SPECIAL ARTICLE

Design, a *Philosophy of Liberation* and ten considerations

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Liberation, how to think it? Enrique Dussel helps answer this question. He tells us that liberation is not the experience of "a something", neither can it be understood in relation to a system, nor is it simply action. Rather it that praxis, that subversion of lived materiality, that opening into a thinking that is able to undo all that is fixed, normalised and unchanging. Here then is the kind of praxis that enabled Nelson Mandela to experience freedom in prison, while also at the same time his accepting responsibility for the other, whose pain and suffering he heard. Doing so was/is not a matter of "compassion" or "sympathy," but a "placement with and alongside" which is solidarity – a "solidarity of the shaken" (Patocka). To hear the cry, the protest, of the other was/is to be decentred from the conditions of confinement (of which prison is just one example) and to allow the acceptance of responsibility to govern one's destiny, as Mandela demonstrated.

The truth of liberation as histories tell it, and as Dussel reiterated it as "liberative justice". It can only arrive with the overcoming, displacement and destruction of the old order, as such it puts the very notion of "the system" into question. It follows that it cannot come to be by reform. The act of liberation breaches the restrictive orders of the past while simultaneously opening into future conditions of possibility. None of this happens without a praxis being prefigured to enfold: a historically constituted historical formation; the humanisation of technology; reconfigure conditions of exchange; and planning and *design.*

But what of design? What is there to say? What can be heard against a backdrop of repetitious and overflowing instrumental chattering of so often trivial preoccupations.

What colour is design?
Is it all colours?
Black or white?
I'm not talking pretty,
I'm talking metaphor.
What I do know is that design is
currently the wrong colour.
How can an answer
be both right and wrong?
Well truth is like that!

Whatever and whoever, we are "we" are not neutral – we are either: "friend or enemy" (Carl Schmitt), "part of the problem or part of the solution" (Stokley Carmichael), and we either "stand or fall" (The Fixx), and recognise that "all that is great stands in the storm" (Plato) as it blows us backwards into the future (Walter Benjamin). As for design ("the pile of debris" at our feet - ditto Benjamin) is equally not neutral: it either future or defutures, sustains or destroys. "We", as well as design, are just "like that". But we (as a species) and design (as an ontological agency) have to change - neither have a future unless they do. And this is a matter of political action.

So, what is the political colour is design?
What is the colour of thinking?
What is the colour of imagination?
And what is the colour of liberation, freedom and
the truth of design beyond self interest?

Words are never enough, but in so many circumstances they are all we have.

Yes I want you to read what I have to say, but I want you to do something more (for yourself). Now here are my ten considerations for your contemplation. Having said this there are two qualifications to make. First, the items listed appear as the "to be done", and for some readers this will be the case. But for others they will denote elements of an/their "existing doing". Nobody will be doing everything! What then is invited is a variable ratio of projection and reflection. Second it should be noted that "the word" (naming), be it silent, written or spoken, is the first act of design into which the "to be designed" arrives.

> **Andrea Botero commented on "Getting design out of its prison house":**
> Besides design, what else needs to get out of the prison?" Tony replied to Andrea's comment elsewhere (that is, while he was answering another comment in one of the others invited pieces).

(1) Getting design out of its prison house: currently as it is trapped by the "who and what" it serves and the restricted practice of: "the profession," service provision and the divisions of knowledge of the Eurocentric epistemologies upon which it has been made parasitic. Here is a normality to be broken (up, free from and down).

(2) Epistemological delinking: crossing borders and borderland thinking: Here is a recovering to rethink a path to "design after design" (a new paradigm, agenda and the potentiality of design liberated). This also implies design is able to contribute to the formation of community after community (the inoperative community of Nancy post modernity/globalism) and an autonomous community of design (Escobar) working with (rather than for) such a community

(3) Recognising the precursors to decolonising design: The philosophers, anthropologists, cultural theorists who make those designers that think (think) must be thought – a few of the many: Cheah and Jullien (China); Fanon and Obenga (Africa); Escobar and Mignolo (Latin America). As for "the people": the ingenious carry ideas from which to learn that seed future, and people's movement (like the Zapatistas) beg recognition as a designing force in their own right.

(4) Exposing the sham of design research is essential as it is set by: The "how to" thinkers that doers ignore; the "lip servers to metrics"; the readers of tired texts; the misrepresentation of (interpolated) users, (commodified) experience, as well as (the lie of) need (in truth a covering over manufactured wants); and the "old guard" gatekeepers of the cultural space of design education. Design research, at its most fundamental has three directive prefigurative questions: "why design" that which has been designated as the "to be designed"? "What will that realised by design go on designing"? And who to design with/for who are futural.

(5) Recasting design education as an actual education: An absolute priority and in the recognition that designer need to be educated in a worldly sense, and that designer who don't think critically are dangerous. By implication this means the creation of a new community of design educators (of which there are scatterings) and new communities of desig(ing).

(6) Confronting the ever-negated imperatives of a defuturing of our being and so many other beings by the negation of being by "world-within-the-world" of human creation that is destroying the "natural world" upon which all life depends. Said another way: the unsustainable arrived by design and has to be countered by design. This again requires a futural transformation of design knowledge and education, designers, and design practice.

(7) Grasping (reaching out and holding) the necessity of non-utopian design leadership, for in the face of the unsustainable, utopianism, in the company of avant-garde speculative design, rests with ideas they cannot be delivered that feed illusions and are without value. This, for example, means working to repair the broken social and material fabric of so many existing cities rather that projecting and creating smart, sustainable and hyper-real new cities with their cluster of iconic post-urban monumental art-work buildings.

(8) Contra-idealism - non-utopian design leadership is the counter force to idealism. It gathers (collects and

comprehends) vital ideas and linked collective practices directed at Sustainment – as it names the imperative, agenda and praxis of futuring and an epoch of liberation that destroys the dominance of defuturing. Sustainment is not "sustainability", which is not about reforming business as usual but overcoming it).

Rather it an ontologically designing condition of continuous change that negates anthropocentrism's defuturing propensity.

(9) Forming collectives for collectives: the complexity of design, as a relational condition, demands understanding there are no singular objects and that designing anything of significance is now dominantly a collective practice of multiple knowledge.

Here is the difference between "a team" as an organisational model of difference and a team as a collective of synthetic knowledge.

(10) Stating the obvious: "we" are small, but the problems we face (by design) are massive. But they must be "gathered" in order for situated action of place to arrive in a relational matrix wherein such action compounds contributes to a transformative collective agency. This means acting by knowingly "digging where we stand" in the situations in which we find ourselves confronting the seemingly impossible in the recognition that human history is a history of the attainment of the impossible (a condition defined by the knowledge of the present and transcended by the knowledge of the future).

A meditation on what has been said as a "coming from a somewhere"

A wandering spirit discovers design as pleasure and a practice of possibility. Then design revealed itself as a way of learning, next it becomes a way of earning a living. But then, few years later, it dawns that working for people one politically does not like, and designing waste destined to become waste, is not one's desired life. This realisation comes at a time when radical politics, built upon nothing more than idealism and illusions, was all the rage. Here of course is an ever to be repeated political error, existing before the Prague and after the Arab Spring. Anyway, so deluded, with hope in one's heart a new beginning is commenced. With a friend a company is formed and goes looking for, and finds, radical clients. The trouble was, as service providers, all these clients wanted was a service. Another realisation arrives. Being a designer, who is self-educated beyond design, is a condition of political limitation. The next move – dump design, travel, and get properly educated, luckily in an excellent (then transgressive) educational institution. In a socially located, economically framed and politically situated and theorised form design is rediscovered. The once a designer re appears in another

Chiara Del Gaudio commented on "This also implies design is able to contribute to the formation of community after community":
How would it be the autonomous design of our design community? (or how is it?).

incarnation: this time as a design theorist, researcher and educator. At the same time the ambition remake design a critical practice lingers.

Out of the nexus between recognition of a world being made unsustainable, the arrival of the concept of "ecologically sustainable development", and design thought otherwise an organisation is formed. It has a life, delivers many projects and provides another environment of learning (at and beyond its time – a decade). The academic and the practitioner are one. Much is made, written, spoken. The perspective and activity is local and global. Over the many decades between a first stumbling into design in inauspicious circumstances to the present, moment of marked attainments and attachments (of various kinds) to comrades and colleagues globally, let's say rhetorically four lessons have been/are being learnt, unevenly, differentially, and still slowly. These lesson as the cracks in the edifice of "design" become more apparent – not least in design education, where redundancy fills the void of a digital future over which it will have no ability to "command and control". So for consideration, the lessons:

(1) The truly worldly transformative explosive potential of design as: profoundly political; as actor no longer just subordinate to the Eurocentric and economic status quo; and as no longer as made in the mould of extant design education, practice and process, *has yet to be discovered* (not least by designers). But the uncovering leading to the discovering has started.

(2) For design to be liberated from its current conditions of limitation all claims to disciplinary boundaries have to be abandoned, as does its bondage to service. Nobody much listens to design talking to itself. Services as the status quo will continue, but as automated AI market metrics drives design, which means its power as service provision will wain, but correspondingly, the importance of the autonomous designer/counter will increase (if the future is to have a future).

(3) Once one realises that the ability to design does not deliver an understanding of the agency of design in the world the entire picture and project of design education changes. Not only does this understanding of design/design education require an interdisciplinary (even post-disciplinary) dialogue, but the exposure of the importance of design beyond design depends on "a new voice" engendered by this dialogue.

(4) Design, as it now is, does not have the fire to light the fuse that will cause the explosion. This requires the new voice, new abilities and the right moment (certain to come as a coming moment, who knows when, when the crisis that we are turns critical as crises converge).

So here then is the beginning not the end. The ideas are nomadic. They come from ancient and modern times and from many places - the Americas, Asia, Europe, India, The Neat East, Africa, from the tiny islands of Timor-Leste and Tasmania (home). The ideas and the action they spawn are the stiff of a "band on the run" - the drifter, tribe, desperadoes, and the coming community of design striving to be set free of its tutelage.

The bands motti: "S/he 'Dares to Know' (Kant) for 'Who Dares Wins'" (British Special Air Service).

Chiara del Gaudio commented on "Once one realises that […] design education changes":
We did not ask directly for a reflection on design education in the CfP. What a forgetfulness! This sentence catalyzes a flux of thoughts and visions…there are words told to designers designing for rethinking designing.

Andrea Botero replied:
But we got some in indirect ways :)

Barbara Szaniecki commented on the overall paper:
Reading these lines written by Tony Fry reminded me about Brazilian ruins, ruins that are the fruit of the recent choices of project: development projects that only produce ruins… economic disaster and social inequalities. In large cities spectacular stadiums and museums. In rural areas, among others, enormous dams, agriculture and intensive extractivism. It is in front of these ruins that I read your 10 considerations. I agree with them and, more than that, I consider them as a good agenda for a more collective action in particular when I come to the reading of the tenth consideration: "we are small, but the problems we face are massive. But they must be "gathered" in order to place a place in a relational matrix in which such action is computed as a transformative collective agency".
But the ruins here (in Brazil) produced are representative of a certain impotence of this agenda: we may cross disciplinary boundaries but when will we be able to cross political boundaries? Here in Brazil, designers do not have a political voice (that is, they do not get representation in institutional politics, nor do they seek greater activism in citizen manifestations.) How can we include these policies - whether institutional or simply citizen - in the teaching itself or in the production of wider knowledge.