gendered, racialised, class-based service labourers off-stage (Akama, Schultz & Sosa, forthcoming). We ask the SD community to step away from the apolitical and into the politics of refusal, because not to carry on designing this way is also an ethical choice, we can all make (Agid, 2022). Our proposals are a form of slowing down to pause and reflect on the trouble in which we are implicated (after Haraway, 2016).

The sections that follow take up varying politics through examples selected across three continents and described by each author: respectively Ann in the UK, Yoko from Japan, and Shana in the US.

2. FOSTERING AND PROTECTING RELATIONAL ASSETS

SD smooths customer touchpoints, sometimes as a deliberate commercial act to win business. Light and Miskelly (2015, p. 8) critique lessening “barriers of use” if this erodes “cooperative tasks that were formerly essential to community life.” They discuss how “relational assets” (Light & Miskelly, 2015; 2019) emerge in neighbourhoods where there are collaborative care initiatives, contributing to people wanting to live in the area (Bardzell et al., 2021). Relational assets are collective, emerging through the repetition of sharing resources, the exercise of goodwill and creating visions for a locale (Light & Miskelly, 2019). This promotes agency and pro-social values, building the trust that comes from relying on each other (Light, 2022).

Erosion of cultural fabrics and neighbourliness has been a concern for decades (e.g. Putnam, 2000); online technologies have exacerbated individualism and isolation (e.g. Turkle, 2017). Now, platform capitalism (Liang et al., 2022; Srnicek, 2016) offers a race to the bottom in service provision, competing to erode worker protections and relying on market-led algorithms that commodify people and resources to maximise profit for the few (Irani, 2019). Services exploit underutilised assets (e.g. beds, cars, skills, etc.), but this ostensible environmental ‘good’ involves would-be monopolies creating destructive externalities. Despite window-dressing (Codagnone & Martens, 2016), eco-social narratives are a veneer. In the context of trading platforms, personal negotiations are removed to produce transactional “crispness” (Benkler, 2004), eliminating emotional as well as financial indebtedness.

For instance, the neighbours app *Nextdoor* (2022) gathers nearby people “to connect to the neighborhoods that matter to you so you can belong”. It intends to be “a goldmine for [local] businesses” who advertise and provide Nextdoor’s income. It is not a generic tool like *Facebook* and *Whatsapp*, which are ubiquitously used for local groups. *Nextdoor* is dedicated to assembling neighbours by street, seeking to capitalize on people’s appreciation for local connection and support. “Neighbors around the world turn to Nextdoor daily to receive

Akama, Y.; Light, A.; Agid, S. (2023). Amplifying the politics in Service Design. *Strategic Design Research Journal*. Volume 16, number 01, January - April 2023. 34-45. DOI: 10.4013/sdrj.2023.161.04.

trusted information, give and get help, get things done, and build real-world connections with those nearby — neighbors, businesses, and public services” (Nextdoor, 2022).

Nextdoor has been mocked on *Twitter* for its pettiness and squabbles (e.g., <https://twitter.com/bestofnextdoor>). There is no direct translation between commodifying engagement with or between local people and a tendency to irrelevance and bad feeling, but, in other “community pages”, local facilitators work to make inclusive and pleasant environments (e.g. Rossitto et al., 2021).

However, *Nextdoor* uses the growth ploy of sending out welcoming letters to everyone in a locality in the name of each new recruit to encourage others to join. Often, this happens without the recruit’s awareness: it is only mentioned in the fine print (where they can opt out). Using an apparently real stamp and hand-written font feigns authenticity. We might see this as deploying covert strategies as touchpoints, in SD parlance. To find you have spammed neighbours with letters purporting to come from you and promoting a service you are trying out (maybe only briefly) is unwelcome. It is also unethical without active consent and draws on contradictory values from those alleged to be the point: *faking* real neighbourly contact.

Ann speaks from personal experience: When I saw one of these letters from a street not-so-close-by to where I live, I was intrigued that someone should go to the trouble of contacting me. I speculated it would cost a small fortune for her to contact everyone in surrounding streets. When I realised it had probably come without her knowledge, I had another look: Are these letters made as piecework, farmed out to developing regions, or was automation involved? It looked like someone’s handwriting, but did not read as such. The cheery style was bland.

Looking at *Nextdoor* through *Dominant SD* logic, their strategy ticks all the right boxes: scaling up localised interactions so the pattern can be replicated elsewhere. The platform is active in 11 countries at time of writing. They have strategised ‘warm’ touchpoints to initiate neighbourly connections. All effort is carried by the platform, creating seamless experiences and convenience and removing social awkwardness so residents don’t need to act (or meet), just ‘belong’. The platform is also cost-free for residents, even in inviting others. Yet, a sense of mass-production or, worse, fakeness demeans the sentiments of community-building here, as does profiting by selling eyeballs in this context. There are competing ethics of exchange. It cannot be assumed that making money out of opportunity is a shared value; it can even taint actions taken for pro-social reasons (Warneken & Tomasello, 2008).

The most eco-socially sustainable pattern in neighbourhoods is when people make an effort for each other and build more than individual relations together. Trust is a significant part of this: and, like trust in trust (Luhmann, 1979), relational assets embody a virtuous cycle – the more you give, the more you ‘get’. Such assets cannot be ‘owned’ by a platform, depending, as they do, on groups of individuals’ “steadfastness or the desire for steadfastness” (Light, 2022, p25). Some people benefit more from this culture than others and awareness of this dynamic is needed to help address inequalities. However, qualities that can only exist *in-between* people will invariably change when they are taken outside that relationship. Commodification is a symptom of seeing those qualities as movable, as if trust and reliance can be transplanted elsewhere, without the relational conditions, time and work that nurtured them.

Dominant SD is geared to scale social value by scaling up business. But social value does not scale; it varies by culture. It operates locally and even its meaningful boundaries and patterns

of inclusion are idiosyncratic. (A large road is often a class divide: nearby houses may share no resources.) Taking the tools for making social value out of local hands reduces pro-social impact, in and of itself (Light & Miskelly, 2019).

To step more reflexively into building relationships, we can ask: *What is (in)visible to you as markers of trust and care in relationships? How is authenticity of engagement valued? and What alterations to the socio-cultural fabric are being proposed by your designs?* Our hope is to avoid a lethal failure in the solidarity needed to address global phenomena like climate change.

3. RESPECTING SOCIO-CULTURAL CUSTOMS

Expanding on relational assets, Yoko, in first person, gives examples of hosting, respecting and serving that arise out of kindness and generosity in Japan.

I have lived away from Japan most of my life, so it's wonderful to arrive home to immerse in customs of greeting and gifting as practices of hospitality. A hot or cold hand towel is offered by the proprietor of the cafe, to clean and refresh my hands before eating. Tips are never expected. Where train conductors in the UK or US might police and penalise passengers with the wrong ticket, in Japan, conductors walk through the carriages to help passengers navigate the complex rail system. I see these as examples and extensions of *omotenashi*, discussed by scholars as a ritual connected to *cha-no-yu* (tea ceremony) that demonstrates sensitive consideration for the guests to foster friendly relationships and ensure a convivial atmosphere during the encounter (Horiuchi, 2013). These social exchanges are heightened, especially when the hosts greet guests, visitors and strangers, because the degree of unfamiliarity intensifies the anticipation of their needs, concerns or wishes.

While such countless acts of *omotenashi* are invisible and everywhere, thickening and enduring in regional towns and communities, promoting this as part of tourism, as they do in the Japan National Tourism Organization (n.d.) website, below, is a precarious act.

You're bound to feel the *omotenashi* hospitality on your travels to Japan, especially at cultural experiences such as ryokan (Japanese-style inns), kaiseki (Japanese banquet), and sado (tea ceremony).... That incredible sense of hospitality begins at every doorway. As you enter stores or restaurants, expect to hear the bellowing welcome of '*irasshaimase*' as you step inside. A polite nod or smile is all you need to offer in return – there is no cultural expectation that this friendly welcome will be reciprocated. ... From the attentive care of retailers to the shinkansen cleaners who bow to the boarding passengers, *omotenashi* is present.

Tourism promotion is a form of advertising that lures visitors with constructed imaginaries and expectations. What may have been a heartfelt hospitality and the genuine encounter of a cultural ritual will undoubtedly 'cheapen' by mere association. Visitors may be misled to interpret such practices of welcoming as a part of 'customer service'. Indeed, we already witness these becoming *sābisu* (the English 'service' imported into Japanese language), which further mistranslates them into capitalism and cultural imperialism to make them more 'accessible' and 'consistent' as an international experience in businesses (Belal et al., 2013). To frame these as services fundamentally changes their nature towards universal and generic expectation, flattening personal warmth into a mere transaction or a star-rating, shifting the power between the actors involved. This commodifies acts that are, and need to be, priceless.

We see this in SD where commodification through scripting gestures, emotional expressions and states of being can quickly become harmful practices, creating role stress (Wetzels et al., 1999). We've all seen inauthentic smiles that require staff to perform the human 'touchpoint'

of a brand experience. Penin and Tonkinwise (2009), very early, critiqued this emotional labour as a forced performance and professional constraint imposed on the service worker. Here, customers – often framed as the human ‘center’ of SD value propositions – are placed as superior to the host. This upturns the socio-cultural hierarchies of respect, such that customers are conditioned to expect or demand a service, which can lead to abuse. A poster campaign on the human rights of service labourers in South Korea raises issues of gendered ‘servitude’: “the staff you are talking to is someone else’s daughter” (ServDes.2020). We could argue that Dominant SD is participating and accelerating this world of simulacra and widening intersectional disadvantages.

If smiles and gestures are already altered by scripts and commodification, gift-giving is made more precarious by the fact that gifts are already monetised. How often have we intuited what is lost or altered when we resort to an impersonal gift-voucher as a default present for someone we care about? Tapping into this memory is a useful, reflexive device. Potawatomi author Wall Kimmerer (2013, p. 26) warns that certain acts cannot be paid for, irrespective of affordability, because both the object and the act changes by the very nature “by the way it has come into your hands, as a gift or as a commodity”. She compares a pair of knitted socks bought at a store with another gifted by her grandmother. She describes how there is no inherent obligation or relationship in the former pair of socks because respect and reciprocity are contained within the exchange of payment with the staff. Here, the price has predetermined what is deemed fair as an exchange. However, with the latter socks, the gift obligates an ongoing relationship. She talks about the care to thank the grandmother with a note, or wearing them especially when meeting her to show appreciation. “A gift is something for nothing, except that certain obligations are attached” (Wall Kimmerer, 2013, p. 26). I find resonances in her descriptions, underscoring how *omotenashi* – the attendance to guests by hosts – is an ‘obligation’ and commitment to care. This hospitality circulates and endures through everyday participating, much like how Wall Kimmerer describes a gift moving: “their value increases with their passage ...the more something is shared, the greater its value becomes” (Wall Kimmerer, 2013, p. 27). This creates an abundance greater than the momentary encounter or the cost of supplying hot or cold towels.

By remembering what inauthenticity and distancing can feel like in a gesture, these triggers can accompany questions to sharpen attention, like, *what might become corroded when designed into a ‘service’ and what are underlying as values of your own designing? How does your mindset, values and worldviews contrast with the sites you are entering into?*

The last story concerns the politics in everyday experiences of systems and how these might suggest *other* orientations to ‘value’, drawn from Shana’s work on participating in organized forms of social struggle.

4. GENERATING AND RECONFIGURING INFRASTRUCTURES

Narratives are always political but the politics of how designer-researchers frame, ignore or attend to existing contexts is often unaccounted for in SD. Histories of social movements and practices evidence *service designs* ‘by other names’ (following Gutiérrez Borrero, 2020), including people’s everyday work to sustain loved ones and community, in mundane and extraordinary ways (Bordowitz, 2004; Lorde, 1984). Stories from marginalized communities demonstrate systems ‘designed’ and shaped by political imperative, experiential knowledge, theories of systemic power and fights for resources.

Akama, Y.; Light, A.; Agid, S. (2023). Amplifying the politics in Service Design. *Strategic Design Research Journal*. Volume 16, number 01, January - April 2023. 34-45. DOI: 10.4013/sdrj.2023.161.04.

For example, sociologist Nelson (2011) offers an investigation of the emergence and organization of the Black Panther Party's (BPP) People's Free Medical Clinics (PFMCs) around the United States. The need for Black-run, free, local clinics emerged through political organizing for self-determination to counteract a racist, classist, and sexist health care system. The PFMCs were one part of the Party's 'survival programs' (Nelson, 2011, p.52). They included a range of services, broadly speaking: provision of basic health care; advocacy and accompaniment to other hospitals and doctors; neighborhood-based health information fairs; ground-breaking medical research about sickle-cell anemia, which was under-researched by (white) mainstream medicine despite being a persistent threat to Black people's health. To build and maintain these services, volunteer medical practitioners trained community members, building broader capacity for community health through *sharing knowledge*, itself a key political principle. These service designs 'by other names' emerged from the experiences and mobilization of people who regularly encountered medical racism, sexism, and elitism and were determined to challenge them, as part of confronting white supremacy and anti-Blackness. In examples like these, the domain of 'expert' knowledge about making systems exceeds the traditional purview of SD. The story of the PFMCs highlights the importance of engaging with the politics that are always already embedded in systems.

What can we look for in practices that emerge through people's experiences and through social movements against systems of domination? These practices are often themselves strategies for making systems, services, and spaces grounded in solidarity and in creating capacities for living "beyond survival" (Dixon & Piepzn-Samarasinha, 2020). Emerging from conditions of oppression and violence, these community-focused systems and 'services' are not habitually instrumentalized for individual gain. They are typically shaped through what people make for themselves, often across generations. With this in mind, how might non-neutral approaches to designing services guide *how* we make things? In community-based practices what gets made from experience and strategy is also shared, theorized, taught and woven into individual and community knowledge over time (Kaba, 2021; Kaba & Richie, 2022). Committing to learn with and from histories of self-determination, and to address generational impacts of violent and oppressive systems of control, is one means to refuse Dominant SD methods in the design of services.

In the system-building work of social movements and practices, people engage in what Participatory Design calls 'infrastructuring'. Infrastructuring refers to working with an amalgam of practices, materials, relationships, and resources people use to build, maintain, and make changes to infrastructures in their lives, including those within and outside their control (see Karasti, 2014). Seen this way, infrastructuring is also a long-standing practice of community-organizing and -building. It is grounded in what people make and maintain, for and beyond survival, creating systems that sustain their lives and the lives of loved ones, while circumventing and fighting those that produce harm (Agid, 2018). Incorporating such discourses – and an active focus on the ongoing, situated nature of people's experiences with infrastructures – will pave important shifts away from Dominant SD toward more nuanced capacities for social and political participation and solidarity practices.

Recognizing, with humility, that designing systems and services is not only the domain of SD exclusively opens up possibilities for learning with and from people's own practices, while minding the ethical imperative to be aware of what and how much design researchers can contribute, and when. As Blomberg and Durrah (2014, p. 127) suggest, all (service) systems are embedded in and constitutive of other, interrelated systems and practices. They note that,

“service systems often are described as existing in the world waiting to be discovered by service researchers. Their reification often brings with it an assumption of a bounded entity... why are some components...called out and others for all practical purposes remain invisible?” In this context, it is interesting to revisit the idea of “externalities”, that convenient term for anything for which companies do not want to take responsibility. For service designers, questioning scope and learning to recognise (not ‘discover’) systems that exist and are made knowable *outside Dominant SD* is fundamental to transforming SD.

Could we politicise SD as one way, among many, to build knowledge through shared commitments with others? What questions, and orientations would this require? In a long-term research engagement with organizers working to end the harms of policing in their city, questions were a primary outcome of our collective work for my design practice. These included: What is at stake? According to whom?; What have we learned together?; Is making systems together a way to make self-determination, and fight the prison industrial complex, borders, racism, and sexism?. Further: How do I understand our work in relationship to what I believe, imagine, desire, hope for?; What space have I been offered and how have I occupied it?; What risks am I taking, and asking them to take?

A political conception of ‘service design’ opens up considerations for practice and brings critical questions to the center of our own work, even and especially when it makes us more vulnerable and less certain. To re-think what SD has to contribute to the ongoing work of world-making undertaken for generations around the world, we can grapple with what self-determination might mean with our partners. This requires paying attention to experiential knowledge we bring and being available and present for the work, learning how to meet the goals at hand. It requires building capacity to listen for nuances of existing and designed systems, infrastructures, obstacles, and possibilities, and begins the long process and hard work of making otherwise.

5. QUESTIONS TO AMPLIFY THE POLITICAL

In amplifying the political in SD work, we have argued for the necessity for SD to expand the range of practices, knowledges, and outcomes that shape and sustain systems in support of people and broader ecologies. We now offer some questions for enabling a reflexive methodology, drawn from our stories.

In Ann’s example showing how Dominant SD shammed, cheapened and potentially weakened connective tissues of trust in communities, we can see what *not* to aim for and what *shouldn’t* be done. Platforms are not intrinsically destructive, but we need to ask what is (in)visible about authenticity and what alterations to the socio-cultural fabric are being proposed by the designs? These questions are suggested as handbrakes.

We must also be vigilant about logics that reify and isolate particular phenomena and occlude the deeper entanglements of services in social life (Blomberg & Durrah, 2014). Yoko’s story shows that a greeting enacts a socio-cultural practice, which permeates places of work. The blinkered focus of the user-centred Dominant SD logic is to see rational individuals as a category, when people and their relationships, desires, needs and whims are in fact always messy and contradictory (Gordon, 1997). Using reflexive inquiry through SD research critically engages these assumptions, such as: what is underlying the values of my designing? How do my mindset, values and worldviews contrast or connect with the sites, practices and relationships I am entering into? All these are important concerns and reminders that motives,

behaviours and experiences can never be clear or explainable, and are governed by interpersonal dynamics as well as structural conditions of power, despite what Customer Journey Maps might have us believe.

In Shana' example, they ask what 'outsider' designers might learn from a political commitment to considering 'local' practices that resist dominant, and exclusionary forces. They propose asking: What is my political position and understanding, and what commitments am I making? What does self-determination look like in relation to designing services or systems, here?

There are many quotidian practices around to learn from, but not in the places that SD tends to look. This amplifies the politics of respecting, recognising and learning from the wisdoms inherent in the situations where we practise.

We need to ask what the methods, frameworks, theories and methods we use enable and disable, reveal and omit? We have exposed the logics hidden within apparatuses frequently used in Dominant SD: scaling up social interactions, routinizing human relationships, prioritizing customer experiences and business bottom-lines as critical knowledge for making 'good' services. Revealing this presents us with a choice to break away from the presumption of neutrality and ideologies of universality that occlude the underlying values that nonetheless manifest through designed systems and services. We must pause to examine possible impacts of our designing.

6. REDRAWING LINES

This paper has asked questions to help us sit with complexities that arise out of design interventions. It joins the work of others who have expressed frustration with insufficient analysis in SD of the cultural, temporal and structural changes that accompany it (Blomberg & Darrah, 2014), especially when these dynamics are made invisible in dominant social and design discourses. Dominant SD rationalises conflicting, contradictory or divergent accounts to produce seamless design narratives. We say this is unethical. All categories, methods and methodologies are leaky, partial and sterile (Law, 2004). Overlooking this complexity in the service of one, linear (designable) story is the classic shortfall about which feminist anthropologists (Haraway, 2016; Suchman, 2002) have taught us to be vigilant, so as not to neuter the vibrancy and incongruence of life (Bennett, 2010). We need to constantly question the politics of what is noticed and ignored, and the ethics of acting upon what we thought we knew.

When politics is amplified, it invites reflection and self-assessment. *ServDes.2023*, held for the first time in the Global South, fostered critical questions and dialogue that pierced the veneer of colonial structures, such as work, service and servitude. The politics were amplified when we witnessed the loud silence between an Indigenous scholar and a Catholic priest in the conference round table *What does serving mean? Perspectives in Dialogue*, participated by Carla Cipolla, Zoy Anastassakis, Paul Schweitzer, S.J., and Lucas Munduruku. It was echoed in challenges put to a story of Brazil that omitted slavery and dispossession (Alt, 2023). When vulnerability and reflexivity were modelled in a keynote (Sangiorgi, 2023), it became significant, prompting attendees to question the labour, access and visibility of the cleaners, security guards and student volunteers who made the conference possible. These exemplars point to how SD spaces, like a conference, can build capacity in complex, reflexive dialogues (see also Akama et al., 2022).

Akama, Y.; Light, A.; Agid, S. (2023). Amplifying the politics in Service Design. *Strategic Design Research Journal*. Volume 16, number 01, January - April 2023. 34-45. DOI: 10.4013/sdrj.2023.161.04.

Ethical lines need to be drawn to emphasize that human experiences, behaviours and relationships are not to be 'designed'. We need to keep asking what is being changed, and why, when interventions are made. By ensuring that ethical questions always accompany SD practice, we can resist the neo-liberal, paternal, white-saviour foundations of Dominant Design (Markussen, 2017). The impacts of complex dynamic systems cannot be known before we act. So, this is an intercontinental invitation to work together, in all our places, to deepen the inquiry and practice of SD, especially where there is excitement to reimagine and remake systems and services that sustain relationships of care, wellbeing, and social justice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We pay respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands, waters and skies where *ServDes.2023* was held. We also give gratitude to Elders and community leaders of the unceded territories where the authors reside, which include Boon Wurrung and Woi Wurrung of East Kulin and the Lenape. We are grateful to the people with whom we work, through invitation, challenge, mutuality, and in solidarity as we work to build worlds in which all can thrive.

REFERENCES

- Agid, S. (2022). How What We Ask Shapes What We Can Imagine: De-Coupling Design and Punishment, *Space and Culture* (Special Issue: Inside Inside), 25 (3). DOI: [10.1177/12063312221104223](https://doi.org/10.1177/12063312221104223).
- Agid, S. (2018). 'Dismantle, change, build': Designing abolition at the intersections of local, large-scale, and imagined infrastructures. *Design Studies*, 59, 95–116. DOI: [10.1016/j.destud.2018.05.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2018.05.006).
- Akama, Y. (2021). Archipelagos of designing through ko-ontological encounters. In T. Seppälä, M. Sarantou, & S. Miettinen (Eds.), *Arts-Based Methods for Decolonising Participatory Research* (Routledge, pp. 101–122). Routledge.
- Akama, Y., Anich, J., Avendano Franco, A., Choi, J. H., Fennessy, L., Foley, M., Heiss, L., Ivanka, T., Luke, E., Page, R., Rosenqvist, T., Sanin, J., & Tan, L. (2022). Why are we here? A reflexive story of decolonising. *PDC'22*. DOI: [10.1145/3536169.3537777](https://doi.org/10.1145/3536169.3537777).
- Akama, Y., Schultz, T. & Sosa, R. (forthcoming) In the pursuit of decolonising Dominant Service Design, in Sangiorgi, D., Penin, L & Prendiville, A. (Eds). *Handbook of Service Design: Plural perspectives and a critical contemporary agenda*, Bloomsbury.
- Alizadeh, T, Farid, R. & Sarkar, S. (2018). Towards understanding the socio-economic patterns of sharing economy in Australia: an investigation of Airbnb listings in Sydney and Melbourne metropolitan regions. *Urban Policy and Research*, 36(4), 445-463. DOI: [10.1080/08111146.2018.1460269](https://doi.org/10.1080/08111146.2018.1460269).
- Alt, L. (2023). *Services and Design in Brazil: Past, Present and Future*. *ServDes.2023: Entanglements and Flows*. Retrieved December 1, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCKDAuarSlg&list=PL-xLVZ-feTmtlfBNmHU-Gn7w0c4ylAjLR&index=3>.
- Belal, H. M., Shirahada, K., & Kosaka, M. (2013). Value Co-creation with Customer through Recursive Approach Based on Japanese Omotenashi Service. *International Journal of Business Administration*, 4(1). DOI: [10.5430/ijba.v4n1p28](https://doi.org/10.5430/ijba.v4n1p28).
- Bardzell, J., Bardzell, S., & Light, A. (2021) Wanting To Live Here: Design After Anthropocentric Functionalism. CHI 2021. *ACM*, 1–24. DOI: [10.1145/3411764.3445167](https://doi.org/10.1145/3411764.3445167).
- Benkler, Y. (2004). Sharing Nicely: On Shareable Goods and the Emergence of Sharing as a Modality of Economic Production, *Yale Law Journal*, vol. 114 (November), pp. 273–358. DOI: [10.2307/4135731](https://doi.org/10.2307/4135731).
- Bennett, J., (2010). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Blomberg, J., & Darrah, C. (2014). Toward an Anthropology of Services. In Sangiorgi, D. (Eds). *ServDes.2014, Linköping University Electronic Press*. 122–132. DOI: [10.1146/annurev.anthro.31.040402.085453](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.31.040402.085453).
- Bordowitz, G. (2004). *The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous and other writings: 1986-2003*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Codagnone, C. & Martens, B. (2016). Scoping the sharing economy: origins, definitions, impact and regulatory issues. *Ispra: Institute for Prospective Technological Studies Digital Economy Working Paper*, from <https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2016-05/JRC100369.pdf>.

Akama, Y.; Light, A.; Agid, S. (2023). Amplifying the politics in Service Design. *Strategic Design Research Journal*. Volume 16, number 01, January - April 2023. 34-45. DOI: 10.4013/sdrj.2023.161.04.

- Costanza-Chock, S. (2020). Design Justice: towards an intersectional feminist framework for design theory and practice (Issue in). DOI: [10.21606/dma.2017.679](https://doi.org/10.21606/dma.2017.679).
- Dixon, E. & Piepzn-Samarasinha L. L. Eds. (2020). *Beyond Survival Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement*. Chico: AK Press.
- Escobar, A. (2018). *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy and the Making of Worlds*. Duke University Press.
- Goodwill, M., Bendor, R., & van der Bijl-Brouwer, M. (2021). Beyond Good Intentions: Towards a Power Literacy Framework for Service Designers. *International Journal of Design*, 15(3).
- Gordon, A. F. (1997). *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Gutiérrez, A. (2020). When Design Goes South. In T. Fry & A. Nocek (Eds.), *Design in Crisis: New Worlds, Philosophies and Practices* (pp. 56–73). Taylor & Francis. DOI: [10.4324/9781003021469-3](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003021469-3).
- Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hartman, S. (2008). Venus in two acts. *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, 12(2), 1-14.
- Horiuchi, G. (2013). Boundaries Consciousness of Japanese “Omotenashi.” *Kaihatsu Kogaku*, 33(1), 29–30.
- Hay, A. F., Vink, J., & Suoheimo, M. (2023). The Context of Addressing Power Dynamics in Service Design. *ServDes.2023: Entanglements and Flows*.
- Irani, L. (2019). *Chasing innovation: making entrepreneurial citizens in modern India*. Princeton University Press.
- Japan National Tourism Organization. (n.d.). *Omotenashi*. Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://www.japan.travel/en/au/experience/culture/omotenashi/>.
- Julier, G. (2017). *Economies of design*. London: Sage.
- Kaba, M. (2021). *We do this ‘til we free us: Abolitionist organizing and transforming justice*. Haymarket Books.
- Kaba, M. & Ritchie, A. (2022). *No More Police: A Case for Abolition*. New York: The Free Press.
- Kallis, G., Demaria, F., & D’Alisa, G. (2015). Introduction – Degrowth. In *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era* (pp. 2–17). Routledge.
- Karasti, H. (2014, October). Infrastructuring in participatory design. In *Proceedings of the 13th Participatory Design Conference: Research Papers-Volume 1* (pp. 141-150). DOI: [10.1145/2661435.2661450](https://doi.org/10.1145/2661435.2661450).
- Law, J. (2004). *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*. Routledge.
- Liang, Y., Aroles, J., & Brandl, B. (2022). Charting platform capitalism: Definitions, concepts and ideologies. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 37(2), 308–327. DOI: [10.1111/ntwe.12234](https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12234).
- Light, A. (2022). Trust in Collaborative Economies and How to Study It: Relational Assets and the Making of More-than-Strangers, In Travlou, P. & Ciolfi, L. (Eds), *Ethnographies of Collaborative Economies across Europe. Understanding Sharing and Caring*, London: Ubiquity Press.
- Light, A. & Miskelly, C. (2008) Brokering between Heads and Hearts: an analysis of designing for social change. In *Proc. Design Research Society Conference 2008*, Sheffield.
- Light, A., & Miskelly, C. (2015). Sharing Economy vs Sharing Cultures? Designing for social, economic and environmental good. *Interaction Design and Architecture Journal*, 49-62. DOI: [10.55612/s-5002-024-003](https://doi.org/10.55612/s-5002-024-003).
- Light, A. & Miskelly, C. (2019). Platforms, Scales and Networks: Meshing a Local Sustainable Sharing Economy. *JCSW*, Summer 2019. DOI: [10.1007/s10606-019-09352-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10606-019-09352-1).
- Light, A. & Seravalli, A. (2019) The Breakdown of the Municipality as Caring Platform: Lessons for Co-Design and Co-Learning in the Age of Platform Capitalism, *International Journal of Co-Design*, 192-211. DOI: [10.1080/15710882.2019.1631354](https://doi.org/10.1080/15710882.2019.1631354).
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press.
- Luhmann, N. (1979) *Trust and Power*. Chichester: John Wiley.
- Maffei, S., & Gaudio, C. Del. (2023). Unmaking the user journey. Fostering alternative Service Design futures. *ServDes.2023: Entanglements and Flows*. DOI: [10.3384/ecp203041](https://doi.org/10.3384/ecp203041).
- Markussen, T. (2017). Disentangling ‘the social’ in social design’s engagement with the public realm. *International Journal of CoDesign*, 13(3). 160-174. DOI: [10.1080/15710882.2017.1355001](https://doi.org/10.1080/15710882.2017.1355001).
- Nelson, A. (2011). *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nextdoor (2022) Retrieved October 20, 2022, from <https://about.nextdoor.com/>.

- Penin, L. & Santos Dias Barreto, G. (2023). Service Designing Service Work And Workers: The Case For Worker-Centered Service Design. *ServDes 2023*, Retrieved December 1, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFlnCtdfhbY&list=PL-xLVZ-feTmtlfBNmHU-Gn7w0c4ylAjLR&index=9>.
- Penin, L., & Tonkinwise, C. (2009). The politics and theatre of service design. *Proceedings of International Association of Societies of Design Research*. Seoul, Korea.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: Collapse and Revival of the American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Rossitto, C., Lampinen, A., Light, A., Diogo, V., Bernat A. & Travlou P. (2021). Why Are We Still Using Facebook? The Platform Paradox in Collaborative Community Initiatives. In T. Maurizio & C. Bassetti (eds.) *Becoming a Platform in Europe: On the Governance of the Collaborative Economy*, Boston-Delft: now publishers, 90-109. DOI: [10.1561/9781680838411.ch5](https://doi.org/10.1561/9781680838411.ch5).
- Sangiorgi, D. (2023). *Designing from the self to system change*. *ServDes.2023: Entanglements and Flows*, Retrieved December 1, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B91uZwYeshQ&list=PL-xLVZ-feTmtlfBNmHU-Gn7w0c4ylAjLR&index=4>.
- ServDes.2020. A Guide to Service Design for Hitchhikers: Conflicts and Contradictions in the Advancement of Korea's Service Industry, Retrieved May 30, 2022, from <https://servdes2020.org/events/14-the-hitchhiker-s-guide-to-service-design-tensions-and-paradoxes-along-the-maturation-of-service-industry-in-south-korea>.
- Sheehan, N. & Schultz, T. (2021). Articulatory Respectful Service Design, Retrieved May 30, 2022, from <https://servdes2020.org/events/105-articulatory-respectful-service-design>.
- Shostack, G. L. (1984). Designing Services that deliver. *Harvard Business Review*, 62(January), 133–139.
- Siqueira, I. L. M. de, & Amstel, F. M. C. van. (2023). Service design as a practice of freedom in collaborative cultural producers. *ServDes.2023: Entanglements and Flows*. DOI: [10.3384/ecp203016](https://doi.org/10.3384/ecp203016).
- Sosa, R. (2020). What the Popol Vuh can teach design. In Y. Akama, L. Fennessy, A. Farago, & S. Harrington (Eds.), *ServDes.2020 - Tensions, Paradoxes, Plurality* (pp. 89–98). Linköping University Electronic Press.
- Srnicek, N. (2016) *Platform Capitalism*. Wiley.
- Stern, A., & Siegelbaum, S. (2019). Special Issue: Design and Neoliberalism. *Design and Culture*, 11(3), 265–277. DOI: [10.1080/17547075.2019.1667188](https://doi.org/10.1080/17547075.2019.1667188).
- Suchman, L. (2002). Located accountabilities in technology production. *Scandinavian Journal of Information Systems*, 12(2), 91–105, from <http://aisel.aisnet.org/sjis/vol14/iss2/7>
- Turkle, S. (2017). *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. Hachette.
- Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2015). Institutions and axioms: an extension and update of service-dominant logic. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 44(1), 5–23. DOI: [10.1007/s11747-015-0456-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-015-0456-3).
- Wall Kimmerer, R. (2013). *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Milkweed Editions.
- Warneken, F. and Tomasello, M. (2008). Extrinsic Rewards Undermine Altruistic Tendencies in 20-Month-Olds, *Developmental Psychology*, 44 (6), 1785–1788. DOI: [10.1037/a0013860](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013860).
- West, P. (2020). Designing in response to Indigenous sovereignties. In Y. Akama, L. Fennessy, A. Farago, & S. Harrington (Eds.), *ServDes.2020 - Tensions, Paradoxes, Plurality* (pp. 66–79). Linköping University Electronic Press.
- Wetzels, M., de Ruyter, K. & Lemmink, J. (1999). Role stress in after-sales service management. *Journal of Service Research* 2(1), 50-67. DOI: [10.1177/109467059921005](https://doi.org/10.1177/109467059921005)