

SPECIAL ARTICLE

Design, development and the challenge of autonomy

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Introduction: A “south” that is not “sub”

Our goal in these few lines is to contribute with some thoughts, acquired in Rio de Janeiro, aware as we are of the need to value thoughts and practices of the Global South, without losing the chance of opening a channel for a permanent exchange with the Northern hemisphere. And, although we find ourselves in a globalised world, fraught with migrations taken in so many directions, the North maintains its hegemonic position over the South when progressive governments that attempted at times to find alternatives for development eventually moved on to implement the same developmentalist policies. More than geographical references, “North” and “South” are visions of modes of development that, at times, cross the hemispheres, intersect and change freely, but tend to be more strongly opposed when hierarchical attempts are made. Our focus of interest is not a North-South polarization, but the constitution of both in a relation that is free, with no place for submissiveness. A “South” that is not “sub”. To this end, we start the debate by proposing the understanding of autonomy in a bio-political key, and move ahead with the problem of development and possible alternatives such as commons and *Buen Vivir*, and present some experiences carried out at ESDI/UERJ, especially at the LaDA - Design and Anthropology Laboratory.

Autonomy through the lenses of biopolitics: The power of life

We start with the word Autonomy. From the Greek word “autonomia”, and stemming from “autos” (of one self) and “nomos” (law), *autonomia* literally means “the setting

of one's own laws”. The word is used to affirm self-determination by individuals or communities and mark their critique to the *modus operandi* of Capitalism and also to the forms of State government. This term is introduced here by the approximation made by anthropologist Arturo Escobar, between Autonomy and Design, an instigating move due to its complexities. Indeed, Escobar relies on biologists Maturana and Varela to think autonomy as autopoiesis. For them, “living beings are autonomous entities, given that they are autopoietic that is, self-produced; they generate themselves through the recurring interaction that exists between their components. Autopoietic systems are totalities that are related to their surroundings through a mechanism of structural coupling. This is the definition of biological autonomy”

Andrea Botero commented on “Global South, without losing the chance of opening a channel for a permanent exchange with the Northern hemisphere”:

I was curious to see if in your positioning do you also think that about Global Norths... the type of hyper developed places and circumstances that also exist in Rio?

Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero replied:

I think that according to the interpretive framework there are “central peripheries” and “peripheral centers”, northern souths and southern norths.

Barbara Szaniecki replied to Andrea Botero:

Hi Andrea, I was not thinking of hyper-developed places (such as some neighborhoods in São Paulo, luxury houses and shopping malls, and access to rich infrastructure), but, for example, a developmentalist idea that evicts a poor resident from a favela (considered as underdeveloped) to house him or her in housing estates with the worst vices of modern housing (but considered as developed).

(Escobar, 2017, p. 195). However, to move from biological autonomy to social and cultural autonomy and to consequently deal with its practices, Escobar resorts to Gustavo Esteva, a Mexican critic of development, to whom autonomy “refers to the creation of the conditions that allow the changes of norms from within or, in other words, to traditionally change traditions. This may imply the upholding of some practices, the transformation of others, and the actual inventing of new practices” (Escobar, 2017, p. 195). In essence, to change the ways in which we change.

Beyond the meaning it is given in Etymology and beyond the realm of the Natural Sciences, the word “autonomy” has a long history. With no intent to approach it in its entire depth and extension, we can at least point that autonomy gained a strong sense and meaning in the anti-authoritarian struggles of the 1960-1970s. Struggles against the power of capital and the power of the State, struggles in universities and factories, and struggles for the civil rights of minorities, amongst so many others. All of these demands, many of them entailing strong mobilization, such as the ones seen in May 1968, had autonomy as their key word. In those years, *Autonomia Operaia* emerged in Italy as a practice and thinking based on Marxism that, heterodox, did not recognize the traditional practices of representation by trade unions and even less by the Italian Communist party that, articulated with the Christian Democracy party, repressed autonomous organizations. In factories and on the streets, co-research was developed, articulating workers, students and researchers, militants and ordinary citizens. One of its most prominent scholars, Antonio Negri, voiced his disagreement with Socialism that allied itself with the capitalist way of production and upheld the need for self-organisation and self-valuation (Negri, 1978).

We can also point that the word “autonomy” is an object of attention in many fields of knowledge, and acquires, in that sense, some variations. Self-organization is one of them. A large colloquium on the theme of self-organization, with contributions from the fields of Physics to Politics, was held in twelve sessions in Cerisy, France, in 1981. The very curatorship of Paul Dumouchel and Jean-Pierre Dupuy was opened to self-organization (1983). The Biological Sciences relied on Francisco Varela to present his thoughts on “self-organization: from appearances to the mechanism”, but also many were the contributions from the fields of Cyber-Sciences who were then emerging. We should also point that, a little earlier than the 1980s, Michel Foucault already dedicated himself to two of his fundamental courses, held in 1977-1978 and 1978-1979, respectively, at the Collège de France: *Sécurité, Territoire, Population* (2004a) and *Naissance de la Biopolitique* (2004b). Rather than insisting on the difference and even opposition between the Biological Sciences and the Political Sciences, Michel Foucault saw in the transformation then in course, the rise of Biopolitics. Unlike the power that “causes death or lets live”, characteristic of the absolutist powers, the mechanisms of discipline and of contemporary control focus on “making live or letting die”. The domain of Biopolitics presents itself as a relation of force between powers that are exercised over life – individual and above all collective – and the force of life itself, in the sense of its struggle for autonomy.

Following the path opened by theory of *Autonomia Operaia*, Giuseppe Cocco (Cocco, 2009) tackles the Biopolitics of Foucault as a governmentality that modulates autonomy and heteronomy. This approach strengthens the need to consider autonomy as a force of self-determination in its relation with the forces of domination and it is, on this relation, that governmentality is constructed. This perception is found in the reflections of Escobar (2017, p. 191) when he relates autonomous design with “the ontological struggles for the defense of the relational territories and life-worlds of the communities” that exist under intense conditions of repression and violence. It is therefore worth remembering that even when we move away from the Social and Political Sciences which reading keys on History (as in the “labor versus capital” dialectics) do not correspond to the time perceptions of traditional communities, we should not forget the power relations that exist in every situation. This means that, in a way, design will be autonomous in that it is located in a field of forces, confronting those of a heteronomous design, amongst others. Relations imply reciprocity but not necessarily symmetry. It is not, therefore about establishing a dialectics of theses and anti-theses that lead to consensus syntheses, but creating new possibilities beyond such logic. If the anthropophagy

Barbara Szaniecki replied to Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero:

Hi Alfredo, yes, it's a good perception ... but I'm afraid it can lead to a relativization without punch. My experience of Brazil in recent years was a Brazil crossed by a “North thinking/perspective” to the detriment of a “South thinking/perspective” of development.

Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero replied to Barbara Szaniecki:

Maybe Barbara, and I know that the way we live the action and the theory does not affect us all equally and at all times, also because everyone has their own experience of the theory, and because we are different according to different times and different projects I said it not to relativize but to affirm the inherence of the contradiction, the value of the ambiguity, you know, for me if of the geographies we dealt with here (which is not everything), the North Pole would be the place where any movement in any sense implies going south, becoming south... or souths... I invented kind of the word “Polycardinal” to use instead of Non-Western to speak of ideas coming of all across the world (even from the souths of the North as Inuit in North Canada, First Nations in the rest of that country, Native Americans, Ainu People in Japan, Gaoshan People in Taiwan, even Muisca People here in Bogotá... But I digress, just thinking out loud. Thank you.

Barbara Szaniecki replied to Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero:

This idea of “Polycardinal” to use instead of Non-Western to speak of ideas coming from all across the world” pleases me!

Ann Light commented on “This means that [...] amongst others”:

A strength and a weakness of designing, which others in this commentary are drawing attention to as a failure to organise or to trace and acknowledge roots, yet speaks of a wonderful ingenuity...

Chiara Del Gaudio commented on “It is not, therefore [...] beyond such logic”:

This is quite important. There are several scholars that even if through a dialectic process, at the end seek for consensus. While, as you state, it is about creating new possibilities beyond such logic.

put forward by Oswald de Andrade as early as in the 1930s opened ways for such alternatives (Cocco, 2009), who knows if autonomy might today leverage greater developments?

Let us therefore go back to biopower, understood as a power over life, which implies, as a result, the setting of hierarchies for the forms of life in the world. The first one of them is based on a Culture versus Nature opposition, that is, an alleged superiority of the cultural and rational being over the natural being. From this standpoint, Nature should serve Man and even among humans a hierarchy is established. At its top we find the “white-urban-adult-male-speaker of a standard language-heterosexual-European-” according to the formula proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1980). “Majority” therefore means a kind of domination through the establishment of a hegemonic model, from which all the others are evaluated and seen as minorities. “Minority” then starts to mean and indicate all the lives that exist on the fringe of this center, held as the norm: women or other genders, people from other ethnic groups and languages, dwellers of the outskirts and of rural areas, creatures of the forests. It is important to understand that the relation between “majority” and “minority” is not of a quantitative nature, that whilst majority defines itself through an essence or stability, minorities are always in becoming. The interest in bringing authors such as Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari to this realm is based on the fact that they closely study the mechanisms of power over life, and describe in minutiae how they operate on the beings themselves, but never overlook the expression of the power of life, of the resistance to these powerful processes, understood as the creation of other worlds. And here, based on this detailed analysis, we can understand that design is one of the most ambiguous practices: it can be seen as tool for governmentality, at the service of the powers over life or, in a contrary direction, as a force for self-determination or power of life. An autonomous design implies in a certain way an adversary and agonistic stance (DiSalvo, 2010), not dialectical but in becoming. An autonomous design can be understood in some way as a biopolitical design insofar as it ceases to be a “development project” and is reoriented to the processes of life – the ontological design Escobar mentions (Escobar, 2017), always open to multiplicity, beyond the universality on which developmental thought and practice were based on.

The problem of development and the challenges of autonomy

One of the greatest inducers of the hierarchy of beings and nations - which continuously reduces the South to being “sub” - is the notion of development. According to Escobar, debates on “degrowth” proliferate in the North, usually associated to words such as communalization, *commons* or common, whilst debates on “post-development” and “alternatives to development” gained momentum in the Latin America of the last decade, in connection with the wave of progressive governments that rose to power from the late 1990s (Escobar, 2017, p. 168) and, in some cases, associated to the notion of *Buen Vivir*. The scenario may look auspicious, but it faces many hardships. How can design contribute?

The return of *the Commons*, the challenges of Commoning and of creative communities

We have mentioned the controversies on the very concept of autonomy and the conflicts and struggles inherent to the very processes that lead to autonomy. The same is true with respect to the debates on development. Its limits become increasingly apparent with the current environmental crises, economic crises and political crises. Faced with these crises, the public-private partnerships have shown to be troublesome on one hand while, on the other hand the search for more “communal-oriented” alternatives meet with intense theoretical confrontations. In *The Tragedy of the Commons*, 1968, Garrett Hardin argued that the management of common goods and assets could only be accomplished by the State or by the Capital. In its turn, in *Governing the Commons*, 1990, Elinor Ostrom de-constructed this theory, presenting good examples of management of commons goods by communities, a research that gave her a Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences. Commons places itself as a possibility for a kind of production that lies beyond the public versus private dichotomy, being characterized as a “dynamic and flexible

Chiara Del Gaudio commented on “And here, based on [...] or power of life”:

I frame design nature as one of on-going and never-ending creation and destruction. Seeing design in this way helps me in understanding its real potential “as a force for self-determination or power of life”. Actually, I do think we underestimate the potentiality of its power of destruction.

Andrea Botero replied:

What Fry refers also in a way as defuturing no? I am not sure if it is a contradiction... it is somehow the reality of almost everything no? But I agree something we cannot lose sight of.

Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero added:

On that matter you can see “The evil of design” in Harold G., and Erik Stolterman (2014), *The design way: intentional change in an unpredictable world*, pages 183 to 190. Sometimes what the design creates and what the design destroys go hand in hand or are simultaneous, in that case you have to assess each circumstance and look for the best possible balance between one thing and another. Also can be helpful here, Tony’s idea of “Sustainment” as a vital intellectual and pragmatic project of discovery marking a turn of humanity that acknowledges that “to be sustained” requires another kind of earthly habitation.

Barbara Szaniecki replied:

Yes, Chiara and Andrea, “power of destruction” or “defuturing” may be other ways of saying that power exercised over life. With some subtleties.

With regard to “power of destruction”, for example, the concept of Foucault differs because biopower does not destroy exactly, it leaves the living but in a minimum vital level. We can think, for example, of totalitarian regimes.

With regard to the “defuturing powers”, I also believe that an approximation is possible, but taking into account that, in those years 70-80, Foucault did not write in the face of the future threat we are facing today.

Still, with these new questions, Foucault’s concepts of biopolitics and biopower remain extremely current. I like :)

Thank you, Alfredo, for the book tips, they will be my next readings (Tony Fry)...

productive structure, disseminated in a network and rooted on the cooperation of singularities", constituting new ways of living, working, accruing, and creating meanings outside the State-Capital axis (Mayer, 2015).

There is, in the field of design, a strong interest on the so-called "creative communities", an interest that is actually double: it reinforces the perception of community as a social organization that is relevant in modern days and also highlights the notion that "ordinary people" (not only designers) can organize themselves to solve local problems based on their needs, resources, principles and, above all, creativity (Manzini, 2015; Meroni, 2007; Ehn et al., 2014). Seen as "daily-life professionals" and "diffuse designers", they manage to see beyond the traditional organization of daily life and to transform limits into opportunities, stimulated by a sense of community, and a shared interest, and by the satisfaction of interpersonal relations with an emotional involvement (Meroni, 2007). In this sense, professional designers can act in such communities to support, stimulate and disseminate their practices with their tools and through their platforms (Manzini, 2015; Meroni, 2007).

In his most recent book, Manzini leaves the notion of "community" slightly aside, for the benefit of connectivity, conversations and collaborations necessary for *place making*, maybe to avoid an idea of community that is too closed and separated from the global realm. Even if the notion of place remains strong, any perception of opposition to the global loses momentum and gains room in the concept of a cosmopolitan localism. The solutions may continue based on and geared to the place, but are open to networking. In brief, "today the small is no longer small and the local is no longer local" (Manzini, 2015, p. 178) and the network connection allows a *scaling-up* through the articulation between top-down and bottom-up actions, apart, of course, of peer-to-peer exchanges (Manzini, 2015, p. 186).

Perspectives of *Buen Vivir*

Some post-development paths and alternatives to development receive in the Latin American context the name of *Buen Vivir* (*Living Well*). Referring to indigenous ontologies, they value the concepts of dignity, social justice, and bio-centrism, and disregarding the economic goals guided by a supposed progress. Always in this sense, they present themselves as a political and cultural project aimed at accomplishing a common well-being, through the collective construction of new ways of life (Escobar, 2017), with diversity and difference. However, and despite the speculations on the ways that the *Buen Vivir* could take up in modern day urban contexts, one needs to consider that these ways should not be taken as models to start with. The idea of a model to follow, typical of modern design, would reduce the plurality of *Buen Vivir*.

In *O Bem Viver – Uma oportunidade para imaginar outros mundos* [Buen Vivir - An opportunity to imagine another world], Ecuadorian author Alberto Acosta presents development as a "spectrum" that surrounds us and points at a historical landmark, the speech of US president Harry Truman who in 1949 stated that the world consisted of "many underdeveloped areas" (Acosta, 2016). This speech gained further meaning with the end of WW2 and the start

of the Cold War when the "discourse on development was established - and consolidated - as a dichotomous structure of domination: developed-under-developed, poor-rich, advanced-primitive, civilized-savage, central-fringe. Even the most critical positions, as we will see below, took up this duality as unquestionable". And Acosta adds: "The Third World was invented, and its members were instrumentalized as pawns on the chessboard of international geopolitics. All of them, on the right or the left, setting different specificities and differences, took up the challenge of attaining development" (Acosta, 2016, p. 47).

Even the critical theories of the 1960s – Acosta mentions structuralism and the theory of dependence – did not manage to dismantle the conventional idea of development, understood as linear progression, expressed in economic growth rates. And so, after a 20th century ruled by some authoritarian experiences, we came through twisted paths to a promising beginning of the 21st century with the arrival of progressive governments in Latin America. This opening was due to the pressure made by social movements and by the very incorporation of other ways of thinking and doing that sought to push the developmental paradigms: "The *Buen Vivir* does not mean to take over the role of a global imperative, as it was the case with development in

Ann Light commented on "demonstrated" that previous to the following conversation was written instead of "argued":

Personally I take issue with the word "demonstrated" since it gives the work a truth value that seems both inappropriate in that he was empirically wrong (on his own positivist basis) and in epistemological terms.

Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero replied:

Dear Ann, just out of curiosity there are some words do you would like to suggest here as more appropriate terms instead of "demonstrate"? (Eager to know more on such a strong argument you place here).

Ann Light answered:

Ah, um. In this context, I guess, "claimed", "asserted", or (my favourite) "presented an ideologically motivated and partial analysis of the working of common good" or anything that gives his work equal standing to Ostrom's, who is seen to "de-construct" and "present good examples", both of which terms come from a more nuanced repertoire that acknowledges the interpretability of knowledge. That said, I've been wondering if I was too harsh in calling his work "empirically wrong". But I think he influenced a dynasty of political thinkers in a negative way... and this paper nicely refutes his claims anyway with its next sentences.

Barbara Szaniecki wrote:

Ann, I understand your concern about the term "demonstrate", and I also thank Alfredo's suggestion for finding a more appropriate term. I agree with you. I just wanted to make it very clear that I am in deep harmony with the work of Elinor Ostrom and with her persistence in deepening Commons's possibilities. What I meant is that Garrett Hardin effectively used all the academic resources to put his arguments as UNQUESTIONABLE and that this text WORKED in that sense for many years, that is to say, it was effectively understood by many readers as an uncontested demonstration of the impossibility of the Commons. Hence my use of the term "demonstrated." It does not mean that I agree with Hardin. It means that many have agreed with their arguments. But I fully agree to look for another wording...

mid-20th century. It is rather, on one hand, a path that should be envisaged as something to be built, and on the other, it is already a reality" (Acosta, 2016, p. 69). In other words, the path to *Buen Vivir* is made by the very walking towards it. When mentioning "reality", Acosta does not mean to say that the *Buen Vivir* is consolidated; quite the opposite, he makes comments on the difficulties and the threats to its construction. Still, it has been embraced by many of us, many minorities.

In the field of Design, Escobar mentions the *Tramas y Miguas para el Buen Vivir seminar* [Weaves and Collaborative Work Towards Buen Vivir Seminar], which has been held since 2012, as a favorable scenario for the construction of an agenda for Design (especially towards an autonomous Design) from the theoretical and political space of the present social struggles, chiefly those of the indigenous, African descendants and rural workers communities and movements. He states, and rightly so, that "it is precisely in these cases that the idea of autonomy is flourishing and where the hypothesis of an autonomous design gains meaning" (Escobar, 2017, p. 192). It is effectively an important option for Latin America in general and for Brazil in a particular way. However, one has to take into account the fact that in the last decade the rural movements of migration has produced a country with over 85% of its population living in urban areas (Censo Demográfico do Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2010). The tragic reasons for such migration movements are many: relentlessly violent deforestation, the continuous practice of forest fires, the insufficiency of a land reform, violence in rural areas and, more recently, projects to build hyper dams that affect the rivers and the populations that rely on them. In spite of the importance of the struggles that take place in rural areas, we chose to build our design agenda in the urban space. In reality, we believe that the rural and the urban realms cannot be separated, and the struggles have shown us this. While the Belo Monte dam was being built and was affecting the population of the Xingu area [and river], indigenous population of other ethnic groups have transformed the building of the former Indian Museum into an experience of resistance to the urban transformations that were taking place in the heart of the city of Rio de Janeiro. They called it Maracanã Village, borrowing from the name of the famous football stadium that sits right next to it. The Maracanã Stadium is one of the pillars of the sequence of mega-events that has taken place in the city and in the state of Rio de Janeiro in the name of its development. It was entirely renovated at the cost of millions but is now partially abandoned. The Maracanã Village resists in its creative experience and existence. What can the notion of the *Buen Vivir* and Autonomous Design contribute for in such troubled contexts?

Design Experiments and Design research carried out at the ESDI/UERJ Design and Anthropology Laboratory

The reference to the word "autonomy" has never been explicit in our research, although it was always present in some way, embedded in the theoretical materials of references commented on here. We now present some of

the experiences carried out since 2013 at the School of Industrial Design - ESDI - at UERJ and, more specifically, at the ESDI/UERJ Design and Anthropology Laboratory. Some of them were based on the concept of chat devices (Anastassakis and Szaniecki, 2016). 2013 is a key year as it marks the 11th anniversary of the arrival of the Workers' Party to the presidency of Brazil. Those were governments that at first tried to articulate a strong relationship with social movements and then implemented measures of intense developmental effect, something we name Major Brazil (*Brasil Maior*). It is quite clear that in many areas the participatory policy proposed at the beginning of the Workers' Party's government began to show signs of exhaustion. In the field of Culture, for instance, the policy designed to create a network of community-based cultural actions – Pontos de Cultura [Culture Hubs] (Turino, 2010) – built upon popular participation, citizenship, autonomy and bottom-up decisions in the elaboration of broader cultural policies, started to be strangled in favor of the concentration of resources for the construction of museums, the accomplishment of mega-events and the encouragement of the so-called creative class (Szaniecki, 2016). In the specific urban context of Rio de Janeiro, these project concepts in general and design concepts in particular were defended in the name of economic development and urban revitalization. We should point that the initial success of the Culture Hubs – acknowledged by institutions such as IPEA (Institute for Applied Economic Research) for their contributions to the economy (Barbosa and Calabre, 2011) – shows that not even a territory as huge as Brazil's can justify this macro *modus operandi* which excludes the micro-oriented policies, understood to be as geared for, and built by, the "minorities".

We assume the choice of the City Government for the creative economy without evaluating local cultures and the participation of the population as a challenge to act differently, in other ways, in the urban space. We had the opportunity in 2013 to work in the so-called "pacified

Arturo Escobar commented on "place making":

This is a perceptive way of explaining Manzini's concern with notions of community, True, he seems to prefer "place", and he is aware that there is always a politics of place within place. I also like Manzini's SLOC scenarios (Slow, Local, Open, and Connected), if I recall correctly. Now, as I mentioned in my comments to his piece above, I do not see necessarily a contradiction between place, SLOC and the Latin America approaches to the communal, although the latter are politics in a different way.

Chiara Del Gaudio commented on "The idea of a model to follow, typical of modern design, would reduce the plurality of Buen Vivir":

Yes, that's the point! Sometimes I wonder if this struggle that looks for overcoming "modern design" through post-development paths and alternatives are not actually fostering an ideal way of addressing design (and this even without proposing a "recipe"). I know that they do not act towards imposing anything and that we can understand their struggle as aimed at just being one of the voices and possibilities. However, sometimes the size and strength of the struggle lead me to think about this possibility. And I also know that several people here may not agree with this statement.

communities", an expression coined by the State Government to label the communities that saw the installation of Peace Police Corps Units (UPPs). Although the actions of the UPPs received considerable criticism as a result of the abuses committed by their officers, they have allowed for greater circulation in the territory, along with some initiatives. The School of Industrial Design - ESDI - at UERJ was asked to work in Design projects in two occasions: firstly with the *Agência Redes para Juventude* [Youth Networks Agency] NGO working in six "pacified communities", producing cartographies and visual identities for eighteen social and cultural projects. Youths from the chosen communities and selected by the NGO worked with ESDI students in those projects. In a second occasion, ESDI was invited by SEBRAE [Brazilian Service to Support Micro and Small Enterprises] to act with design in several projects that saw implementation in the slum called Morro dos Prazeres. The following year, 2014, based on these previous experiences, our LaDA (Design and Anthropology Lab) held the *1st Entretemos seminar – Modos de vida e práticas criativas na cidade* [Weaves Seminar - Ways of Life and Creative Practices in the City], an event that has already seen its 4th edition. Our goal was and remains to map, in the field of Design (but in cooperation with other fields), students, professors, and researchers with topics and research approaches in tune with ours. In parallel, we persisted in our individual and collective research in Rio de Janeiro, and here we select three of them that articulate city making and city orienting (in the quest to expand the dialogue with Manzini) with emphasis on commoning – understood as common goods management (Ostrom, 1990) – and, above all, on the expansion of the *Buen Vivir* and autonomy concepts (in the quest to expand the dialogue with Escobar).

The Citizenship Circle of Fátima's Neighborhood and Surrounding Areas (CCBFV)

Interested in the existing connections between Design, City and Citizenship and attracted by the new political ways set in motion by citizens in the urban space, between years 2015 and 2017, researcher Liana Ventura took part of an autonomous and local initiative which aimed at alternative political experiments. Set in the small square that sits at the entrance to the Fátima's Neighborhood – which lies between the Lapa district and the downtown area of Rio de Janeiro – this experience came about from a desire of an autonomous and heterogeneous group of people, residents or connected by affection to the area, to have greater political participation in the issues that concern the collectivity. With this in mind, the CCBFV was conceived as a collective effort, and as a space for debate and action, capable of stimulating an active reflection on the production of the city and of the neighborhood. As a result, and an ongoing process, its creation took place from a weekly event that used the square mentioned above to set up a small popular "agora" whose political principle based itself on the contin-

uous construction of a horizontal democratic space and on the action of the citizens, mobilized around the local issues at hand. This experience was designed by itself thanks to the interweaving of various forces, agents, creativities and personal or collective skills. Ordinary people, neighborhood residents and visitors were interested in working together towards the producing of a common or a communal. It was an open experience built in open public space, so anyone could join or leave the group anytime.

Liana Ventura, design researcher at LaDA/Esdi, participated in the group since its inception. She sought to reflect on how the specifics of the field of Design could contribute to the processes of organization and action of the group as well as to investigate how the empirical practices of the group could be recognized as design practices. Despite her technical background in design, her participation was not defined by it. That means she was not working for the group – as a designer hired for a service –, but first, with the group as a citizen, just like any other participant. Based on some of the actions carried out with the CCBFV, her research sought to identify, understand, and explore practices and tools capable of encouraging citizen participation in social actions and democratization processes inherent to a democracy. As a result, the practices, tools, and methodologies explored in an empirical way by the CCBFV in the actions carried out in the neighborhood have been studied according to their capacity to: build knowledge networks; contribute to the mapping of matters of concern to the community; organize knowledge on the territory; plot plans for action; setup democratic procedures capable of distributing the powers of decision-making and the responsibilities; build, in a collaborative way, viable solutions for the transformation of the space, encompassing a continuous effort aimed at valuing the singularities of the many subjects involved.

"Rio Comprido em nós"¹

"Rio Comprido em nós" is an individual project started during the masters of Mariana Costard and still under

Arturo Escobar commented on "a small popular 'agora'":
Very interesting experience, a designing event (Fry) that was itself designed.

Liana Ventura replied:
Yes. Thank you for your interest. I'd like to add that this experience was designed by itself thanks to the interweaving of various force, agents, creativities and personal and collective skills. A collective agency. Ordinary people, neighbourhood residents and visitors like me, interested in working together towards the producing of a common and of a communality. It was an open experience built in open public space, so anyone could join or leave the group anytime. It is also worth mentioning that despite my technical background in design, my participation in this experience was not defined by my professional activity. That means I was not working FOR the group – as a designer hired for a service –, but first, WITH the group as a citizen, just like any other participant.

¹ The word "nós" can be translated as "us" or "knots", so the name of the project can be understood as "Rio Comprido inside us" but also as the complexity of knots and assemblies that make up the territory and the neighborhood.

way, in her work now towards her doctorate. It explores Design as a way of collective investigation of the city, amidst several dimensions and perspectives, using its tools and methods to trigger dialogue on common matters of concern, and on possible collaborative constructions. Her fieldwork focused on the Rio Comprido district in Rio de Janeiro, and she has been deeply involved with the community since 2014, using mediation tools to stimulate dialogue, critical reflection, and collective imagination on the local issues and possible alternatives for the future, in line with the theories and practices of Design Anthropology (Gunn *et al.*, 2013). Currently, she has been carrying out actions in partnership with collective groups that work in the neighborhood and with a local Government-funded school (CAP-UERJ), exploring the democratic possibilities of Co-Design (Binder *et al.*, 2015) of making socio-material connections. In addition, the actions aim at collective creation - involving designers, non-designers and professionals from other disciplinary areas - through the use of experimental tools and techniques, such as cartography, games and visualization and imagination activities. The research focuses on the improvement of the neighborhood, albeit aligned with an autonomous Design that challenges the parameters for development and for urban revitalization, based on local practices, working with the management of common assets, such as micro-policies, but also in connection with a more systemic and strategic perspective, seeking to push the urban planning and the formulation of public policies. It seeks the practice of a political Design (DiSalvo, 2010) that stimulates spaces for discussion and a multiplicity of opinions and desires that contributes to expanding participation and democracy in the process to construct the cities.

Map-Square-Machine

As an activity of collective research, a theoretical course named "Map-Square-Machine: A collaborative Design experiment in the public space" was organized and held as an extension activity of the Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial (ESDI-UERJ) in partnership with the Hélio Oiticica Municipal Art Center (CMAHO), through its Emergency Platform. Open to the general public and conceived in a collaborative effort of the coordinator (Barbara Szaniecki) and postgraduate students (Liana Ventura, Philippe Anastassakis, Talita Tibola, Ewerton Santos Dantas, Larisa Paes, Romulo Guina, and Gianna Larocca) it aimed at collaborative practices in the public space, more specifically Praça Tiradentes [Tiradentes Square], located in Central Rio de Janeiro. The articulation of the three elements - the map, the square and the machine - meant to evoke the meeting (of the dweller of the surrounding areas, and those of a more temporary nature, of the square itself and usual passers-by), intended or causal, of the heterogeneous elements of it: the map as an excuse for conversation and data acquisition, the square as the potential venue for these processes, and the machine, already present or still to be built, such as that which comes to update such potential. We sought to investigate what makes the meetings happen and what leads to engagement in this *mélange*, seeing Design as an important tool in the Map-Square-Machine.

Final considerations

We set off from the problem of development and tried to face the challenges and dilemmas for autonomy in the domain of Design and, above all, for the practices adopted by the designers. We were faced with the eternal return of the *Commons* and also with the perspectives opened by the concept of *Buen Vivir*. And lastly, we presented some research developed within the scope of the Laboratory of Design and Anthropology of ESDI/UERJ. We identify with the proposal of an autonomous design geared to the common, and propose to ask what the role of the public university in this path is.

We understand that autonomous practices, amongst which that of design, move away (or seek to move away) from structures such as governments, corporations, universities, and religions, to move closer to "territorial ecologies", seen as "ecosystems entanglement consisting of places and communities - where the open processes of co-design could operate with more fluidity" (Escobar, 2017, p. 187).

At the same time, we cannot close these reflections without addressing the role of the public university. We are designers, do research work on design, but we are also citizens. Each one of us, in our specific domains of action, seeks autonomy, having in Design a companion and in University a support. In recent years, the Brazilian university system saw an important, albeit insufficient, transformation. The implementation of quotas for admission to UERJ - the State University of Rio de Janeiro - for example, made it more democratic and more open to diversity, to the expressions of the minorities, and to their bodies of knowledge and skills. Its presence in the center of the city has a significant impact on the territory and beyond that. Therefore, the crisis that hit Rio de Janeiro, a state that followed the development-based model to the letter, its economy based on the exploits of the oil and gas industry, affected the operation of the publicly funded university. The question we leave here is whether and how the university can move closer to the "territorial ecologies" and, based on the notions of the Commons and of the *Buen Vivir*, move to being a pluriversity.

Ann Light commented on "At the same time [...] move to being a pluriversity":

Having, in fits and starts, now managed to read to the end of your paper, I can say that I love this question and the framing of it. I believe that we need structures that allow learning to take place across horizontal planes, so that community can meet and learn from community and good things can grow in more than ad-hoc ways. The university system in many areas of the world is one of the few robust opportunities for this, though not well enough realised, partly as old-fashioned notions of the meaning of knowledge persist. Your argument is set off so well by the three cases you mention just before.

Barbara Szaniecki replied:

Great!

Chiara Del Gaudio wrote:

Barbara I wonder if what all of you went through last year at ESDI (due to the lack of public funding) and how you reacted and acted starting from that couldn't be discussed in terms of autonomous design.

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