

walking



the



word of



design



Pablo Calderón Solázar

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KU Leuven / LUCA School of Arts
Faculty of the Arts

WALKING THE WORD OF DESIGN
Explorations and reflections of a
decolonial-interventionist practice

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Dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor in the Arts

April 2021

Dedication

A Priscilla, mi compañera de vida y de viaje, por apoyarme en TODO; por permitirme acompañarla -desde la retaguardia- en su camino hacia el feminismo y aprender con ella. A Pola, por darme -sin saberlo- un nuevo impulso de vida y el aprendizaje inmenso que significa ser padre.

To the other TRADERS researchers -Michael, Annelies, Jon, Saba and Naomi-, infinite appreciation for the complicity in all the explorations, discussions, encounters and experiences that allowed us to grow and evolve as professionals and human beings. To Michael a special acknowledgement for lending a hand, an ear, a voice and his infinite wisdom to all the situations and moments where he was called upon.

A mis padres, Maria Cristina y Carlos, por hacer todo lo posible por despejarme el camino y generar las condiciones de posibilidad para que yo creara mi destino en la mayor libertad posible. A mi hermano Jose, pues su sensibilidad y talento creador me inspiraron para buscar mis propias capacidades de creación. Y a mi padre José quien, aunque nunca conocí, se que ha determinado en maneras inconmensurables quién soy yo hoy.

To my supervisors, Veerle and Liesbeth, for their patience throughout my -far from smooth- ride and their support in finding the best paths in front of the different roadblocks I stumbled into (or put up myself!). To Ramia, I will be forever grateful for her dedication and critical assessment of my whole journey.

A mis amigxs y (ex)colegas -Cristiam, Lina, Cira, Santiago, Adriana, Estelle, Mateo, Alfredo-, sin cuyas conversaciones, colaboraciones, discusiones y compañía me parece absolutamente inconcebible haber podido terminar esta tesis anclada en nuestro sur.

To my colleagues -Katrien, Ben, Geert, Selina, Niek, Andrea, Virginia, Niels, Jessica, Teodora and Mela-, with whom I was able to share a very important space and time of my life, but also the affects that allowed our encounters to transcend the formality of the 'office space'. A special appreciation to Katrien, for her immense generosity with her time, conversation, opinions, knowledge and friendliness.

A mis ancestrxs y todxs los que vivieron antes que yo y me dieron la vida; al territorio que me vio nacer y crecer y los pueblos que lo han habitado; a Bogotá, Colombia y Latinoamérica, los anclajes que, por más que me aleje ellos, estarán siempre presentes para recordarme de dónde vengo.

Acknowledgements

Dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor in the Arts

The present doctoral dissertation, and the research it was part of, were made possible thanks to the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration, under grant agreement no. 608299

All illustrations were made by Priscilla Suarez Bock.

Title	Walking the word of design. Explorations and reflections of a decolonial-interventionist practice	
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Abstract

Dear reader, you find yourself in front of a territory that has no one-only-way to be discovered. In the journey, you might find some knowns and perhaps some other unknowns. The prologue (navigation guide) -and its accompanying map- will help you have an overview of how such territory and its domains are organised and assembled, and maybe to navigate through them; yet its goal is not to avoid you from getting lost, rather to make sense of the different cues you find on the way. This territory helps ground the doctoral research I have undergone for the last 7 years (2014-2021) and therefore provides some anchors to understand my journey. The structure of the thesis allows the reader to explore it in different ways, similarly to Cortazar's Hopscotch. For this same reason, instead of being assembled as a book with a given order, each text is a single booklet included in a box and inviting you to chose your own path.

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INTERACTIVE MAP: CLICK ON TITLES TO JUMP DIRECTLY TO EACH SECTION

PROLOGUE

ARTICLES

OUTRO

mapa del territorio

INTRO

CASES

EPILOGUE

ARCHIVE



PROLOGUE



July 12th 2017, Immigration Office, City of Brussels.

Even though there is no visible clock in the waiting room, the long wait makes as if there was a huge old clock counting the seconds as an enormous metronome. Several kids from different queuing parents play in the photo booth, only to be reprehended (for a fourth time) by a functionary, visibly annoyed, who knocks on the window of her counter and shouts "Arrêtez! Il est interdit de jouer dans le kiosque!" (Stop! It is forbidden to play in the booth!). The kids disperse back to their parents' position in the waiting room, some still with enough energy to make some 'mess' in their new location. It is my fifth time at the Immigration Office of the Municipality of Brussels, doing the usual 3-hour queue to request the renovation of my residence permit in Belgium. My first visit, in end-March (2017), saw me handing in my contract with the University to prove 'I am an immigrant worthy of a visa', and receiving a temporary permit while the Foreigners' Federal office would give an answer. Answer which was negative, at worst, suspicious, at best: they needed more proof of my linkage to the University, for which I was asked to urgently come early in a working day, do the 3-hour queue, and present additional paperwork. Which I did, only to be asked for, once again, additional paperwork. But do not get me wrong: I kind of enjoy the visits to the Immigration Office, as I see a real mix of peoples of different cultures, and I have a feeling of belonging (curiously enough, in a place that accentuates the lack of belonging); I like to believe that all the people queuing in this room feel they belong to the group of the unbelonging.

Walking the word of design: a navigation guide / prologue



Caminar la palabra (walk the word) is an expression coined by the indigenous peoples of South-West Colombia when, in 2013, they started the Minga social, indígena y popular (the social, indigenous and popular minga) as means of resisting the imposition of free-trade agreements and denouncing the historical debt (of land and self-determination) of the Colombian state towards them. Caminar la palabra, in this sense, is putting the verb, the concept, the idea and reason, in action (Castillo, 2013) as well as reaching agreements through dialogue; speak -and through 'the word'- acknowledge the other and his/her truth (Agudelo-Arcila, C.A., 2019). Besides being a tribute to Colombian indigenous peoples, the title of this dissertation should therefore be understood in its metaphorical sense, as a way of collapsing the theory/practice dichotomy by putting ideas into action. In her talk Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism, Jane Rendell suggests that writing [...] is an architectural practice, in the sense that it involves the processes of thinking, designing and building – in short it can be understood as a spatial construction (Rendell, 2007). Similarly, the construction of this text is seen as a design exercise but, moreover, texts are seen as -and organised by- a spatial logic, in which the only way to discover it is by walking (or wandering) through it. Similarly, Maria Lugonés calls for understanding “the spatiality of theory”, claiming for the importance of ‘grounding knowledge’ (2003). Furthermore, the choice of framing this doctoral dissertation as a territory is not only grounded in the intention of giving a spatiality to theory or bringing ‘down to earth’ my theoretical reflections (Latour, 2018), but also inspired in the Spanish language notion of territorio as “an ‘arena of dispute’, where struggles of spatial control take place through processes of negotiation and contestation” (Sandoval et al, 2017). In this way, by ‘territorialising’ these texts I intend to situate them as spaces for the dispute of meaning of the different concepts, contexts and practices presented and discussed. That being said, in the present opening text, when I speak about ‘territory’ I refer to the dissertation; when I speak of domains, I refer to the sections; and when I speak of the sites, I refer to each of the texts.

Dear reader, you find yourself in front of a territory that has no one-only-way to be discovered. In the journey of walking through it, you might find some knowns and perhaps some other unknowns. This text -and its accompanying map- represents a first mandatory passage that will give you an overview of how the territory and its domains are organised and assembled, and perhaps to navigate through them. Its goal is

*The following text is a presentation of the whole dissertation and has two narratives running simultaneously: the first (presented in black writing and aligned left) represents a navigation guide to the whole dissertation understood as a territory; the second is the prologue (in green letters and aligned right) through which I make annotations on the navigation guide, anchoring concepts in theory, further contextualising the arguments being made and clarifying the central notions that will be addressed throughout.

Legend
Territory = dissertation
Domain = section
Site = chapter / text

TRADERS -short for Training Art and Design Researchers for Participation in Public Space- was a FP7 Marie Curie Multi-ITN project that ran from September 2013 to August 2017, and for which I was one of the Early Stage Researchers exploring 'interventions'. More info on: <http://tr-aders.eu>

not to avoid you from getting lost, rather to make sense of the different cues you find on the way. This territory helps to ground the PhD process I have undergone for the last 6 years (2014-2020) and therefore provides some anchors to navigate through it. It is important to note that this territory is also part of a larger endeavour called TRADERS, an EU-funded research project seeking to investigate the roles that art and design researchers and practitioners can play in engaging diverse actors in public spaces and issues .

On an interview included on the Random House edition of her book *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy is asked if her training as an architect factor into [her] writing or the storyline, such as with the detailed descriptions of the Ipe family residence, Velutha's home, and the History House? How important is a sense of place in the story?" To which she answered: "I don't think you necessarily need to study architecture to describe building in detail. I may be wrong, but I think my training as an architect kicked in more when I was structuring the books— structuring the narrative. (Roy, 2008). I believe this take is close to the one I have pushed forward in this dissertation, insofar as my training as a designer is not necessarily evident in the descriptions of material elements and scenarios, but on the structuring (design) of the narrative in itself. That being said, the structure of this dissertation is not designed in a linear way, but in a more rhizomatic way, which invites the reader to traverse it in different ways. And as a way of supporting you in reading the dissertation, I have included a map, which further grounds the proposal of understanding the body of texts as a territory. As Brinkley would note in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's essay *What is a minor literature?*, "the result [of reading Kafka's work] is not an interpretation but a map, a tool with which to find a way; the map is the production of an experimental reading" (1983). The map -just as this navigation guide- is therefore not aimed at suggesting a path to follow, an order for reading the texts; instead, it gives an overview of the domains -represented as island-like spaces- and their role and position of each within the overall dissertation. This is explicitly supported by the illustrations included in the map, which represent some of the central ideas of each text.

Before explaining in further detail the contents of each domain, I consider it important to clarify certain decisions regarding the structure, as well as the different tones and formats present throughout the overall territory. In the present text, as well as in all the sites of the case studies domain, there are two simultaneous narratives running in parallel: one representing the practitioner recounting his experiences and the other representing the researcher critically reflecting on them. In the present text, the latter are shown as annotations to the first, while in the case studies, they take the form of footnotes. In this sense, it is essential that the reader understands that, in these texts, no narrative is more important than the other; instead, they complement each other by feeding into the direct experience or the theoretical references and reflections. Furthermore, I have made it a deliberate decision that each domain has different forms and structures, aiming to express the different ways in which I engage in such (writing) processes, as well as to speak to different types of audiences.

The structure of this text is directly influenced by Fals Borda's *Historia doble de la costa* (1979), for which he proposed a dual narrative running simultaneously in the two pages of each spread throughout the four volumes that compose the book. In the case studies I have made it a deliberate decision to push the theoretical reflections and references to the footnotes, however insisting on their equal importance to the dissertation. In *The Footnote: A Curious History*, Anthony Grafton calls for acknowledging the paramount importance of footnotes in historiography

as, he argues, "without them historical thesis can be admired or resented, but they cannot be verified or disproved" (1997). Now, certainly in these texts the footnotes do not pretend to function as a form of validation, but they are inseparable to the main body of text insofar as they fulfill the role of synchronous annotations on the narrative. Footnotes (as well as side -and end- notes) are often neglected in scholarly writing, carrying marginal information of little importance to the arguments being presented; instead, in the case studies footnotes host the central arguments and references that give further context to the experience being narrated.

The emergence of practice-based doctorates and PhDs in the Arts has called for reevaluating the role of writing as a form of scholarly reflection in (creative?) research processes. Candlin (2000) suggests that the most common strategy to address such issues (in the UK), has been to clearly differentiate theory from practice and by assigning to writing the role of scholarly reflection on creative work. Yet she warns that this approach "does not open out the boundaries of academia to acknowledge different ways of thinking and working, but reduces art practice to the conventions of academia" (Candlin, 2000). For this dissertation, I have made it a deliberate choice to challenge the perspective that sees writing as a process separate from practice; the assemblage of the finished texts -and the construction of the new ones- might be seen as a stand-alone project (and creative component), therefore not 'reflecting on', but being practice in themselves. The way in which this dissertation is structured -and the different tones and formats used throughout- resonates with the explorations made by Burroughs (2016) in her doctoral dissertation, wherein she wrote the different sections from the perspective of the architect-practitioner, the researcher and the educator. These experimental ways of addressing writing in academia are still novel and rare, yet represent an opening to integrate other ways of knowing -and reflecting on knowledge- in design and the arts. The doctoral regulations for the Faculty of the Arts in KU Leuven already manifest an opening in this respect: "the PhD in the Arts consists of a thesis as well as (a) creation(s) in arts or design. Both parts are considered equal and as a unity. Together they show evidence of the ability to create new knowledge" (2020).

Take this guide as an overview of the whole territory and an introduction to each of the domains with their corresponding sites.

Before beginning any kind of journey, one should do the best possible effort to position (situate) oneself: where am I standing and how that position influences the way I navigate a given territory? This domain of positioning is a mandatory passage for exploring the rest of the territory, as it lays the essential foundations that frame the construction of the overall territory. In understanding the circumstances that led to the development of PAR in Colombia and discussing some of their subsequent experiences, as well as arguing for their relevance in contemporary design practice and research (beyond the Global South), I wish to support the reader in understanding the position from which I write and operate. In doing so, I also expect the reader to position her/himself in relation to the experiences recounted and reflections being made, so as to appropriate them for her/his own case..

The recent 14th Participatory Design Conference (PDC 2020), organised by the Universidad de Caldas in Colombia, represented an important forum for critically revising the ways in which (scholarly work on) participatory design has been made. In going to the home country of Orlando Fals Borda, questions about the birth of participatory action research (PAR) in Colombia became particularly relevant, as well as its relevance for contemporary design practice and research.

Full paper presented in the 16th Participatory Design Conference (PDC 2020), which was hosted by the Universidad de Caldas in Manizales, Colombia (due to the ongoing COVID pandemic, the conference took place virtually).

The map and illustrations were made by Brussels-based artist and illustrator Priscilla Suarez Bock. I find it important to disclose that she is my partner, with whom I frequently collaborate, as it manifests a way of working very much enmeshed with my private life.

With this in mind, our paper addresses the question: what can Participatory Design (PD), with its Scandinavian roots and further 'Northern' expressions, learn from the history and experiences in participation in Latin America? Even as this should not be assumed as a 'research question' of the whole dissertation in a strict sense, it does set the tone for the different arguments that are made throughout. In the 1960's, Fals Borda developed PAR in response to the lack of appropriate frameworks in the (European) social sciences to study the Colombian reality. His explicitly political and transformative proposal questioned the modern divisions between subject and object of study, mind and heart, theory and practice, academic and popular knowledge. In recounting this history, through this paper we attempt to contribute to recent debates on decolonising design, including discussions on feminist perspectives (Donna Haraway, depatriarchising design), southern epistemologies and approaches to design (Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Alfredo Gutiérrez Borrero), and redirected design practices (Arturo Escobar, Tony Fry).

In this domain you will find four different sites, which host and recount different experiences I have had, working as a designer-researcher from 2014 to 2019. This domain grounds and embodies most of the theoretical reflections and positioning that the first domain (intro) presents.

The cases represent practical examples of interventions I made during the time I developed this research. The choice of framing these practices as 'interventions' is deliberate, as it was the starting point of my doctoral trajectory, wherein I inquired into the relationship between short-term interventions and long term participation (Dreessen et al, 2015). However the research scope and focus has shifted, the discussion about the nature of interventionist practices in art and design remains as relevant, and is discussed in various texts of the dissertation. Presented in the form of chronicles or field diaries, the texts of the Case Studies include semi-fictional elements, but are informed by my direct experience on each project: "through the actual experience of something, we intuitively apprehend its essence; we feel, enjoy and understand it as reality, and we thereby place our own being in a wider, more fulfilling context. In PAR such an experience, called *vivencia* in Spanish, is complemented by another idea: that of authentic commitment." (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991). This choice of writing styles for recounting my experiences with the different interventions is therefore not random and has deep roots in PAR practices, in which the experience of a direct involvement with the (studied and/or intervened) context is essential.

De Andere Markt: a logbook

The first and most visible site of the domain -and the whole territory- is De Andere Markt, a living lab and participatory design process in Genk, Belgium. This site is divided in two parts: a first one where you will be able to meet one of the central characters of the project, the cargo bike - printing press (My hip hurts for folding so much), and its first-hand testimony of its involvement in the whole trajectory. The second part will allow you to understand more about the site, as you will find a logbook of the project, recounting its day-to-day experiences and the reflections emerging from it.

Chronicle of a northern minga

The second site of this domain has an important presence of Latin American indigenous peoples and their ancestral knowledges and practices -however being situated in the global north-, hosting the experience of Minga for Hasselt, a southern-inspired collaborative intervention in the context of the TRADERS Open School.

Routes through the roots

Despite being in central Taipei (Taiwan), the only way you can arrive at the third site is by walking; a place that allows you to reflect on the right to the city and the roles that both locals and foreigners play in it. But here you are also encouraged to critically question your role as an 'uninvited outsider' and how that can influence the way you intervene in a context very different from your own.

Trasenster, the missing link

The fourth site of this domain takes us back to Belgium, more specifically to Seraing. In a city heavily affected by deindustrialization and the deskilling of labour, we will reflect on how short term interventions and involvement with a given community can trigger participatory processes when thought of strategically, based on a specific experience of a social innovation project called Welcome to Seraing. But visiting this site will also support in critically assessing the impact designers have, when intervening in contexts not our own during a short time-span.

Blázquez and Lugonés discuss the risks and perils of writing about the lives of others, yet highlight the importance of the figure of 'the narrator' in ethnographic processes (2012). In citing Benjamin (1973), they argue how "the act of narrating allows to complete the experience" of the involvement with a group of participants (Blázquez & Lugonés, 2012). This perspective reinforces my choice of using the testimonial chronicles and field diaries as writing formats, insofar as they function as dispositifs that bring to the fore the experiences of the participants that have taken part in the projects. But it is also crucial to highlight that these stories have no end, nor final conclusion: "as performances, the tales [...] cannot be forced into final interpretations; narrations have no end" (Blázquez & Lugonés, 2012).

What do we mean when we speak about participation, intervention, storytelling, social innovation, designs from the souths, design epistemology, territorio and place(s) of enunciation? This domain hosts sites for rumination, for slow appreciation of ideas that resonate throughout the whole territory. Each site -constructed under different circumstances and made public in different places- develops some of the concepts previously mentioned.

Letters south of (nordic) design (w/ Alfredo Gutiérrez Borrero)

Here you will find many examples of -and a plea for- what Alfredo Gutiérrez (2015) calls 'designs with other names' (or 'designs from the souths'), on a site aiming to problematise -from a southern epistemological standpoint- 'northern' notions of design practice and research. Even though this is the site of designs of the souths, you will learn how designs with other names are present all around the world (including the global north), yet we have been taught to ignore them.

From (single) storyteller to (multiple) stories-enabler

Saying that as a (socially engaged) designer you take the role of a 'storyteller' has become very common, almost a cliché; visiting this site allows you to question that narrative. Instead, here you will be introduced with the figure of the 'stories-enabler', a proposed role for designers, wherein they can act as mediators for stories to emerge, instead of agents controlling how the story (singular used intentionally) is told.

Bourgeois (w/ Michael Kaethler)

On this site you will meet Hanna Arendt who, in her development of the concept of the 'bourgeois' (as opposed to the 'citoyen'), gives us

The TRADERS Open School (TOS <http://tr-aders.eu/open-school/the-school/>) was a 10-day open academy organised as the last public event of the TRADERS project. The TOS invited practitioners and researchers from diverse fields (from design to contemporary dance; and from urban planning to computer science) to host lectures, debates, performances, workshops, dialogues or walks that triggered participants to think -and perform- how the city could be otherwise.

Epistolary article written with colleague and friend Alfredo Gutiérrez Borrero, and presented at the NORDES 2017 conference, which took place in Oslo.

Text written as a contribution for the book *The Pearl Diver: the designer as storyteller* (Bertolotti et al (Eds), 2016).

Text co-written with TRADERS' ESR Michael Kaethler for the book *Designing in Dark Times: An Arendtian Lexicon* (Tassinari & Staszowski (Eds.), 2020).

A shorter version of the text was published in the book *Trading Places: Practices of Public Participation in Art and Design Research* (Hamers et al (Eds), 2017).

Introduction to the Intervention chapter of the book *Explorations in Urban Practice: Urban School Ruhr*. (raumlaborberlin et al (Eds.), 2017).

An earlier version of this text was published in the book *Social Matter, Social Design: for good and bad, all design is social* (Kaethler & Boelen (Eds.), 2020).

The misak are one of the indigenous peoples inhabiting Colombia's southern Cauca province.

TRADERS Talk is a platform developed for the sharing and discussing of art and design practices concerned with participation and/or public space: <http://www.traderstalk.org/>

some clues to question the hegemonic epistemological frameworks in design practice and research. You will also meet Walter Mignolo who, based on the decolonial dictum 'I am where I think', points us to the alternative of thinking -and doing- design from a situated perspective.

Intervention as tactic, not as strategy
Whether explicitly or implicitly, all the territory deals with -and speaks about- 'intervention', yet on this site you will see the concept being explicitly outlined with the help of De Certeau's differentiation of 'strategies' and 'tactics'. You will also learn about a specific experience of *Arquitectura Expandida*, a Bogotá-based collective working extensively on interventionist practices.

Over the southernmost border of social design, trees are people too
On the centre of this site there is a fireplace, a spot where everyone can gather around and talk about their places of enunciation, those from where they speak and operate. The conversation is triggered by Eyder, a misak philosopher and artist integrated with nature and accompanied by Maya, an undergraduate design alumni who, through her graduation project, helps us illustrate how the awareness of situating oneself can open space for practices of 're-existence' (Albán Achinte, 2017).

Just as the Case Studies represent some of the projects I developed throughout the years I was engaged in this research, the Articles include most of the (mainly non-academic) texts I wrote for different fora during that same timespan. As such, each text helps underpinning some of the central notions addressed throughout the dissertation. In the first text I discuss the notion of southern epistemologies (de Sousa Santos, 2015) and designs of the souths (Gutiérrez Borrero, 2015), previously introduced in the intro and further developed in the outro. Inspired by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's criticism of 'the single story' (2009), in the second text I introduce the proposal of considering a role for designers as enablers of multiple stories. The third text develops the Arendtian notion of 'the bourgeois' and questions the stances that approach design from an 'universalist' perspective; instead, resonating with the intro, it calls for a situated standpoint that supports decolonising design. In bringing to the scene de Certeau's differentiation between 'strategies' and 'tactics', the fourth text calls for understanding interventions from a tactical perspective, insofar as they can function as a ruse from the week to subvert power relations (de Certeau, 1984). The fifth text of this section recounts an encounter with a misak philosopher and artist, backdropping the introduction of the notion of 're-existence' (Albán Achinte, 2017); even if barely mentioned elsewhere in the other texts, this concept is of central importance in the dissertation and my research, and is further discussed in the epilogue.

This domain includes a selection of 22 different sites -all sourced from the territory of TRADERS Talk- and is presented as a space for conversation around practices. Aware of the importance of developing theory from (the reflection on) practice (and not only the other way around), TRADERS Talk was conceived as a place where different art & design practices can be showcased and discussed. As an entry to this domain, you will find a conversation with Michael Kaethler, discussing the act of archiving and the importance of starting such an archive.

Camerino and Medina (2020) highlight the importance of (art, design and architecture) projects' archives, as they support in visibilising and legitimising practices that were previously hidden. The projects, -as well as their descriptions and discussions- are not of my authorship, which presented a dilemma on the relevance of its inclusion in the dissertation. However, having been a crucial

endeavour during my involvement with TRADERS, the development of the TRADERS Talk platform supported the creation of a non-exhaustive 'state of the art' of interventionist projects. Aiming at further deepening the discussions generated around the practices featured in the platform, together with Michael Kaethler we organised a series of three interactive exhibitions, wherein participants would collectively curate a series of projects sourced from TRADERS Talk. This was motivated by the observation that design researchers are too much concerned with "thinking about practice and not enough thinking with practice" (Kaethler, 2019). The three exhibitions attempted to untangle the three central concepts of TRADERS (participation, public space and agency), by using practices situated within those domains and following an open call published in the platform itself (Calderón & Kaethler, 2016).

This domain represents a passage for exiting the territory; it does not give any definitive answers nor a final conclusion, yet it hints to some ideas so as to how we can make sense of the different domains we have traversed and the cues found on the way. Here you will meet Arturo Escobar who, with his proposal of an 'autonomous design', gives us some clues to redirect design practices towards the self-realisation of communities. This will also allow us to revisit the central site of this territory (De Andere Markt), through the lens of autonomous design and influenced by a southern perspective; therefore, we could say we entered this territory by the south and exit it through the south as well. Moreover, if the entry domain (intro) inquired into the ways in which southern experiences in participation could inspire northern design practices, this domain allows us to deepen the discussion around that question by focusing on the particular approach of autonomous design.

This paper presents an horizon for participatory design, in the form of what Escobar has dubbed 'autonomous design' (2017). In calling to understand 'autonomy' from a southern perspective -that is, as a communal instead of an individual endeavour- we argue for the relevance of such notion in contemporary design practices beyond the global south. In acknowledging that design has been historically linked -and contributor- to a "patriarchal capitalist modern/colonial world system", Escobar points at the need to radically re-direct design practices (2012). His proposal departs from scrutinising the 'rationalist dualism' present in most of modern science and academic research, resonating with Fals Borda's motivations for birthing PAR and situating autonomous design from a perspective of southern epistemologies and ontologies (Gómez Obando, 2017). The paper also does a more exhaustive discussion on design interventions, calling to embrace the 'southern manners' for intervening in a context, by which a special attention is put in avoiding to disturb the internal workings of local communities. The reflection made on 'interventions' in this text, therefore directly reflects on the sub-title of the dissertation (explorations and reflections of an interventionist-decolonial practice), insofar as it attempts to reconcile the practice of interventions with a decolonial approach to research and design.

This journey begins by passing through a domain that invites you to position yourself in regards to a given territory (intro); it continues by passing through a series of domains that help to ground such positioning in concrete practices (cases), reflections (articles) and reference projects (archive); to finally arrive to the last domain and establish a conceptual -and practical- horizon for landing all the thoughts and ideas picked up and developed throughout the journey (outro).

Article written together with my co-supervisor Liesbeth Huybrechts and my De Andere Markt's colleague Mela Zuljivic, which was published in the special edition of the *Strategic Design Research Journal* on 'autonomia'. It was written and published before the intro (which might seem odd), but I decided to use it as an outro, insofar as it presents a conceptual and practical horizon for participatory and socially engaged design practice and research.

It should come to no surprise to learn that Escobar was a pupil of Fals Borda, and his work is strongly influenced by the latter's experiences with PAR in the Caribbean coastal region of Colombia.

This site was created as a critical reflection on the experience of wandering through the overall territory. It does not attempt to give absolute answers to any questions, not to propose final conclusions; instead, it attempts to support you, the reader, in ‘making sense’ of the different sites and their presence in the dissertation, as well as to share what I have learned in the process of crafting it. Moreover, an articulation of the loose ends left throughout, will allow to look back with a clearer view on the journey presented.

Just as the Case Studies represent some of the projects I developed throughout the years I was engaged in this research, the Articles include most of the (mainly non-academic) texts I wrote for different fora during that same timespan. As such, each text helps underpinning some of the central notions addressed throughout the dissertation. In the first text I discuss the notion of southern epistemologies (de Sousa Santos, 2015) and designs of the souths (Gutiérrez Borrero, 2015), previously introduced in the intro and further developed in the outro. Inspired by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s criticism of ‘the single story’ (2009), in the second text I introduce the proposal of considering a role for designers as enablers of multiple stories. The third text develops the Arendtian notion of ‘the bourgeois’ and questions the stances that approach design from an ‘universalist’ perspective; instead, resonating with the intro, it calls for a situated standpoint that supports decolonising design. In bringing to the scene de Certeau’s differentiation between ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’, the fourth text calls for understanding interventions from a tactical perspective, insofar as they can function as a ruse from the weak to subvert power relations (de Certeau, 1984). The fifth text of this section recounts an encounter with a misak philosopher and artist, backdropping the introduction of the notion of ‘re-existence’ (Albán Achinte, 2017); even if barely mentioned elsewhere in the other texts, this concept is of central importance in the dissertation and my research, and is further discussed in the epilogue.

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INTRO



"I speak the 'I' at the level of the street and as moving through multiple encounters, geographico-historical paths to indicate the subversion of the theory/practice dichotomy and to express the writing itself as a tactical-strategic interactive performance. The third person seems to me to hide that the writing is itself an encounter, nonsensical apart from dialogue, heavily touched by uncertainty. The third person tends toward removal, toward a metapositionality that takes one out of the action."

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PD 'otherwise' will be pluriversal (or it won't be)

*Paper written with Liesbeth Huybrechts for
-and presented at- the Participatory Design
Conference 2020.

Abstract

The following text proposes a narrative and argumentative path starting in the wetlands of the Caribbean coastal region of Colombia, where Orlando Fals Borda, more than 50 years ago, found himself in the search for appropriate tools and methods for studying the complex social situation of the communities living there. His development of PAR -a transformative and explicitly political research approach with communities (Fals Borda, 1979)- represented a radical critique and novel proposal for research in the social sciences. Such proposal opens a path for us to explore some examples of knowledge and research (building knowledge) otherwise such as 'systematisation of experiences' 'epistemologies of the south' (de Sousa Santos, 2011) and 'situated knowledges' (Haraway, 1988), as well as some design initiatives, networks and platforms otherwise that have emerged in recent years, such as 'designs from the souths' (Gutiérrez, 2015), 'decolonising design' (Schultz et al., 2018), 'depatriarchise design', and 'autonomous design' (Escobar, 2017a). We then build on these proposals of knowledge and design otherwise, to explain how they have influenced and informed our intervention in a specific case study of northern-European PD, which we will present as a practical example of such ideas. Our journey will end with a plea for contemporary PD to incorporate the political nature of the origins of PAR and the more contemporary concept of 'pluriverse' (Escobar, 2018), so as to better articulate -not only its investigative- but also its transformative qualities.

In 2013, the Dutch king Willem-Alexander declared "the end of the welfare state, and the beginning of the participation society" (Independent, 2013). This statement resonated with the 2010 policy plan of David Cameron in the UK, dubbed The Big Society, which attempted to reduce the interference of the state in civil society. The declaration of the Dutch king and the former British PM could be interpreted as noble attempts to give power to civil society, yet it is important to also consider the political -or rather politicised- instrumentalisation of participation in order to push forward policies aimed

1 Introduction

at undermining the welfare state.

Previous to this particular approach to participation in 'politics', within the field of design practice and research, other approaches to 'the political' in participatory processes were developed. The origins of Participatory Design (PD) can be traced to the democratisation of the workplace in 1970's Scandinavia, wherein designers collaborated with workers to re-design their workplaces (Ehn, 1988). Later, as types of labour and workplaces radically changed, PD began to engage with other settings that involved different constituents and publics (Huybrechts et al, 2016).

However, this text won't focus on Dutch or British politics, nor specifically on Scandinavian or European PD. Instead, it proposes an archaeological exercise for tracing the (potential) influence of Latin American participatory action research (PAR) in contemporary design (and) research practices. It also explains how this trajectory has informed and influenced the authors of this text in positioning themselves as designers-researchers intervening in diverse contexts. We will begin by describing the historical context in which Latin American PAR emerged (Fals Borda, 1979) and how it established itself as a valid epistemological standpoint for social research throughout the continent. We will continue by exploring some references of knowledge otherwise, such as 'systematisation of experiences' (Mejía, 2007; Clocier, 2014), closely linked to PAR practitioners; 'epistemologies of the south' (de Sousa Santos, 2011), by which other ways of knowing -and building knowledge about- the world are accepted as legitimate; and 'situated knowledges' (Haraway, 1988), a feminist critique to the universalisation of knowledge fostered by many (Western-ized) scientists.

This trajectory will follow with a brief inventory of design practice and research otherwise, such as 'designs from the souths' or 'design with other names' (Gutiérrez, 2015; Calderón & Gutiérrez, 2016), which call for understanding the practices corresponding to design -but not recognised as such from the European design tradition- in different cultures and geographical contexts; 'decolonising design' (Schultz et al., 2018), by which a group of researchers and practitioners call for revising the role of design in the global colonial matrix of power; 'depatriarchise design', critically questioning the marginal role of women -and other disen-

franchised groups- in the hegemonic world of design; and Escobar's (2017a) proposal of 'autonomous design', which offers a basis for a design praxis with communities, contributing to their realisation. This narrative and argumentative path will support the positioning of the author-researchers of this paper, in their participatory research and design interventions in different contexts.

Moreover, through the theoretical review and presentation of the case, we would like to contribute to a question we consider crucial, taking into account that the PDC is being hosted for the first time in Colombia and Latin America: What can PD, with its Scandinavian roots and further 'Northern' expressions, learn from the history and experiences in participation in Latin America? In that same line, the use of the 'otherwise' in the present text represents a ruse for dislocating the knowledge structures or, as Danah Abdulla puts it, "thinking otherwise is another way of thinking that runs counter to the great modernist narratives—it locates its own inquiry in the very borders of systems of thought and reaches towards the possibility of non-Eurocentric models of thinking" (Abdulla, 2018).

Orlando Fals Borda was a Colombian sociologist who, at the end of the 60's, began to lay the groundwork for what is now known as Participatory Action Research (PAR). As he travelled throughout Colombia -more specifically in the most remote territories of the Caribbean coastal region- and began to research the social reality of the workers, peasants and indigenous communities, he found that "the terms of reference and the categories operating within sociological paradigms imported from Europe and the US, where unsatisfactory" for the Colombian reality (Fals Borda, 1979). His seminal work, *Historia doble de la Costa* -Double history of 'the coast'- (Fals Borda, 1979) is a profound narrative of the social struggles that had been fought in the region in the course of the 20th century. Besides the content itself of the book and the historical situations its informed by, we would also like to highlight the tone and structure of the book: its four volumes recount four different sites and moments of resistance, and in each volume, there are two parallel narratives running simultaneously. The two narratives (or 'double history') are represented on the two pages of each spread of the book: on the left page, there is the academic voice that, even with an evident 'sarcasm' towards European social sciences

research, represents his role as one of the leading academics in the country; on the right page, there is a more informal and narrative voice, representing his engagement as a citizen in investigating reality as a 'common man'. Those four volumes -with their two respective 'tones'- represent a sort of epistemological anarchism, by which Fals Borda, in refusing to study the social reality of communities through frameworks from the social sciences not fitting to understand them, developed novel methods for research and documentation.

In positioning himself, Fals Borda compared his role with a figure adopted in the riverside areas of the San Jorge river, in the caribbean coast region of Colombia: the hombre hicotea -or turtle man (Fals Borda, 1979, p. 27b). The hicotea is a type of turtle that inhabits the wetlands in northern Colombia and Venezuela; he uses such "anthropomorphic representation to illustrate, not only cultural forms of resistance, but also ecological relations" (McRae, 2015, p. 82). By identifying himself as an hombre hicotea, he is recognizing his dual role as an academic from the interior (the man) as well as discovering the territory through its river basins (the turtle); but this identification also attempts to break the modern dichotomy between human beings and nature. Such dichotomy, based on an anthropocentric worldview, would suggest that only humans would be able to research and make sense of the world; instead, acknowledging that a turtle -or any other animal- can better make sense of the territory, becomes a revolutionary and profoundly political statement.

Image 1. Monument for the 'hombre hicotea' in the riverside of San Marcos river. Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Monumento_al_hombre_hicotea.jpg



But his use of figures and metaphors to illustrate his stance on investigating reality went beyond the anthropomorphic figure of the turtle-man: he insisted on introducing himself as a sentipensante being, "who combines reason and love, body and heart, to un-do (himself) from the (de) formations that affect harmony and the possibility of speaking the truth"

(Moncayo, 2009). Sentipensante is a neologism combining the words sentimiento (feeling) and pensamiento (thought) and it presents itself in the form of an adjective. By positioning himself as such, he was not (just) being a romantic, he was transgressing the European standards of social sciences and research, in which (scientific) reason and objectivity are the only valid ways of constructing knowledge. But assuming the role of the sentipensante being -and all of his practice in general- was not oriented 'against' certain form of research in the sciences: instead, he was acknowledging that scientific reasoning was not enough, in order to understand -and transform- the social reality he was intervening in, but it also required his emotions and affects. From a similar perspective in PD research, yet from a different cultural standpoint Yoko Akama reminds us of the Japanese term kokoro, which (greatly simplified) "collapses any separation between mind-spirit-heart to infuse one's being and the world as interrelatedness" (Akama, 2017).

It is important to understand PAR in its historical and geographical context, as it did not emerge in vacuum; it did so as part of a 'wave' of liberatory practices throughout Latin America. Such was the case of Faletto's dependency theory, Freire's popular education, Gutiérrez's theology of liberation, Boal's theatre of the oppressed, Quijano's coloniality of knowledge and Max-Neef's human scale development, amongst many others (Mejía, 2007). But more than explaining in depth each of such movements and practices, we consider important to speak about what they have in common: they all share a critique to the hegemony of the positivist / scientific method on the construction on knowledge and suggest different ways in which we can approach knowledge production; but, most importantly for the present text, all such practices inquired how research can become not only investigative, but transformative. Such was the case of popular pedagogue Paulo Freire, who explored the approach of PAR in the education of the masses, which case will serve as an introduction to explore some ideas of what we have (unoriginally) dubbed knowledge and research otherwise.

In the development of what he called 'popular education' (PE), Paulo Freire strongly advocated for pedagogues to directly intervene in diverse social contexts to trigger processes of learning that would be explicitly transformative. In so doing, Freire insisted on the inseparable rela-

tion between teaching and research; yet he does not refer to the latter from a positivist, scientific, perspective, but considering it a 'search' that follows the constant questioning of things he noticed from the social reality (Freire, 2000). This manifests what PE and PAR have in common, insofar knowledge can only emerge from particular social realities. Furthermore, Freire claimed that he did "research so as to know what [he] does not yet know and to communicate and proclaim what [he] discovers" (Freire, 2000), making it a constant -and never ending- process of searching for what he yet does not know. Such stance on the construction of knowledge (teaching and research), was accompanied and complemented with a position on knowledge itself in relation to practice: "without practice there's no knowledge; at least it's difficult to know without practice" (Horton & Freire, 1990). Freire's statement -and overall practice- represents an application of PAR in PE, as it suggests having to embody and incorporate a set of practices in order to be able to reflect and produce knowledge about it. Building on this insight by Freire we will now make a journey through some core particularities of approaches to knowledge -and research- 'otherwise', as are systematisation of experiences, epistemologies otherwise and situated knowledges from a feminist standpoint.

Within the research approaches contained in the liberatory praxis of PAR, we can highlight the systematizing of experiences (SE) as one that radically transgresses the ways in which scientific knowledge is constructed, documented and communicated. The SE is a sentipensante research practice par excellence, as it seeks "to probe the integrality of the doing, the feeling and the knowing" (Mejía, 2007). "The SE declares itself openly against the trends that dichotomize the knowing subject from the object of knowledge (...), aiming to share it (systematization) with other interested parties and fundamentally to intervene in the transformation of its social spaces" (Clocier, 2014). SE proposes a different research paradigm in social sciences, as it suggests that, instead of having to define the theoretical and conceptual frameworks before conducting any field work (aka. the experience), the latter would precede the first. This strongly resonates with Schön's critique to 'technical rationality' and its "belief that the teaching of scientific principles should precede the development of skills in their application" (Schön, 1983). The proposed shift implies giving special attention to the systematising (or docu-

menting and sharing) of the experience, having previously defined a framework for doing so.

But what is most important for the present text is the following: "SE is a process of social appropriation of learnings and knowledges built through a critical reading of experiences, which is mainly produced by the active and central participation of those who take part in the experience" (Capó et al, 2010). This suggests that, aside from challenging the order of the steps in the method, SE also implies a change in the terms of the research, in which the central goal is not the search for an objective scientific truth, but the validation of the diverse personal voices that have been actively involved in a given social research process. However, it is important to clarify that SE is not the mere description of a series of facts and actions, nor the organizing of data, of a given experience; SE is a "critical reflection with transformative purposes" (Capó et al, 2010) that aims to empower the participants by allowing them to critically reflect on their experiences. SE, therefore, presents itself as a practical example and application of PAR, insofar as it gives researchers and practitioners tools and insights into how to follow social research processes inspired by its principles. But SE also serves as a link and vehicle to explain how PAR represents a fundamental -yet constructive- critique to Western/ Northern science's monopoly on knowledge and research.

In his article 'La sistematización como proceso investigativo; o la búsqueda de la episteme de las prácticas' (Systematizing as a research process; or the search for the episteme of practices), Marco Raul Mejía argues for the importance of legitimising research practices such as systematizing experiences. For doing so, he does a succinct recount of the philosophy of science, and the critiques emerged from many thinkers regarding the stance of seeing science as the only valid source of knowledge. Among many others, Mejía acknowledges the work of Feyerabend and his epistemological anarchism in questioning the validity of the scientific method. This call resonates with Boaventura de Sousa Santos' revising of the limitations of (exclusively) relying on western epistemology when attempting to understand and interpret the world; instead, he advocates for what he calls southern epistemologies, not (only) referring to 'the south' as a geographical reference, but as an epistemological location (2011). We can connect such a stance to Papastergiadis,

who defines "the concept of the South as a loose hemispheric term that refers to a series of places that share similar patterns of colonisation, migration and cultural combinations" (Papastergiadis, 2010). This certainly implies acknowledging the hemispheric location where most of these practices emerge, yet understanding that nowadays it can be considered a third space that can emerge anywhere and define new epistemic locations; locations where other ways of knowing -and building knowledge about- the world, are considered valid and legitimate. Without having made a direct reference to Fals Borda, we could interpret his approach to PAR as a remarkable example of de Sousa Santos's epistemologies of the south in a dual sense: on one side, as a practice to interpret - and build knowledge about- the world emerging in the global south; and also, most importantly, as a practice proposing new epistemic locations from where to approach the world and its knowing.

Image 2.
Strip of
Chalarka's
graphic
novel 'Historia de la
lucha por
la tierra
en la costa
atlántica'
(1985).



In referring back to Fals Borda's approach to research and knowledge building, we consider relevant to mention his collaboration with a local popular artist from the Caribbean coastal region called Ulianov Chalarka, which, in turn, allows us to expand the spectrum of possibilities for documenting and communicating research in the social sciences. Fals Borda and Chalarka worked together to produce a series of 5 comics, which aimed to make more accessible the history of struggles for the land of different provinces in the region. Chalarka's work, entitled *Graphic history of the struggle for land in the atlantic coast* (1985), added visuality to the already narrative-full recounts of PAR (Rappaport, 2018), at the same time as it reinforced the belief that PAR processes were oriented to the popular classes and their participation -and understanding of the processes- was considered fundamental. But the use of visual language, beyond its instrumental and practical function, also resonates with what Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui has dubbed 'sociology of

the image' (2010), a nascent field of social practice and research which both includes visual expressions of communities in its analyses and utilizes graphic language in its products (she does extensive use of 'visual essays'). Cusicanqui's take can also be interpreted as a way of situating knowledge and research, as she calls to consider the different codes and languages present in a given context and moment.

From a similar standpoint, we would like to consider how the approach to knowledges otherwise, can also be articulated through the work of feminist thinkers such as Donna Haraway, who has strongly questioned the hegemony of science on knowledge from a feminist standpoint. Haraway calls for a situatedness of knowledge: "I would like a doctrine of embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects: feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1988). Haraway's claims resonate with de Sousa Santos call for southern epistemologies, insofar as they don't attempt to propose better epistemological or methodological approaches for the construction of knowledge, but to consider that universality claims in scientific knowledge had to be revised. In doing so, she advocates for situating knowledge, which inevitably passes by positioning oneself in the process: "positioning implies responsibility for our enabling practices. It follows that politics and ethics ground struggles for and contests over what may count as rational knowledge" (Haraway, 1988). The situatedness of knowledge and its construction is also one of the main calls made by decolonial thinkers, for whom the dictum 'I am where I think' becomes a guiding principle (Kaethler & Calderón, 2020). Such dictum "presses the imperative to consider the how and what of knowing as 'located' in a way that is inherently political" (Kiem, 2017). Situating knowledge connects us back to SE, which radically questions who can 'own' knowledge and under which circumstances can it be constructed. In echoing Santiago Castro-Gómez, Madina Tlostlanova consolidates such a critique, connecting it to decolonial thinking

"the sensing and thinking subject, which is Western/Northern by default, occupies a delocalized and disembodied vantage point that eliminates other possible ways to produce, transmit and represent knowledge, allowing for a worldview to be built on a rigid essentialist modern/colonial model that hides its locality

and represents itself as universal and natural"
(Tlostlanova, 2017)

However de Sousa Santos, Feyerabend, Haraway, Tlostlanova and many others have posed fundamental critiques to the scientific monopoly on knowledge, it is important to clarify that neither of them intend to propose a better stance or epistemology of knowledge. Instead, in words of de Sousa Santos, what they all do is contribute to an ecology of knowledge, an ecology which "does not refute scientific rationalism but challenges its dominance by portraying it as one of many possible ways of knowing" (Kaethler & Calderón, 2020). Having covered some manifestations of knowledges otherwise, we would like to argue how these have permeated and influenced –either directly or indirectly– several initiatives of design practice and research otherwise.

Continuing our journey, in the passage between knowledges and designs otherwise, we refer back to Tlostlanova, who calls for understanding "modernity/coloniality as a total design" (2017). When approaching this from Willis' (2006) perspective of ontological design (in a reductionist way, summarized by the dictum 'the designed designs'), we understand that the totalising and universalising power structures of modernity (scrutinized, amongst many others, by the authors we have brought to the fore in the previous section) are designed. But Tlostlanova also stresses how design as a field of practice becomes a site of contestation, hence her call for decolonizing design. As an initial contribution for such endeavour, she suggests to consider practices and philosophies such as the Sumak Kawsay, from indigenous populations of the Andes, as an idea "grounded in equity, participative democracy and defense of biodiversity as the necessary conditions of individual and social welfare" (Tlostlanova, 2017). Tlostlanova's scrutiny, by inviting us to critically inquire how conventional design has contributed to establish the total design of modernity, becomes a base for us to explore different manifestations of design practices and research otherwise.

The different manifestations searching for other paradigms of research in the sciences and the way knowledge is constructed and transferred have influenced many academic spheres, as well as different institutional spaces. However with a considerable delay, they have also influenced design practice and research in

recent years. The prevailing (Eurocentric) design paradigm is built upon the very idea of universalisation; take IKEA, a European reference on democratising design in people's everyday life: "IKEA promotes the agenda that one design fits all, regardless of the context" (Kaethler & Calderón, 2020). Such approach might be compared to scientific claims of the objectivity of knowledge which we have made reference to before, evidencing how the struggle for opening space for practices otherwise overflows disciplinary frontiers.

To begin unpacking some of the different approaches, initiatives and networks that have contributed in building alternative readings of design practice and research, we bring to the fore the decolonial notion of 'pluriverse' (which will become even more relevant in the conclusion). This notion, frequently coined by Escobar and other decolonial thinkers, finds the closest attempt to a definition in the Zapatista dictum of 'a world of many worlds', and can be understood in opposition to "modernity's One-World ontology" (Escobar, 2017a). This evidences how such a notion builds upon the different perspectives of knowledge otherwise we previously discussed. We argue then for the consideration of pluriversal designs, in which different manifestations will coexist in deep correlation, resisting totalisation and universalism. We will continue by giving an overview of some examples of what we understand as part of such a constellation of pluriversal designs.

It is precisely in problematizing the universalising tendencies of the One-World design of modernity, that Gutiérrez (2015) suggests the need to consider practices of 'design with other names, or 'designs from the souths' (plural used intentionally): "from an intercultural perspective, we could postulate the designs of the souths as ways of prefiguring artefacts that are left out of the margins of what is considered 'design'" (Calderón & Gutiérrez, 2016). This implies questioning the universality of design represented in brands and companies such as IKEA and the likes, but also taking into consideration other practices that rarely enter within the 'design radar', for being made under different logics than the prevailing ones within the field. Such might be the case of the Bolivian Cholets, the colourful buildings of El Alto commissioned by the new wealthy urban Aymara peoples, which are not recognised as legitimate works of design or architecture by the Bolivian architectural establishment (partly because

they are made by a self-taught architect and partly because they represent a new wealthy class, which is no longer at its service).

Similarly to how decolonial thinkers have sought to pose a challenge to the universality of knowledge legitimised by the colonial matrix of power, in design practice and research there have been recent initiatives attempting to go a similar way in challenging European design standards. Perhaps one of the most visible and representative examples is that of 'decolonising design', a network of art and design researchers and practitioners who articulated themselves as a response to the modern/colonial mark of the traditional design research field. However they acknowledge that "designers have very little to go on in the way of thinking about design's relation to the problem of modernity" (Schultz et al., 2018) -a statement that does not keep them from intervening in the world (of design)- they go in great lengths to critically position themselves in relation to the European design tradition. But they also make sure to clarify that "decolonizing design is not a 'new' nor an additional form of design. but a political project that takes design as such - including its theorization- as both an object and medium of action" (Schultz et al., 2018), which suggests that, instead of proposing a better form of design, they use design as a way to problematize our social reality (including design itself).

Their critical stance resonates with a critique that designer Ruben Pater posed to the 'Refugee Challenge', a design competition proposed by 'What design can do' and Dezeen in 2016. In his article, published digitally on Dezeen the 21st of April 2016, Pater questioned the relevance -or even coherence- of designers participating in a crisis that they have taken part in creating (Pater, 2016). The act of critically positioning oneself -and recognizing the historical role that such position has played in creating the conditions of power present in the world- is one of the central characteristics of decolonial thinking, which decolonising design has rightfully appropriated.

In a similar vein, the platform 'depatriarchise design' was created in 2017 to critically examine "contemporary design through an intersectional feminist perspective" (<https://depatriarchise-design.com/about/>). Yet, similar to Haraway's critiques to scientific knowledge, the stance of depatriarchise design stems from feminist standpoints, but aims to a wider critical reflec-

tion on different forms of oppression and discrimination in the design milieu in particular, and in society -through design- in general:

"Design participates in amplifying the overall experience of oppressed groups (gender-based, sexuality-based, race/ethnicity-based, wealth-based, etc.) and plays an active role in their subordination as users, practitioners, theoreticians, and objects of representation. Structural and symbolic violence work interchangeably within the field in order to perpetuate what we call design patriarchy." (<https://depatriarchise-design.com/about/>)

In representing a 'universal' and 'scientific' truth, hegemonic design becomes a vehicle for sustaining and reinforcing a patriarchal system. Their call for depatriarchalising design is then a call for diversifying (through situating) the voices present in the design world, as well as those who define what is -or can be- considered design.

Heading back to Latin America, it is imperative to talk about Arturo Escobar, one of the most prominent Latin American decolonial thinkers who has explicitly crossed disciplinary borders to the field of design theory and critique. He has done so, in acknowledging that design is not only part, but a protagonist in the "patriarchal capitalist modern/colonial world system" (Escobar, 2017b) and, in doing so, recognising it as a battlefield in the quest for other possible worlds (resonating, in turn, with Tlostlanova, 2017). Escobar proposes a practice of what he dubs 'autonomous design', "a design praxis with communities contributing to their realisation" (Escobar, 2017a). As Calderón, Zuljevic and Huybrechts have argued (2018), autonomous design has to be seen through a southern lens, wherein autonomy requires to be approached from a communal perspective (that is, not autonomy as individuality, but as based in commonality). Moreover, Escobar insists that designers willing to engage in such practices ought to "deeply understand the political project of the movement, and submit design interventions and co-design processes to the same principles to those to which the movement submits his actions", deeply echoing what Fals Borda defended through PAR and reminiscing the figure of the hombre-hicotea, whose knowledge of the territory is based on a corporeal rootedness to it, rather than on rational or scientific reflections.

Perhaps it may be suggested to read these diverse manifestations of 'design practice and research otherwise' as contemporary manifestations of the different avant-garde movements of 20th century Europe; however, such reading might be limited by the contestatory logic of such movements and initiatives. As Schultz et al. argue, we should not see these as new forms of design (2018); instead, we suggest these practices should be seen as structural critiques to the knowledge structures that sustain the hegemonic design practices. Precisely, as Abdulla argues (citing Mignolo), the otherwise as decolonial category asks for re-defining not only the content of 'the conversation', but also the terms under which it is undertaken (2018).

Furthermore, similarly as de Sousa Santos argues for an ecology of knowledges, we might follow that these initiatives, practices and stances on design, rather than representing a new field of practice, attempt to expand the spectrum of what can legitimately be considered as design and the different ways of building knowledge about -and through- it. We might argue that these examples of designs otherwise illustrate the beginning of an ecology of designs, or, as de Sousa Santos himself puts it: 'an ecology of practices' (de Sousa Santos, 2007).

These different approaches of knowledge, research and design otherwise have served to inform and inspire the authors of this article to intervene as designer-researchers in diverse contexts. And we have done so, through what Donald Schön calls "reflection-in-action" (1983), meaning that instead of having to previously define the theoretical concepts and analytical categories, we have established certain practices through which we have been able to build critical reflections. As we have argued before, this deeply resonates with SE, insofar as the practice or experience precedes (or takes place simultaneously to) the theory. In this section we will present a case we have been working on the last years -specifically focusing on two 'actions' we undertook-, in order to explain how different manifestations of knowledge and design otherwise can take shape in practice in a specific location and moment. Our presentation of the case takes place in two parts: first reflecting on how we positioned ourselves and the implications that had and, second, we explain how we have made use of SE as an alternative framework for academic reflection.

We could address many aspects of De Andere

Markt (DAM), the particular case we discuss here, being a long-term PD process that has been developing over the past five years. However, for this particular text, we would like to refer to the experiences that relate to what has been discussed by Fals Borda in relation to PAR in Colombia. Furthermore, we will explain how some of the references of knowledge and research otherwise we have discussed, have helped us in positioning as designer-researchers in a specific case study. The mentioned case partly emerged from the PhD research of one of the authors of this article, which has been exploring the participatory potential of interventions. That being said, we understand interventions as the ways designers enter the public realm (usually in a context not their own), and acknowledge the importance of "widening the field of [artistic] intervention by intervening directly in a multiplicity of social spaces in order to oppose the program of total social mobilization of capitalism" (Mouffe, 2010). At first sight, intervening in a given context might seem at odds with the principles of PAR yet, as Freire argues, "though we know that things can get worse, we also know that we are able to intervene to improve them" (Freire, 2000). Intervening becomes, then, an ethico-political imperative, and the question becomes then "how do you position yourself within such an intervention?".

In trying to answer this question, we first have to acknowledge that as designer-researchers we were informed and inspired by PAR. When we intervened in different contexts we have done so not with the lens of a scientist looking at an object of study, but assuming the role of an active participant who, in researching the context, simultaneously transforms it (Fals Borda, 1979). Such was the case when we began to work in Genk, where we immersed in the daily life of the city, starting from a concern with the ways in which many actors were dealing with a major work crisis -the recent closure of one the greatest employers in the region- and the effects this might have on its population and the (further) development of the workspaces, services and tools, as well as the larger urban landscape. The main concern was that there was little public debate taking place, regarding how to deal with this crisis of work in the city and how -and with whom- a meaningful and sustainable transformation of the work landscape could take form. We didn't have any prefigured ideas of what was to be done about this concern, allowing for the design interventions that have emerged from this concern, to have

done so from the interactions with the community in context. This approach was influenced by the references of research and knowledge otherwise, insofar as we have avoided defining any prior theoretical concepts that, in turn, have emerged through reflection-in-action.

Governments, organisations and inhabitants were confronted with a lack of clear answers in developing a strategy for the future of work in their city. Therefore, our first action for intervening in the city consisted of mapping the capabilities of the inhabitants, but also of local organisations, companies and policy makers. For doing so, we made use of a DIY-printing press as a way of starting a first conversation with them about work in the city based on their perspectives and strengths (for a more thorough discussion on the role of capabilities in this project, read Huybrechts, Dreessen & Hagenaaers, 2018). This intervention addressed the re-localising of production and deskilling of labour that had heavily impacted Genk in the past years. By visualising specific, situated, knowledges and capabilities, we were countering the ruling narrative that a series of 'experts' in power (being them researchers or policy makers) have the capability to find a solution on their own. Instead, we contributed to construct a narrative that suggested that if there were solutions (plural used intentionally) to the crisis, they would emerge from the articulation of the many capabilities of the people and organisations already living and working in -and governing- the city. Such approach is explicitly a political one, as we decide to bring to the fore voices of people who have not been taken into account before and set up the conditions of possibility for them to articulate diverse (design) projects and initiatives. This was built upon our understanding of Rancière's notion of politics as "rendering visible what had not been, and making heard as speakers those who had been perceived as mere noisy animals" (Rancière, 2009). At the same time, this was implicitly responding to the calls of 'decolo-

nising design' and 'depatriarchise design', insofar as we tried to articulate the positions of people and organisations who have historically been -consciously or not - marginalized and oppressed by the colonial matrix of power (migrants, unemployed, youngsters, women, etc.) in the city's design processes and spaces.

The following intervention consisted in setting up a living lab in Winterslag, one of the city's neighbourhoods, in order to give continuity to the process of mapping and visualising these diverse capabilities in a physical, more permanent, space. Although the living lab methodology has an important history and trajectory in Scandinavian PD, we would like instead to bring to the fore how such approach was also influenced by the different manifestations of design otherwise we have cited. Setting up the living lab required us to immerse in the everyday life of the community, which, in turn, allowed us to better grasp what were their concerns but also their dreams and capabilities to act upon these. Such is a central quality of Escobar's notion of autonomous design -in turn deeply inspired by Fals Borda's PAR approach-, by which the only way of understanding and being able to actively intervene in a community, you have to share the spaces of their everyday life (Escobar, 2017b); in other words, you have to *sentipensar* with them. But both interventions also contributed to give shape to the 'otherwise', as it helped to change the terms of the conversation. By understanding the loss of workplaces as the central concern among most actors, we suggested, instead of speaking about jobs and access to them (as most were doing and was perhaps expected), to openly and critically discuss the nature of work and its changing character in the transition the city was going through.

Image 3. Portrait of Ann Vanderheyden with the poster visibilising her skill: 'finding differences'. Photo by Boume-diene Belbachir.



Image 4. Photo of the living lab's shopfront and the street where it was located.

Even if setting up a living lab implies -and supports- building strong relations over time, we considered it insufficient as a platform for articulating the many voices we encountered during our research process and to give them a prominent place in the future development

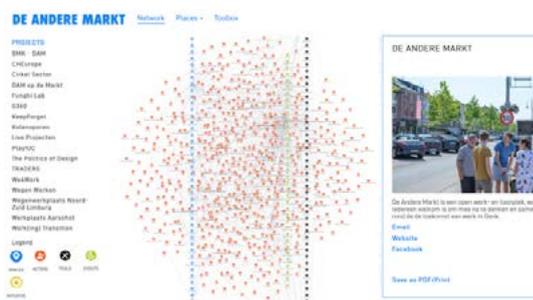
of the city and its community. For that reason, we developed a tool to visualise the voices and their multiple relations in the city, and which we had identified throughout our different interventions. The tool –which we called ‘the relational network tool’ (RNT)- is a website (<https://deanderemarkt.be>) that maps five different categories of nodes –actors, spaces, tools, events and initiatives- and the relations between them. The development of the RNT has several goals: on one hand, visualising the actors we worked with –and their capabilities situated and related to specific sites- in the city, as a documentation that was publicly accessible. On the other hand, the RNT has aimed to foster autonomous processes, by means of giving backoffice access to different actors, groups and community leaders we collaborate with, through which they can map their own interventions and the networks of actors that relate to them. From an outward perspective, the RNT has helped to represent Genk to the rest of the world, based on the strength of its relations and its potential for building new work environments and relations in the city, rather than for its problems. The RNT as a tool for representation also encourages and inspires other places to appropriate such pluriversal (urban) design practices. It is also important to note that this network tool is in continuous change, on the level of positioning, structures, content or actors that maintain it, and based on the new interventions that take place. In that sense, the RNT does not represent a modernist ‘total design’ but aspires to be a pluriversal representation of an ‘ecology of designs’.

process, or from any other approach we have presented. However, we see this as an example of countering hegemonic PD endeavours, which have become widespread since participation has become a key neoliberal strategy for many governments, as we have illustrated in the beginning of this article. Pluriversality became then a counter-hegemonic strategy in our interventions, taking shape in our positioning as designer-researchers when framing our different actions, but also in the ways of documenting and sharing the process and reflections of our research.

This careful disclosing of radical interdependence was sometimes particularly challenging as local inhabitants, policy makers and companies were often sceptical of the time it took to gather different perspectives and bring them together in new pluriversal constellations. Each intervention took several months (or in short projects several weeks) before the insights from this exploration surfaced, both on the level of content, visuals and social networks. This requires conscious and careful positioning of researchers, supported by a sensible systematisation of experiences.

Reflecting back on how PAR has served as a central influence on the ways in which we –as design researchers- have entered an unfamiliar public realm in close relation to the inhabitants of the city, we see SE has had an essential role in exploring ways of making critical reflections relevant for academic (and non-academic) contexts. We have written several texts about DAM, which –even if some may be written in academic and scientific language (such as the present text)- have been constructed based on critically reflecting and problematizing our own experiences. In some cases, by using formats as field-diaries or chronicles, we have been able to valorise our experiences and those of other participants of the project by reflecting on the process and producing valuable ideas for the design practice and research field. Moreover, as Rappaport argues, visual (graphic) and oral narratives are central to PAR practices, which see themselves enriched by the tones and formats of disseminating knowledge that privilege reaching the masses (Rappaport, 2018). The challenge to find alternative ways of socialising and disseminating knowledge, becomes particularly relevant in institutionalised academic spaces –such as conferences- where contributions as the present text will have the obligation to give example in its exploration; that is, even

Image 5. Snapshot of the relational network tool. <http://deanderemarkt.be>



Furthermore, we see this as an example of how ‘northern’ PD practices –such as the case we present- can be informed and inspired by other ways of thinking and doing. In this case, the development of the RNT was heavily influenced by Escobar’s notion of ‘radical interdependence’ (2017a), by which all actors –both living and non-living- are deeply interconnected between them. It would be quite a stretch to label the process we have made as a Latin American PAR

being an academic article to be presented in an institutionalised space, its presentation will explore other ways of sharing knowledge, such as visuality and other narrative paths.

It now also seems important to disclose our positions as authors of this text, in relation to the topic and overall argument we have made: one of the authors is a Colombian designer, researcher and educator who co-founded DAM as part of his PhD trajectory on interventionist practices; moreover, he had a 7-year trajectory in Europe, wherein he always asked himself how his position as a Latin American and Colombian influenced the way in which he intervened and operated in diverse European contexts. The other author is a Belgian researcher and practitioner, with extensive experience in participatory design processes who co-founded DAM in order to engage in a long-term project with a city with which she had worked in numerous short-term projects. Such combination of profiles and positions makes manifest our interest in fostering articulations and links between southern approaches to participation in the social sciences and northern manifestations of participatory design, at the same time that presents DAM as a site where such connections could be made.

In her paper *On decolonizing design*, after laying bare the stakes and stressing the urgency of decolonizing design practice, and suggesting some alternative readings from different epistemologies and ontologies, Tlostlanova (2017) argues that participation (in design) is not enough. However, in that conclusion is also made clear that the notion of participation she alludes to is grounded in an exclusively Northern understanding of the term. That being said, it is only fair to acknowledge that participation has been a central topic in the agendas of contemporary design (see Huybrechts, 2014), art (see Bishop, 2012) and architecture (see Miessen, 2010) practices and research in the last decade. Moreover, as we briefly described in the introduction, initiatives of infusing the design process with participatory dynamics as political endeavours were given form to in 1970's Scandinavian countries, later expanding throughout Europe and the global north.

Yet the statements by Tlostlanova and the whole discussion we had on pluriversal designs, challenges us to further unravel and debate the political nature of such participatory endeavours. For instance, it is important

to note that PD did not always succeed to pose a fundamental challenge to the field of design and how it was being practiced. This, due to the fact that the role of design and designers in supporting a given and established social order was not always fully questioned beyond including workers' -and later other disenfranchised groups'- voices in the design process. PD practitioners could have perhaps gone much further in inquiring their interconnections with the world they work in through asking the following questions: How do the products of the work of factory-workers -or other actors PD works with- create situations of inequality, racism or coloniality? How do they affect the natural world and non-human actors? How has PD work served as a token for designers to whitewash the image of their clients and projects by adding a 'social' tone? Such questions bring to the fore the lengths that PD can still explore in challenging itself and design practice in general.

However, in the same text where she declares the insufficiency of participation, Tlostlanova (echoing other discussed authors in this article) also give us some hints of an alternative 'reading', which can in fact give form to these pluriversal approaches to participatory design. She suggests that the decolonial notion of pluriverse -which we have roughly outlined before- can be used as a "positive ontology" for design (Tlostlanova, 2017) with which she opens the space for considering other forms of participation, or participation otherwise. Citing Ingold (2011), in one of his constructions of the notion of pluriverse, Escobar argues that we cannot marginalise ourselves as sole observers of the world. Instead, we need to understand that we are active participants in the world's construction (Escobar, 2018); says Ingold: "participation is not opposed to observation but is a condition for it, just as light is a condition for seeing things, sound for hearing them, and feeling for touching them" (Ingold, 2011). Participation is to immersion, what observation is to research; our conscious -and critical- intervention and participation in the building of worlds is an example of 'pluriversal politics' (Escobar, 2018).

Escobar goes on to argue that "we cannot exit the crises with the categories of the world that created the crises (development, growth, markets, competitiveness, individual, etc.)" (2018). Reflecting on what we discussed before, we can even consider 'participation' as other of such categories that are easily being tokenized by the powers of the one-world ontology. Instead

of ruling that we should abandon altogether any pretensions of participation, we believe that we should challenge ourselves as designers-researchers to understand the political nature of participation, and that this comes about by seeing it through a lens of pluriversal politics –aimed at “creating the conditions of possibility for the emergence of the pluriverse, other ways of making worlds” (Escobar, 2018). It is precisely in these pluriversal politics that we believe there is a seed of participation and PD otherwise that can be able to take part in engaging with the challenges of our times. Following Abdulla’s proposal of seeing the ‘otherwise’ as a decolonial category for ‘changing the terms of the conversation’, the call is not –only- to ask what kind of participation should we practice or foster. It also challenges us as PD researchers to assess if –and how- our work is engaging with other ways of world-making, by taking into account unheard voices and contributing to the articulation of those voices (human and not-human) in their own right, in relation to each other and to us as designers.

With the PDC conference being hosted for the first time in Colombia and Latin America, we refer back the question we posed in the introduction: what can PD, with its Scandinavian roots and further ‘Northern’ expressions, learn from the history and experiences in participation in the region? Even though we have not –and cannot- give an absolute answer to that question, we consider the present text contributes to the debate (1) by presenting an overview on knowledges and designs ‘otherwise’, through which we gained insights in pluriversal ways of approaching research and design; and (2) by critically reflecting on our learnings of a northern European design project (that is always framed through particular notions, understandings and expectations of PD) via DAM. This process of carefully disclosing and giving form to radical interdependence through a case study on work in the city, that slowly took shape in an ecology of designs, challenged us as researchers to provide people insight and confidence in this process. And for doing so, we found that by explicitly positioning ourselves as designer-researchers and exploring the potential of SE in design practice (including the RNT in such process), we could better support the transformative intentions of the local community.

In more general terms, we hope that the present text might contribute to advance in the (necessary!) process of inspiring PD -in particular- and

the field of design -in general- with the political and emancipatory spirit of Colombian PAR and Latin American decolonial approaches. We believe that this spirit benefits the particular ways in which human and non-human actors are involved in our processes and articulates and reasserts our commitment to their transformations.

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BACK TO MAP

CASES



"To take from literature that part which is a living bridge from man to man, and which the treatise or the essay will permit only among specialists. A narrative that will not be a pretext for the transmission of a 'message' (there is no message, only messengers, and that is the message, just as love is the one who loves); a narrative that will act as a coagulant of experiences, as a catalyst of confused and badly understood notions, which first off will cut into the one who is writing it, for which reason it will have to be written as an antinovel, because every closed order will systematically leave outside those announcements that can make messengers out of us, bring us to our own limits from which we are so far removed, while being face to face with them."

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«My hip hurts for folding too much»

- * An earlier version –and originally written in Spanish– of this text, was presented at the 1st edition of the Seminar ‘Diseño, Sociedades Justas y Políticas de la Vida’ (Design, just societies and politics of life), which took place the 29th of August of 2018 at the Jorge Tadeo Lozano University of Bogotá (Colombia).

It's hard to believe, but I have some years on my back; it is hard to prove, as I lost my ID, but I have seen a couple of generations go by. However, I have to admit that what I have lived and seen in the last four years has been particularly bizarre. I don't know, put yourselves in my shoes: I was used to being around families and children, only going out on the weekends and -most specifically- where I could commute by myself. All that changed in September 2014.

That year I went to Genk, a small city in the east of Flanders, one of the regions of Belgium. Before I lived in another Flemish city called Ghent, which might make you think that the change was not that 'abrupt'; however -with the greatest humility that characterizes me- I can confirm you are absolutely wrong. Ghent is a bourgeois city that, even if it has had its fair dose of social struggles (particularly at the beginning of the 20th century), they have mostly been linked to student and intellectual circles; relocating to Genk, then, was like moving to another continent and let me explain to you why. As I was telling you, Genk is a city located in the east of Flanders; it was initially constituted around the 'garden cities' (cités in Flemish) built around the three coal mines opened since the beginning of the 1900's, and following the trend of many cities of the Meuse-Rihn Euregion , rich in underground coal deposits. The opening of the coal mines preceded a series of migratory waves from the impoverished countries of southern Europe (Greece, Italy and Spain), whose governments made treaties with those of northern Europe (Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany and England) to send people to work on the mines. That movement of workers makes me think of that which I myself had to pass through four years ago (even if within the

- 1 **The Meuse-Rihn Euroregion is a transnational cooperation structure formed by provinces and regions of Belgium (Liège and Limburg), The Netherlands (southern Dutch Limburg) and Germany (Region of Aachen). It has been historically rich on coal and has an important industrial heritage.**

same country), to fulfill a specific task. However, in my case, I did not have deep roots in a specific place, while the workers migrating to Genk were uprooted from their territories to work on the mines. Despite the difference between our situations and positions, we have shared one thing, though: we were all a pliable workforce who has had to bend and adapt to different situations. Have you ever been forced to relocate to fulfill a specific task?

Anyway, beyond the questionable decisions of the early XX century European governments, I highlight the aforementioned migratory waves to show the essential difference between Genk and (most of) the rest of Flemish cities, which are agricultural-based and of a Flemish identity base. Genk, instead, continued to grow through the mix of cultures, thanks to subsequent migratory fluxes from the east of Europe (the new south), as well as from Turkey and Morocco. Around the 1960's, the city was recognised as an important economic player in the region, with a strong identity as a working-class and multicultural city. However, that same decade started to see the closures of the mines across the region, motivated by the plummeting in the price of coal, but especially the growing number of mine workers who were getting tired of bending, and who did not accept so easily the inhumane conditions of the mines for low wages. Having an energetic network dependent on coal, countries like Belgium began externalizing its operation and extraction to countries with looser regulations and more pliable workforces (like Colombia). Anticipating the inevitable closing of the mines, the local government managed to attract General Motors to open a Ford-vehicles assembly plant in 1968. This, as you might imagine, reinforced the working class identity of the city, which began a transi-

- 2 **Martinello (2013) explains how, after WWII, Belgium began negotiating directly with (Southern or Eastern European) States to provide workers for the mines, given that -contrary to France or the UK- they did not 'recruit' a colonial workforce. That is how Belgium signed "bilateral immigration agreements with Italy in 1946, Spain in 1956, Greece in 1957, Morocco and Turkey in 1964, Tunisia in 1969, and Algeria and Yugoslavia in 1970" (Martinello, 2013).**

tion of a dependency in the primary industry of coal-extraction to the secondary industry of manufacturing. But, more than that, in a city already suffering from an urban sprawl, this contributed to impose an urbanisation and development model centred around the vehicle ; this, as you might be able to imagine, didn't open much space for actors as myself. Ah, until now I had not referred to myself as an actor, had I? Well, that I precisely learnt it in these last years, with other actors with whom I worked and about whom I will tell you about. 3

As I was telling you, the Ford factory deepened the identification of the citizens around a working-class identity. This reality started to be seriously challenged by the end of the 60's, with the closure of one of the mines of the city, and reached its most critical point in 1988, with the closure of the last mine that had remained open. If well the Ford factory managed to re-employ an important number of workers who had been laid-off from the mines, the impact on the city's economy was nevertheless immense and social protests followed suit. Reading what I am telling you, you might think that I witnessed first hand one of such moments and situations when, in fact, I only arrived in the city 26 years later; it is just that the infrastructures of the industrial heritage are still standing (and occupied for uses other than the original) and it is inevitable to be in Genk without being in contact with its industrious past. The year I arrived in the city (2014) was another convulsed time of transition: a few months after my arrival, more specifically the 18th of December, I heard the call for the last work shift at the Ford factory , after two years of progressively slowing down its operations. I was there and witnessed how thousands of people, of all ages, origins, genders and classes, took to the streets 4

3 To illustrate the ontological design dictum 'the designed designs', Tony Fry uses the automobile and the innumerable and unexpected ways it has come to define our ways of life today. Defining as a starting point the invention of the combustion engine by Karl Benz in 1885/86, Fry goes on to argue that "he would have had very little idea of what his creation would actually cause to come into being over time, and with what designing consequences" (2008). Many of the unforeseen consequences of the vehicle have been evident in Genk, from the urban arrangement based on the 'sprawl' and connected via roads, to the 9-to-5 organisation of worklife.

4 The 18th of December of 2014 at 12:30h marked the end of an era for Genk, as the last shift of the Ford factory was announced, and thousands of citizens from the city and province took to the streets to make noise with what they had at hand (whistles, pots and pans, bells, etc.). The moment, dubbed De Luidste Post ('the loudest shift'), was advertised as a celebration, but the atmosphere was also grim, as many workers were facing imminent layoffs, early retirement or transfer to another country. News reported on: https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2014/12/18/genk_neemt_afscheid_vanfordmetdeluidstepost-1-2184172/

to join the bell with its voices and the objects they had with them (mainly casseroles). The sound represented the end of an era, with the definitive closure of the Ford factory and the transferring of its operations to Valencia where, once again, the workforce is more pliable. Having arrived that year, the history of the city -and specially this situation- marked what would be my role in the following years.

Even as I have similar characteristics to the actors of the city (especially those of Ford factory), I function under an absolutely different logic . Having in mind such reality, in order to fulfill the task I was commended in Genk, implied sensibly integrating in the context, instead of altering in a disruptive manner the internal workings of the city. That is how I started to visit different neighbourhoods of the city -with slight physical adaptations to when I had arrived- and meet different people. In such visits, we would ask people about their other skills -those that few people know they have and they are rarely vocal about- aiming to understand the collective intelligences present in the city. Well, to be fair, saying 'we', is just a way of speaking, as I didn't speak the same language of the people with whom we interacted; therefore, my task became that of materializing and visualizing the conversations. One such case of someone we interacted with was Katrien Dreessen, a researcher at the local arts school (LUCA School of Arts); and she was not any actor, but one of my closest collaborators, with whom I worked intensively in these last years. When we spoke with her, she told us that one of her greatest (other) skills was her ability to chit-chat with anyone. That day I learnt that there is an expression in Flemish to communicate such skill: koetjes en kalfjes, which means cows and calves.

- 5 Ivan Illich also scrutinised the lifestyle and far reaching consequences that the automobile has had presenting, in contrast, the bicycle as what he calls a 'convivial tool'. While the automobile causes thousands of deaths (directly via accidents and indirectly through pollution), wastes gasoline and occupies an unnecessary amount of space, bicycles are human-powered devices that can only move at a reasonable and humane speed (Illich, 1973).

It was also she, who made me understand that I do have agency, something around which I had never reflected upon: one day, while working at our lab (because yes, I guess I can call it our lab, being part of the network), she explained Liesbeth -another of my closest collaborators- that all actors (be them human or non-human) have agency as long as they are part of a network and leave a trace that has consequences. Now that I mention Liesbeth, it's worth mentioning what she considered her other skill and which she shared with us during a conversation: 'mensen samen brengen', which means to bring people together, build connections. After a few years working with her, I can definitely see that! Just as we did with Katrien and Liesbeth, we interacted with several dozens of citizens of Genk. In the process, at the same time as we began to understand -and map- the skills present in the city, we were sensibly introducing ourselves to the community. Moreover, this process supported the weaving of a network of actors, tools and places.

That process lasted around two years, driving to the different neighbourhoods of the city, meeting and getting to know its inhabitants, visibilising their skills and even articulating them to kick-start initiatives. One of such initiatives -in which in fact we collaborated with actors similar to myself- was Funghi Lab, and for which different actors with whom we had interacted, articulated and collectively expressed their intention to experiment with the production of mushrooms out of leftovers and local resources. The main substrate employed for this process was the leftover coffee from the several coffee shops in the area around our lab, given that the neighbourhood where it is located has an important italian influence. This might be perceived as an irrelevant fact, but we

- 6 **The notion that objects are actors (or actants) that have an agency within a network was first introduced by what is known in the social sciences as actor-network theory (ANT). This approach, extensively developed by Bruno Latour, argues for understanding the social as being in constant construction by the various actors (both human and non-human) comprising a network (2005). Dreessen et al. (2015) take up this premise in calling for the importance of considering objects' agency within participatory design processes, yet highlight the importance of “making them talk”, so as to be more explicit in what is their impact on other actors and role on the overall network.**

see it as evidencing how history and traditions have influenced the decisions we have made in the city: would it have been elsewhere, we would have not had the main resource. And what was my role in this project? Well, the same I had had until now: support the process of visibilising the skills and roles that the different actors were taking regarding the project. And, as I had told you, we collaborated with actors similar to myself, as there was one who supported the process of collecting the coffee leftovers as well as the rest of resources that we used in the process. The process of interacting and engaging in conversations with several people across the city, visualising their skills and building networks has drawn plenty of attention, to the point that I have been invited to other processes in Genk and other cities to work on similar initiatives. Well, to say ‘I have been invited’ is an overstatement, as I haven’t had much agency to controvert such decisions . Anyhow, that has allowed (or forced?) me to visit and work in other neighbourhoods of the city and other cities of Flanders, where I have commuted by train, van and even by my own means; but in most cases, I have had to bend over and over again.

Going back to FunghiLab, I would like to talk about one last actor with whom I collaborated extensively during the last years. Just as myself, he came to Genk in 2014 from another city -another country, even! He also didn’t speak the local language, yet together we managed to design ways of communicating and interacting with locals. He did manage to learn a bit of the language, though; me, given my physical limitations, only managed to express myself through written language. He studied industrial design and after social design, and that background might explain why we have built such a close and special

- 7 In pushing forward the need for making objects talk, Latour calls having them “offer descriptions of themselves, to produce scripts of what they are making others—humans or non-humans—do” (2005). This is a crucial aspect when considering how an object can ‘travel’ to different contexts and continue to have agency within a wider network, and was evidenced in how the cargo-bike went in different contexts in interaction with people other than us (researchers from DAM). Such was the case when a local NGO, asked us to borrow the bike for an activity they were organising called ‘Talent Day’; or when it was used as a mobile proxy to the participatory architecture project The Ark; or when it travelled to Mechelen (another Flemish city), to take part of the project We4Work. In all such cases, even if it might have been used slightly differently each time, the object had an embedded script that suggested the ways of interacting with it.

relation. His name is Pablo Calderón Salazar, and together we have compensated our limitations and deficiencies.

But please, now that you might better understand who I am, avoid seeing me as an archaeological object, as I feel in such cases I would be stripped of the agency I might be able to have and exercise. I would also like to ask you to remove your designer-artist glasses, and avoid judging me for how I look: I didn't come to Genk to make an aesthetic or functional statement (moreover, you may make Pablo accountable for that, as he is the main responsible for me looking and functioning as I do). I would rather be seen through what Tony Fry calls ontological design, and which he exemplifies through the dictum ‘how the designed designs’, as I believe that since my arrival to Genk and my adaptation process, we have designed new ways of being in the city.



- 8 This text is built upon the basis of Latour's actor-network theory, ANT (2005), insofar as it acknowledges the agency of the cargo bike / printing press in the trajectory of De Andere Markt by -quite literally- giving it a voice. However, I find it important to discuss other theoretical standpoints (more aligned with the rest of the dissertation), which put into question the ideas put forward by Latour. Ingold problematizes ANT by countering the figure of the spider: “whereas ANT conceives of the world as an assemblage of heterogeneous bits and pieces, SPIDER's world is a tangle of threads and pathways; not a network but a meshwork” (Ingold, 2011). This argument certainly puts into question the figure of the network -presenting in contrast that of the meshwork-, but also of the actor, which ceases to be an entity with agency of its own and instead becomes a force within the interwoven lines of the meshwork. Szaniecki further discusses this argument by stating that a meshwork “implies a common and continuous materiality” present within its interwoven lines (2018). Another discussion point on ANT is the dichotomy proposed between human and non-human actors; even if presented in an inclusive manner, this categorisation is problematic on multiple counts. On one side, we can see such division as an example of the ‘rationalist dualism’ extensively scrutinised by Escobar, wherein we separate “nature from culture, us from them, object from subject or mind from body” (2017). Similarly, de la Cadena questions the use of non-human, by asking “what if the non-human rejected the category of non-human?”, with the example of “Ausangate, which is a mountain --and not only”, putting forward the notion of “earth being”; instead, she proposes the notion of “other than human” (2020). Lastly,

For all that I have told you -and much that I have omitted-, I believe that I have aged more in the last four years than I had in the rest of my life. After so much hassle, so much movement from one side to another, so much bending and plying to adapt to different situations and travel to different places, can you understand why my hip hurts?

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García Gutiérrez questions how, “in certain dichotomies, the subordinate element is presented dismissively as a negation of the subordinating instance that initializes the pair” (2014), as in human / non-human, and which evidences an anthropocentric worldview.

- 9 The notion of ‘ontological design’ can serve as a means to assess the impact that certain objects (e.g. the vehicle or the telephone) have had on our ways of life, beyond the initial intentions of the designer (Fry, 2008). However, it is a notion that can also support in thinking about -and conceiving- alternative (re-directive) design practices, insofar as it demands the designer(s) to think beyond their immediate interventions and critically assess how these will trigger a series of reactions in a given context through time (Escobar, 2017). Within our experience with De Andere Markt, in general, and the cargo bike / printing press, in particular, we have strived for triggering and unleashing new ways of thinking about –and acting upon- the changing work landscape in the city. Moreover, the different uses and appropriations that diverse organizations and people have made of the bike and living lab, manifest a will for a design and research process that goes beyond the spectacularity of a short-term intervention. This progressive –and sometimes unexpected- unleashing of different reactions can be considered as sensitive to an ontological design perspective.

Case 1

“My hip hurts for folding too much”

De Andere Markt: a logbook

- * An earlier and shorter version of this text was included in the book 'Trading Places: practices of public participation in art and design'.

2015

Wednesday 28th of October

"How did I ever get into this?" I thought while riding our heavy cargo bike, with the wind and rain against my face, and as I repeated in my head a few sentences in Flemish to be able to communicate what our project is about. Some 20 minutes before, we had prepared all materials at DAM's shop front for making an intervention at the public library, in the centre of Genk. Wednesdays are days when youngsters are hanging-out in the library after school, a good reason why we chose to go there today. We were joined by Boumediene (Boumie), a young photographer -and student at LUCA- who grew up in the city and is connected to the local scene. The sign attached to the bike has a direct and seemingly easy question ("What are your other skills?"), yet we understand the difficulty for people when confronted with it. It is not common to be asked what our skills are, let alone what our 'other skills' are. As much as the question -and the conversations triggered by it- are somewhat confronting, the intervention perhaps would not qualify as disrupting, as it does not generate a drastic interruption in public space. This makes me wonder if it is still relevant for us to speak in terms of 'intervention'.

Wednesday 4th of November

Today the train from Brussels (where I live) was late. As we are still two keys short for the group that works in DAM on a weekly basis, one of my colleagues could not access the space in the morning. When I arrived, Teodora had been waiting for 20 minutes in the cold. In these cases I feel very self-conscious of my 'outsider' position, and question the ethics of such role: what are the implications of engaging in a long-term project based on 'presence', yet living 92km away? Would it change anything if I lived in Genk or a neighbouring city?

- 0 De Andere Markt (DAM) is a living lab initiated by researchers of LUCA School of Arts (campus C-mine) and Hasselt University, where we collectively explore the future of work in Genk. It is an open work and exhibition space freely accessible to all citizens of Genk from Tuesday through Friday, from 10am to 4pm. The core team who founded DAM, and work there on a weekly basis, is composed by Liesbeth Huybrechts and Teodora Constantinescu (Hasselt University), and Katrien Dreessen and Pablo Calderón Salazar (LUCA School of Arts).
- 1 Complementing the physical location, we organize interventions in public spaces of the city, and where we invite people (passers-by) to make a poster describing their skill, which they further elaborate on in a short video statement. After that, Boumie takes a portrait of the person holding their skill-poster, making a clear association between the person and their skills. These interventions work as a way of 'opening up' the debate on 'work in Genk'. All the content generated (portraits, videos, etc.) is uploaded in our blog and Facebook page, making people -and their skills- visible to the community.



Image 1.
Intervention
Genk city
centre.
Photos by
Boumediene
Belbachir

Friday 6th of November

Routine day at DAM. I arrived at 10:05, turned on the light and the heating, prepared some coffee and organized the space to work. These actions -which I perform upon my arrival to DAM- comprise a kind of choreography and have become my daily routine. We normally work close to the window, which allows any passer-by to see us through the glass. When looking for a space, our main criteria was to have windows looking to the street, becoming visible to the locals; but also establishing a sort of intervention in the everyday life of the neighbourhood by taking the form of a shop. Some people read our sign with certain curiosity and others with scepticism, yet nobody dared to come in, which makes me question if 'transparency' in our working space is enough of a strategy to engage people.

2

Friday 13th of November

Very busy week at DAM. The second international TRADERS Autumn School took place, with over 40 researchers and practitioners coming to the neighbourhood of Winterslag, home to one of the three coal-mines around which Genk was initially conceived and where DAM is located. The theme of the week is aligned with that of DAM, namely 'work', stemming from the city's changing work situation. During the week I led a working table on the topic of 'interventions', which was joined by six other researchers and practitioners. In a conversation about the project, I expressed what I felt as an ethical conflict between doing a project based on 'presence' yet living in another city, to which one of the participants responded: "I don't see the conflict; in fact I think it is important your position as an outsider! The energy you bring to this project has to come from somewhere". This made me understand the value of the outsider position.

3

4

- 2 One of the core aspects of my research lies in understanding two types of interventions: ephemeral (hit-and-run) and permanent (long-term). The shop front represents an intervention of the second kind, as it attempts to dwell in the assemblages of the daily life of the neighbourhood, establishing a place that might eventually become part of the community.
- 3 Genk started to grow in the beginning of the 20th century around three coalmines (Winterslag, Waterschei and Zwartberg), which were the economic base of the city until the 1960's, when a large manufacturing plant of Ford was established in the city. The later produced 6.000 direct -and other 6.000 indirect- jobs until its closure on December 2014. This put the city in a -literally- post-Fordist condition (of work and labour) and backdropped the creation of De Andere Markt and the framing of the TRADERS Autumn School 2016.



Image 2. Living lab's shopfront window.

- 4 In *The Nightmare of Participation*, Markus Miessen (2010) proposes three roles that might contribute to situations of participation: the 'crossbench practitioner', the 'uninvited outsider' and the 'unwilling participant'. Referencing Edward Said's *Representations of the In-*

Tuesday 17th of November

Today there was little interaction at DAM. So much silence seems strange after such a busy last week. Days like today are plentiful, in which no one comes in besides (one of) us, which leads me to ask myself if there is a point for us to be here every day. But DAM is a space for possibilities, where people can imagine together a different future and to create such scenario it is important for us to simply be 'present': be here when somebody might want to come. That is why we have regular 'opening hours' and at least one of us is there, even when nothing is planned .

5

Thursday 19th of November

We received the visit of Gianluca Nobile (Don Luca), a local rapper and youth worker who we recently contacted to explore future collaborations; he expressed his interest in exploring with us strategies for re-positioning the 'Genkse Hip-Hop' (Hip-Hop from Genk) in Flanders and Belgium. Besides the interventions we make in the different neighbourhoods of Genk to reach out, we also contact specific people (such as Gianluca), who we invite to explore potential collaborations. The engagement of such key local players is essential for us to build a local network, which sets to become our greatest asset. Still, such process (of building a resilient local network) seems to be rather slow and something that cannot be rushed, which gives me a sense of anxiety; as much as I repeat to myself that these things take time, my designer's instinct to see immediate visible outcomes inevitably takes a toll on me.

Wednesday 25th of November

When I arrived in Genk today, instead of biking straight to DAM as I usually do, I went to the city hall, where we had one of our bi-monthly meetings to discuss about the advances of the project . Being in partnership with the municipality puts us in a privileged position, as we have

6

tellectual, Miessen argued for the importance of the intellectual as outsider, for he /she is alien of the special interests which are represented on the inside. Likewise, in this project I understand the power that I, as an outsider, can bring by having an external 'perspective' on the context and have less specific interests at stake that bias my decisions (e.g. I am not connected to any local party, organization, etc. and my relation to the Arts School is temporary).

- 5 The definition of 'prefigurative interventions' by Andrew Boyd (2012) resonates with our intention to create a space for possibilities: "[they] are direct actions sited at the point of assumption — where beliefs are made and unmade, and the limits of the possible can be stretched". DAM stands close to this approach, as it attempts to create a space for imagining and collaboratively building alternative possible futures.
- 6 The rent and services of the shop front are financed for two years by the city administration under the department of Participation; some costs of the interventions are also sponsored by the city in the context of a yearly program called 'G360'.

a direct connection with decision-makers and leverage to support DAM's network; but this same relation constantly jeopardizes our independence and grassroots nature. This condition demands us to take a strategic position, in which we understand and address their policy concerns, while also bringing forth the interests of other civil stakeholders.

Saturday 5th of December

I am not used to work on Saturdays, but today I had to make an exception: a group of Product Design students from LUCA, who had taken DAM as a case study, made their final presentation during today's fresh market taking place around the corner from DAM. Their collective project was aimed at searching for new strategies for DAM to reach out to citizens. They organized an event called "De Andere Markt op de markt" (De Andere Markt at the market), setting up a tent in the market to engage with shoppers. When the students started to work with us, two months before, I felt they had difficulties on grasping what DAM is about, but this action helped them further understand and engage with the issues DAM deals with. Sometimes it is necessary to take direct action to understand what is at stake.

7

Tuesday 8th of December

An academic day at DAM, as my PhD supervisors come for a meeting; it is the second time we meet here to discuss the advances in my research. Talking about my research at the space where my case study takes place makes for an easier understanding of the issues I deal with. Moreover, these meetings illustrate the multifaceted nature of our space, as one day it can be hosting rigorous academic conversations or official meetings, while another day it may be hosting drawing classes or sewing workshops.

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- 7 Ivan Illich also scrutinised the lifestyle and far reaching consequences that the automobile has had presenting, in contrast, the bicycle as what he calls a 'convivial tool'. While the automobile causes thousands of deaths (directly via accidents and indirectly through pollution), wastes gasoline and occupies an unnecessary amount of space, bicycles are human-powered devices that can only move at a reasonable and humane speed (Illich, 1973).



Image 3. Intervention 'DAM op de Markt' by Product Design Students.

- 8 In relation to how some particular situations demand the need of action, Zizek wrote, in the context of the elections that elected Syriza in Greece in January 2015: "there are never perfect conditions for an act—every act by definition comes too early. But one has to begin somewhere, with a particular intervention; one just has to bear in mind the further complications that such an act will lead to" (Zizek, 2015). Despite being said as a political commentary, such affirmation finds relevance for us in understanding that –rather than inquiring whether an intervention should be done- there should be great care in considering the potential implications of a given intervention.

Friday 11th of
December

Today my colleagues planned to do an intervention at the Christmas Market of the neighbourhood. As I was not in Genk, Liesbeth and Katrien prepared to go with the bike to the market, but torrential rain kept them from doing so. Such situations make us extremely frustrated, as we are not able to 'release' the energy accumulated in the prior days and it generates ever more pressure on the project and us.

Friday 18th of
December

Once again, this was an incredibly calm and eventless week. No day was there more than one of us working at the space at the same time, and we had only a couple of incidental visits. It is definitely encouraging to see a curious passer-by come in every once in a while, but DAM cannot rely solely on them. This concern reminded me of the time I worked with Jeanne van Heeswijk in Rotterdam, with the project 'Wijkwaardenhuis' and where I occasionally had the exact same feeling of loss of pressure due to the lack of planned activities. One day, after I expressed Jeanne this concern, she smiled and explained me that "during its more than 5 years of existence, the project had been constantly generating concentrations of energy, to then disperse back throughout the neighbourhood". These concentrations of energy could take the form of an event, an intervention, a lunch, etc. and would be part of what she considers acts of urban acupuncture. This invites seeing the city -and society, for what it is worth- as a complex system, in which an intervention in one of its parts will always affect the whole .

Saturday 19th of
December

After the failed intention to make an intervention in the week before, and a week of low-pressure that had just passed, we had great expectations on making an intervention during a Christmas market at C-Mine, the former

- 9 **One of the main goals of DAM has been to bring together different sectors of society (academia, public sector, private sector, local organizations, etc.) in one same place, fostering new collaborations and connections. This makes the shop front an agonistic space, where a radical form of democracy is enacted (Mouffe, 2005), and which procedures and lessons will be relevant for actors beyond academia and / or the design world.**
- 10 **In her text *The Artist Will Have to Decide Whom to Serve*, van Heeswijk (2012) refers to (cultural) interventions as a form of "urban acupuncture", that will allow the sensitive places in our society to emerge and the blocked relational energies flow again".**
- 11 **(Second order) Cybernetics focuses on self-adaptive complex systems that are difficult or impossible to be controlled due to their high complexity. Stafford Beer (1975) had started to explore how such principles might contribute to the management of large-scale organizations (and even countries, as it was the case with project Cybersyn in Allende's Chile (Medina, 2011)). In such cases, the challenge is to build a responsive system so as when there is an action performed in one of its parts, it would positively affect the functioning of the system as a whole.**

mine building of Winterslag. We had plenty of great conversations and found it a great way to canalize the energy we had been accumulating during the last days. Furthermore, we started to understand this whole process in terms of flows, which means accepting that there will be moments of low pressure as much as there will be of high pressure, and which requires a sharp sensitivity to understand and manage 'time'. And yes, perhaps our interventions are not disruptive to the institutional status quo. However, when they are embedded in a bigger frame (a longer process), maybe they do not need to be disruptive. When thinking of these interventions in longer-term frameworks, we embrace the possibility that, instead of 'fighting the institution', we are actually contributing to build new types of institutions from within the system and, in such case, we might perhaps embrace the concept of intravention, as that which comes 'from within' and engages in long-term processes that direct and redirect the flows.

12

13

14

2016

Friday 22nd of January

The first days of the year come with great enthusiasm and ambitious plans. Last year ended in a high peak, with the intervention at the Christmas market at C-mine, and the feeling that people and organisations in the city were enthusiastic about our presence and initiative. It feels like a right moment to plan the first activities of the year: intervention at the Municipal Library in March, participating in 'Design and The City Conference' in Amsterdam early April, hosting the Creative Design Module in April-May and planning the one-year celebration of DAM in end-May.

Friday 11th of March

Having found out that several youngsters hang-out in the local library on Friday afternoons, we decided to intervene

- 12 The cardiac cycle is divided into five phases, two of which imply a radical change of pressure in the heart: the diastole (or joint diastole) and the systole (or atrial systole). During the diastole, the heart is relaxed and the ventricles are expanding and filling up with blood: on this point the pressure in the heart (ventricles) is low; during the systole, the atria contracts, pumping blood into the ventricles and, therefore, generating a considerable increase in the pressure of the heart. This process can be seen as an analogy to long-term participatory projects as DAM (Calderón Salazar, 2014).



Image 4. Intervention C-Mine Christmas Market. Photos by Boumediene Belbachir.

- 13 Amador Fernández Savater (2016) explains how the only way of fighting 'power' is to build new infrastructures within the existing ones, which echoes The Invisible Committee's (2014) take on the futility of seizing governmental power, as it is not where power resides anymore. We could relate the traditional take on interventions (as a disruption of status quo) to traditional takes on revolution (as seizing government), as they respond to power concentrated by the state. Instead, our take on interventions address the new conditions of power, distributed throughout institutions and infrastructures, by proposing and designing new types of institutions that can grow within the system at place.

in its entry hall today. Being such an open and democratic space, I think today is the day we have spoken to the most diverse group of people: Dosse, a migrant from Ivory Coast who shared with us his passion for dancing; Brahim, a local youth worker said to always have 'an ear to lend'; Hussein, a community worker who told us he considered himself 'a link on the chain'; and Samir, a young Albanian who acknowledged speaking fluently seven languages. But today's experience also made me think of the importance of 'intervention as an ethical imperative', being that as designers-researchers we cannot resign ourselves to being sole observers of the context where we operate, but we should deliberately intervene to actively incite in its transformation .

15

Monday 11th of April

Today was the first day of class for this year's Creative Design Module (CDM). It is the third year in a row that I get to teach it (together with Gert Wastyn), but the first year that we involve the students directly with DAM and its partners . One of my visions for DAM was for it to become a place where students, researchers and groups of citizens could come together to collaborate and work together to build a city closer to their dreams; including the students of this module in our process was already working towards that goal. On 2014 focused on public design and the students were expected to produce site-specific interventions for the area around the school; on 2015 we worked again through the lens of public design and students were encouraged to produce interventions that contributed to democratising the issue of -and conversation- work in Genk (also functioning as a preparation for the work we were starting to do with DAM) ; this year we wanted to take the assignment a step further, and invited them to collaborate with one of DAM's partners in

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- 14 **Alberto Altés Arlandis and Oren Lieberman propose to shift the approach from intervention, to intravention. This neologism combines the roots intra and vention, meaning 'coming from within'. Through this approach they advocate for a practice that taps into the existing dynamics of the contexts they intervene, rather than starting from an external influence that affects the internal workings of a given group or community. This approach, they argue, also favours durability and long term effects of their actions, one of the main critiques posed on interventionist practices: "If we think of it (the intravention) as a 'thing', we can speak of its durability, as its inherent ability to both dwell within the assemblages, clusters and meshworks in which it takes part, as well as to coordinate and curate those assemblages" (Altés Arlandis & Lieberman, 2013).**



Image 5. Intervention Genk Municipal Library. Photos by Boumediene Belbachir.

- 15 **The 'popular educator' Paulo Freire has been quite explicit in relation to the ethical imperative of educators and researchers, stating that "[his] role in the world is not restricted to a process of only observing what happens but it also involves [his] intervention as a subject", reinvincating in turn, a political commitment to the transformation of the realities of the subjects he works with. But he also makes sure to state that this ethical imperative is indissociable to "the radical nature of hope: in other words, though I know that things**

a concrete project from the perspective of citizen design . 19

Thursday 14th of April

I received an email from Christiaan, a student of this year's CDM, excusing himself for not having attended the first class, but also disclosing that he might not be able to come to any of the classes and asking if he might "do some particular work" to cover for the module's assignment. I was frankly offended by the message, as it assumes that a student can follow his or her courses as they want, and that teachers will adapt to each case. However, the program director spoke to me about his case, and asked me to give him a chance, as his skills might be useful for DAM and we could guide him on an assignment that would be beneficial for all parties. I reluctantly agreed and set up a meeting with Christiaan after next Monday's class.

Monday 18th of April

Today I met Christiaan after our class. I felt that we would have needed a translator in order to communicate, not because he did not speak english or I did not speak dutch, but because of his approach to design in contrast to mine. I realised then that not being able to attend the classes was not the only reason why he asked to be given a particular assignment: Christiaan is an inward, shy student, more comfortable in developing programmed digital tools by himself, rather than in working collaboratively with his classmates and engaging with a partner from the city. This was challenging for me, and gave me a great lesson, as it made me realize that I should not expect students to have the same approaches or interests as I do, in order to take advantage of my teaching opportunities; fact being, Christiaan challenged me to think and propose how his skills and assets might be useful for our process and, how in giving him an assignment,

can get worse, I also know that I am able to intervene to improve them" (Freire, 2000).

- 16 For this year's course, we decided to have the students work directly with three of the different partners of DAM: Muna, a catering service working with under-abled youngsters; De Tuin van Betty, a local community garden and orchard; and TNT Jeugdhouse, a youth-house in south-Genk working extensively with Hip-Hop.
- 17 The perspective on 'Public Design' was inspired by Carl Disalvo, who argues that, "Since the turn of the twenty-first century, there has been an increased interest in how the practices and products of design shape and contribute to public discourse and civic life" (2012), therefore calling for a more explicit understanding of the impact designers have on the public sphere.
- 18 In 2015, students were invited to devise and implement interventions 'to start a conversation' about work in the city; the results of the course are available here: <https://theothermarket.wordpress.com/2015/05/26/how-to-start-a-conversation-lessons-from-students-in-genk/>
- 19 Steven Heller calls on designers to look beyond "creating good-looking-work", fostering the role he calls 'citizen designer', for which 'talent' is not enough: "the key is to ask questions, for the answers will result in responsible decisions. Without responsibility, talent is too easily wasted on waste" (Heller & Vienne, 2003).

he would also experience the learning process of the module. That is how I began to think of the event we would host in the end of May as a celebration for the first year of DAM, and my dream to somehow visibilize the network we have been building, nourishing and working with. To my surprise, when I pitched the assignment to Christiaan, he understood it right away, and in all its complexity; and by engaging in such exercise, he would also have his fair share of engaging with a local context and contributing from his own design skills.

Thursday 5th of May

The date of the celebration is approaching and we still don't have much prepared for those days. Christiaan showed his advancements on the network visualization and, however he understands the goal of the assignment, he has bumped into countless technical limitations. Besides the visualisation of the network, during the celebration we want to host the opening of an exhibition where we will highlight our work of the past year, give the scene to a local partner -Don Luca- for a Jam Night and print postcards with all the portraits we have made during the interventions. The necessary planning makes me realize of the importance in distributing responsibilities and tasks across different actors of the network; that is how Katrien took over in the organising of the Jam Night, together with Don Luca, and I was able to hire Thomas Billen, a local designer and enthusiastic citizen, to produce the postcards of the portraits.

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Saturday 21st of May

Yesterday and today we hosted an exhibition and celebration of the first year of De Andere Markt. Being a celebration, with everyone being so upbeat and joyful, it somehow seems off to be self-critical, but I definitely feel the need to be so. I ask myself -in silence- what is

- 20 Don Luca has been organising Jam Nights -open-mic hip-hop nights at the youth house he works in (TNT Youthhouse)- for over a year and as part of our celebration we invited him to organise a version of it at DAM. We gave high importance to the fact that during our one-year celebration, we not only shared outcomes and insights of the research we have done, but also hosted manifestations of the popular culture already rooted in the city, of which Hip-Hop is an important part.



Image 6. Flyer / banner as invitation to the 1st year anniversary of De Andere Markt.

the real impact we have had after a year in this place and what could we show and tell the people sceptical of our presence here? They aren't easy questions and certainly have no easy, immediate answers; yet, they seem as a good trigger to make adjustments, where necessary, in the functioning of the space and the way in which we communicate what we do. But posing myself such critical questions is also a good excuse to de-instrumentalise our role, meaning that we have to create our own (non-technocratic) criteria for assessing our impact in the community; if we let the policy makers measure us with the yardstick created by -and for!- their milieu, DAM will only be a failed experiment.

Tuesday 7th of June

Today I received a call by my LUCA colleague Ben Hage-naars, telling me that Z33 was curating an exhibition called Manufactuur 3.0, looking at new ways of (distributed and open) production within cities and for which they were commissioning several works; they asked him if we could make a proposal. I got very enthusiastic by the prospect, as I think it can help in further materializing the networks we have created in a more concrete case, also taking advantage of the space offered for the exhibition (C-Mine) and the resources allocated for it. But I also see this as a sign that there's something we must be doing right, insofar as DAM is acknowledged as an initiative legitimate in having something to say and do in regards to the work scenario in Genk -and elsewhere.

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Thursday 23rd of June

Today we worked with Ben on the initial ideas and the proposal for Manufactuur 3.0. It was a very fruitful and productive session, starting with us mapping the resource flows within the neighbourhood, which led us to identify a potential opportunity on the coffee grounds

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Image 7. First year anniversary of De Andere Markt. Photos by Giovanni Gorga.

- 21 **Z33 is a contemporary art and design centre located in the neighbouring city of Hasselt; as part of the City Triennale, they were in charge of curating two exhibitions: one in their own space, located in Hasselt's city centre, and another in Genk, to take place in C-mine.**
- 22 **We saw this opportunity as a way of materialising and concretising the network we have been building in a specific project and case. So far we have opened-up the discussion on work in the city via the interventions, allowing numerous (previously unheard) voices to join the conversation; but now we might have the opportunity to give a glimpse -via a concrete project- of how the future of work in the city might be shaped.**
- 23 **Gunter Pauli (2010) calls for re-thinking the economy in terms of flows, stating that when, for example water, is stuck, it will start smelling bad; instead, he urges for allowing all the resources to flow. Considering 'time' as one of our most important resources, this concept becomes relevant in considering the flows of time and energy invested by members of the project. This inevitably allows for precious resources - as 'time' is - to be valued and used to their maximum potential (e.g. using time as a currency, or implementing goods and time exchange).**

being discarded from the many cafés in the neighbouring Vennestraat street. As an immediate testing experiment, we decided to go to all the cafés and collect the coffee grounds, surprisingly gathering more than 12k of them! This process (of identifying a potential opportunity through a resource-mapping activity and after engaging in a direct hands-on experimental action) is quite representative of the way of working we engaged in DAM, using both semi-structured methods of research -mainly stemming from PD- as well as experimental approaches inspired by Arts-based Research (AbR); this, in turn, makes me think of the importance of being able to walk the (border) line between academic and popular knowledge, as did Orlando Fals-Borda in Colombia more than 50 years ago .

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Monday 4th of July

We invited some people of our network who had expressed having skills -and interests- around food (in the widest understanding possible--gardening, composting, cooking, conserving, etc.), in order to share our insights regarding the coffee grounds and develop a collaborative project with them for Manufactuur 3.0. We were pressed by the fact that summer holidays would start in a week for many people in Flanders (us included) and we wanted to have at least a draft proposal before the leave. When they came to DAM, we were gladly surprised to learn that some of them had already been thinking on developing a project for growing mushrooms in Genk; knowing that coffee grounds are a perfect substrate for growing mushrooms , we proposed them to develop the project in the framework of the exhibition, and we would put all resources (material, financial, human) at the service of the initiative. They were of course excited by this proposal, so we set a date later this same week to further map

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24 **Arts-based Research (AbR) usually refers to an ensemble of practices that involve 'artistic means' as modes of inquiry in social research and it can be considered as contributing to the array of tools used in qualitative research (Greenwood, 2019). It is "most commonly used when the aim is to explore, describe, evoke, provoke, or unsettle" (Leavy, 2017) and it supports in expanding research practices to not (only) provide answers to previously framed hypotheses, but (also) propose new questions and perspectives to look at an issue or object of study. This is done thanks to experimental methods that support opening-up the issue at stake, instead of meticulous processes that aim to prove the veracity of a given question. Looking at our experience with DAM, we can see the cargo bike / printing press interventions as an example of AbR, as they did not seek to answer a question or prove the veracity of a hypothesis; instead, the interventions represented what Catharina Dyrssen calls "explorative experiments" as actions that "subvert conventional strategies; shake up ingrained patterns of thought; provide quick feedback, increased curiosity, and discoveries of hidden possibilities; reveal possible links and points that need to be mapped; and get the creative process moving forward" (Dyrssen, 2011).**

25 **"Orlando Fals Borda was a Colombian sociologist who, at the end of the 60's, began to lay the groundwork for what is now known as Participatory Action Research (PAR). (...) His seminal work is called Historia doble de la Costa -Double history of 'the coast' (Fals Borda, 1979)- a profound narrative of the social struggles that had been fought in the region in the course of the 20th century [and which has] the two narratives**

the process necessary for producing mushrooms and the necessary resources, aiming at being able to reuse those being discarded somewhere in the city.

Thursday 14th of July

Today we met again with the team with whom we were going to do the project, which we named FunghiLab, as a way to highlight the experimental and explorative character of the initiative. Each of us had studied somewhat about the process of producing mushrooms, so making the diagram of the process was rather simple. This process allowed us to identify material and resource needs for each step of the process: one example of this is that we needed containers for the incubation stage, to which Wim (one of the citizens participating in the project) suggested that we went to the different fritteries (where they sell fries) and ask for the buckets where the mayonnaise they buy come in; another example was the need of dry and moist organic material, which was needed for combining with the coffee grounds to make a 'fertile ground' for growing the mushrooms, to which Katrien (other of the citizens involved in the project) suggested we asked Souliman, an organic farmer who had plenty of leftover organic material. This process was pinned down in a printed map of the city, so as to have a clear idea of how the act of gathering the materials and resources, and producing the mushrooms, might be carried out. After an extremely productive session, we felt we could go 'at peace' to holidays, knowing that there would be plenty of work awaiting for us in August.

Wednesday 10th of August

The times after summer leave are strange: even if many people are 'officially' working, some things move at a different pace and some others don't move at all. However, Ben and I knew that we had to move forward with

(or 'double history') represented on the two pages of each spread of the book: on the left page, there is the academic voice that, even with an evident 'sarcasm' towards European social sciences research, represents his role as one of the leading academics in the country; on the right page, there is a more informal and narrative voice, representing his engagement as a citizen in investigating reality as a 'common man'." (Calderón Salazar & Huybrechts, 2020).

- 26 Growing mushrooms from coffee grounds (as well as from leftovers from the production of coffee) is one of the most emblematic projects within Gunter Pauli's proposal of a Blue Economy (2013). In that sense, we relied on the fact that it was a process that had already proved success and did not -in itself- represent an important innovation; however, we believed the main goal of the project would not be to propose or prototype an innovative process or product, instead aiming at testing the possibility of implementing an existing one within Genk.

Funghi Lab if we wanted to be ready for the opening of Manufactuur 3.0 the 1st of October, so we made a tight timeline for making sure it would be the case. When discussing with him, we agreed that our role in this project would be to provide all the necessary support for the group of citizens to be able to develop the project; within this role, we identified two things that we could start designing and producing ourselves: a big map where all the resources, actors and places of the project could be visualised and connected between them, highlighting the network logic behind the project, and the adaptation of two cargo bikes for gathering all the resources and materials necessary for the process.

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Friday 19th of August

Given that I didn't want to let go to waste the process Christiaan had done in mapping the network of DAM, I invited him to come and discuss how we could move forward with the development of the tool. For our one-year celebration, he had explored the use of Neo4j, an open-source software for data visualization; now it was time to find a way of visualising the processed data, so as to be able to share the network, and eventually use it. As much as I understood that Christiaan was an undergrad student and I could not expect -or demand- too much professionalism, it is nevertheless frustrating to hear his excuses for not having been able to arrive to the point where we wanted. Still, I sensed he was enthusiastic on being able to continue working on the project, so I proposed him a student job to be able to do so; I would just have to adjust my expectations set on his task and role. I told him that, as we are very busy with Funghi Lab, he would have to work very autonomously; he said he was ok with that.

29

27 Celine Condorelli (2009) highlights the lack of attention that architectural practice and research dedicates to what she calls 'support structures', which she describes as those which 'stand behind', allowing the central object to 'keep standing'. Framing DAM as a support structure highlights its power to serve as an aide for the existing networks and projects of the neighbourhood and the city. While the concept of 'intravention' is useful to assume an attitude when entering into a local context, that of 'support' allows us to establish the procedures for working within it: the two concepts are not exclusive to each other, but they complement and precede each other.

28 When we pitched the curator from Z33 our proposal, we suggested to either buy or get the funding to build two XYZ cargo bikes, an open-source model produced and designed by the Danish collective N55 (<http://n55.dk/>), so we could adapt them to collect and transport all the necessary materials and resources. To this request, we got the surprising answer that Z33 had several XYZ cargo bikes 'parked' in a basement from a previous project; I went to see them, and received as a material resource two of the bikes for the project and after to keep for DAM. This was a fantastic coincidence, as it allowed us to re-use existing bikes instead of buying or building new ones, which was completely coherent with the whole spirit of the project.

29 Tiziana Terranova defines (distributed) networks as "abstract machines of soft control that represent a diagram of power that takes as its operational field the productive capacities of the hyperconnected many" (2004); this understanding, in which the power of the

Monday 13th of September

Having a relatively clear idea of the process of growing mushrooms, plus having identified and mapped all the places where we might get all the necessary materials and resources, today we decided to move forward in the preparations; for us, this essentially meant to make a flow-diagram and timing of the whole process of mushroom-growing, in order to print and have as a means to organise the activities over the coming weeks. The (living) exhibition will take place in C-mine -which is actually a perfect place for most of the stages for growing mushrooms- and will last 100 days, starting the 1st of October; aiming at having a first harvest of mushrooms by mid-December, we will have to begin the production process the first days after the opening.

Saturday 1st of October

Today was the opening of the exhibition. Being part of the Triennale of Hasselt (neighbouring city), Manufactuur 3.0 was a satellite exhibition that did not host a big event, nor gathered great crowds today for the opening. This, for us, was preferable: for the opening we basically staged the 'occupation' of the space; a space that would be our laboratory for the following 100 days, and which needed to be adapted. As part of the adaptations of the space, we organised a workshop for building a laminar flow cabinet, an equipment to be able to mix the different ingredients (wet and dry organic material and coffee grounds) with the mother spawn (the equivalent of seeds for mushrooms) in a sterile environment. Two highly technically skilled citizens came to collaborate in the process, and the cabinet was up-and running by the end of the day. Additionally, we set up the map we had made so as to showcase the network (of actors, organisations, resources, places, etc.) that made the project emerge, as well as a wall where the skills/roles of each participant of

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network lies in the articulations of capacities of the mass, represents an important reference for us, being that our process began by mapping and visibilising skills that we are now aiming to interconnect.

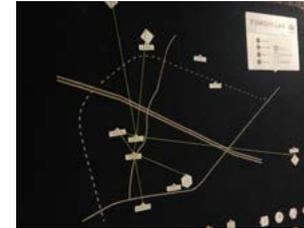


Image 8. Material and resource map (left); and 'waste collection module' built for XYZ Cargo Bike (right).

- 30 **The requirement to develop our project outside of the shopfront was double-edged: we understood it as problematic insofar as we would be 'less present at the shopfront', but we also see a powerful opportunity in framing and projecting DAM 'beyond the physical space', highlighting the importance of the project in the connections forming the network (that are long-lasting), rather than on its material resources and conditions (which are frequently short-lived).**

the project (printed, of course, with our mobile printing press) were glued and made visible.

Monday 3rd of October

Having everything ready at the exhibition space, we headed with Wim to gather all the resources necessary for growing the mushrooms. Each riding one of the cargo bikes, we went to Souliman's to gather the wet organic leftover, to Niels's to pick up the hey as dry organic material, to a friterie (cafeteria where they sell fries and other fried food) to collect the leftover sauce containers and to the coffee shops of the Vennestraat to get the coffee grounds. The bike-trip was a beautiful moment of going directly to the places we speak about and map, within the 'comfort' of our living lab and our classrooms, and meet the people and stories behind them; but it was also a way of threading the network we had been building in Genk over the last two years and, by doing so, experiencing it in a very human scale. After a 5-hour journey around Genk, passing through most of its neighbourhoods, we came back to the exhibition space in the late afternoon to unload all the material and be able to begin the process in the coming days.

31

Wednesday 5th of October

Today we met with all the team at the exhibition space to run the first step of the process: combine the materials to form the substrate and inoculate the mother spawn; to test out how they would work, we tried out different proportions of mixing of coffee grounds, moist and dry organic matter, and marked these on each of the containers. The mixing had to be done -with aseptic gloves- in the laminar flow cabinet, avoiding to allow other fungi or bacteria to develop within the substrate: it was fascinating to see such a meticulous process being done at a makeshift lab in a former coal mine. All the containers

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31 Maria Lugonés proposes the figure of the “streetwalker theorist” as someone able to disrupt the tactical/strategical dichotomy proposed by De Certeau, as “it is in this line of vision, street-level, among embodied subjects, with ill-defined “edges,” that the tactical strategist lives without myopia, without epistemological/political shortsightedness”. With this, she hints at the importance of being able to experience a context from within (from a tactical perspective), yet with a wider vision on its situation on a wider scale (from a strategic position), highlighting that “one does not have to keep social relationality “at a distance” if one is to see into its depth” (Lugonés, 2003). We could understand the initial process of intervening with the printing press as done from the a tactical position, while the later process to map the people and skills done from a strategic one; instead, this process of intervening again -by touring around Genk- with a clear goal and wider vision, is done from a tactical/strategic streetwalker's position.

32 Mother spawn is the equivalent of seeds or spores in mushrooms, usually grown and found in a grain-based substrate; for Funghilab, practically the only thing we had to 'buy' for all the project was the mother spawn, and we did so from a company called Mycellia (<https://www.mycelia.be/>).

were put in an enclosed room of the building, as they need to have a constant temperature (no less than 19o) and relative darkness. I proposed to check on them every day in between, when I would come to Genk.

Thursday 13th of October

Aiming to have weekly harvests, today we made a second batch of containers, again testing different combinations of proportions in the resources. I had passed by a couple of days in the last week to check on the containers, but found out that there was not much to do or control, besides making sure they were still there. That was just a teaser of what we foresee the process will be in the coming weeks: doing (almost) nothing and waiting: I guess this shows that there are certain things and processes to which we cannot impose our own flows and rhythms .

33

Wednesday 26th of October

Given that we are waiting for the spawn to incubate in the substrate, I decided to catch-up with Christiaan today, so as to know how has he advanced in the process of visualising the network. Trying to set reachable goals, we agreed with him that before the end of the year he would try to arrive to visualise the data that he had been able to process and organise in the previous phase, and that hopefully this would be a dynamic map (not just an infographic). Once again, he spoke plenty about the numerous technical obstacles he had encountered and that I had to constantly ask him to translate what would that mean in practical terms: from what I understood, he has not yet found a reason to have each node to show information that is associated to it (so, if a node is a place, say C-Mine, that we can see the name and even an icon). He told me that he was trying some new procedures and codes, hoping that they work; as he did not project so much confidence, it was difficult for me to fully trust him

- 33 **On The mushroom at the end of the world, Anna Tsing (2015) recounts the myriad of conditions that incede for the 'matsutate mushrooms' to grow, counting within them also the human intervention. But in showing the complexity of its growth process, she also points at the importance of understanding that there is little human beings can do to accelerate a process that has its own rhythms, which we can only accept and adapt to.**



Image 10. Makeshift lab (left) and buckets in incubation (right).

but, once again, his enthusiasm beat me.

Friday 11th of
November

Knowing that we will have to move the containers pretty soon for the fructification stage, we gathered at the exhibition space to assemble a greenhouse-like walk-in cabinet with shelves on the sides; it is a design and model we found online, and decided to replicate. We then moved the first batch of containers we inoculated, from the 'dark room' to the top shelves of the cabinet, where we removed the lids; I have already experienced harvesting a fruit or vegetable of a plant I cultivate, but I believe this is a whole different level of excitement. Be it because it is such a meticulous process or because it depends on so many factors and conditions, the fascination of being able to see the first trace of mushrooms was absolutely priceless. But the emotions of the day were bittersweet: today the citizens participating in the project also told us that they had thought of naming their collective Fungi-mama, with which I felt that they also wanted to continue working more autonomously. I guess it is somehow difficult to let go of a process to which you have invested so much care and time, but it would be coherent with the role of support we had defined for ourselves in the beginning. We told them that we would be happy to help them with whatever they might need.

Wednesday 16th of
November

The collective messaged us a couple of days ago, stating that they wanted to organise an 'open doors' event, so as to openly share with different actors of the city what we had been doing. They suggested to do this on the 4th of December, when the first harvest of the first batch of mushrooms would be ready (each batch can be harvested two times), and also aiming to expand the network (of providers, producers, consumers, partners, etc.) for the

continuation of the project after the exhibition . We supported them by making a poster announcing the event and distributing within our network; they said they would do likewise.

34

Thursday 24th of November

In the past days I learnt from Liesbeth that she had hired Boumie to visualise an interactive map of a project she had been working on, and embed it into a website (and, by learning that, I learnt that besides working as a photographer, Boumie was also a web-designer); we talked about this and agreed it would be best to bring Christiaan and Boumie together, so as to collaborate on doing the whole network/mapping project together. Today I met with the two of them at DAM and got them to start working together: the first designing the back-end and the latter the front end. They do not seem thrilled to work together (I feel they are used to work alone, the first programming and the latter photographing), yet they reluctantly accepted and convened on a collective working plan.

Sunday 4th of December

Today we hosted an open doors day at FunghiLab. We had around 60 people coming by to learn about the process we have been conducting but, most importantly, there were quite a few public officials dropping by, included the mayor himself. Now, I am not giving more importance to politicians over citizens, just that in this case the first have the leverage to support the continuation of the project after the closure of the exhibition; and this intuition proved right, as the mayor -exited by the results of the project so far- promised to find them a space (rent-free) to continue growing the mushrooms from January-on. There were also plenty of citizens interested in buying the mushrooms, for which they wrote their names and

34 We see our whole process with DAM as being invested in a long-term commitment to a context and the communities inhabiting it. This resonates with what Paul O'Neil and Claire Doherty have outlined in their research on 'durational approaches to public art', which speaks of processes of art production exceeding the 'spectacle' of the immediate intervention. In advocating for "durational approaches to public art" that "involve a process of being together for a period of time with some common objectives, to constitute a new mode of relational, conversational and participatory practice" (2010), they are proposing to look more critically at the matter of 'time' within art projects (though the same could be said to many interventionist design initiatives).

addresses on a list, for having them delivered once the new harvest is done. However the process within the framework of Manufactuur would last for another month, today felt like a moment of transition from a collaborative effort to a more autonomous endeavour. This feeling was highlighted by the gesture of Fungimama, gifting Ben and myself a 'box' of the latest harvest of Oyster Mushrooms to thank us for our support in the project.

Wednesday 14th of
December

Perhaps I was naive, but I was expecting Christiaan and Boumie to be more autonomous in their work and proactive with their reports on updates. Being that I had no news from them by now, I wrote asking them to tell me how the project was moving on. I received evasive answers from both -separately-, which made me understand that their collaboration was not going smoothly and I would eventually have to intervene to try to repair the link. However, as the year is coming to its end, I decided to wait until next year to take charge of this task.

2017

Monday 9th of
January

Being the closure of the exhibition, today we helped Fungimama to transport all the equipment and material to the space they were offered by the city authorities. I also took the opportunity to share with them a few different organisational possibilities for their initiative, fiercely believing that a cooperative model would be much more appropriate than a conventional company one. I advised them to integrate all the nodes of the network as partners, even considering to include consumers -both individuals and commercial as restaurants- in the cooperative. They said it sounded promising and that they would explore it in the coming days with the whole collective. I said goodbye, thanking them for the fruitful collaboration and offering them the necessary support in

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- 35 **Tine de Moor is a Dutch scholar who has spent her career advocating for the creation of new “commons institutions”, of which ‘cooperatives’ are an example of “institutional instruments (...) that have the potential to mediate cooperation, and avoid unnecessary, and potentially harmful competition” (De Moor, 2013). I shared with Fungimama my conviction that they ought to aim at a cooperative organisational model, as it would deeply engage all the nodes in the network (needed for producing the mushrooms) as active participants or the project.**



Image 10.
Harvest
of oyster
mush-
rooms.

the following steps.

Tuesday 21st of February

The start of the year has been extremely tranquil, allowing us to critically reflect on the work we have been doing until now: these moments of decompression have become highly important in such a long-term process. Looking in retrospect to the almost three years I have been working on the city (starting on May 2014), I realised how the first two years represented a slow and careful process of entering and getting to know the context, of which the articulation of the network was its main outcome; the last six months we were instead busy implementing several initiatives based on the network we built, FunghiLab being one of them. For the moment I am not very certain whether I will continue working with LUCA or even staying in Belgium for much longer, which makes me also think of having to begin designing an exit strategy. But even if I was to stay, I guess a project like DAM has to have an end -or at least a transition to a different 'form'- in order to leave space for other initiatives to take place, as well as to avoid turning into an overly institutionalised space.

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Thursday 9th of March

Last week I received an email from Christiaan. It was a long, detailed recount of the difficulties working (or trying to) with Boumie, mainly complaining about his lack of commitment in the tasks he had to do. Being a very shy and uncommunicative guy, I thought he has had to be pushed to his limits to get to the point of writing such an honest message. Thankfully, the message also included a proposal to fix the situation and come through with the project: he suggested he would work with a friend of his -Kevin, who owns a web-developing company- to finish the processing of the data, visualise it and put it online

36 In his argument for a practice of Autonomous Design, Arturo Escobar -in line with Lugonés' 'streetwalker theorist'- calls for a direct engagement with the communities and contexts designers work with: "the witty and effective disclosure (skilful disclosing) of new possibilities of 'being in the world' demands an intense engagement with a specific collectivity, instead of the so celebrated 'distanced deliberation' or the 'decontextualized understanding'; (...)it demands a different type of attitude, stemming from living in a place and having a commitment to a community with which we engage in pragmatic activities around a shared concern" (Escobar, 2017).

37 Within non-profit organisations in humanitarian missions or projects, it is common to hear about 'designing an exit strategy', as an intervention cannot 'last forever'. Janzer (2017), speaking about guaranteeing safe-drinking water to communities in developing countries, argues that "to ensure access to clean, safe water, the greatest challenge isn't digging the well but making sure it keeps flowing"; with this, she highlights the importance of the local community to appropriate the initiatives, so as to maintain them over time. However DAM represents a different kind of project, the similar procedure -of designing an exit strategy- applies, as we aim at being able to 'leave' something for the project to continue and be maintained by the local community.

as an interactive tool. After so many (failed?) try-outs and stumblings, it was somehow refreshing to see someone taking ownership of the project to come through with it. The only issue was that we had to pay him as a contractor, being an agent alien to the School; but, on one hand, I convened with Liesbeth to stop the contract with Boumie and redirect the remaining funds and, on the other hand, to use my remaining research funds for this cause. With a relative clarity of the financing, today I sat down with Kevin and Christiaan to go over their proposal: the latter's self confidence left me impressed: "I really understand what you want to do with the network and now I have the support, knowledge and infrastructure to make it happen". Moreover, they defined a tight timing, with in between deliverables, of finishing it by the end of the year. I could finally delegate some work and feel at ease with having done so.

Monday 19th of June

It has been almost three months since I last wrote on the log. The main reason for this is that I was busy organising the TRADERS Open School, which took place from the 21st to the 30th of April in Hasselt; but, even if there were some things taking place at DAM during the past months (courses from both UHasselt and LUCA, neighbourhood meetings, sewing workshops, etc.), I was only participating from the margins. Precisely thinking of the different activities and events constantly taking place at DAM, and how it had become enmeshed within the fabric of the neighbourhood, we asked the city administration to finance -at least- another year of renting the shopfront. We did expect that we would have to 'prove our worth', yet I was surprised on the request to quantify all of our actions; it went against our ethos, which was based on a qualitative and layered process only measurable with

38 **The TRADERS Open School was a 10-day hands-on academy, which I co-curated together with Michael Kaethler and took place from the 21st to the 30th of April in Hasselt. More info: <http://tr-aders.eu/open-school/the-school/>**

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the particular experiences of our projects and initiatives. 39
 However, we complied with the request, and today I was happily surprised to learn that the municipality would support us renting the shopfront for two more years.

Friday 7th of July

Today I received a last report and update before the summer holidays from Christiaan and Kevin; to be fair, they have been in constant contact with me about this. They were advancing greatly and -if well the timeline and delivery date might be delayed a couple of weeks- they did not see any major obstacle to the realisation of the website. With prototypes they sent today, I saw the potential of the network, not only as a way of strengthening many of the connections and fostering the creation of new ones, but as the trace I would leave when I would leave Genk and the most logical evolution of DAM. That would give us two years to develop and fine tune it, so that when the shopfront closes, all the value created would live in it.

Wednesday 6th of September

Today we met with Liesbeth at DAM to discuss the advances of the network and reflect about the nature of such a project in itself. We began to call it the Relational Network Tool (RNT), as we saw in it the potential to create and strengthen the connections between different actors -both human and non-human- within the city and beyond. We also reflected on the implications on the scale of representation of the network: however each node will represent a person we have met, a place we have visited, a tool we have used or an event we have hosted, we understand as problematic the fact that the map in itself can be seen as a 'strategic' perspective on the territory. Now, is this something that should hinder us from moving forward with the project? I don't think so, as it is already triggering important discussions and 40
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39 We believe, together with O'Neal and Doherty, that the 'measurability' of projects as this one ought to be problematised, in order to find more appropriate ways to assess the impact made within a given context: "participation is not something that can be measured or evaluated in a clear way" (2010).

40 On a paper written for PDC 2020 (which also serves as introduction to this thesis), we spoke extensively about the development of the RNT: "even if setting up a living lab implies -and supports- building strong relations over time, we considered it insufficient as a platform for articulating the many voices we encountered during our research process and to give them a prominent place in the future development of the city and its community. For that reason, we developed a tool to visualise the voices and their multiple relations in the city, and which we had identified throughout our different interventions. (...) The development of the RNT has several goals: on one hand, visualising the actors we worked with -and their capabilities situated and related to specific sites- in the city, as a documentation that was publicly accessible. On the other hand, the RNT has aimed to foster autonomous processes, by means of giving back-office access to different actors, groups and community leaders we collaborate with, through which they can map their own interventions and the networks of actors that relate to them." (Calderón Salazar & Huybrechts, 2020).

41 At the base of Escobar's proposal for a "profound relationality" lies an understanding of the interrelation -and interdependence- between human and more-than-human actors within a given context (Escobar, 2017).

reflections.

Thursday 23rd of November

Once again, it has been a long time since I last wrote on this log. As I have already said before, this is not because of inactivity at DAM, but because my deliberate self-marginalising from many processes. As much as one can feel tempted to be involved 'in everything', is important to frame these long-term endeavours as 'infrastructur-ing processes' that distribute the power to discuss and design future imaginaries (of work) across the citizens of Genk. In that sense, after an intense initial work of direct engagement, there comes a phase when the project continues to advance with little intervention or main-tenance and it transforms into a platform that allows participants to kickstart their own initiatives in semi-au-tonomous ways.

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2018

Friday 19th of January

Today we received an email from Kevin and Christiaan with the link to the network, which was already uploaded into the website. With the prospect of -most likely- having to leave Belgium later this year, I feel extremely excited to see the consolidation of this network as something that can contribute to the continuation of the project over time. I also felt like a weight was taken off my shoulders, as this is a project I have been trying to develop for almost two years and would want to leave Genk without delivering.

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Yesterday I found out that my contract with LUCA would definitely end by the end of next month and there were no funds to further extend it. This news, combined with the upcoming expiration of my residence -and hence working- permit in Belgium, made me and my wife decide to move back to Colombia in mid-June. With that certainty

- 42 Michel De Certeau proposed a dichotomy between the strategy and the tactic, claiming that the first “assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (propre) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it”, while the latter is “a calculus which cannot count on a «proper» (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a border line distinguishing the other as a visible totality” (De Certeau, 1998). Highlighting on the ‘spatiality’ of such conceptualisation, Lugonés claims that “The strategist “sees” from a point of view characterized by the distance of height and abstraction. He “sees” the immobile city, but the immobile, immutable city—a triumph of space over time—is presupposed in the relation sight-abstraction-distance.” (2003). From a first sight, the RNT might be seen as exclusively from a ‘strategic’ position; however, as there is a previous work of meeting each of the nodes and a latter one of contacting again with them, it not only assumes a ‘tactical’ perspective, but a tactical-strategic (Lugonés, 2003).

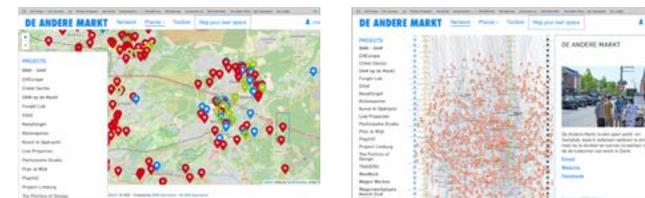


Image 11. Snapshots of open map (left) and Relational Network Tool (right). <http://deandere-markt.be>

- 43 Infrastructuring processes are characterized by the continuous building of long-term relations of trust with different types of actors over time (Emilson, Hillgren & Seravalli, 2014). In this project, an infrastructur-ing process has been put in place through setting up DAM as a local Living Lab focusing on “democratizing

Wednesday 25th of April

in sight, I have begun to prepare the 'handover' of DAM to my colleagues at LUCA and some local citizens. Regarding the shopfront itself, which will be active for at least another year, I wrote to all my Social Spaces colleagues, inviting them to use -and care for!- the space for both their classes, exhibitions and the research projects they were conducting; regarding the RNT, I shared with them -as well as with several community leaders of the city- the website and gave them back-office access, so they could actually login to map their own networks and projects.

Thursday 24th of May

Today is the last day I will be coming to DAM. However I knew that this moment would come, it is hard to confront the moment of 'letting go' of a project you have invested so much time, effort and care into. I was happy to have received an answer from one of my colleagues though; in relation to my invitation to use the shopfront, she replied: "It's a great space. For those of you who haven't done it, I would encourage any of you to host your classes there. Having the class (even if it has nothing to do with the immediate neighbourhood) dramatically affects the vibe and by nature becomes more community-focused." These kinds of manifestations show that people have seen the value in the creation of a space like DAM and, moreover, that they are invested in keeping it alive. I will leave Genk today, then, with the satisfaction of having done a sensible process and with the words of Arturo Escobar in the back of my mind, when he says that "autonomous design strives for the self-realisation of communities", which I believe DAM has contributed to advance in Genk.

innovation". Its functioning relies on building networks of people, groups, things, places, etc. and the commitment to establish long-term relationships of trust. In this sense, the emphasis of infrastructuring processes is not set on the specifics of design activities (co-design workshops, receptions, lessons, etc.), but with how these contribute to a larger process (e.g. establishment of or integration in a cooperative, an institution, an organization, etc.).

- 44 **An example of this was a project called Tek Stiel, which was hosted in the shopfront and worked with migrant women in Genk to re-use textile leftovers and old clothes, in order to re-purpose them. [More info about this project on: <https://www.genk.be/teks-tiel-verbndt>].**
- 45 **The network was uploaded on a server and hosted on our own domain [<http://deanderemarkt.be>]. We decided to -at least at first- name the website as the shopfront, so that there would be a clear connection between both, and showing the first as an evolution of the latter.**

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Chronicle of a northern minga

- “The community tradition of getting together to work for a common good, la Minga, has been an effective tool at the hand of (indigenous and peasant) peoples to confront the abuses from those imposing themselves through colonising practices” (Serrano Valero, 2019).

Prelude

'Northern' and 'minga' are two words that might seem very much at odds with each other, a contradiction in terms when put together in a sentence. However, exploring how such construction came to be, might contribute to shed some light on the possibility and potential of understanding and integrating the ethos of 'southern perspectives' in participatory design processes. This particular experience extends over three months (Feb-Apr) at the beginning of 2017, when I was busy organising and hosting the TRADERS Open School (TOS), together with TRADERS' ESR Michael Kaethler and curator and artist Anne van Oppen.

The TOS was a 10-day open academy, where different practitioners, researchers, students and citizens would gather to think-and-perform how the city could be otherwise. Instead of curating and organising a final exhibition (which was actually one of the deliverables of the project), we decided to host the TOS as an active and dynamic space, where the focus would not be in 'showing' the work done, but putting it into practice, testing it, performing it and involving others in the process. As the last of TRADERS' public events, each of the ESR's were expected to host (at least) one session, in the format more suited to their own research and trajectory; being busy with the overall organisation of TOS, I had little time to think and work on my personal proposal for the program. By late February, as I had not advanced with an idea for a project, I began to think that I would simply have to do a straightforward intervention with De Andere Markt's (DAM) printing press. Thankfully, there were a series of events and coincidences that prevented me from doing such a thing, which would have represented an intervention with little regard to the local context's conditions.

- 1 **A minga is a Latin American indigenous tradition of collectively working for a common goal. It is usually represented in acts of collective building (e.g. constructing a building for common use) and it has a deeply political connotation of resistance (Murillo, 2010). Collective 'barn raising' (or house transporting) can be considered as similar practices in the global north, but as an ancestral indigenous practice, it has deep roots in Latin America, hence why, on a first sight, it might seem at odds with the imaginary of 'the north'.**
- 2 **In her critique to the conventional approaches to design and advocating for decolonising design practice and research, Tlostlanova (2017) proposes the sumak kwasay as a positive ontology to consider for design. Sumak Kwasay, roughly translated to Spanish as 'buen vivir' (good living), "means to live in harmony and plenitude (not material), and participate in a vital cosmic collectivity; that is to say, in close relation with nature" (Tlostlanova, 2017). This is but an example of the myriad of practices and cosmologies that might function as positive ontologies for design, mainly emerging from the Global South. Calderón & Borrero (2017) also refer to a series of practices relevant to design research, in what they frame as 'designs from the souths' or 'designs with other names'.**
- 3 **The TRADERS Open School (TOS) was a 10-day open academy, and was organised as the last public event of TRADERS. For it, practitioners and researchers from diverse fields (from design to contemporary dance; and from urban planning to computer science) were invited to lead activities like lectures, debates, performances, workshops, dialogues or walks.**

As we were looking for potential spaces to host the TOS, I wrote an email to local designer, educator and community organizer Pablo Hanon, as we learned that he had been very active in projects involving temporary occupation of vacant spaces around the city. He answered right away, suggesting I contacted Yousra Rifi, a young entrepreneur who had recently opened a tajine restaurant in a building in front of Hasselt's train station. The story of Tajine (yes, that was the straightforward name of the tajine restaurant) started the year before, precisely in the context of a project aiming to revitalize the neighbourhood around the train station, by favouring the temporary use of its empty shop fronts. Pablo was the overall coordinator of the project, called Bamstat, and for which Yousra did the first pilot for the restaurant in a small fraction of the space where Tajine is now located: a former hotel building without guests for more than seven years. We had a first meeting with Yousra at her restaurant, hoping to discuss the possibility of hosting the TOS in the building where Tajine is located (mainly in the ground floor and the first two floors). Early enough through our meeting, I realized the difficulty of that to happen, as many practical issues stood on the way (spaces required too much 'work' to be ready for use, technical difficulties to set up the exhibitions, security for equipment, etc.). However, meeting Yousra and getting to know her initiative and principles made me interested in further collaborating with her. Even as we took the decision to host the majority of TOS activities at Z33 I stayed in touch with Yousra, as I was very inspired by her project and how it contributed to materialise a different future for the 'station area'.

Feeling that Yousra was too much of an important energy

- 4 **De Andere Markt is a living lab based in Genk (Belgium), founded by researchers of Hasselt University and LUCA School of Arts, Campus C-Mine. The living lab is located in a shop front in the neighbourhood of Winterslag, where we work together with citizens to discuss and prototype alternative work futures (work is the most pressing issue in Genk, hence why we chose to address it). We designed a printing press mounted on a cargo bike as a way to "place ourselves in – and explore – the context" (Anastassakis and Szaniecki, 2016), by mapping and visibilising the skills present within the city.**
- 5 **Z33 House for Contemporary Art and Design is a cultural institution based in Hasselt.**

in the neighbourhood to let go to waste, I continued meeting with her and seeing if that might lead to an opportunity for intervention. The second time I came by myself, I wanted to know more about her story and how it resulted in the project. Even though she was born in Hasselt, she was away for several years, having recently come back from Jordan, where she had worked at refugee camps. Coming back to her city, she arrived with a renewed sense of engagement to the community, and took on the challenge of improving her context through the activity she likes most: cooking. That is how she first came up with the idea of Tajine, a place that, more than a restaurant, would become a meeting place for different cultures and contribute to the collective improvement of the city. The Bamstat project presented an entry point and opportunity to test a pilot project in a specific space: a shop front in front of Hasselt's train station.

Hearing her story, I felt she had a very sensible approach to the community and the context she was inhabiting, which made me think of the communal ethos of rural and indigenous communities in Colombia. Enter the minga. Minchia? Would repeatedly ask almost any person I shared the idea with; no, minga, a Latin American indigenous tradition of communal work. I did not escape confronting the apparent contradiction: I refused to use a method we have developed 15km away in Genk, instead appropriating a practice with its roots more than 5,000km away. But it is important to note that a minga is not a 'design' or 'research' methodology, nor does it have a fixed or given way of being done. Within indigenous communities of the Andes -where the term, with some variations, is mainly used- it works instead as a way of summoning the community to engage in a collective

- 6 **The central focus of my research during the last four years has been interventions as means to foster participatory practices within art and design in the city. More specifically, I have been looking at how interventionist approaches in design can contribute to self-organization of communities in the city, therefore fostering autonomy (Escobar, 2016).**
- 7 **In the Belgian Limburg, it's mining heritage attracted, in its peak years, mass migration from different countries of Europe (Greece, Spain, Italy) and elsewhere (Morocco, Turkey). This phenomenon strongly influenced the culture of its different cities and, with it, its language. In Hasselt's neighbouring city, Genk, this is clearly evidenced with what they term cité taal, a dialect appropriating words from Greek, Spanish, Moroccan, Turkish and, most prominently, Italian. In Italian as well as in Genk and other Limburg cities, the word minchia is used as a surprise expression. [<http://www.meertens.knaw.nl/profielwerkstukken/cites.pdf>]**
- 8 **In understanding the 'situatedness' of design practice and research and the knowledge it produces, we might be more sensitive to understand that "this knowledge can not be 'generalized', it can be transferred. Transferable means that knowledge can be passed to others and used by them." (Chow & Ruecker, 2006). In that sense -even not being a 'design method' per se- by appropriating the practice and ethos of the minga, we were not attempting to replicate an experience, but to transfer it and see how it would evolve in the new context where it is tried out.**

endeavour. I saw the minga as an opportunity to gather different actors and get them to collaborate around a common goal of improving their neighbourhood.

By having frequent conversations with her, I learned how Yousra was committed to have a positive impact in the city through her restaurant: once a month she gives a decent lunch to homeless people, offers discount to clients arriving by bike or public transport and organizes events against racism and discrimination. On that same line, she has decided to improve the neighbourhood by taking advantage of the space she is occupying and has access to, namely the restaurant space and the terrace. Seeing this last element (the terrace) as the transition between her 'private' space and the public space of the city, we asked ourselves what would happen if we could engage local inhabitants to collectively re-design the terrace for the common good. In a surprising act of detachment from an entrepreneur, Yousra dreamed of having a terrace that would act as a semi-public space: where homeless could sit or lay down, where herbs would be planted and anyone passing by to pick a few leaves, and around where all communities of the neighbourhood and the city would be able to gather, even without being 'clients'. And within that vision, Yousra also had some concrete ideas on how she saw this new in-between space, where there would have to be plenty of green: she wanted to make an oasis in the neighbourhood.

Slowly, I began to notice how there was a project emerging from the conversations with Yousra, strongly grounded in the local context. That made me reflect how within my practice, in particular, and participatory and autonomous design practices, in general, projects emerge from

- 9 I call the 'terrace' the space in front of the restaurant, usually a public space that restaurant and bar owners pay the city to be able to make use of.



Image 1. Yousra Rifi in front of her restaurant Tajine.

- 10 However referring to urban interventions of a bigger scale, Richard Sennett makes an important differentiation between 'borders' and 'boundaries': "in human ecology, the eight-lane highway isolating parts of the city from each other is a boundary, whereas a mixed-use street at the edge between two communities can be more of a border" (2012). Following this idea, we might conceive of Tajine's terrace as a border, not necessarily connecting two communities, but bridging -and blurring- the difference between private and public space by fostering encounters of difference.

11 already existing groundwork initiatives. This way, when the designer-researcher does 'enter' the context, there is not a drastic disruption to its internal functioning. Seeing how the idea started to take more shape (it was now 'a minga for constructing a semi-public space in Tajine's front terrace), I became aware that in order to be able to come through with it, I would need to build -and collaborate with- a network of both internal and external actors. Thinking on Yousra's wish for her restaurant space to become an 'oasis' within the neighbourhood, I decided to invite Giacomo Piovani, an Italian friend and fellow designer who could contribute greatly to the project thanks to his experience in devising participatory design processes involving greenery, as well as having lived and worked in Hasselt for a couple of years. Being now based in Luxembourg, he got fascinated by the concept of the minga and very excited by my invitation, agreeing to collaborate on the project. Having someone like him, technically knowledgeable on construction and co-design methods was indeed a valuable asset. However, besides Yousra there was not much involvement of the local inhabitants, without which a minga would seem very much at odds.

12

Around the days of mid-March (a bit more than a month to the start of the TOS), on a conversation with Yousra, she spoke about Halte 24 (Stop 24), a recently opened youth house around the corner from Tajine. Moreover, she mentioned already having gotten in touch with them and having plans to involve the youngsters in cultural activities at Tajine. It seemed to me a perfect opportunity: energetic youngsters who need to engage in local cultural activities in an area where there is no much sense of belonging (one could say the 'station neighbourhood' is a 'no-man's land'). We agreed with Yousra to go there

13

- 11 **Building upon existing concerns within communities instead of 'parachuting' projects and practices from the outside is closely related to what Arturo Escobar describes as autonomous design, "(...) a design praxis with communities contributing to their realisation" (Escobar, 2017). This approach, in turn, stands close to what Altes & Lieberman term intravention, as a practice that builds projects from within communities and their concerns (Altes & Lieberman, 2011).**
- 12 **Giacomo is one of the founders and partner of a design studio called Socialmatter, dealing with participatory and sustainable design interventions in public space [<https://www.socialmatter.eu/>]**
- 13 **Marc Augé denounced that modernity has excelled in creating and reproducing what he calls 'non-places': "if a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (1995). Amongst these sorts of non-places, he highlights the transport stations (like airports, bus and train stations), as they are more connected to the exterior of the place they are located than to the place itself.**

and propose the, -the youngsters and youth workers- a framework for collaboration. One week after we went to the youth house, located in a shopfront similar to DAM, but in a much busier street. The space was vibrant: once one entered, there was a big table at the right, behind the front window, where there were some youngsters writing, drawing and playing table games; on the middle of the space there was a football table and a dart board on the wall, with several youngsters playing with them; and on the back there was an improvised 'living room' with loud music playing from a stereo. We sat together with Yousra on the table at the front of the space, waiting for Ludo -the coordinator of the youth house- who was discussing with some of the youngsters. After ten minutes waiting, he finally sat at the table with us, also joined by a girl of around 15 years old. Ludo's limited English and my limited Flemish made for us communicating with words from both languages, sometimes bridged by Yousra's fluency in both. In a very straightforward manner, he directly asked: "Ik hear you want to organise an activiteit met de jongen?" I told him about the idea of the minga. Somehow, he understood everything. Not only 'practically' what it meant or implied, but also the spirit of it all. He said it was a perfect activity for the youngsters to join, so would participate with around 15 youngsters. I promised I would further define the practicalities and details of the minga and get back to him in the coming two weeks.

The following days I was busy connecting and articulating the different actors and details for the minga: Yousra, Giacomo, Halte 24 and the 'site' (the terrace of Tajine); additionally, Z33, being the central partner and host of the TOS, offered technical support for the activity. During a first discussion with Giacomo, we agreed that it would

- 14 In her conceptualisation of the thresholds she encountered when growing up as a Chicana in the US, Gloria Anzaldúa highlighted the language to be one of the most critical, to the point of using in her writings "a unique blend of eight languages, two variations of English and six of Spanish; in many ways, by writing in 'Spanglish,' Anzaldúa creates a daunting task for the non-bilingual reader to decipher the full meaning of the text" (Gloria Anzaldúa: History - Criticism), a take furthered by Mignolo in presenting the decolonial option of the "bilanguaging epistemology" (2012).

be important to get input from the youngsters as in 'what to build' (co-design), not only seeing them as 'labour' during the construction day. That resonated with the notion we had of the 'front terrace' as a space the youngsters could actively use and inhabit, therefore having a say in deciding how it should be shaped. Motivated by this, we decided to organise the minga in three acts: a first one for organising and co-designing, when all participants would give input into how we dreamt and imagined the space; a second act for construction, as a moment to build the necessary furniture and infrastructure for the terrace; and a third moment dedicated to collective cooking, as a moment to collectively occupy and use the space for a first time. In the understanding of the minga, it is important to clarify that it is not -solely- about 'building infrastructure', but about a deeper level of collective social and political mobilisation; that is why activities such as cleaning or organising the space, as well as occupying and using it once finished through a collective cooking session, were as important as the moment of direct physical construction.

One month to go and everything was set... on paper: we had a rough planning, the participants, skills and site (the materials and tools would come later). In order to reach more people and trigger conversations prior to the three acts, I asked designer and illustrator Priscilla Suarez to make a graphic piece that captured the spirit of the minga. The piece she made was a beautiful illustration of different people engaging in collective work on a festive environment, and served as means to invite people to the three different activities; as a printed image -in both flyer and poster format- it also functioned as a trigger to discuss and engage people in the project, as

- 15 **Within the indigenous communities of South-West Colombia, the minga has become a powerful tool for popular resistance and mobilisation, which has been put into practice countless times to protest against land-taking, free trade agreements affecting local farmers and monoculture (Serrano Valero, 2019). This evidences the political nature of the minga, whose ethos gravitates around the collective mobilisation for the common good, integrating the mediums necessary for each case.**
- 16 **Priscilla Suarez is an illustrator and graphic designer (and important also to disclose, my wife). I often collaborate with her, finding in her illustrations a powerful tool for enabling communication and participation within different stages of the projects I work on.**
- 17 **We could understand this perspective as close to the notion of 'conversation pieces' introduced by Grant Kester (1985), as it presents a 'design piece', not as a finished object to be admired, but as one that aims at triggering new conversations and different paths for participation within a project.**

it allowed people to better grasp the concept and values behind it. This made me think of the importance for designers, in developing their projects, to begin producing and making public different graphic and material manifestations: as much as I have advocated for a practice of dialogical design, I argue for this to be mediated by boundary objects that help trigger the imagination of the people involved. In this particular case, the graphic piece served as a way to open the imagination of different futures (for the station area) and inspire more people to engage in the collective construction of the terrace as a communal space.

18

Act 1
April 5th

The day of the first act of the minga had arrived. Having invited some of the youngsters of Halte 24, as well as other citizens from Hasselt who were somewhat triggered by the poster, the goal of the day was twofold: on one side, to have all participants brainstorm and contribute their own dreams and ideas for the construction of the terrace as a communal space and, on the other, to collectively organise and 'clean-up' some of the spaces of the building; the day would be then organised around -and divided in- these two moments. As a tool to facilitate the first activity, I designed, printed and took several copies of a booklet with a drawing of the facade and a top-view plan of the building and its surrounding public spaces, hoping to serve as a space to capture the ideas (through drawing and/or writing) of the people for the space.

Some youngsters, led by a coordinator, started to arrive in Tajine by 10am, seeming 'forced' to attend something they were not particularly motivated to do. They began to disperse around the space, so after a 'call to order' by the coordinator, they all sat and gathered around a big table,

- 18 On a chapter for the book *Innovación Social y Diseño (Social innovation and design)*, I (2019) have further outlined the importance of conversation pieces as key elements within a practice of 'dialogical design', particularly in their potential to 'unlock' thinking on -and working for- alternative futures.



Image 2.
Poster /
flyer to in-
vite people
to join the
minga.
Made by
Priscilla
Suárez
Bock

expectantly looking at me. I did not have so much as a 'presentation' prepared, so I used the poster as a starting point and conversation piece: "do any of you know what a minga is?" After the predictable giggles and jokes (thinking I was saying michia), and the negative answer to my question, I began to tell them about the ancestral tradition of the minga within numerous indigenous peoples in the Andes. However they began to be relatively intrigued, I only got their full attention when I told them the case of a minga organised once a year by indigenous communities in Peru, to rebuild -via collective threading and knitting- the Q'iswa Chaka rope bridge over the Apurimac river. However, having a very limited attention span, most youngsters and other participants, who had joined the activity, began to lose interest in my storytelling, instead eager to know what I expected from them in that precise moment. "Yusra would like you to take ownership of the front terrace and for doing so I want to build it with you. But for doing so, I would like you to draw or write your ideas on this paper". Most of the youngsters seemed to be following the activity as an obligation, few of them because they were motivated to participate in the collective building (Act 2). Nevertheless, all of them seemed to be excited with the prospect of having their opinions and ideas taken into account in the transformation of the city, it made them proud of participating, evidenced in the fact that some of them signed their drafts as 'Architect' followed by their name. Being aware that asking for precise drawings or proposals might deter the participants to let go their creativity, we invited them to use the kind of drawing they wished or use writing what they imagined to 'sit' at the space; the results of this exercise did not give us concrete parameters to design and build the terrace, but it gave us plenty of insights

19

20

- 19 **The Q'iswa Chaka (or Queshuachaca) is a rope bridge crossing the Apurimac river, in Peru. However there is a 'modern' bridge close by, the neighbouring indigenous communities get together once a year, in June, for a minga to rebuild the bridge (Queshuachaca, 2019).**
- 20 **In contrast to the non-place (or abstract space) representing the train station, Lugonés presents the figure of 'hangouts' as "highly fluid, worldly, non-sanctioned, communicative, occupations of space, contestatory retreats for the passing on of knowledge", and goes on to highlight them as "spaces that cannot be kept captive by the private/public split." . Aiming to create a hangout in Tajine's terrace is an explicitly political act, insofar as it proposes "an everyday practice of resistant inhabitation of space" (Lugonés, 2003).**

into how they imagined a communal place (like being able to 'lay down' somewhere, have plants all around, different levels for sitting, etc.).

As it was foreseen, besides the brainstorming and co-design session for the front-terrace, we also planned to collectively organise and 'clean-up' some of the spaces of the building. This task -for which we also got the support Wim and Ali, two guys from the technical staff of Z33- had several purposes: first, to have the community invested in 'giving back' to Yusra her commitment to the neighbourhood; second, to have a first moment of 'collective work' in the organizing and cleaning up; and third, to be able to scavenge and collect some materials for the next stage of the minga, in which we would build the infrastructure of the terrace. Given the disregard that such kinds of operations have in contemporary society (particularly in the Global North), the youngsters were not fully invested in this second activity, slowly leaving one by one, and finally leaving Wim, Ali and I to finish the work, with whom we finished salvaging the materials we thought were somewhat re-usable, essentially planks of plywood and market crates. As much as we were able to gather some materials, I knew these would not be enough for the construction of the terrace, so I had to keep my eyes open for other opportunities.

Later that same day, I went to Z33 to check on the advances in the overall organisation of the TOS. Once there, I had to enter the building via its production workshop, where I noticed they had a considerable amount of wood (both solid slats and plywood planks) piled-up. After asking about it, I learnt it was from a previous exhibition, to which my obvious next question was: "what is going to

- 21 **The idea of indirect reciprocity might be somewhat difficult to grasp for most people who live in societies whose transactions and interactions are mainly mediated by money; the minga shares the values of practices like *mano cambiada*, an ancestral tradition from Afro Colombian communities, by which certain tasks -mostly related to child care- would be taken in turns by someone from the community: it "is a relation of reciprocity and solidarity among us, where monetary exchange is not a medium for the acquisition, possession and accumulation of material objects" (Bangue-ro-Camacho & Giraldo-Díaz 2018).**
- 22 **In the innovation-driven mentality of today's world, particularly in the global north, there is a disregard to people and practices that focus on maintaining the existing, rather than inventing the new (Russell & Vinsel, 2016). In this case, it became very important for the minga to have participants engage in practical activities of cleaning and maintenance. Similarly, we could envision "cultures of repair" as a positive ontology and decolonial option for design (Schultz, 2017).**



Image 3.
Act 1:
youngsters
brainstorming
on the design
of the
'terrace'.

happen with it?" They answered it would normally go to the trash but, understanding my intentions, said I could take it and use it for the minga . A couple of days later, with the help of Wim and Ali, I transported all the leftover material from Z33 to Tajine. I did not want to reflect too much on how this first act the minga went, as I saw the activity as an organic process that escaped any form of methodological structure, yet it was nevertheless important to critically reflect on the process so far, in order to make adjustments for the following activities. One of the main learnings of this first act was the importance of quickly arriving to give very concrete tasks to the participants; as much as I considered it important to tell them about the context of the minga, they simply wanted to do it, which is something that I could harness to my favour.

23

One day before the second act I went by Tajine, where Yousra, visibly excited, told me she had gotten 'sponsorship' for the minga by Thomas, an important plant and garden shop in Hasselt. She shared with him her dream of 'an oasis' in front of the Train Station, inspiring him to donate all the necessary greenery, including two big olive trees. Once there, and in preparation for the next day, we also called Ludo to check on him and the youngsters, as well as to confirm if he would be able to lend the necessary tools and equipment for the coming two days; as difficult as it was to make him understand what I needed (a few drills, a circular saw, a mitre saw and a jigsaw), he finally said he would bring all the tools the day after with 'de jongen' at 10am.

Act 2
April 22nd and 23rd

The first day of the second act had arrived. It was a chilly but sunny day and Giacomo had just arrived from Luxembourg, where he is based. After the "hello's", "how

- 23 **Within his argument for an autonomous design (or designs for the pluriverse), Arturo Escobar (2017) scrutinises how conventional economic postures have forgotten that "economy has to do with real flows of matter and energy"; this posture -resonating with the proposals of the circular economy (MacArthur, 2013) and the 'blue economy' (Pauli, 2010)- calls for looking at the flows of resources in a given project and to privilege reusing, recycling, repairing and reducing, as strategies for fixing the interruptions of flows. Searching for sources of materials being discarded by some part of the system manifests a will to integrate these logics into design practice and research.**

are you's" and "how is life treating you in Luxembourg / Brussels", we went straight to take decisions over how the two following days would unfold. Uncertain on how many people would join the activity, we needed to devise a strategy to be able to get things done, in the case it would be just the two of us as well as in the scenario where there would be twenty people. We first went through the material available, so as to begin envisioning the constructive possibilities, and the sketches and comments from the first act, to see how participants 'dream' the space. Without a clear understanding of how the space would actually 'look', we focused on defining a basic construction unit, a kind of building block, which could be modulated to build different sorts of furniture (benches, tables, stools, pots, etc.). The measurement and shape of the 'unit' would be based on the grid of tiles/bricks on the ground of the terrace (44cm), and decided that the structural elements would be constructed with beams and the surfaces with plywood.

24

Being 10:15, we began getting a bit anxious, as we were still missing two key elements for the activity of the day: the tools and the participants (youngsters). Almost as if he would have read my mind from afar, just a couple of minutes later Ludo arrived with a trailer attached to his car: "the tools are here!" he shouted; I was relieved to have one of the issues sorted out. We helped him unload the tools and check if everything was there, after which he left to park his car. While we waited for the youngsters to arrive, we continued working with Giacomo on a framework to give the participants for the construction. About 10 minutes later, before we could have a concrete plan, we saw some youngsters standing in front of Tajine, like awaiting instructions for something to do. At that

- 24 **In describing a fictional scenario of Walter Gropius travelling throughout Minecraft worlds, Grima and Muzi (2015) highlight the connection between the digital game and the Bauhaus, based on the basic unit of the building block. In our case, defining the 'building block' was key to allow the youngsters to participate in the construction with clear tasks, yet seeing the myriad of possibilities surfacing from a basic unit.**

point, we knew we had to take very quick decisions to start the construction; with the basic construction unit defined (a 44cm side cube), Giacomo suggested we set up 'working stations' for different tools and give as concrete as possible tasks to the group at each station. I thought it was a good idea, yet noted that so far only three youngsters had arrived. "It doesn't matter! As long as there is the 'station', people can come and go and exchange roles and tools". We set, then, a first station for the mitre saw with two tables two metres away from each other and a series of wood blocks to level the long beams when cutting; a second station with several chairs for the circular and jigsaw; and a third station as a space to 'assemble' the pieces. We set up the three stations in front of the indifferent look of the three youngsters; once set-up, we asked them if they were coming for the minga. "Yes", they answered, after which I tried to find out if there were more of them coming; "no idea", they said. With Giacomo we began to use masking tape to mark on the floor the location for the first modules as a way of preparing the space for construction, which allowed us, in turn, to define which modules we would need to build: four benches, four stools and one big table. I was starting to resign myself to the fact that we would have to make-do with these three boys, who barely understood -not to mention speak- English, when we saw a group of around nine youngsters approach, and greet the three ones already there. Now we were set.

Brahim, the coordinator accompanying the group, introduced himself to me in Flemish, to which I answered in English; visibly offended, he responded "Warom spreek je in het Engels? Ik spreek goed Vlaams!" (Why do you speak to me in English? I can speak Flemish!). It was clear that

- 25 In using tape to show the 'spatiality' of law in public space through their project Friction Atlas, Patelli and Vendrame highlight the importance of giving a spatial representation to abstract constructions, as law is (2018). But, similarly, using tape for outlining on the ground may serve as a way of 'prefiguring' a material intervention, as it was our case with mapping the position of the different modules.

he thought I didn't speak to him in Flemish because I thought he was not Flemish; little idea he had that I was not Flemish myself and my capabilities with the language were rather limited. I tried to explain this to him, which he kind of understood, so we had to continue speaking in a 'broken Flemish', being as it was that he did not speak English. He then asked what should the youngsters do, which I saw as a cue for Giacomo and I to begin giving specific tasks to different groups: "you two, cut twelve beams of 44cm", "you three, cut 4 boards of 44 by 44cm and three of 44 by 132cm" and "you two, begin assembling the pieces". However I cannot describe a 'method' for this activity, it is possible to look in retrospective at the key moment where things simply 'started to work': when we gave tools and concrete tasks to the youngsters and they started to see how, by doing them, the terrace began to take shape. Once they got a task, it was actually difficult to get them to stop; in fact, we had to constantly pass by each 'station' to change the indications. The rest of the day flowed in a very organic - which does not mean mechanic - way: with Giacomo we would map on the ground and define the modules to be built, which determined the elements to be cut and assembled, and the youngsters would execute them. During the whole day I also acted as a messenger, biking to buy the necessary tools, materials or elements that were missing. The end of the first day saw half of the terrace being 'furnished' and the youngsters who took part proudly asking to have a picture taken of the group. Before they left, I asked the youngsters if they would come the day after; "no way man, it's Sunday, a family day!".

The second day of the act two of the minga started with just one certainty: very few people would probably join to



Image 3.
Act 2:
collective
construction
of the infrastruc-
ture.



collaborate. So, instead of waiting for people to arrive, we got straight to work with Giacomo and his partner Lynn, riding on the remaining energy from the day before and the working stations and organisation we had achieved. Having built the stools, benches and tables we wanted and based on an idea of one of the participants of the previous day, we decided to focus our energy and remaining time to build a tapchan. Amongst the plants and trees donated by Thomas was a 4m high olive tree, which Yousra mentioned could serve as an important symbol for Tajine and around which we decided to build the tapchan. Giacomo, Lynn and I started to work. Late in the morning, when we had already started to build the tapchan, Mela Zuljevic, a new PhD student from Hasselt University arrived and lent a hand. The four of us worked on an easygoing -yet productive- pace during the whole day. When the tapchan was done, we spent the last hour of the day organising the plants and trees, resulting in the oasis Yousra dreamt in the middle of the street with self-made furniture. Giacomo left that evening, but the week was just starting for me with the TOS.

26

Act 3
April 31st

The last day of the OS had arrived, and Anne, Michael and I were visibly tired after a long and busy week. Besides us, the organising team, the rest of the present participants could be counted on one hand. Having reached the highest peak of the OS in the middle of the week (Wednesday-Thursday) the last two days (weekend) were seen as moments for decompressing. Saturday we had a breakfast discussion and an informal talk, while on Sunday the third act of the minga was the only activity planned. The goal of the third act of the minga was twofold: to use and enjoy the space we had built together and to give a closure to the TOS. I delegated in Yousra the responsibility

- 26 **A tapchan is a platform-type kind of furniture covered with cushions or carpets, original from central Asia, where people can lay down as well as eat food or drink tea (Tapchan, 2020).**



Image 4.
Finished terrace (top) and tapchan (bottom).



and autonomy to organise this third act, as she was the central actor within all this process and cooking is her business and expertise. In her vision for the session -and following the spirit of the minga- she invited a neighbour to contribute by cooking food from a different culture: that is how Shun Made, a Taiwanese resident of Hasselt, led the activity of collectively cooking dumplings.

Yousra and her family were all busy cooking a BBQ; meanwhile, some of her children, Michael, Jon (another of TRADERS ESR's) and I were helping Shun prepare the dumplings. To me it is still a mystery if the choice of inviting Shun was a deliberate choice by Yousra (I mean, her in particular, instead of any other citizen), as well as the choice to cook dumplings, but they were the perfect dish for cooking collectively and building community around, and Shun was a patient and sensible teacher sharing her knowledge for cooking them. Similarly to the dynamic with the 'stations' during the second act, there were clear and defined functions to cook the dumplings: knead, thread and cut the dough, make it flat and cut it in a round shape, putting the filling and carefully closing it. All of us were exchanging roles, wanting to learn all the steps in the process, without ever interrupting the 'production chain'; moreover, when someone had to take a new task, the person doing it until that moment would transmit the knowledge that Shun had initially given him, making the scene a beautiful situation of weaving collective learning through active conversation .

27

Some locals gathered with us to eat together on the terrace, feeling like the final scene of an Asterix story, with everyone gathering around a table, sharing good food. Besides the TOS organisers, a couple of participants

28

- 27 **These sorts of open conversational dynamics bring us back to one of the essential practices of Colombian indigenous communities: el círculo de la palabra (which could be roughly translated as 'the word circle'), an horizontal way of building and sharing knowledge (usually around a fireplace): "the 'circular forms' of dialogue have allowed [communities] to demonstrate an harmonic form of sharing knowledge and wisdom with humility throughout history" (Majín Melenje, 2018).**
- 28 **Every Asterix story ended with a communal moment of sharing a meal, a reward experienced collectively, after their journeys.**

and some locals, my mother in law (Anna Maria) and her boyfriend (Jean Marc) joined the feast. They intended to join some activities of the TOS, but just came the last day, being able to take part only in the third act of the minga. After eating, when people were starting to ‘disperse’ back into their lives, Jean Marc stood up and took out his wallet while asking, "How much do I owe you?" As much as I felt it ‘went against the grain’ of the whole event, I didn’t want to avoid Yusra making some extra money, so I left it for her to decide if she would receive it or not. As I expected, Yusra was baffled by the question and kindly said "No, it’s really not necessary". But for JM it was not normal to have received something (food and drinks), without giving something in exchange, so he insisted: "Please, it has been very good, how much was it?" Knowing Yusra’s stand, Michael and I insisted: "It is not the spirit of the minga, you have already given back with your presence". He seemed partly convinced with our response, but his habitus wasn’t, so he still put a 50 euro banknote on the table. Once again, we insisted that it was – not only not necessary – but almost offensive, as it went against the spirit of a minga. He finally understood and stored the banknote back in his wallet. This situation allowed us to reflect on the three acts of the minga, which were now coming to an end, through the lens of the location where it took place; it made me critically inquire if it makes any sense at all to appropriate such practices on the Global North, wondering if the words ‘northern’ and ‘minga’ can -or should- go together. The fact of having had that situation and the conversations it triggered, makes me think that it is not only possible, but highly desirable to do so, in order to dispute the hegemonic perspectives of design and research.

29

30

- 29 According to Bourdieu, “habitus are classificatory schemes, principles of classification, principles of vision and division, different tastes. They make distinctions between what is good and what is bad, between what is right and what is wrong, between what is distinguished and what is vulgar” (1998). As such, our own predisposition (that is, our habitus) will determine what for us may be accepted as legitimate or not.
- 30 In a similar vein to Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, Santiago Castro-Gómez calls for revising what is established as a ‘common sense’ within a given collectivity, understood as an “undisputed horizon of everyday practices” (2018). I see this as an useful concept for scrutinising what might be considered the ‘hegemony’ (Gramsci, 2006) within design practice, and dispute its manifestation through what people perceive as the common sense -of design.



Image 5.
Cooking
and eating
together
in the
terrace.

With our bellies full and the satisfaction of an extremely insightful week, it was almost time to go back home. We all started to collect the dishes, and take everything to the kitchen; Yousra asked us to let the mess there, saying that she would take care of it after; but Michael and Jon, however tired and wanting to go home, spent an hour cleaning up. Never before had a message by Colombian architect Simon Hosie seemed more relevant: "I think with Manuel (a friend in common, who worked with him before) you can move forward in great ways in what you propose to yourselves; he has a great talent and a great attitude to confront challenges, even when they exceed the dreamlike parameters. From my point of view, this is the fundamental aspect when undertaking any process, having in mind that the result of a good dinner with friends does not depend exclusively on the recipe, but on the disposition and the generosity to wash the dishes".

31

31 S. Hosie (Personal communication, March 26, 2014)



Image 6.
Jon and
Michael
washing
the dishes.

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Routes through
the roots

September 4th
2015

"Before coming to Taipei, I was afraid I would have to make-do without my morning coffee, following the stereotype of east Asians being tea-drinkers; well, I was gladly surprised to find Taiwan, in general, having a big coffee culture, and this place, in particular, serving delicious coffee for more than 60 years" - I said, pointing at Fong Da, a historic coffee house located in the historic district of Taipei, Wanhua, while 60 attentive Taiwanese would listen carefully at the interpreter with the mic. Without any context, this situation might seem odd -at best- or insulting -at worse-, as one might think that I was taking a colonialist and racist approach, full of generalisations and stereotypes. However, a brief context on how I arrived at such a moment and situation seems only necessary for me to suggest how that is nothing close to the case I will recount.

Invitation and
practical 'issues'

On May 26th I woke up to find the following e-mail in my mailbox:

Dear Pablo, I'm Lisa, and I've heard about you from Weilun Tseng. Given that Taipei was designated World Design Capital in 2016, we decided to invite international designers to participate in a residency project. We hope to stream the power of design among cities through the exchange of designers and citizens in the city. Last year we got to know about your work "The Other Market"; we've been interested in this project and the concept a lot. When we were informed about the opportunity to invite designers to have a residency in Taipei, we immediately thought about you. We sincerely hope to have the opportunity to work with you. We also look forward to seeing your new work. [] We will take care of your lecture fee, plane ticket, living expenses, and the costs to host the activity. Please

feel free to let me know if you need more specific details or if you have any questions. Sincerely, Lisa.

In short, I was being invited to Taipei for a residency or exchange. I was of course very enthusiastic, but also wary of the fact that I had just recently begun to work with LUCA on TRADERS. Moreover, at the end of October we would host our second Summer (Autumn) School, and I was in charge of its planning and organisation. But this seemed an opportunity I could not let go, as it would be an option to go to Asia – where I had never been – and work on a site-specific project with local partners. I wrote to Liesbeth asking for her insight: her answer? "Indeed a bad timing, but I understand you want to go". As much as I would have liked to go for three months and have a real immersion in the context to develop a project, I answered to Lisa, stating my interest in taking part in the Design Exchange, for two weeks at the end of August.

After agreeing on the time and engagement of the collaboration with Art Happening (the hosting organization), they took care of buying the tickets and arranged my stay in Taipei. However, there was a 'minor' (major) detail that they had not thought about: considering that, to that date, they had only invited European designers to both the residencies and exchanges, they ignored the fact that I needed a Visa to travel to Taiwan. Experienced as I was with these sorts of migratory hassles, I began to worry that we might not make it on time for the travel and we would have to cancel the whole invitation. Despite my concern – or perhaps powered by it – I asked the hosting organisation in Taipei to send me an invitation letter and called the Embassy of Taiwan for an appointment. Due to issues of crossing agendas and mutual holidays, I just

- 1 I was offered two different ways of collaboration: a three-month Design Residency in which I would develop a whole Project; or a Design Exchange for maximum one month, at the end of which I would organise a workshop or other type of activity to share the results and insight of my visit.
- 2 I saw my potential visit to Taipei as an opportunity to have a South-South collaboration (however the invitation would have not come, had I not studied at the DAE in the Netherlands), understanding that Taiwan can be seen as 'southern' according to the framing of the 'south' as places that share "similar patterns of colonisation, migration and cultural combinations" (Papastergiadis, 2010). Taiwan, not being recognised as a legitimate state by Chinese authorities, and its citizens required to have a Visa to study in Europe, shares similar southern characteristics as many Latin American countries.

received the official invitation letter on the 10th of August. Having in mind that I am planned for travelling the 23rd of this month, I began to seriously consider that we would have to call the whole thing off. Nevertheless, I went to the embassy of Taiwan to hand in the necessary documents to process my visa. When I arrived in the embassy, it became clear to me that getting a visa for Taiwan was not the same as getting a visa for, say, an EU country, and I was immediately assured that I would be able to travel.

After taking a train from Brussels to Amsterdam, the 23rd of August I boarded the flight to Taipei; I did so with complete awareness of the limited time I would have in the city (two weeks), which made it particularly urgent to have a critical stance on what is the scope and reach of such short interventions. I am normally wary of calling every participation, initiative or practice that we (or anybody else) do a 'project': I call this 'projectitis', the disease to fit everything within the idea of a (art or design) project. In this case, this was especially important, as I had to manage the expectations of the people who invited me, in relation to what I would be able to 'do' in just two weeks. As much as I might have done some previous research on Taipei (I did not know I was going to work on a specific district), the WDC and other projects done by designers in residency or exchange, I was still an outsider with a limited knowledge and perspective on the issues of the context.

Visit and research
August 24th

I arrived Monday the 24th of August to Taipei. After walking out through the Arrivals exit in the airport, I was met by Tzuhan Yeh (who introduced herself as Irene), my aide, interpreter and overall 'partner' for the following two weeks. Tzuhan is a DAE bachelor alumni herself, and

- 3 **Being lighter-skinned than the stereotypical Latin American, I have rarely suffered from 'everyday racism' or xenophobia, yet my nationality made me subject to constant acts of institutional racism within Europe (like not being able to participate in projects or not being invited to different events or initiatives, given my migratory status). For this reason, it was somewhat refreshing to find a bureaucratic errand that did not seem to discriminate according to my nationality.**
- 4 **For her graduation project in the Contextual Design masters programme at the Design Academy of Eindhoven, Ya-Ling Hsao practically 'moved' in the masters studio and lived there for almost the whole academic year. At the end of her process, instead of a thesis, she wrote a letter to the external examiner, saying "many people say they like 'my project', but this is no project, it is just living".**
- 5 **In The nightmare of participation, Markus Miessen -reflecting on Edward Said- argues for the importance for the intellectual's role as that of an (uninvited) outsider, as it represents interests different to those present in the inside of a given context (2010). In this case, I try to be as aware as possible of both the limitations and potentialities of my position as an outsider.**
- 6 **When I began my studies at the DAE and met my Taiwanese classmates, I found out -with no little surprise- that they were given English-friendly names by their English teachers back in Taiwan. Introducing themselves as Echo, Max, Irene, etc., you could see how they were forced to 'fit-in' in a culture by not making it difficult for the English-speaking world to relate**

made me feel very much 'at ease' in my visit to Taipei. We hopped in a bus that would take us to the centre of the city, and started talking about the relationship of 'design' with 'everyday life' (both of us ignorant of the fact that this would be -one of- the central themes of my visit and intervention). I was constantly watching out the window, curious to discover a whole new culture and context; in the middle of a the dialogue, between the myriad of signs I saw on front of the shops in the street all written in chinese alphabet, I spotted a sign written in Latin alphabet with the word 'design' on it, and a series of numbers that were probably a phone number where you would call to buy that so-called 'design'. Now, this does not mean anything per se, nor is it a big coincidence, but it does make the relationship between design and everyday life ever more timely.

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After a ride of around 45min, we arrived at what after I would learn was the historical district of Taipei: Wanhua. We got off the bus in a big open space, surrounded by major stores with flashy screens and lights, a scene you would expect to find in a stereotypical (east) Asian capital. Surprisingly enough (for me), after walking a couple of blocks inside one of the neighbourhoods, we were in an area full of character and history, evident in the buildings and people on the street. When arriving at the hotel, Tzuhan suggested that, as I would probably be tired of the travel and suffering from jetlag, it was best if I took the afternoon to myself and rested well for beginning to work the day after.

August 25th

After a rather rough first night (my windowless room did not help in overcoming my light jet lag), Tzuhan came to pick me up at the Hotel to go and have breakfast. I told

with them; I saw it as a violent imposition to them, and encouraged my non-Taiwanese classmates to teach us their original names (which we all eventually did).



Image 1.
Picture of
sign taken
from the
bus

- 7 The relation between design and everyday life is of course very complex, and the debates around it rich and abundant. But I would like to argue for a notion of the latter as “filled with trivialities [but] also [hiding] many unknown and interesting things”, and the possibility of design to intervene in it by understanding that “radical change is only possible through the critique of everydayness. In other words, in order to change the world, we have to change everyday life” (Čelik, 2014). Now, this does not square the discussion on ‘who can be called a designer’-addressed by Manzini (2015) and Rawsthorn (2014), amongst many others- but it gives some space for designers (understood in a wider sense) to operate in -and transform- everyday life.

her that, as a good Colombian, I needed a decent coffee to start the day, to which she responded by taking me to the most fascinating and delicious ‘coffee-house’ in the centre of Taipei: Fong Da (I would be a regular of the café during the following two weeks and it became the site for the scene I started this text describing). After having had some coffee and pastries, we began to do the main thing we did during the two weeks of my visit: we walked; we walked and walked as a way of discovering the city, but also as a way of intervening in it.

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Walking to an area called Monga, the oldest part of Wanhua that hosts the Lungshan temple, Tzuhan started to tell me about the expectations they had by inviting me to Taipei; they said my presence would be framed in one of the themes of the WDC: urban regeneration. But they also took the liberty of ‘adding’ another issue for me to work on, based on the district chosen as the context of my investigation (Wanhua): homelessness, to which they probably expected me to propose a ‘practical solution’ (this was hinted to me through their understanding of ‘social design’ as a practice to give practical solutions to ‘social’ problems). I tried to tell her the many ways in which I thought the expectations put on me were problematic: on the one hand, I thought it would be irresponsible -at best- to propose a ‘solution’ to deep societal problems within a two-week visit (let alone to previously frame ‘homelessness’ as a problem in itself, practically ignoring its root causes) and, on the other hand, the perspective they had of ‘social design’ as a practice of (almost magical) solutionism. I tried to adjust the expectations by committing to do some kind of ‘action’ at the end of my visit, so as to share my take on the context and issues; yet I insisted the first week we would focus on a sensible

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8 **Walking as a critical and direct intervention in the urban space was probably first appropriated by the Surrealists who, through their Wanderings, decided to walk-out of the enclosed studios to encounter the particularities of everyday life in the cities. Later, the Situationists -led by Guy Debord- would also put in practice *derivés*, as a walking practice that “tended to avoid the more obvious tourist areas, which pandered to crass appetites for ultravisible urban spectacles” (Basset, 2004). Similarly, Maria Lugonés proposed the figure of the “streetwalker theoretician” as a radical practice of meeting face-to-face and having a deeper understanding of ‘the social’ (Lugonés, 2003).**

9 **Tzuhan explained to me the situation by saying that “Wanhua District has the most low-income households in Taipei, with the elderly living alone, the physically handicapped and homeless people.” T. Yeh (Personal communication, August 15, 2020)**

10 **These kinds of approaches are have been highlighted by publications as *Looks good, feels good, is good: How social design changes our world* (Van der Zwaag, 2014) that, with a very humanitarian (and probably well-intended) tone, highlight the role of social design to solve problems of different scale and magnitude. However, such perspectives ignore (at least partially) the potential of social design to re-frame the problem or issues that designers deal with or participate in new ways of defining ‘the social’ (Erikson & Mazé, 2011).**

11 **‘Solutionist’ approaches to (social) design can be linked to Evgeny Morozov’s (2013) critique of “technological solutionism”, a blind faith in ceding the most**

observation of the context, trying to forget the ‘need’ for some kind of result or outcome. And so, we kept walking.

Our first destination was the ‘headquarters’ of a non-profit organisation called Homeless Taiwan, where we met Yong-Tze Lee and Teng-Yu Ku; they kindly received us and told us that, besides giving nine homeless people (who they called ‘street friends’) a place to live, they train them to give informative tours around different areas of Wanhua, combining historical information with their personal experiences. I get mixed feelings regarding the work done by this organisation: on the one hand, I find remarkable the effort done by them (with very little resources) in striving to find alternative productive scenarios for people who have been marginalised from society; on the other, I cannot avoid to see as problematic the fact that somehow homeless people are being instrumentalised and ‘street life’ is recuperated to be sold as a touristic service for better-off people. Nevertheless, I found it deeply inspiring that the main tool for the empowerment of the homeless people was ‘walking’ (tours) and the acknowledgment of their experience of the city. At the end of our visit, and by suggestion of ms. Lee and mr. Ku, we then headed to Urbanists Collaborative, a collective of city practitioners and concerned citizens who have set-up an ‘open office’ in the Bopilao block, for working on the recovery of the area directly with the citizens. Amongst the many different activities they host, I was surprised to discover that they organise a series of ‘walking tours’, focusing on highlighting and socialising the cultural and historical value of the district. These two visits not only reinforced my intention of walking as a critical intervention, but allowed me to identify it as a common practice within the citizens and organisations of Taipei.

control to technology, in order to solve the problems of our times.

- 12 As much as I was weary of the reach of an intervention after such short presence, I believed the importance of proposing an action that could trigger longer-lasting processes; as Zizek once said, “there are never perfect conditions for an act—every act by definition comes too early. But one has to begin somewhere, with a particular intervention; one just has to bear in mind the further complications (and potentialities?) that such an act will lead to.” (Zizek, 2015).



Image 2.
Homeless
people in
Wanhua.

- 13 In The miseducation of contemporary design, Salvatore Pelusso points at many new designers who are appropriating certain “street aesthetics”, somewhat bringing a sanitised version of poverty into the galleries, something that was only common in the art and music worlds until now (Pelusso, 2020). Certainly the case of Hidden Taiwan is different, as they are not ‘bringing the street into the white cube’, but inviting people -who rarely inhabit the streets- to them; howe-

August 26th

After a repairing night, in which I managed to recover from the jetlag and fatigue, we went again to have breakfast at Fong Da; Tzuhan briefed me on the plan of the day while sipping a good cup of siphon-prepared coffee. In the morning we went to a different zone of Wanhua, to visit a small gallery called Waley Art; once there, we were met and shown around the space by Paul Peng, who explained the work they did in supporting young artists in producing and showcasing their work. But the most interesting aspect (for me and my investigation) had to do with the neighbourhood where the gallery is located: it's an area which has received much less attention than Monga, yet has been targeted by private developers to 'erase' most of its history and build new residential units. Being shown around the area by Paul, we learnt that the neighborhood was built around a well, which developers are seeking to close, though the community has been resisting actively through diverse legal actions and community organising. Walking around the area, I could not but think of The Right to the City, as something that should not be taken for granted, but regularly claimed from the bottom up. In the afternoon we went to Future Ward, a co-working and Maker Space located inside the campus of Tatung University. I was amazed by the capacity, infrastructure and human resources of the place; however, I could not avoid but wonder why most FabLabs -this one included- were used and inhabited mainly by technically high-skilled people, yet had little connection with common citizens and rarely engaged with issues of everyday life. Moreover, the previous visit to an active and engaged community made me realize how so many cities suffer a deep divide between such communities and the skilled and creative class so praised by the likes of Richard Florida.

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ver, these kind of initiatives do contribute to whitewash the incapability of public authorities to address the issue from its roots causes.

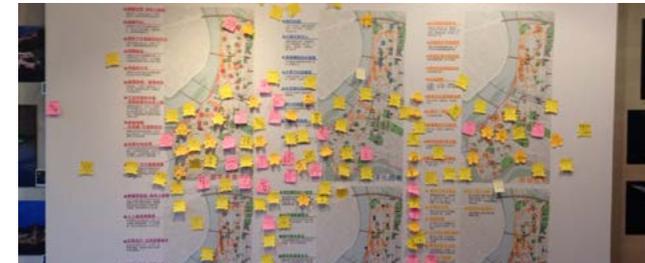


Image 3. Annotated maps at Urbanists Collaborative headquarters.

- 14 **The importance of walking (and the power of it being done by homeless) can be linked to De Certeau's plea for the role of the walker: "the ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below', below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk - an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, 'Wandersmänner', whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility. It is as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness. The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other." (De Certeau, 1998).**

August 27th

Thursday morning we had a meeting with some members of The Urbanists Collaborative and Art Happening (the organisation that invited me to Taipei), aimed at discussing some of the insights and ideas I had had during my first two days in Taipei. I told them that I had no clear idea of what 'I would do', but it would have for sure something to do with walking, as it was the most recurrent practice that came back on each visit we had and person we met. I pitched them my vague idea of 'walking the city as a way of building a stronger relation to it and its cultural and historical heritage'. They seemed excited by the insight, yet disappointed by the lack of a clear idea or proposal from my part: how might walking 'solve' the homeless issue and urban regeneration of Wanhua? I stayed in my opacity in terms of an expected outcome and tried instead to focus on the issues and insights I had found. The neighbours and the members of the Urbanists Collaborative invited me to a procession that would take place in the evening, a celebration of something they call the 'Opening of Ghost Doors'; I told them I would happily join.

In the previous days, I had shared with Irene my fascination for 'stamps' and that I had noticed that it was a very common practice in Taiwan to have stamps in shops, public sites, libraries, etc. as ways of having people 'mark' their visit to a place. Perhaps motivated by this information, she suggested we visit the last letter foundry still functioning in Taiwan: Ri Xing type foundry. Going there for me was like entering in a toy workshop for a child, but when speaking with the owner, I found their story even more fascinating: he told us -while he kept working, fabricating the typefaces himself by hand- that he has received numerous offers with immense amounts of money, probably to be able to 'modernise' the business or

- 15 Bopilao is a street whose adjacent houses were conserved as the original constructions of the first settlement of Taipei.
- 16 What the Urbanists Collaborative was doing is reminiscent of the endeavour of Renzo Piano in 1985, when he was asked to coordinate the renovation of Bari's city centre, and decided to set-up a tent with an office and workshop- space in a central square of the city. The project, known as Laboratorio di quartiere (neighbourhood workshop), made open and public the renovation plans, as well as invited for the active participation of citizens (Milella, 1985).
- 17 Saskia Sassen has repeatedly warned against the appropriation of cities by speculators and transnational finance institutions (2015), to which Taipei is as vulnerable to, as any other major cosmopolitan capital city.
- 18 In highlighting collective -over individual- agency and an ongoing and iterative struggle -instead of a one-off and permanent achievement-, David Harvey advocated for the right to the city as "far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization" (2012).
- 19 By citing Gershenfeld (2002), Dreessen et al. (2015) define FabLabs as collections of "commercially available machines and parts linked by software and processes we developed for making things, which allow people

turn to a more profitable one, but he has always rejected them. His story is most likely a very common one, of small business owners or artisans in cities across the globe, standing against big developers and speculators, and it becomes an inspiration for people claiming their right to the city.

As promised, in the evening we joined the procession in Wanhua; here, once again, I saw a clear example of walking (together) as a way of connecting to the cultural and historical heritage of a territory. During the procession, we walked around the district, stopping to pay respect in each of the temples present in the trajectory, and ending by the Tamsui river, where a prayer was made and house-shaped paper lanterns were sent adrift in the river. I was very excited to have participated in this beautiful and intimate encounter, which also reinforced the insights I had had of Taipei so far.

August 28th

Today we had two walking tours around Wanhua. In the morning we met Mr. John, a social worker who has been working with the homeless of the district for over 12 years; he knows very well the area and the people, and in the private walk he gave us, he combined general history with his personal experiences. Amongst the stories he shared with us, he told us that Wanhua is known as 'The district of the five currents', given the concentration of hooligans, strays, homeless people, mobile vendors and informal workers; he showed us an alley behind a market where the prostitutes used to work, and which had the mosaic and tiles of their old places still standing (even if the buildings don't exist anymore). In the afternoon I had the opportunity to join one of the tours organised by Hidden Taiwan, the organisation we visited the first day. The

to develop a prototype of almost any imaginable product". Yet Dreessen et al. (2016) also advocate for putting such spaces in service of the city, by supporting non-experts to use its facilities and grounding the space to the context where it is located.

- 20 Through his seminal work 'The Rise of the Creative Class' (2003), Richard Florida is said to have had a tremendous impact on urban policies leading to gentrification processes. The central argument brought forward by Florida was that people would no longer have to migrate looking for the best jobs, but that jobs (or job providers, like companies) would be the ones to move where there would be a higher concentration of 'creatives'. But, as Wetherell notes, Florida's latest book is a mea culpa acknowledging the damaging effects his theses have had in shaping [American] cities (2017).



Image 4. Procession in Wanhua for the 'Opening of the Ghost Doors'

tour, guided by a former-homeless guy known as Popeye, took us around the area of the Ximen MRT station, and he also combined general history of some buildings and sites with his personal experience on the street (for instance, he spoke about a major police breakdown against homeless that took place in an open square). Both tours reinforced the power of walking to appropriate the city and public spaces, as well as it being a common practice within Taipei's community organisations; however, I felt that they missed some kind of 'permanent' element (a souvenir?) that supports the permanence of the memory and experience over time.

August 29th

Saturday had arrived. The week was almost over, and I would have to be figuring something out, as the date for the open lecture had already been set (Friday, september 4th) and I would be somehow expected to deliver some sort of outcome. I told Tzuhan that they should not worry, as I would come out with 'something', but that we would discuss it throughout the day. We went to an area called 'South Airport' (called like that in honour of the location of the previous airport, before the current one was built) where, besides learning about the strategies developers are engaging in order to unleash a process of gentrification, we met with the founder of Taipei Walking Tours, and agency that is taking the challenge to devise unconventional tours of the city, combining theatre, art, architecture, history and different social aspects of the neighborhoods. When I shared with him my insights, he responded quite enthusiastically and positively (being close to what they do), yet was weary about sustainability: "these processes take time", he said.

While we ate dinner in South Airport's Night Market,



Image 5. Meeting with the founders of Taipei Walking Tours at South Airport area



I shared with Tzuhan some of the ideas I had for next Friday. I insisted on the fact that I did not feel responsible 'proposing' a project in just one week, nor to attempt 'solving' any major (nor even minor) issue in the city; instead, I would like to propose an experimental way of sharing my experience in the city, which might after serve as inspiration or tool for others to use and re-appropriate in their own ways. In practical terms, I would like to guide a walking tour myself, leading people (locals) to different sites of Wanhua, combining historical information I had learnt, as well as my own personal experience during the last week; and each person who joins the tour would receive a 'passport', which would be stamped in each stop and complemented by people's own notes (which, in turn, would also serve as a 'souvenir' for people to keep a personalised memory of the experience). Tzuhan seemed kind of baffled by the proposal, but was probably assured by my conviction and enthusiasm; she told me she would help me throughout the following week to do all the necessary production for the tour to take place. Still, I could not but left wondering: how are people going to respond to a foreigner showing them their own city? Will there be anyone at all interested? Would they feel flattered or offended?

Monday
August 31st

As much as I would have preferred to spend my second week in Taipei continuing to discover the city and meeting different people, the expectations regarding the delivery of some sort of outcome, led me instead into a design-production mode. We began by visiting a paper-shop, where we bought the paper for the production of the passport; after, while waiting to be served in a 'slow coffee shop' (our coffee took literally more than 30 minutes being prepared), I discussed with Tzuhan the

route of the tour for Friday, so that I could move forward in designing the map and passport. We defined the 6 stops of the tour based on the information I was given by the different people I met throughout the previous week, as well as my own personal experience walking around the district. We also defined that the tour would be called Routes through the roots, as a way of highlighting the historical value of Wanhua (the roots) for the city of Taipei, and anyone would be able to join prior registration.

Later that day I worked on my own in designing the graphics for the passport and map; specially regarding the latter, I could not but think of Guy Debord's psychogeography, as a way of representing -not the objective measures of physical space- but the personal experiences and relationships of a place. This led me to design a map that would be 'useless' for someone trying to find a site in the district, yet (hopefully) valuable for the people who would follow the tour and interested in experiencing the city in a less directed way. Additionally, my psychogeographical map of Wanhua could be folded so as to have the passport to stamp and annotate throughout the walk. However things were falling easily into place and I was getting all the support I needed, I was slightly nervous of the event and how locals would respond to it.

September 1st

Today I met with Han Cheung, a journalist writing for the Taipei Times (most read English-written newspaper in Taipei) who wanted to report on my visit and Friday's event on the paper. The meeting took place -as it could not have been otherwise- in Feng Da coffee house, where I shared with him the insights I had had the previous week and the ideas I had for the following Friday. Speaking with him also sparked new insights and ideas; however I had

21 **Psychogeography is a way of understanding a territory, not only by its ecological and architectural features, but by the personal experience of the people who inhabit it, which is rarely taken into account; "the sudden change of ambiance in a street within the space of a few metres; the evident division of a city into a few zones of distinct psychic atmospheres; the path of least resistance which is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the physical contour of the ground); the appealing or repelling character of certain places -all this seems to be neglected." (Debord, 1959).**

22 **The article based on the interview was published in the printed edition of September the 3rd, as well as an online version here: <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2015/09/03/2003626807>**

made the proposal of the tour, I had rarely pictured it in my head and foreseen the performative potential of the scene. Suddenly, I realised that perhaps the most powerful aspect of the event would not be ‘the act of walking’, but of doing it together (as a pilgrimage or procession). 23

September 2nd

The responsiveness of Tzuhan to all my ideas and insights did not stop surprising me, as she organised a visit to an important map-maker of Taiwan, who happened to have his office in the middle of Wanhua. Mr. Yu showed us around their small office and with great pride showed us a map they had developed for biking through Taiwan; of course the maps they make are of a different kind than the map I was doing for my tour, yet it was fascinating to find a third generation map-maker and publisher in the centre of Wanhua (also mapping for sustainable mobility). We then went to another FabLab / Makerspace in order to inquire on the possibility to produce the stamps for the tour (I made a line drawing representing each of the stops of the tour, which was then made into a stamp). We decided to use simple MDF to make the set of stamps, and managed to produce them in the same day. 24

September 3rd

As we walked together with Tzuhan the route we would take for the tour on the day after, she told me something I definitely did not expect: there were more than one hundred people who had registered for the walk and public lecture! However telling her I was keen on going through with the tour for so many people, she said that the production team was concerned of the logistical issues it might provoke. For that reason, they had decided to limit the tour to 50 people.

- 23 **Just as Debord advocated for drifting (practicing *derivés*) in small groups (Debord, 1959), Maria Lugonés calls for how the streetwalker, “una callejera, en compañía, in the midst of company, and obliterating the theory/practice distinction, (...) seeks out, puts out, entrusts, invokes, rehearses, performs, considers, and enacts tactical-strategic practices of resistant/emancipatory sense making” (2003). Lugonés, in particular, highlights the emancipatory potential of inhabiting together the public space, of forming critical masses to subvert the power relations in public space.**
- 24 **The company is called Dah Yu Publishing.**



Image 6.
Meeting
Mr. Yu at
his office

Walking tour and
public lecture
September 4th

The day of the tour had arrived and I was really nervous, as I knew that a high number of people registered was no guarantee of a good acceptance of what I was doing. For that reason, I decided to walk the route of the tour in the morning by myself, trying to repeat in my head the different anecdotes and stories I was planning to share in each stop. As much as I understand the value of scripts, I have always done better by improvising and spontaneously speaking-listening (storytelling?) based on basic notes and ideas (be it in a lecture, presentation or class). I started to wonder if I would not have preferred to have a more scripted version of what I wanted to say, but finally decided to follow my guts and 'go with the flow', hoping that participants would appreciate the sincerity and humility of my presence and attitude.

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I began to prepare the material for the tour, while people slowly started to arrive and shyly sit down on the chairs set up in the room (an open space in Bopilao where we would start and end the tour, as well as where I would be doing my lecture). We had enough prints of the passport/map: a tabloid page with my psychogeographical map of Wanhua was printed on one side and on the other side 8 pages that when folded became the passport; we had two sets of stamps, in case there was a problem with any one of them, packed in its own box with the image of the six stamps engraved on the top; and we had stickers, which each participant would be asked to put on their clothes, so as to intensify the feeling of a (critical) mass walking together around the neighbourhood. I insisted repeatedly on the possibility of speaking through a megaphone, as I thought it would create a strong image for the participants and outsiders, but the production team was concerned about the quality of the sound for so many

25 Bertolotti et al. (2016) explored the potential -and limitations- of stories -and storytelling- for designers, particularly those working within the realm of social innovation. By arguing that "stories are used as design tools that contribute to the generation of new meanings and values for the context in which they are framed", they highlight their role in the (collective) construction of meaning; I would say that this is exactly what stories would do in the context of the walk: try to create (new, collective) meanings for the urban space of Wanhua.

people in public space, so we had a portable speaker with a mic instead.

Once all the registered people arrived -not much after the first person arrived (Taiwanese are very punctual!)- I welcomed them and invited them to take one passport/ map each. I then explained to them how to fold it, so that they could compose the booklet that would serve as a passport. Having interest as I do in tutorials and manuals as ways of opening and sharing knowledge, it became easy for me to explain to them the way of doing it. We then parted for the tour, with Tzuhan and I heading the group, a production assistant with the rollable speaker, 49 Taiwanese citizens and 1 German reporter living in Taipei. I began by making the disclaimer that the intention of the tour was not to 'teach them' anything about the city or district, as I considered that it was not a role for me to take, being a foreigner visiting Taipei for just two weeks; instead, I told them that I wanted to share with them my experience of Wanhua, hoping that through it, they would find connections to their own personal stories and build a stronger relation to the territory.

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The tour itself was a beautiful and sensible experience; we walked together around Wanhua and, as I expected and desired, the sharing of stories and information was not unidirectional: each time we stopped and I shared a story (either personal or historical), there would be at least one participant adding -or confronting- their knowledge and narratives about the site. And as we moved from place to place, someone would catch-up to walk along with Tzuhan and I to share with us their own histories and experiences. Our first stop was in the place that the evenings became the Huaxi Street Tourist

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- 26 The Cuban designer Ernesto Oroza has extensively researched the inventiveness of the island inhabitants in resolving everyday issues; he traces this back to the 'special period', with the dismantlement of the URSS and the heavy embargo imposed by the US: Cubans had to make-do with what they had (Bozzi & Oroza,, 2002). But most of the (street) knowledge would have not been so widely spread, had the Cuban government not edited, printed and distributed two manuals: *El libro de la familia* (The book of the family) and *Con nuestros propios esfuerzos* (With our own efforts).



Image 7. Walking tour with citizens of Taipei. Pictures by Jimmy Chao.

- 27 Each of the stops within the walk could be seen through the lens of what Maria Lugonés calls *hangouts*, places where the appropriation of space can take place through tactical-strategical intervention of active subjects (2003); but she highlights the important of moving (together) from one place to another: "the occupation of space is defined by movement in and between hangouts where resistant sense was/is made in practice by active subjects".

Night Market; the image on the stamp (representing my personal experience) was of a big fat pig, which I saw wandering freely one of the days I was walking around the area; for me it was somewhat 'particular' to see livestock wandering around the city. But that experience was just an 'excuse' to highlight the importance of such 'night markets' -urban spaces that are completely empty during daytime, but become hectic and fully inhabited by night-; I then asked the participants: "raise your hand if you come often to eat here?" Even being the most popular night market in Wanhua, only one person raised his hand out of 50. We then stopped in front of the building where Dah Yu Publishing (the map-makers) had their central office, which not one of the walkers knew about; the image on the stamp was a map. However, they all recognised the maps that they make and acknowledged owning at least one: we discussed how map-making is such an 'understated' profession, as the products they make are omnipresent but we rarely notice them or think about the labour put in making them. We then went by a market in a pedestrian-passage, where we had visited the equivalent of a 'Pharmacy' in Chinese medicine; I told them how fascinating this was for me -doing my best not to romanticise it as 'exotic'- as it showed that even in cosmopolitan cities as Taipei there was place for the coexistence of diverse forms of (scientific) knowledge. The image on the stamp was of a hand-scale, used to weigh the ingredients and herbs offered for the prescriptions. We then passed by the riverside of the Tamsui river, where the walk of the 'Opening of the Ghost Doors' ended. I shared with them the beautiful experience of joining the procession -which none of them had ever joined- and stamped their passport with an image of the paper lanterns that were sent adrift in the river.



Image 8. Detail of stamps and passports. Photos by Jimmy Chao.



We then came back to the the first site I visited when I arrived in Taipei and the background scene for the beginning of this chronicle: Fong Da coffee house. Touching on two stereotypes -of Colombians being coffee-drinkers and 'Asians' drinking only tea- I shared with them my joy of finding this coffee house just a couple of blocks away from the hotel where I was staying. While I was sharing my experience, I saw the workers of the coffee house attentively following what I was saying and smiling at my story (they already recognised me after two weeks coming there daily). The image on the stamp was of a 'siphon-like' object they used to prepare the coffee. We then headed back to the place where I would give the lecture, but before entering I told them that I had not forgotten the sixth and last site I wanted to show them, I just could not find it back so I would instead share the story there: on my first days walking around Wanhua I saw a gigantic tree on a sidewalk, whose roots were savagely overflowing the concrete. I walked over the streets where I thought this was with no success, but thankfully had taken a photograph to further illustrate my story and the message I wanted to convey: "for me, Wanhua is like that tree: as much as you put concrete over its roots over and over -which is what 'new, modern developments do'- the history and culture will always re-emerge to claim its place".

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- 28 The lecture I gave was titled *Design, The City and The Everyday*, and it combined my personal insights on Taipei/Wanhua, as well as most of the theoretical references I have cited on this text.



Image 9.
A tree's roots overflowing sidewalk and street in Wanhua

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**Trasenster:
the missing link**

Prelude

The following text presents a testimony of my involvement in a social innovation project in which I was invited to participate, in 2015. The project, called Welcome to Seraing, was aimed at drafting ideas for the improvement of Trasenster, a neighbourhood of the city of Seraing (Belgium), and for which most of the work concentrated in two collective visits to the site, one in January and the other in May. The text is written as a diary, giving importance to my own personal voice in the process, but also making use of the testimonio as a valuable narrative resource; footnotes are used as a second voice, referencing relevant concepts or citations. Through recounting this experience, I wish to highlight how, as designers, we can have a positive impact –even in a short time engagement– when we are aware of our position and manage to articulate our work with local actors.

1

Part I

2015, January
Sunday 18th

As we walk together with a group of inhabitants of Trasenster, I feel my presence somewhat legitimised. I have a similar feeling as that of being in a critical mass, where the power of the crowd makes you feel safe; just that, in this case, there is the additional factor of being an outsider walking with a group of locals. I cannot avoid thinking that, often, designers and researchers take for granted their intervention in contexts not their own, evidencing a lack of critical scrutiny of their own position; and that is precisely my thinking, while I incessantly question my role in this activity and overall project. To understand how I came to this moment, we would have to go back five days.

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Wednesday 14th

I arrive in Liège in the evening; I know the city relatively well, as I took part in an exhibition and project three years before, which spin-offs' have made me a recurrent

- 1 **John Beverley has advocated for valorising the testimonio (testimonial narrative) within the social sciences, as it allows surfacing learnings and reflections coming from direct participants of an experience. However, he also makes a clear distinction of with 'anecdotal' storytelling, simply focused on facts occurring during an event, while the testimonio involves a critical reflection of the lived experience (Beverley, 1989).**
- 2 **Trasenster (officially named Ougrée-bas) is a neighbourhood of the city of Seraing located in-between the Muse River, the motorway and the derelict and abandoned Acerlor-Mittal factories.**
- 3 **Critical mass is the name given to a movement of cyclists born in San Francisco in 1992, and now spread around many cities around the world, in which citizens go biking together to occupy the streets. The term is coined from physics, referring to the minimum mass a material needs to provoke a nuclear reaction, and in social science it's understood as the minimum number of people necessary to unleash a given transformation (Ball, 2004).**
- 4 **The 'uninvited outsider' is one of the roles proposed by Markus Miessen (2010) in The Nightmare of Participation, as those that might contribute to situations of participation. Referencing Edward Said, Miessen values the role of cultural practitioners as outsiders, alien to conflicts of interests present inside a given context. However, I would argue that being an outsider should not be seen as an asset per se, but seen as a process in which the 'outsider' critically questions the relevance of his presence in such context.**

visitor. However, this time my destination is not Liège, but Seraing, a neighbouring city. Once the engine of the industrial and economic development of the province and region, Seraing is now one of the cities with highest unemployment and poverty rates in Belgium. I take a bus that takes me close to the hotel in Seraing where I will be hosted for the upcoming five days. Being dark already, I cannot see the grim urban landscape between Liège's central train station and the bus stop in front of the Hotel, but this would begin to reveal itself in the following days.

Image 1. Abandoned houses adjacent to a closed steel factory.

Thursday 15th

I wake up early and head to the hotel restaurant to have breakfast. Once there, I meet the colleagues I will be working with on the following days who, together with me, were invited to take part in this initiative.

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After having a quick breakfast and catching up (as most of us knew each other), we head to what would be our 'basecamp' for the following days: the former town hall of the once-city-now-neighbourhood of Ougrée. We arrive at a slick modernist building across the river from where the stadium of the Standard Liège (local football team) is located and representing a green and clean oasis in the middle of a decrepit post-industrial landscape. We then receive a brief contextualisation of the city and neighbourhood by Nik and Virginia: they introduce Seraing – and most specifically the neighbourhood of Trasenster – as an urban post-industrial scenario in social and economic crisis, unchained by the recent closures of its -once booming- industries. They also highlight what would be our

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- 5 **As designers, our position of outsiders intervening in contexts not our own should not be taken for granted, and we should always critically question our role and how we can contribute to endogenous processes.**



Image 1.
Picture of
sign taken
from the
bus

- 6 **Nik Baerten and Virginia Tassinari, of design studio Pantopicon and curators of the project; Henriette de Waal, Elisa Bertolotti and Yara Al-Adib were the other invited designers; and Gilles Franquignoul, photographer and film-maker who would document our work.**
- 7 **Welcome to Seraing (WtS) was a commission of Reciprocity, Design Triennial of Liège, and aimed at fostering the development of neighbourhoods through social innovation strategies. It followed a similar process made in Liège's neighbourhood of Saint Gilles three years before, in this case structured around a situated design residency and two design expeditions.**

role during the upcoming days, "not to fix the problems – which would be very pretentious, to say the least – but to activate elements of the area that could unleash wider improvements". However giving a 'flexible planning', they define two concrete activities for this first moment of the project: (1) at the end of the week, on Sunday, we would have an 'open doors' event at our basecamp, where we would present our insights and ideas to local citizens; and (2) every night we would collectively cook at the local youth house, inviting outsiders who could bring insights and contribute to the project, as well as locals we would meet throughout the days.

After the introduction at our basecamp, we receive the visit of Marc Coyette (puppeteer and community leader) and Frank Gerard (community organizer at La Maison du Combattant). They tour us around the neighbourhood, showing us what -for them- are the most critical spots and issues, which I perceive from two different perspectives: an objective and a subjective one. The first is related to infrastructure and jobs, for which the neighbourhood – more than the rest of Seraing – has been neglected in programs of improvement of facades and public spaces and, given their precarious living conditions, most of its inhabitants feel disenfranchised. The latter (the subjective aspect) is evidenced in the mood felt in its streets, where nobody seems to smile, nor even look at you in the eyes, and when you try to engage in a conversation with someone, their answer would be completely overrun by pessimism (which, if you walked around, you could absolutely understand). Confronted to such panorama, I begin to question my presence here, as an outsider expected to respond to -or at least address- some of the pressing issues of the area's problems in five

- 8 **The closing of the factories in 2013 heavily affected Trasenster – and Seraing in general, spiralling the city into a social crisis with sky-rocketing unemployment (19%) and rising poverty rates (36%).**
- 9 **La maison du combattant ('The fighters' house') is a community organisation fighting against precarity and fostering intercultural development through community meetings, French-language courses and community restaurant, amongst other actions. [More info: <http://www.aliss.be/node/2245>]**
- 10 **In his accounts of psychogeography, Guy Debord gives us some leads in understanding the territory beyond its infrastructural 'features', taking into account its emotional and subjective characteristics; "the sudden change of ambiance in a street within the space of a few metres; the evident division of a city into a few zones of distinct psychic atmospheres; the path of least resistance which is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the physical contour of the ground); the appealing or repelling character of certain places -all this seems to be neglected." (Debord, 1959).**
- 11 **Certain approaches to 'critical design' call for avoiding 'design solutionism', instead "generating and iterating on solutions as a way to reason about a problem space"(Brdzell et al., 2012).**

days. The day ends with a collective dinner at the local youth house, where we encounter much more dynamism, mainly powered by their puppet theatre hosting shows every Sunday for local children.

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Friday 16th

After a quick breakfast we head to our basecamp to have a first discussion and brainstorm. Before starting the collective meeting, I call Eliane, a chocolate-maker from Liège with whom I collaborated three years before, in order to invite her to come for dinner at the youth house. "Seraing?!" she asked, alarmed. "Yes" I said, "more specifically in Trasenster" or Ougrèe-bas, how it is officially called. "What would anyone do in Trasenster?" I think she accepted the invitation for simple cordiality, but such testimony of a wealthy Liegoise reinforces what for me seemed one of the biggest problems of Trasenster: an image of the neighbourhood and its inhabitants imposed from the outside and reproduced with resignation from the inside. During the brainstorm we all agreed that the future of the neighbourhood was somewhat sequestered by careless politicians and hopelessness was avoiding any kind of agency to be enacted. The different ideas of actions to counter this reality were thus aimed at unlocking different (and better) futures.

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This evening we had our collective dinner, for which Elisa led the cooking of gnocchi, a typical dish from the south of Italy. As promised, Eliane came to the dinner accompanied by her son (I am guessing because she does not feel safe 'coming to Seraing alone'). Having brought plenty of chocolate with her, she cannot hide a feeling of being 'out of place'; she was very cordial and keen on sharing her experience in collaborating with me some years before, but went home shortly after we finished eating.

- 12 **René Boer and Mark Minkjan (2016) warn of the limited effect of pop-up practices, arguing that bottom-up interventions are highly dependent on the good will of governments in turn and will rarely have a significant and long-lasting impact on society. With such limitations in mind, designers involved in such practices should conceive ways in which the immediate actions might articulate with local agendas.**
- 13 **In her critical reflection on the COVID-19 pandemic and its backlashes, Argentinian anthropologist Rita Segato has insisted on "who will appropriate the narrative of the present moment and how will this be done" (Bercovich, 2020); her argument, making reference to Edward Said's "power to narrate" (1994) is of paramount importance for designers working on socially engaged practices, as it suggests the need to support (subaltern) communities in 'telling their own story', instead of having others impose it from an outside perspective.**

Saturday 17th

Today we further explore our initial ideas by directly intervening in public space and engaging in spontaneous conversations with different groups of citizens: Nik and Virginia disguise as doctors and go around asking people to 'diagnose' the illnesses of the neighbourhood, to after collaboratively come up with 'prescriptions' to those problems; Elisa prepares some speech bubbles saying, "nobody knows I can..." and inviting people to vocalize their (hidden) skills; Henriette goes to experience the everyday life of the place; Yara and Nik made wooden frames saying "here I would like to see...", and allowing people to imagine what different spaces could become; myself, I decide to gather new 'slogans' for the neighbourhood, aiming to re-brand it from the inside. These different interventions serve, in Nik's words, to "get to know the neighbourhood, but also to get the neighbourhood to know us".

My initiative is inspired by a Colombian practice called Marca Comunidad - MC (Spanish for 'community brand'), initiated to support communities in redesigning their image from within and which has become "a tool for communities to express who they are, what they do and how they want to be seen". But MC's aim is not (only) to design a new visual identity for neighbourhoods and cities, but promoting a more open communication and socialization of the local concerns amongst its citizens. With this key reference in mind, I go to the neighbourhood to gather ideas for 'new slogans' for Trasenster; as much as I -most likely- won't be able to execute the whole branding, kick-starting this process seems like a sensible and responsible intervention.

I go into the neighbourhood and engage with pas-

- 14 **Henriette later said: "it's important to not only speak about 'our project' or 'our vision', but to join in people's everyday lives" (Franquignoul, 2015). This follows a similar principle of the proposal of autonomous design by Arturo Escobar (2016), who suggests that in order to work in a given local context, designers will have to embed themselves in its everyday workings.**



Image 2. Collective dinner at the youth house with the presence of Eliane (on the right foreground).

- 15 **Recent literature on design research argues for interventions as ways of introducing oneself to a given context, as opposed to approaches where the designer enters a context to disrupt the status quo (Anastassakis, & Szaniecki, 2016; Huybrechts et al, 2016). These perspectives express certain humility in the researcher, recognizing that, as an outsider, she or he has to firstly focus on understanding the context and the issues at stake.**
- 16 **This information is available on MC's website: <https://marcacomunidad.co/acerca-de/>**

sers-by, shop owners and even residents by ringing in their homes, telling them something along these lines: "Trasenster has a very negative image, as people perceive it as grey and unsafe; if you would have to come up with a new slogan to invite people to come here, what would it be?" After giving some context about the overall project and what was my intention with the initiative, some people were quick on agreeing with the assesment of 'the grim image of the neighbourhood', "particularly from the outside", they would add and, perhaps for that same reason, keen on contributing with their ideas. "Trasenster: The Missing Link", "Dare discover the conviviality of Trasenster", "Trasenster: an Adventure worth Living" and "Ougrée, rising from the ashes" were some of the ideas people came up with. Without me leading or conducting the proposals in that direction, the concept behind most of the slogans is turning the aspects perceived as negative, into an attractive asset ('dare', 'an adventure', etc.).

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At the end of the day I have an internal conflict: asking the people about their dreams for Trasenster and getting their reactions was a personal success -of sorts-, thanks to the amount of responses I receive and for the depth of the conversations I have. However, the picture they represent when talking with me was that of a neglected and hopeless neighbourhood. Which makes me question the project altogether: is it really worth doing this? Wouldn't it be a better investment to take all the money being spent on this project and give it to the youth house or another local organisation?

Sunday 18th

The last day of our design expedition has arrived and we are preparing to receive the visit of the neighbours. I feel pressured to give some meaningful insight to the

- 17 **Taking aspects perceived as 'negative' and putting them on a phrase in which they become somewhat 'positive' can be seen from the perspective of what the Situationists referred to as *détournement*, "a turning around and reclamation of lost meaning by plagiarizing materials already part of the spectacle and using them subversively against it" (Basset, 2004).**



Image 3. Gathering slogans from local inhabitants (stills from Frankignoul, 2016).



locals, as they seem to be expecting it. We start to prepare for showing the different ideas and initiatives that emerged during the week (co-designing a new 'puppet hero' for Trasenster, co-writing a novel of the future of the neighbourhood, drawing business cards for people's ideal work, etc.) and I begin to think how to materialize the slogans, which is part of my 'contribution' to the overall project. 18

In preparation for this week, I brought with me a set of stencils of letters, which can be used to easily visualize textual elements and ideas. Having collected the slogans, I begin working on their materialisation and with the clear intention to make them visible in public space. I use the stencils to print the slogans in A1-size sheets of paper, resulting in a series of posters. Not wanting to place the posters by myself, I plan to gather with all the visiting locals at the end of the day and march in a procession around the neighbourhood, reclaiming its spaces and pasting the posters in the place they consider most needed of transformation. To further highlight the performative aspect and get more attention, I make four flags with some of the slogans printed on them. For the sake of communicating and inviting people to the event, I was asked to give a name to my project; I chose for La voix de Trasenster (The voice of Trasenster), as I saw it as an opportunity to give the people living in the neighbourhood a say in how they wanted to be seen. 19 20

The whole afternoon unfolds in a very convivial way; around 40 local citizens come to our basecamp to see the result of our explorations and take part in some of the activities. Most people stay for a short period of time, no more than an hour; but two of the neighbours who come

- 18 One of the central goals of the overall project was to 'challenge the hegemonic narratives' imposed on the neighbourhood, aware that "the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism" (Said, 1994). In this sense, having the locals design and write a story for 'new heroes', who would be the protagonists for the new narratives of the neighbourhood, became one of the most important collective activities.



Image 4. Printing the slogans into posters and flags.

- 19 Within her account for the "streetwalker (theoretician), una callejera", Maria Lugonés presents her (gendered article used deliberately) "en compañía, in the midst of company, and obliterating the theory/practice distinction" (2003). Furthermore, she argues how this collective movement through public space "(...) seeks out, puts out, entrusts, invokes, rehearses, performs, considers, and enacts tactical-strategic practices of resistant/emancipatory sense making" (Lugonés, 2003), highlighting the importance of moving collectively through the city (as a procession?).
- 20 This initiative could be understood through a lens of critical positioning of the designer (Kaethler & Calderón, 2020) and by which we deliberately use our

end up staying all afternoon: Nathalie and her eight-year-old son, Thibault. They have their alternative business cards made ("carrier of sun" and "helping hand", respectively), contribute to the neighbourhood novel and to the new 'puppet hero' of Trasenster. At the end of the afternoon, when it is time to go march around the neighbourhood with the flags and paste the posters, we are only the core team left, with two local citizens, Nathalie and Thibault. We go marching around the neighbourhood in a group of 12 people, stopping in different places that the locals identify as run-down (a row of houses in front of one of the former foundries, a former shop -now closed- where neighbours gathered to eat fries, etc.), where I glue one of the posters in a wall as a means for reclaiming that space. Besides the walkers, the people in the street also participate in the procession, be it by staring at or ignoring us. After three stops and three intermediate stops, we arrive at the spot locals consider the most problematic: a dead-end of the small street bordering with one of the former steel industries. When looking around, I see empty syringes, plenty of trash, an abandoned loitered car and a fetid smell that makes me believe some people use this space as an open-air public toilet.

Covering my nose to prevent the strong smell, I begin to glue the remaining posters on a big grey wall, behind which we could see the ruins of one of the closed industries and to the attentive look of the participants of the procession. While doing that, two very young kids peek out of one of the nearby houses, curious at what 'we were doing'. After them, follow their two older sisters and father; a whole family living next to that alley. While I finish gluing the posters, my colleagues are speaking with the family, who express wanting to have one of

(relative?) privilege to give 'the stage' to others who have been invisibilised by the matrix of power. I believe I was privileged to be invited to participate in the project, giving me a voice to speak about my practice; critically assessing my position I could not but do what de Sousa Santos refers to as 'sharing voice', as opposed to 'giving voice' (2016), "which would reproduce colonialist patterns and therefore represent a northern approach"; by sharing my (our) voice with the local citizens we assume a southern perspective of design practice (Calderón Salazar, Huybrechts & Zuljevic, 2018).



Image 5. Walking together with local inhabitants (left) and gluing the posters (right). Photos by Gilles-Ivan Frankignoul.

the posters to put on their car. I give them one saying "Trasenster: le chaînon manquant" (Trasenster: the missing link). We then take a group picture with everyone, including the whole family we just met. When we were saying goodbye, Nathalie approached me and says: "Today was very special for Thibault, he was very inspired by your presence! And he is too shy to ask, but he wanted to know if he could keep one of the flags?" I then turned to him and handed him a flag saying: 'Ougrée, rising from the ashes'. We then head back to our basecamp, cleaned up and went home .

21

From the beginning of the project and its briefing, one of the few clarities was that there would be two intensive working weeks: one in January and one in May. The first has come to an end, but the second will be defined and organized based on our experience this week. Moreover, during these past days we discussed the importance of 'returning' to Trasenster in order to further elaborate on our ideas and have the proposals 'take root' in the local community. We decide, then, that we will return at the end of May for two days of work and a final public day.

Intermezzo
2015, April
Friday 24th

I arrive at Liege's central station on a sunny spring day, this time planning to go by bike to Seraing (around 6.5km), so as to be able to see the transition of the urban landscape. Riding the bike from Liege's central station to Seraing's Trasenster allows me to appreciate with more attention the changing landscape of the area; the city of Seraing is but a blurry image of what it used to be: a bustling industrial centre pulling the development of the whole region. I have been in contact with Marc during the last weeks, discussing one of our main proposals for the event in May (which we decided to call the Day of Passion

- 21 **The road to hell is paved with good intentions is a proverb suggesting that, as much as you might 'mean well', unless you translate your intentions in concrete, coherent actions, you might in fact be provoking an opposite effect. Tassinari & Bertolotti (2017) suggest how designers working on time-limited and site-specific projects should be aware of their position and limitations, in order to direct their interventions towards articulations with local actors, so that these can give continuity to kick-started processes.**



Image 6.
Thibault
and his
mother
Nathalie.
Photo by
Gilles-Ivan
Franki-
gnoul.

-DoP), consisting in setting-up a pop-up puppet theatre in the neighbourhood. As an ethical principle to follow up with a process we had started, I had offered to follow-up and meet with Marc to discuss about -and work on- this proposal. The fact of being the only member of the team who took the initiative to 'be present' and follow up with the people we had spoken with, was somewhat frustrating. This makes me think of the importance of engaging and committing your time and energy with a community beyond an initial intervention; never before I thought the words 'follow-up' were so essential.

I truly enjoy being back in Seraing. I meet with Marc by the puppet theatre in the youth house, where he shows me the portable theatre they have for doing shows outside of their space: the disassembled pieces are quite heavy and it has a very labour-intensive assemblage (to set it up, they need at least three people for an hour or two). Part of my visit is intended to evaluate if we could use their itinerant theatre or if we would have to build one ourselves; it becomes clear we would have to take the second option. Having planned for that contingency, I worked some time with Marc to obtain the minimum requirements for setting up a mobile puppet theatre. I leave, promising Marc to meet in the coming month for the DoP and taking with me some basic sketches and notes that can help us design and build a mobile puppet theatre.

On my way back I decide to pass by the place where I glued most of the posters three months before; spring makes the neighbourhood look less grim, having more people on the streets and with much more friendlier attitude and mood (I even had a couple of strangers greeting

- 22 **On their proposal for 'durational approaches to public art', Paul O'Neil and Claire Doherty advocate for engagement processes that exceed the 'spectacle' of an immediate intervention, "involving a process of being together for a period of time with some common objectives, to constitute a new mode of relational, conversational and participatory practice" (2010).**



Image 7.
Back of
the pop-
up puppet
theatre
assembled
by Marc.

me, as if I was a visiting tourist). However, I am aware that the social and economic conditions of the locals have not fundamentally changed, and our responsibility with coming through with the project is as important as before. In passing by the dark alley, I was very happy to see a trace of some of the posters, with just one being able to be read in its entirety: "Trasenster: an adventure worth living".

Part II
2015, May
Friday 29th

We meet again in Trasenster with the rest of the team, except Henriëtte who decided to stop her participation in the project. These days of coming together in the neighbourhood will culminate in an open day on Sunday, the Day of Passion, when we will share more detailed re- counts of our ideas for the revitalization of the neighbour- hood. I have mixed feelings to be back in Seraing: I am glad to be back in Trasenster to be able to 'close the cycle' and leave something to the inhabitants; but I am also frustrated for not having felt a collective commitment to gather a significant number of people for Sunday. The posters to publicize the DoP were only printed and brought today, even if I had asked for them in April, so as to be able to paste and distribute some copies during my short visit. This makes me reflect on what I perceive as a common tension in socially engaged (art and design) projects, between doing and showing , and evidenced by the curators apparently prioritising to have the project 'ready to show' in an exhibition coming October . Re- gardless of my discontent with this situation, I remind myself that we have all returned to meet the locals again and, hopefully, articulate some of our initiatives so that they can take them on. With that in mind, we prepare an intense co-working session for tomorrow, for which we in- vite several people living and working in the local scene.

23

24

25

23 **Henriëtte pulled off the project, arguing that she did not think there were the conditions for developing the project she had proposed (and which she believed best answered to the situation of Trasenster), as well as what she perceived as a missing long-term vision and plan for the overall initiative.**

24 **In the introduction of Living as Form, Nato Thomp- son (2012) points at the need of art to move away from representation into presentation; quoting Tania Bruguera, he says: "I don't want an art that points at a thing, I want an art that is the thing" (Thompson, 2012, p. 21). With this, Thompson is signalling a type of art that is operating out of the museum, describing what Claire Bishop terms 'the social turn' in the world of art (Bishop, 2012). If well this is referencing the realm of art, the use of similar means of representation (exhibi- tions) makes the reflection also relevant for this case. By focusing on the representation of the project, there was less care on thinking and working on the present life of the project.**

25 **Welcome to Seraing was commissioned by Reciprocity Design Liège, a design exhibition organized on a trien- nial basis in the city. This was clarified from the first moment; however, Nik and Virginia highlighted the fact that we were not 'working for the exhibition', but whatever we would do would eventually be shown. The core program of exhibitions and activities would take place in October of this same year.**

Saturday 30th

In the morning I go with Elisa around the neighbourhood, in order to glue posters publicising the DoP, as well as to personally invite some of the people we had met in our previous visit. After handing some posters on the shops and putting them up in some public spaces, we passed by a house that seemed familiar: "Doesn't Thibault live here?" asked Elisa. "Yes!" I answered. We ring on the doorbell and soon after see Nathalie as she opens the door. To our pleasant surprise, she recognises us right away and greets us with enthusiasm. We tell her about the event we will be hosting at the basecamp tomorrow and that we would love for her and Thibault to come. "Oh no! You should have told me before; Thibault is with his father in Namur (another Belgian city) this weekend. I will try to see if he can be here tomorrow, but I doubt it." She promises to come together with her partner, though. Yes, of course we should have told her before; of course we should have announced this event with at least a month in advance. This situation makes me question the way we have involved -and excluded- certain participants in the process so far, and wonder once again about the legitimacy of our presence here. We head back to the basecamp, as we are expecting several guests for a working session and a collective outdoor lunch.

Once we return to our basecamp, most of the guests have already arrived: local inhabitant James Mano (who we had met during our first visit and were inspired by his enthusiastic commitment to the neighbourhood) and community workers Marc and Frank, are accompanied by local policy makers and three architects from Eriges, an urban planning studio in charge of devising a master plan for Trasenster. The purpose of the session is to articulate our ideas into a compact and concrete set of



Image 8.
Co-creating a new (puppet) story for the neighbourhood.

proposals, for the local community to eventually appropriate and implement. With the certainty that the puppet theatre will be a central aspect of tomorrow's event, we gear the session towards co-creating scenarios and stories of speculative futures for Trasenster. For facilitating this activity, Virginia and Nik prepared a series of printed cards. It was simple: in groups of 3-4 people, we take one card representing a site or place in the neighbourhood (e.g. former hospital), another with an activity (e.g. urban gardening), one with a skill (e.g. cooking) and a last one with a person (e.g. student); each group is then asked to write/draw a future scenario using this components. The resulting scenarios of this activity are as diverse as vague, and I am concerned of their 'usefulness' to effectively inform and inspire a puppet story. But Marc has no doubts about his storytelling capabilities to turn them into an interesting narrative he would later perform: "give me your notes, I will go through them tonight and tomorrow we will have a play." His self-confidence was comforting and it takes a weight off our shoulders. We spend the rest of the afternoon preparing for tomorrow's event (I go with a stencil sign representing the new 'puppet hero' of Trasenster, and spray-paint it all around the streets of the neighbourhood, indicating the way to the site; Anthony, a designer working with Nik, builds a light version of a pop-up theatre based on Marc's requirements; Yara finishes to design and print a recipe book to leave at the youth house, for people to share their cooking experiences).

26

Sunday 31st

Perfect sunny day; all the conditions are set to receive the guests at our basecamp for the DoP. The programme starts at midday by sharing lunch in a long table outside with the guests. Many stakeholders who were present yesterday are now sitting at the table, as well as one

- 23 **Ramia Mazé has examined the political nature of 'designing futures', underlying that "whether it is made explicit or not within design, identifying and making a difference between what is real, now, and what is, or is not, negotiable or preferable in the future is a political act" (2019). Within our involvement in Seraing, we were aware -and attempted to make explicit- that collectively crafting future scenarios for the neighbourhood is not an 'innocent' act, but a deliberately political one, through which the agency to define the narratives of the community and its territory is shared with the local citizens.**

local inhabitant (James). The lack of more neighbours and locals makes me wonder if we are doing this for them or for us. After a convivial outdoors meal, we head back inside to share our ideas and proposals with the guests and start welcoming the ones arriving. Yara is on one table, accompanied by Denise Iket (manager of the youth house) as her interpreter, presenting her idea with a prototype: a recipe logbook to start a practice of shared dining; Elisa is on the floor, painting the scenography for the play that Marc will perform later today, as well as continuing with the initiative she began on January (Alterjob); and Nik and Virginia are prototyping an initiative they dubbed Un coup de main (A helping hand), a system for sharing skills between the citizens.

I am standing at the entry of the building with my proposal, an evolution of the intervention I produced last January. Still making use of the letter-stencils, I propose to produce a 'lettering kit' to mark un-and-underused spaces in the neighbourhood, as well as allow people to be more vocal about their skills; this is influenced by a similar project I have been working on in Genk. The proposal, which I call l'autre regard (the other onlook), consists of a set of letters and a spray-painting can to be used for any of the following purposes: (1) as a place-making tool to re-brand public spaces with imaginaries from local inhabitants (e.g. square of the bright future); (2) to make signs to put in front of empty shop-fronts, representing the activity that could potentially take place there (e.g. bike workshop); and (3) to allow citizens and business owners to be more explicit about their stories by writing them on a poster and pasting them on their window. An example of the last use was clarified by Eliane, my chocolatier friend, who asked me to make a poster saying

- 27 Further information about the project (De Andere Markt) can be found in the text "De Andere Markt: a logbook", which documents the last three years of my participation on the project.



Image 9. Poster making at the entrance of the event.

"ou l'écoute, ou le sourire" (we will lend an ear or a smile). Behind all these uses, stands the same intention of making visible personal and collective imaginaries through visual and textual language .

28

Around mid-afternoon, when I am still on the entry to the basecamp, I see Nathalie arriving with her partner, but without Thibault. She explains that, due to the short notice, he could not come to Seraing today, and that he is very sad to miss the event; she decides then to call and put him on: "Hello, Thibault? How are you?" With a very low volume expressing his shyness, he answered "...good." The sadness in his voice which makes me feel responsible for not having told him in advance about today, and self-critical of how this final event has been arranged. I try to cheer him up, by telling him I will do a poster for him and send it with his mother. In speaking with Nathalie and her partner -and trying to understand what Thibault really likes to do and which I could translate into a 'skill' or future occupation- I learn how much he likes to build small cabins and houses with materials he scavenges and finds around his house. He was en route to becoming "a cabin architect". After making his poster, we all go back in for the puppet play.

29

The play features the central character from Walloon puppet theatre: Tchantchès, an engaged factory worker who, together with his wife Nannesse, represent the working class (anti) heroes. In the story, Tchantchès points at the issues the neighbourhood is going through, when the 'new hero of Trasenster' arrives, suggesting some of the ideas that were drafted during yesterday's session. There were very few people during the play, just a couple of them from the neighbourhood, leaving us with a bit-

28 **Schoffelen et al (2015) argue how data visualization in urban settings can help to better 'make things public', by presenting issues as things rather than as facts. This perspective favours seeing information platforms as sites for debate, rather than as vehicles for transmitting data. However they refer to more complex (usually interactive) data visualizations, they also mention a characteristic of such visualizations that is relevant for this case, namely the enabling of reflective interpretations about a place and its issues. On a similar vein, Spanish artist Miguel Ángel Rego developed a project questioning the presence of plaques with names of people involved in Franco's dictatorship in the streets of Madrid by replacing them with official-looking plaques carrying context information about the person being referenced (<http://www.miguelangelrego.com/Espacios-para-la-Memoria-I/>); for me this is a valuable exercise in place making, as well as in questioning who controls the narratives of our urban environment.**

29 **The literal sentence written on the poster for Thibault was architect de cabannes. The most direct translation of cabanne is cabin; however, in this case cabanne is representing the spaces children create with leftover material in their backyard, or with their linen inside their houses.**

ter-sweet taste. Nevertheless, the overall process was an important learning experience for some members of the community, like Thibault.

Postlude

Through this text, I attempt to re-trace the steps of my involvement in the project Welcome to Seraing. Far from proving the success or failure of the project, it aims to reflect on a common tension in design practices and research, namely between interventions in limited time frames and the expectations to have a long-lasting impact. There will be as many ways to deal with such situations, as there are designers working in such contexts; in the case of WtS, our focus was on devising and prototyping different ways to 'unlock possible futures', unleashing the imagination of its local citizens. My intervention, specifically, wanted to leave a visible trace of our work, at the same time as suggesting the idea that a change of the neighbourhood can (only) be enacted from within.

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Image 10. Snapshot of the puppet show written and performed by Marc Coyette.

August, 2020]

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[BACK TO MAP](#)



ARTICLES



Random House: "[D]id your training as an architect factor into your writing of the storyline, such as with the detailed descriptions of the Ipe family residence, Velutha's home, and the History House? How important is a sense of place in the story?"

Arundhati Roy: "I don't think you necessarily need to study architecture to describe building in detail. I may be wrong, but I think my training as an architect kicked in more when I was structuring the books— structuring the narrative."

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Letters south of (nordic) design

- o This text was submitted as an exploratory paper for the NORDES conference, which took place in Oslo (Norway) in June 2017. It was written in an epistolary way (exchange of letters), together with Alfredo Gutiérrez Borrero, and I made the presentation in the conference through a series of telegrams recounting a fictional journey before arriving in Oslo.

Abstract

The following text is an e-mail exchange between colleagues, countrymen and friends – one located in Brussels (Belgium) and the other in Bogotá (Colombia) – and it is presented as an epistolary article. Different to traditional academic articles, there is no initial hypothesis proven throughout the text, but a narrative emerging from the conversation among peers. We started from the topic (design + power) and questions proposed for the 2017 edition of NORDES; we could say that, paradoxically, we head north in a southbound conversation that involves decoloniality, deschooling, practices of designs with other names and even the film *Ratatouille*.

Letters

Brussels,
March 6th 2017

Dear Alfredo,

I write to you with certain thoughts and questions regarding the upcoming NORDES conference, which I would like to discuss with you. I think your explorations with Design of the South (or designs of the souths) might offer a valuable perspective on these issues.

For starters, the name of the conference is an invitation to problematization: Nordic Design Research Conference. If well I understand that 'Nordic' refers to a geographical location, as it brings together design researchers across Scandinavia, I feel the name is being embraced without 'a pinch of salt'. However Nordic researchers might be considered pioneers in participatory (western) design practices for the last 40 years, I would like to see more self-critique and acknowledgement of the conditions that allowed them to innovate in such practices. Almost 35 years ago, our countryman Gabriel García Márquez

received in Stockholm the Nobel Prize for Literature. In his acceptance speech, entitled *The Solitude of Latin America*, he says: "it is understandable that the rational talents on this side of the world [Europe], exalted in the contemplation of their own cultures, should have found themselves without valid means to interpret us" (García Márquez, 1982). Similarly, today I see Scandinavians exalted in the contemplation of their participatory and collaborative design practices, yet staying short in understanding other types of designs and critically analysing the emergence of their own practices.

Things get ever more complicated when mentioning this year's conference theme: 'design + power'. It troubles me, again, the relation to the 'north': don't you think it's rather cynical to propose discussions about power from a north without self-critique? It makes me think of a recent public debate in The Netherlands, triggered by a contest that invited designers to propose solutions to the so-called refugee crisis (Refugee Challenge). In a critical article, Dutch graphic designer Ruben Pater (2016) suggested that the contest would not mitigate the effects of a "crisis [that] is pretty much designed" – I would add 'from a northern perspective'. With this, Pater suggested that designers are partners in crime in the construction of the systems that have caused this crisis and proposing 'solutions' that don't challenge the structural conditions of such systems is superfluous. Coming back to NORDES; it would be important, then, to know if the allusion to 'power' includes a critique to the power relations of the global north that they represent, together with its different design manifestations.

Another worrisome issue for me is the ambiguity in the

use of the word ‘power’; I personally frame it in a perspective close to Holloway (2002), who suggests the existence of a ‘power over’ and a ‘power to’: the first defining relations of domination, the second referring to agency to act. Which makes me think of Foucault (1980), for whom power is not something only present in privileged circles, but throughout the whole social body, and can be enacted by anyone. When reading the call for this year’s conference, I see traces of ‘power over’ in calling-out the current state of affairs (economic inequality, technological determinism, weakening democracy, etc.); but also of ‘power to’, when referring to the need of design to confront such issues (as in the ‘refugee challenge’, it seems searching for ‘solutions’). However, I doubt that a transformation can be achieved without questioning the conditions that produced the current state of affairs. I believe debates around design and power ought to take place on different levels: from social structures to daily life practices, and by designers as much as non-designers, and I think the South has plenty to say about this.

Do you think it’s relevant to trigger a South-North dialogue around design and power in the context of NORDES 2017? Which do you think are interesting references? I believe there’s a great potential to mutually learn from the practices emerging in different parts of our souths and norths.

Pablo.

Dear Pablo,

I’ll share my thoughts in the same conversational tone you propose. Your invitation to have Scandinavian

researchers question the conditions that allowed them to generate participatory practices reminded me of an idea of Santiago Castro-Gómez (2007 pp. 83-84), about the way in which disciplines (or those who design them) build their own origins. For him, disciplines generate their own mythologies, which allows them to structure a canon to define how and who is allowed to speak, the valid themes, that which the students ought to know, teachers to teach and professionals to practice; canons, adds Castro-Gómez, as power apparatuses that organize fluxes of knowledge, making them identifiable and manipulable. I embrace your call for a critical reflection around design and power in this year’s NORDES, noting perhaps a lack of self-criticality. However, it might be unnoticed by many in terms of Bourdieu’s habitus, meaning a “shared structuring structure” that leads to naturalize “a world that is sensed and seen in relation to certain position and disposition” (Bourdieu, 1980, pp. 86).

Amongst the references for debate, I suggest a NORDES 2015 keynote lecture delivered by another southern thinker: Cameron Tonkinwise (2015). On that occasion the theme was “Design Ecologies”, and Tonkinwise questioned the brief in a similar fashion as our dialogue does, yet noted that was met with certain criticism for just denouncing the faults and not suggesting alternatives. NORDES 2015 advocated for diversity, but which diversity, Tonkinwise questioned. Diversity tolerated by the ecology of a certain place? Or migratory diversity, with the capacity to challenge – and even change – an ecology? Now, lets replace “design ecologies” for “design + power” and Tonkinwise for Calderón/Gutiérrez. After checking the call for

NORDES 2017 (surely limited by my habitus and directed by your questions) I find the words 'design' and 'power' always in singular, ignoring polysemy. I prefer to speak in terms of designs and powers, or norths and souths and many other places, something that is ignored in the call.

Let's speak about souths not as places in the world, but as spaces where people can imagine other ways of 'being in the world'. A sort of "little public sphere" which, following Nikos Papastergiadis ([2009]/2011), is not confined to southern hemisphere, but is related to all the contexts sharing "similar patterns of colonisation, migration and cultural combinations". The south – or souths – gather cultural imaginaries attempting to transcend imposed classification (through 'power over'), to visibilise its own history (hidden by colonisation) and its own denied traditions. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2010:8) argues that the understanding of the world is much broader than the western understanding of the world, just as 'design' and 'power' exceed its north-western understanding.

Such is my hypothesis: there is design (or its equivalent) in every social group. That's why I don't speak about designers and non-designers, but about professional designers and designers of all other kinds (daily-life, vernacular, spontaneous, etc.). Antonio García-Gutiérrez confronts such system of compartments and classifications with a strategy called "declassification". For him, generalization and negative exclusion (as in design/non-design) produce that, in most dichotomies, the subordinated element is presented as a negation of the element that organizes the couple ('power over'),

through prefixes as un-faithful, non-believer, abnormal or non-designer; yet the negated instance usually represents a much larger and more diverse world than that of the negating instance (García, 2014:396). It would suffice to think of the amount of artefacts made by designers in comparison to those made by 'non-designers'. This reinforces the notion of "majority world", proposed by Bangladeshi photographer and activist Shahidul Alam (2008) as a replacement for concepts as 'third world countries' and 'developing world', noting that that which is considered secondary is usually much larger than that considered as reference. From an intercultural perspective, we could postulate the designs of the souths as ways of prefiguring artefacts that are left out of the margins of what is considered 'design'. Let me remind you that in Chinese, Arabic, Hindi and many indigenous languages of the world, there's not an etymological trace of the word 'design' (with its European roots); however, there are terms referring to 'forms of prefiguring artefacts' that could be considered equivalent to practices of what in the west is considered design; I call those practices designs with other names.

To finalize the present letter, and in the spirit of avoiding the lack of self-critique that you encounter in NORDES 2017, it would suffice to value the sum of the weaknesses of the 'so-called' non-design and the skills of the 'so-called' non-designers as an inexhaustible source of designs with other names and designs of the souths.

Alfredo.

Brussels,
March 17th 2017

Dear Alfredo,

In your message I encounter valuable elements to continue deconstructing – from our south – some of the issues suggested for this year’s NORDES. And I don’t mean ‘deconstruction’ as a negation of ‘construction’, but both as interdependent conditions. But in your response I also spot the gaps in my argumentation, as I critique the global north from the southern subaltern position, yet I assume the position of the oppressor by using the dichotomy design/non-design. I feel like the oppressed of Paulo Freire (1973) who, after gaining a position of relative power (perhaps represented in my six years in Europe?), becomes an instrument of oppression (or an oppressor himself). Nevertheless, this reflection helps me understand how my habitus has adapted to certain conditions and circumstances.

I am intrigued by your reference to Castro Gómez, where I find important elements to contribute in a critical and constructive manner to the debate on NORDES 2017 and support the path of our epistolary conversation, which aims to deconstruct certain discourses on (the power of) design to allow for their reconstruction (or resurgence). I feel the heart of the issue is in the dominant discourses of design, the canons, which might be considered a conceptual north. South of such discourses we find a series of practices that, if well in many cases might not be considered as design (by those who define the disciplines), carry the seeds of a diversity of renovated practices, or what you call designs with other names.

In Deschooling Society, Ivan Illich (1973) advocates for autonomous and vernacular learning practices through

networks, over scholarly systems of educational institutions. Illich suggests that, if well the book focuses on educational systems, the same principles might as well apply to different sectors of society (politics, justice, communication). Which makes me wonder: wouldn’t it be relevant, as well, to deschool design? And with this I don’t mean to free design from formal education (though it might pass through there). Instead, deconstructing the power relations present in the dominant discourses of design (schooled design) that still assume human beings as tokens in a production-consumption dynamic. And this stands close from what Papanek (1971) denounced, by criticising the role of designers for making products that advertisers could sell by fabricating false ‘needs’. This deschooling of design, towards designs with other names, would pass by what you reference from García-Gutiérrez as declassification, as the breaking down of boundaries of dominant discourses in design, which have been built from classifications and qualifications that sanction what is accepted and what is not. But let’s attempt to propose and trigger a constructive debate – beyond the sole-criticism of which Tonkinwise was accused – by indicating some alternative paths.

A lesson that would be valid in the global North, as much as in the global South, is to allow for our practices to be permeated by other ways of being in the world, other ontologies and epistemologies different to the ones that we know and inhabit. In this way, designs with other names is not understood as an opposing category to design, but as a call to question and expand the ways in which it operates. Scandinavia has been a pioneer in participatory and collaborative design practices in the global north, which represents an openness to question their position

as designers and include others as participants in their designs. As well as considering others as part of our design, we should perhaps generate the conditions for the emergence of those designs with other names. Can you think of such emergencies already happening somewhere that might serve as a valuable reference? I can already think of Ernesto Oroza's (2009) take on what he terms technological disobedience in scarcity-driven Cuba as a sample of what happens when we let those other voices emerge.

Looking forward to read back from you.

Pablo.

Bogotá,
March 21st 2017

Dear Pablo,

What you call “gaps” in your argument is a southern thought with northern manners; beyond geographic references, it represents an unnoticed supposition that the ‘expert’ knows more than the non-expert, denying as well the right of the non-expert to be an expert of its own experience. Looking at the designs of the souths we ought not to fear contradictions. García-Gutiérrez suggests we embrace them, and not only as negations, but as different modes of understanding and acting upon the world. Assumed and accepted dissent is the first step to understand diverse forms of being in the world.

Which made me think of a scene of the film *Ratatouille* (2007), when Émile, the vulgar brother of the main character, Remy, discovers the hidden culture of his brother:

Émile: «Wait, you read?»

Rémy: «Well, not excessively»

Émile: “Oh man. Does Dad know?”

Rémy: “You could fill a book, lots of books, with things Dad don’t know!”

Emile, on a mouse level, represents the stereotyped and conventional world of the expert; but Rémy, Oh lálá! he’s in the permanent search of reconfigurations of the already designed. He’s not a follower, but a decentralizer of use in a journey southbound, bringing once in a while novelties to reality.

Following your thoughts, we need to deschool design; but we would also need to declassify it. I believe on recuperating the polytechnic man that lives within all the excluded peoples of exclusive societies. In poly-cardinal countries – as I like to call them to refer to various directions and take away from ‘the west’ its dominant prominence – have emerged those who will never be modern (those ‘not-yet-designed’ by the canon) or perhaps those who design in different modes. Kirtee Sha (2012) sees in the slums of the planet scenarios that, beyond problems, account for the human ability to create in difficult situations; we ought to overcome the pretension of saviours and learn and accompany endogenous processes of such communities (which are the majority of urban dwellers in the world) who, in their own way, already practice those designs with other names.

In a similar line, Vyjayanthi Rao (2010) invites us to stop thinking about design as a universal solvent for modern problems; according to her, we have to look

at the speculative, innovative and productive potentialities of emerging collectivities, instead of assuming – from the roles of professional experts – what such collectivities are and impose on them what they should dream of becoming. The binary designers / non-designers leaves professional designers in a bad position, seen through the ‘majority world’ of Alam and the ideas of García-Gutiérrez, as their design is minor compared to the quantity of artefacts designed in the world. I assume that with time we will see less professionals following ‘the canon’, living under the illusion that they are ‘the designers’ in the extent that the rest of humans are non-designers (and therefore designable). And here stands the paradox: designs with other names have always been present in many subaltern cultures; we have simply been educated to not see them.

Even within academia there are attempts of giving a voice to these designs with other names, as the Maori Johnson Witehira (2013) who, in his doctoral work, linked graphic design with Maori thought. I see this as an approach to design of the south from a Maori tradition. There are designs with other names everywhere, evident in the emergence of indigenous studies and literature of alternative modes of action in the world; in the ‘autonomous designs’ of Escobar (2017) and his work with afro-Colombian communities; in the extrapolation of constructive logics behind the Q’iswa Chaka (2016) Inca bridge in Peru; in the South African weavers of phone cable or the artefacts resulting from the Indian Jugaad, equivalent to western ‘innovation’ (Subhas, 2014).

Designs with other names have always been there; perhaps, besides de-schooling, we should also consider de-scaling to perceive and allow others (remember that as white male professionals we are north in the south of Colombian peasants, afro-Colombian and indigenous) to teach us, as Rémy to Émile, that there are many ‘designs’ that we ignore, as they are named and practiced in ‘other ways’, yet they precede by far everything that professions, with their presumptuousness, pretend to appropriate.

Alfredo.

Dear Alfredo,

When I first wrote to you, I was not sure where the conversation would lead us. However, I considered it important to add a critical note to this NORDES conference from a southern perspective and knew you were the ideal interlocutor in this endeavour. This exchange is just the beginning for a larger conversation that will continue in this and other fora, about power (which power?) and design (which design?), and how designs with other names can help us deconstruct dominant discourses.

Pablo.

Dear Pablo,

Your last message made me think of Krippendorff (1995), who states that power can be undone if we oppose the temptation to build universalizing theories (especially in design), whose inherent imperialism discourages local understanding and diversity. ‘We’, as

Brussels,
March 28th 2017

Bogotá,
March 21st 2017

it seems, is a word that we must use carefully, because, depending on the context in which it appears, it always includes and excludes. Thus, the transformation of the world depends on we/us, true, but a different 'we/us' on every occasion. Let us keep on designing 'together'.

Alfredo.

Telegrams

Brussels,
May 8th 2017

Dear Alfredo,

As you might have noticed, our paper "Letters south of (Nordic) design" has been accepted to be presented at NORDES 2017. As I imagine the distances won't allow you to be there for the presentation, I will take a southbound trip to Oslo and let you know what I find on the way. Just like Marco Polo recounting his travels to Kublai Kahn in Calvino's Invisible Cities, I will tell you what I see on my journey.

To begin the journey, I look at a map. Mercator's projection has been the main reference in cartography for almost 500 years; however, recently it was announced that the Gall-Peters projection is more accurate. Regardless of the proportions, I sceptically note that both projections share a common characteristic: the 'north' is above, whilst the 'south' is below. What happens if we turn it around? Changing the actors, but keeping the conditions of domination, not sure if that is ideal either. I will go with Buckminster Fuller and his dymaxion projection, challenging the north-western understanding of territory.

With the dymaxion map at hand, I begin my journey southbound. But these southern territories are not limited

to the global south; following Nikos Papastergiadis, we see the 'south' as a "little public sphere, sharing similar patterns of colonisation, migration and cultural combinations". This approach helps us assert two things: on one side, that there are many souths in the northern hemisphere and, on the other, that we are north in our own south (as white-looking, educated, male Colombians). Moreover, the reference to the 'south' is also an invitation to question labels that reproduce relations of domination, like 'third-world' or the very condescending 'developing world'. Instead, we should consider the term 'majority world', proposed by the Bangladeshi photographer Shahidul Alam.

With these disclaimers, I begin my journey.

Pablo.

Dear Alfredo,

I am walking around La Habana with Ernesto Oroza, an industrial designer who has devoted his whole life to study the resourcefulness of the island's inhabitants, especially during the so-called 'special period', following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. He dubs this resourcefulness 'technological disobedience', for he sees it as a disobedience towards the 'designed' object, and it was encouraged by the state through publications like Obrero, construye tu propia maquinaria ("Worker, build your own machinery"). This makes me think of your reference to Santiago Castro-Gómez, who questions the canons of disciplines and those who define them. In this case, questioning the designed object opens space for new kinds of practices to emerge. Moreover, it questions

La Habana (Cuba),
May 15th 2017

the roles of designer and user, recognizing that, under the appropriate conditions, everyone can be a designer... perhaps designer with other names.

When we were about to cross a street, we almost got ran over by an old man on a bike adapted with a lawn-mower engine. Ernesto after explained they are called rikimbilis, and date several decades back, when millions of bicycles were brought in Cuba from China as a democratic and low-cost form of transport. Pushed by the need of doing longer journeys in the sun, Cubans challenged the 'designed object' and adapted these bikes to run with an engine. This was just a small example of a myriad of repair, reinvention, hybridisation and other practices that have emerged in Cuba since the start of the Revolution.

Thanking Ernesto for his hospitality, I continue my journey.

Pablo.

El Alto (Bolivia),
May 27th 2017

Dear Alfredo,

I am walking through the streets of a city that I find difficult to 'pin-down' or classify in some way. It looks like a small village from the 'Majority World', yet it has small details that seem coming from outer space. From the edges of the city, we can see mountains with its snowed peaks, as well as a valley where the city of La Paz was built. Many consider el Alto a poor suburb of La Paz, but its inhabitants claim that it is a city in its own right.

Mainly inhabited by indigenous peoples coming from around the country, El Alto is full of traces of traditional

cultures. I am walking with Fredy Mamani, a self-taught architect specialised in building what in Bolivia are known as cholets. The word is a neologism combining the word chola, previously used as a derogatory term for indigenous women, and chalet, as a housing unit. Indigenous migrants have gained notoriety and wealth, normally thanks to the favourable trading conditions with China, but also since Evo Morales became the first indigenous president of Bolivia. They are the people commissioning the cholets, which has opened the space for a new urban elite to form, bringing its traditions to the city.

Fredy Mamani has designed and built over 60 buildings in the last 10 years in El Alto. He argues they represent a vernacular adaptation of indigenous culture to his commissioners' new urban condition. The constructions are heavily scrutinized by the Bolivian architectural elite - influenced by Europe - which criticizes them for representing a folk kitsch. But why every time these types of practices emerge, there is an official voice being raised, judging it as illegitimate? Which makes me think of your reference to Antonio García-Gutiérrez and his strategy of 'declassification', as a way of battling the system of compartments. That system which dictates what should and should not be considered as design, ignoring, as you rightfully note, that the world of artefacts -and buildings, like in this example- made by non-professional designers extend by far the world of artefacts made by professional designers.

As much as I would like to avoid criticizing an abstract entity as 'a profession' (design), it is unavoidable to note that its representatives (official architects) are reproducing patterns of colonialism towards other kinds of

practices.

Pablo.

Quehue (Peru),
June 4th 2017

Dear Alfredo,

I find myself in the middle of the Peruvian mountains, where indigenous communities from different ethnic backgrounds gather these days for a four-day ritual of re-building a rope bridge crossing the Apurímac River. Despite being in Latin America, nobody speaks Spanish, which makes me feel very self-conscious about my position as a white Latin American man. I understand how I am north in our own south! But perhaps that realisation of privilege is not at all negative, and it paves the way for new ways of understanding. In sight of my linguistic limitations, I find an interpreter who explains to me what is taking place.

Q'iswa Chaka is the name of the bridge connecting two parts of the river and its ritual to build it dates several centuries back to the Inca empire. It takes the form of a 'minka' (or 'minga'), which is a name given to an event of communal work practiced throughout Latin American indigenous communities. The bridge, fulfilling a very important practical role (of connecting the two sides of the river), takes an even more important role as an event and ritual gathering the communities of the region for a collaborative endeavour. This way, instead of building a long-lasting bridge, safe under governmental standards, they gather to build a bridge that, they know, will have a one-year lifespan, by which time they will have to gather again to re-build it. This challenges many assumptions of what has been considered 'design' from a north-wes-

tern understanding, in which efficiency and a sense of aesthetics have been prioritised in relation to other kinds of practices, or what you rightfully call designs with other names.

Pablo.

Dear Alfredo,

I came to Delhi intrigued by your reference to the jugaad as an Indian word for innovation. Here I discovered that the name was given by a farmer who, in need to run an irrigation pump, connected it to his motorcycle. So, at first, jugaad was used to designate a specific object. With the popularity of the adapted system, jugaad came to represent a category instead, what many in English translate as hack. But perhaps translating to English as such is also attempting to interpret it through a north-western understanding. Why, if it is coming from the Global South is a 'hack' and if it comes from the Global North is an 'innovation'? Following García-Gutiérrez's, in this case we could also pass by de-classifying such practices. Why should someone categorise them as non-design? If with another name, their builders are designers in their own right. We would argue they practice designs with other names.

We need to start accepting these different practices in their own right, but also avoid classifying them from our own understanding. Every new place I visit opens an opportunity to understand why and how these other practices emerge.

Pablo.

New Delhi (India),
June 9th 2017

Oslo (Norway),
June 16th 2017

Dear Alfredo,

I arrived two days ago in Oslo, where I will present our paper, and enriched by seeing many examples that might help the attendees of NORDES consider an expanded version of design, or what we call designs with other names. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos said in a 2013 interview, "the Global North -especially Europe- have little to teach the world, given it has been disabled by colonialism to learn from the experience of the rest of the world. Colonialism created such an arrogance in Europe, that innovations coming from the Global South are rejected because they were always considered inferior". He goes on to clarify: is not that now the South will teach the North 'a lesson'. Instead, it is about generating an intellectual ambience where Europe (and the global North in general) can recognize different ways of knowing and being in the world, as well as the context where they emerge.

But I have to say that the warning in our epistolary article, thinking that the habitus of the NORDES attendees would avoid them to understand other epistemologies and ontologies, has proved wonderfully wrong. Yesterday I heard critical, yet constructive, voices speaking on many of the topics we touch: Dori Tunstall kicked-off the conference with a call to "separate design from the modernist project", necessarily accepting other ontologies and epistemologies, as are the native indigenous from Canada. Martin Avila invited us to consider other forms of non-human life in our design processes, which resonates with indigenous cosmologies and their symbiotic relation with Pachamama. Yoko Akama, through a testimony of her own story, noted the lack of spirituality in design research and took us on a journey on the value of emptiness in other

design understandings; moreover, she made reference to the term *kokoro*, which I interpretas close to the term *sentipensante* first coined by Orlando Fals-Borda. Silvia Mata-Marin and Dan Lockton showed how borders are socially constructed and can be mediated by what Mignolo terms "epistemologies of exteriority", and arguing how systems of classifications exclude certain members of society in the everyday. Laura Popplow and Melisa Duque assumed and embodied the roles of idiot and ghost, respectively, as a way to challenge assumptions of the role of designers in participatory processes. At last, Mahmoud Keshavarz, as if responding to Dori Tunstall, gave the last blow to the modernist design dream, by questioning how power structures are Designed (with capital D), and calling designers to ask 'how' and 'why' they intervene in different contexts.

Mahmoud referenced Arturo Escobar's Notes for a New Ontology of Design, explaining how we cannot face contemporary issues with the same ontologies. His lecture then ended with a question: "What now?" If well our contribution was not alone in the critical scrutiny of this year's NORDES, I believe our approach to designs of the souths or designs with other names, may signal possible paths for answering that question from a southern perspective.

Greetings from Oslo,

Pablo.

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From (single) storyteller to (multiple) stories-enabler

- This text is part of the book 'The Pearl Diver: the designer as storyteller', edited by Bertolotti et al (2016).

Triggering question

When you work in social innovation and storytelling one of the issues that opens up is its power and manipulative character. What does it mean to have responsibility over the ethics of storytelling?

Abstract

Defining the role of the designer (for social innovation) as a storyteller is a very attractive position nowadays, in a time when design is driving away from purely material or aesthetic concerns to a more socially engaged and relational practice. But this position may have some direct implications on how he or she deals with other narratives other than his or her own. Should the designer hold the power to decide which narratives or stories are told and how are they represented? Drawing on a lecture by the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie, recent video footage of news channel analysing recent Paris attack and the ideas of 'design of the south' of Alfredo Gutiérrez Borrero (inspired, in turn, by Boaventura de Sousa's epistemologies of the south), I argue on the importance of critically evaluating the role of designer as storyteller, and consider instead a role of stories (in plural) enabler.

Text

Chimamanda Adichie is a young Nigerian writer who has been at the lead of a new generation of writers drawing interest on African literature. On 2009, she was invited to speak at the TED Global event. In her talk, entitled The Danger of the Single Story, she explains how she came to realize the danger of showing and knowing only one story –one perspective–on a place, people or situation. She went to study in the US, and since her arrival she was confronted with stereotypes about Africa (like if it

was easy to generalize about a continent that can fit Italy 100 times!). When settling in the college campus, her roommate inquired her where had she learnt English so well (English is an official language in Nigeria) and asked her to show her some of her 'tribal' music (leaving her on shock with her Mariah Carey mix-tape). She was far from offended by these requests or inquiries, as she actually realized that she had also been a 'victimizer of the single-story'. As a middle-class Nigerian, her family had 'help' working in their house, normally coming from rather poor contexts and backgrounds (situation repeated throughout developing countries worldwide, perpetuating some kind of internal (self) colonialism). She had a single story from them: they were poor; she did not see the other stories of them –like the fact that they were skilled craftsmen. After seeing herself in the role of the 'victim of the single-story' in the US, she understood that "stories have been used to dispossess or to malign but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity" (Adichie, 2009)

In more recent events, after the attack on Charlie Hebdo magazine in Paris, the US broadcaster CNN dedicated many programs to analyse (or pretending to do so) the course of the events. In their news broadcast of the evening of the 12th of January (CNN Tonight), the anchors show a clip from comedian Bill Maher's show, who criticized liberals (democrats) for not denouncing more openly 'Muslim countries' for their abuse of women rights and promoting violence within their people. After playing the clip, the anchors interviewed live the Iranian-American writer and scholar Reza Aslan to react on these statements. The headline and main question of this

interview (visible in the low part of the screen) was does Islam promote violence? Mr. Aslan was rightly annoyed by the question, arguing the over-generalizations the reporters were making by using terms like 'Muslim countries' or 'Islamists' to speak about 1.57 billion people spread in more than 57 countries (of Muslim majority) (CNN Tonight, 2015). An expert as he is, he explained some nuances between different Muslim countries, even proving how in countries like Indonesia women had equal rights as men, and has even had more female heads of state than the US; or proving that female genital mutilation is not a problem of 'Muslim countries', but of specific African countries (like Eritrea or Ethiopia, two Christian countries). What he was doing during this interview was giving a different perspective, therefore fighting against the single-story-narrative. And here lies the key issue with stereotypes: as put by Chimamanda Adichie, "the problem with stereotypes is not that they are not true, but that they are incomplete. They make 'one story' become the only story".

All this takes me to story-telling in design (for social innovation?). As socially and politically engaged designers and researchers, working in challenging communities and contexts, we carry great responsibility. By giving certain people a voice (and therefore excluding others), by making some communities visible (and neglecting others) and by aesthetically representing others (from 'our perspective'), we can very easily fall into the vice of the 'single story'. We do it within the confines of our discipline (by stating 'what design is' or 'should be') but, furthermore, we enact it on others by imposing our story. A similar situation occurs with aid-workers who, in their best, heart-felt intentions, impose their single stories

and stereotypes (Africa is poor, Muslims are dangerous, Latin America is violent, etc.) to bring their single story of 'development'. This resonates with the ideas from the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa, who advocates for the epistemologies of the south (calling for the diversification of knowledge), in contrast with the single-sided story common in Eurocentric thinking tradition (2015).

Perhaps the role of the designer should not be that of a storyteller –for it is a role with high risks of falling into the 'single story'—but more in the realm of a multiple stories enabler. This 'new role' would imply that he is not be the author of the stories, but he would act as a mediator that allows different stories to emerge and enter in dialogue and discussion with each other (even in 'conflict', resonating with Chantal Mouffe's vision of a radical agonistic democracy). Such is the argument that Alfredo Gutiérrez Borrero brings forth in his paper 'The south of design and design of the south', in which he says that 'design of the south' seeks "possibilities for designing artefacts and nurture the material and immaterial culture with emancipatory knowledge, in order to validate the right of every person to be an expert on its own experience (design with others), involving multitude of knowings (knowledge, in plural), instead of privileging hegemonic postures of experts in designing for others" (2015).

We ought to understand that design (and its stories) is never neutral (Thackara, 1988), and is therefore always dealing with power relations (manifested through inclusion, visibility, representation, etc.). Giving the designer full responsibility of this mediation might sound pre-

tentious, but being aware of your own position is a good start to avoid colonising other's thinking and their stories, thus allowing for multiple stories to emerge.

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Article 2

From (single) storyteller

Bourgeois

- This text is co-authored by Michael Kaethler and is included in the book 'Designing in Dark Times: an Arendtian Lexicon', edited by Tassinari and Staszowski (2020).

How we assess, valorise and justify knowledge is a powerful mechanism instrumentalized by the bourgeois to exert an indelible influence on society. Hannah Arendt makes a clear distinction between the responsible citizen who is 'concerned with public affairs as affairs for all', heavily invested in the public realm, and that of the private and isolated bourgeois who 'judges and uses public institutions by the yardstick of private interests' (Arendt, 2013). The bourgeois irresponsibly wield what Foucault refers to as power-knowledge, by controlling what is considered valid knowledge, its means of verification, and by determining the relationship between the knower and the known, ultimately defining who can be a 'knower'. The western tradition of design, intertwined with the logic of post-enlightenment reason and born from the capitalist mode of production, is an important purveyor of this epistemological marginalization (Fry, 1988). Design has and continues to be a set of practices, a disciplinary orientation and a mode of thinking that acts in support of a specifically modern structure of power—sustaining bourgeois and colonial pursuits (Kiem, 2013). This text confronts the bourgeois design epistemology vis-à-vis theories of coloniality and design practices from the global-south.

Knowledge has been, and continues to be, one of the core tools for sustaining and reproducing coloniality—the continuing structures and cultures of colonialism in the modern capitalist system. This can be seen in the dominance of scientific rigour (veracity), analytical gaze (relationship between knower and known) and the authority of English language and 'western' academic institutions (knower). Yet it is essential, in order to make any meaningful commentary on this respect, that we recognize

the global epistemicide that has occurred at the hands of bourgeois epistemology (de Sousa Santos, 2015).

The bourgeois epistemology decouples the subject from its epistemic location, rendering it universalist and totalising. This can be traced back to Descartes; his famous *ego-cogito*, struck a wedge between mind and nature, deifying the mind without situating its thoughts in the fallen world. With this, the particular of the local is obliterated by an abstract universalism, empowering the 'ego-politics of knowledge' over the 'geopolitics of knowledge' which, Roman Grosfoguel explains, "...has allowed Western man (the gendered term is intentionally used here) to represent his knowledge as the only one capable of achieving a universal consciousness, and to dismiss non-Western knowledge as particularistic and, thus, unable to achieve universality" (Grosfoguel, 2013). Such a decoupling befits modernist and colonial exploits, establishing dominance through the dismissal of situated knowledge.

While design epistemology is still nascent, it must be challenged, prodded and provoked to wrench it free from the socio-cultural trajectory from whence it emerged, and aiming to open up new possibilities for emancipatory transformations. A key starting point is the question, "from where does the subject, in this case the designer, speak?" from which ethnic, cultural, gender, sexual or class location? "I am where I think" is a basic epistemic premise to delegitimize claims of an only universal epistemology; it geo-historicizes and bio-graphically locates knowledge (Mignolo, 2011). Unlike the bourgeois abstraction of knowledge, which is exercised with impunity, grounding knowledge implies modes of knowing-in-ac-

Design,
Coloniality and
Knowledge

tion and can therefore be held responsible and accountable.

The western design tradition emphasises a universalism rooted in the requirements of market expansion and with it the distension of the modernist/colonial world system (Escobar, 2017). A detaching of design from the particulars of aesthetics, semantics and user-interaction served the logistical and economic demands of mass production and cultural domination. Ikea, for example, is active in 38 countries and is becoming a global standard for design objects, influencing notions of value, quality, form, aesthetics and so forth. Ikea promotes the agenda that one design fits all, regardless of the context—across countries as diverse as China, Saudi Arabia and India.

Calderón and Gutiérrez remind us that in many languages, including Chinese, Arabic and Hindi (as well as scores of indigenous ones) there is not an etymological trace of the word 'design' (with its European roots) (Calderón Salazar & Gutiérrez Borrero, 2017). They point out that there are terms referring to forms of prefiguring artefacts that could be considered equivalent to practices of what in the west is considered design. The bourgeois epistemology makes invisible broad swathes of design practices, rendered, at best, as oddities or obscurities. Such is the case of the kaleidoscopically coloured Cholets, built by new urban dwellers from indigenous communities of El Alto, Bolivia, or the annual reconstruction of the elaborate Q'iswa Chaka rope bridge by the Quechua indigenous community of the Quehue district in Peru. These practices, along with a myriad of others, certainly do not require recognition as design to be validated in their own worlds; however, it would be

immensely enriching to design practice and discourse to flatten the epistemological (and praxis) hierarchies, therefore enabling such practices to inform other design practices and not be invisibilised by, for instance, Ikea's cultural universalism.

To recognize epistemic locations is to realise that design cannot be the same in suburban USA as in the slums of Delhi, or in the rural Spanish communities as in the new urban settings of El Alto, in Bolivia. Situated epistemologies present critical alternatives to the dominant bourgeois epistemology by providing an ecology of knowledge, as de Sousa explains. Such an ecology does not refute scientific rationalism but challenges its dominance by portraying it as one of many possible ways of knowing. It serves not the interests of the bourgeois but those of the public realm, increasing the number of participating voices and perspectives. Arendt emphasises the importance of thinking 'representatively', to be able to think from another's position or standpoint in order to expand our worldview and ultimately arrive at more valid political judgements. For this, she stresses the need for a 'multiplication of perspectives' in order to show a particular issue "...from all sides, in every possible perspective, until it is flooded and made transparent by the full light of human comprehension" (Arendt, 2010).

Our argument is therefore geared at challenging the incumbent bourgeois epistemology in general and in design, in particular, yet without proposing a better epistemology. Instead, we would argue for the need of an array of situated epistemologies as standpoints from which to responsibly expand relational practices, such as in design. Shared public discourse is enlarged by this eco-

logy, supporting participative citizen action to combat the obscuring of the public realm. The dark times of the bourgeois epistemology have left us blind to a world of astonishing design practices; as Alfredo Gutiérrez Borrero and Pablo Calderón Salazar aptly put it, "designs with other names have always been present in many subaltern cultures; we have simply been educated to not see them." (2017)

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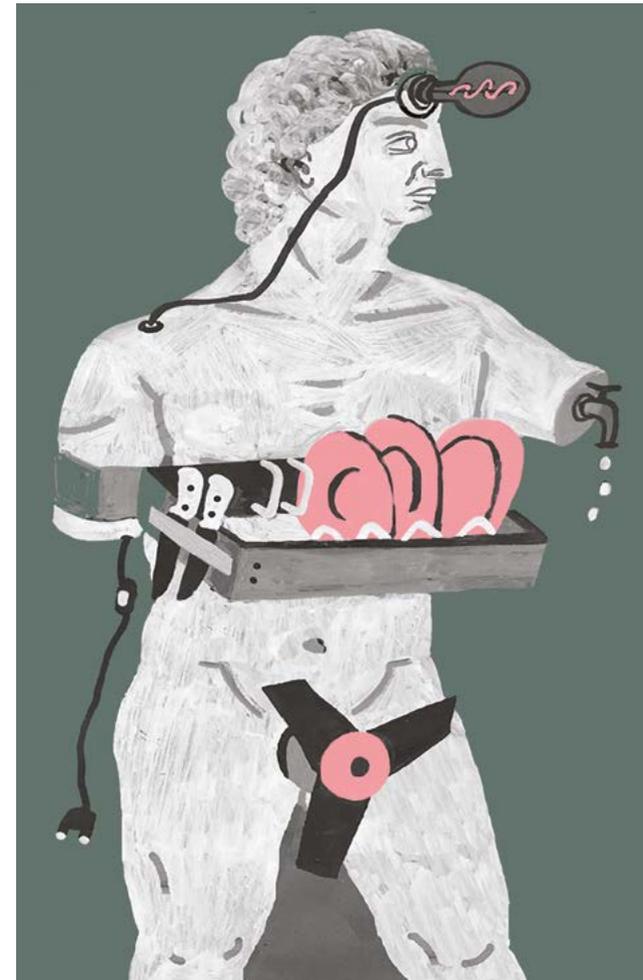


Image 1. Epistemic sculpture. Illustration made by Priscilla Suarez Bock especially for the text.

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Intervention as tactic, not as strategy

- This text was written as the introduction for a chapter (Intervention as strategy) of the book 'Explorations in Urban Practice', edited by raumlaborberlin et al (2017).

A few years ago, during a visit to Paris, I was walking around the 5th arrondissement, when I suddenly stumbled upon a sign that read: Ici, nous intervenons pour un chantier urgent ("Here we intervene for an urgent matter"). The city authorities had put up the sign to communicate to citizens that works were taking place on that site. The message would have gone unnoticed if it were not for the fact that I had recently been selected to take part in a project called TRADERS (Training Art and Design Researchers for Participation in Public Space). Within the project, I had been researching the role that art and design interventions could play in participatory processes. On account of this new bias, I found the sign extremely interesting. When I began my research, I was looking at the different media artists, architects and designers were using to intervene in public space but had not considered the multiple contexts where intervention was used and the different meanings that it acquired as a result.

Image 1.
Street
announcement,
Paris
reading
«Here, we
intervene
for an
urgent
matter»



This text serves as an introductory essay for a chapter entitled "Intervention as Strategy" and in it I attempt to reconcile interventionist takes on art and design with participatory practices. Intervention and participation are frequently assumed to be approaches that are counter to one another; the first taken as being immediate and ephemeral, and the latter understood as referring to something sustained and durational. This stance has been further exacerbated by institutional appropriations of intervention, which reinforce the notion of the State as an apparatus that regulates social life. The State then has the power to intervene in a range of different social contexts, with little to no participation of the citizens. However, by looking to the definition of strategies and tactics given by Michel de Certeau, the approach to durational art of Paul O'Neil and Claire Doherty, and recent concrete examples, I argue that the two seemingly opposing concepts of intervention and participation can in fact go hand in hand. Moreover, I suggest that problematizing the title of the chapter serves as an opportunity for bridging both approaches, with the resulting re-appropriation of the language and practice of interventions being a way of effectively disrupting established power relations.

Interventions of the kind I describe in the above Paris example abound in cities around the world, where public authorities take decisions over the life of their citizens – increasingly in partnership with private parties. There is nothing surprising, nor something inherently positive or negative about this, it is just the way city authorities 'work'. However, in the case of the sign placed by the Paris authorities, I found some novelty lay in the explicit use of the term "intervention". It exemplified how public bodies

In the text I use the terms intervention and interventionism interchangeably, as I understand them as different ways of referring to the same terminology.

Intervention as
strategy

have appropriated interventionist stances, not only on an outward international level, as in 'military interventions' such as Iraq, but also on an inward and local scale. Intervention, from the Latin *interventio*, means to "come [in] between", which typically suggests an external actor entering into a context not their own. For this reason, it is perhaps more common to hear about interventions when talking about international geopolitics, rather than when dealing with domestic, municipal issues. The choice of a municipality to appropriate an interventionist stance is reminiscent of what in Latin America was understood as *el Estado Interventor* ("the interventionist state") or in France the *État-providence* (the welfare state), which saw the State body as an apparatus that ought to enact control over the economy – and society at large – in order to assure its functioning. On a State level, the actions may take the form of regulations, taxes, subsidies and other controls that attempt to assure for the fair distribution of wealth; on a municipal level, the interventions can take the form of a concrete infrastructural action (paving a street, fixing a street sign, expanding a sidewalk, etc.), changing or introducing new regulations (use of public space, mobility, housing, etc.) or the realisation of big urban renewal projects.

This last case was exemplified in the London borough of Hoxton, in 2014. In March that year, the American fund manager Westbrook bought a housing estate called New Era, planning for the 'redevelopment' of its 93 homes. This meant the properties would shift ownership, from charity fund to private owners, and that rents would be hiked up to match 'market value', in this case, a jump from around £600 up to £2400 (Chakraborty, 2014). This scenario is all too common nowadays, especially in Lon-

don where a vast amount of property is owned by foreign investors (Sassen, 2015). But in the case of New Era, opposition to the move gained public notoriety, thanks in part to actor-turned-activist Russell Brand, who took an active interest in working with the tenants association to fight back, attending protests against the redevelopment and using his YouTube program *The Trews* as a platform to lend exposure to the cause. After several months of civic resistance and public pressure, Westbrook backed down, withdrew its redevelopment plans and sold the estate back to a housing charity foundation. Reflecting on the success of their resistance and organisation, in December 2014 three single mothers who lived on the estate appeared with Brand on his show (2014). Part of their success, they said, stemmed from their devising of memorable slogans and songs, of which they gave an example at the end of the video, chanting an a capella, adapted version of Pink Floyd's *Another Brick in the Wall*:

We don't need your intervention,
we don't need your social cleansing.
Hey! Westbrook [Westbrook],
leave our homes alone!

In the story of New Era, many of the issues at stake (gentrification, social cleansing, commodification of the city, etc.) are both linked and highlighted by the use of the word *intervention*. The tenants saw the intent of an external actor (Westbrook) to intervene in their housing estate, with the complicity of city authorities. Just like the State or municipality intervening in the economy or the city, this is seen as an intervention enacted by an external actor, without participation of the citizens affected by the action. Moreover, in light of this chapter's title,

this case brings to the fore Michel de Certeau's differentiation between strategies and tactics, as set out in his 1984 book, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. For de Certeau, strategies are enacted by the powerful as a way to further consolidate their positions and are built upon a pre-defined idea of a proper (propre) space. From this perspective, Westbrook employed intervention as a strategy, using its power to further consolidate its own position; had it gone ahead, the development would have hindered the strengthening or creation of new relations in the community (beyond that of the financial, between owner and tenant). Even though Westbrook itself never appropriated the term 'intervention' in their communication, their proceeding was perceived as such by the tenants and it demonstrates how interventionist practices have been appropriated by public and private institutions and applied in strategic ways. But De Certeau also offers some cues as to how to enable the re-appropriation of intervention. Distinct from strategies, he suggests that tactics belong to the weak, as ruses attempting to challenge and subvert relations of power.

Intervention as tactic

Ciudad de Cali (literally meaning "City of Cali") is a neighbourhood located in the southeast district of Patio Bonito, in the Colombian capital of Bogotá. It was established as an illegal settlement in 1989 by people arriving from different parts of the country, as well as those from different districts of the city. The area where Ciudad de Cali is now located used to comprise nothing more than a couple of houses and an unpaved road, at the margins of the city limits. A 'pirate developer' organised the division of lots for the new arrivals, upon which each family built their own house. As an illegal settlement, the area had no basic public services or infrastructure. Confronted

Pirate developers abound in Colombia, essentially informal developers plotting – and sometimes building – areas that are then typically occupied illegally.

with this situation, the inhabitants engaged in a process of community self-organising to acquire legal status for the neighbourhood, collectively fill the services gap (electricity, water and sewage) and build infrastructure (roads). Part of this process included the founding of a community centre, which was built within the limits of a lot that had been deliberately left empty to fulfil the role of a public park. Local inhabitants have recounted that despite its use at the beginning of the initiative, the small building housing the community centre was later effectively abandoned, due to the individual achievements of the different households and its transformation into a materials storage space.

For more details, see the documentary *EL TREBOL (Yo Solo Pro, 2015)*, where a local inhabitant narrates how, once most members of the community had managed to satisfy their basic habitation needs (roof, water, electricity), communal spaces were neglected, even if they had originally been acquired through collective struggle.



Image 2. The space prior to Arquitectura Expandida's intervention. The words read 'In process of in[ter]vention'.

Enter *Arquitectura Expandida (AXP)*, a Bogotá-based collective whose name translates as "expanded architecture" and who work hand in hand with communities in self-organised processes of recuperation for public and communal spaces. Honouring the community-organising tradition of the neighbourhood, the collective proposed to rehabilitate the derelict structure and reactivate the

space together with the community. This set in motion a whole chain of activities: from collaboratively designing and prototyping the space, to the clearing of the site and then the actual construction, which resulted in a new communal centre called El Tr3bol ("the clove"). The centre has a large common space that serves as a multi-purpose area for different cultural activities as well as a communal garden. Inside the centre's entrance hall, a painted timeline appears on the wall, mapping the neighbourhood's development (and by extension, its struggles).

Image 3.
Interior
of the
communal
space after
AxP inter-
vention.



Certainly, this represents an intervention of a different kind from that of Westbrook; instead of being decided and imposed from above (top-down), it was planned and enacted by the local community (bottom-up), with the support of the architects. Interestingly, AxP also appropriated the concept of intervention (just as the Paris authorities did with their sign), but took a different approach to the term. Looking back to De Certeau, I regard this as a tactical intervention, as it helped the weak (citizens living on a semi-informal situation, neglected

by city authorities) to become empowered in relation to the already powerful. El Tr3bol shows how other kinds of (tactical) interventions – as opposed to strategic ones appropriated by institutions (both public and private) and imposed from above – can encourage long-term engagement of different groups of citizens and, by building upon existing networks of people, result in sustained participation. Furthermore, the project emphasises the power of intervention as situated actions through time, aligning with the view adopted by Dutch artist Jeanne van Heeswijk, who sees interventions as "a form of urban acupuncture that will allow the sensitive places in our society to emerge and the blocked relational energies to flow again" (van Heeswijk, 2012). Similarly, O'Neil and Doherty, in their advocacy for durational artistic practices, as explored in their publication *Locating the Producers: Durational Approaches to Public Art*, suggest that creatives can play a role in place-making by participating in "a series of cumulative and dispersed encounters over time" (O'Neil and Doherty, 2011). Without being explicit about their tactical nature, both O'Neil and Doherty and van Heeswijk see interventions as direct actions that play a role within a larger scheme, and favour the understanding of the city as a complex system, calling for situated actions to treat its problems. By organising a series of collaborative actions over time at El Tr3bol – from construction to programming – AxP reclaimed interventionist practices as tactics and proved they could allow for the incremental engagement of the local community, thereby facilitating new types of participation.

Interventions are disruptive by definition. For this reason they are interpreted as one-off actions, contrasting with the long-term engagement of participatory processes.

**Re-claiming
interventions**

However, as much as disruption can be performed as a hit-and-run action, it can also be understood as a tactic aiming to build new relations between actors and strengthen existing ones, thereby having a lasting effect. From this perspective, no action should be perceived as isolated. This resonates with O'Neil & Doherty's description of a mode of participation in which subsidiary audiences are formed through time, extending beyond the initial actors and gaining sustainment through the dispersion of the narrative of a project. By this logic, an individual intervention ought to be understood against the backdrop of a larger scheme and its effects measured beyond the immediacy of the event.

The examples of Paris and New Era evidence how public and private institutions have been appropriating the language and practice of interventions, and how this has been done in a 'strategic' way. On the other side, El Tr3bol proves the potential of reclaiming interventions as 'tactics', through the incremental engagement of diverse actors and situated collaborative actions over time. This text calls for a re-appropriation of interventions by citizens and creative practitioners. Moreover, it favours a tactical and durational approach, inviting practitioners and researchers to take it into account when engaging in such practice. Chantal Mouffe (2010) suggests we need to widen "the field of artistic intervention by intervening directly in a multiplicity of social spaces, in order to oppose the program of total social mobilisation of capitalism". In other words, capitalism is already intervening; we can choose not to intervene, but we would then be complicit in its takeover of our living environment. We ought now to re-appropriate interventions as tactics in order to regain agency over our own cities.

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Over the southernmost border of social design, trees are people too

- An edited -and shorter- version of this text is included in the book 'Social matter, social design. For good or bad, all design is social', edited by Kaethler and Boelen (2020).

"Did that tree vote for Duque?", asks Eyder with a slow-paced tone of voice, as that of an old wise person who has seen it all (despite that he is only in his late twenties).

Duque is the current president of Colombia (serving the term 2018-2022), a right-wing politician who got elected in the shadow of former president Alvaro Uribe Velez. Eyder Calambás is a philosopher and artist integrated with nature (literally the name of the MA he followed) and, most importantly, member of the misak community, one of the indigenous peoples from southern Colombia's Cauca province. The addressee of the question was a group of last semester Industrial Design students from the Jorge Tadeo Lozano University, one of the universities of Colombia's capital, Bogotá, and their three teachers, myself being one of them. The tree was probably an eucalyptus, a non-native species abundant in the city and its surroundings, and which has generated a disastrous impact on the ecosystems of the region. The encounter, brokered by myself, aimed at students problematising their graduation projects -and design practices in formation- in a conversation seeking to situate the place of enunciation from which each of them speaks (and designs) and the role that the notion of territorio has in their projects. The first can be considered a 'condition' of decolonial thought (summarized in the dictum 'I am where I think'), while the latter should be understood beyond the English language (geografic) notion of territory .

The place of enunciation refers to situating oneself in relation to a specific issue and, however there is no predefined formula for doing so, Eyder proposed a framework based in four aspects: (1) ethico-political, by which we ought to question the extent of our involvement

Territorio is a concept used in hispanophone indigenous and peasant contexts that exceeds the geographical understanding of 'territory', integrating both historical and non-anthropocentric ontological perspectives (Sandoval et al., 2017).

with causes that we defend in our discourse and practice; (2) economical, through which we engage in systems alternative to free-market capitalism; (3) ontological-spiritual, by which we would recognise other ways of being in the world in which, for example, a tree is considered a person; and, lastly, (4) epistemological, in which we may give the same weight and relevance to the testimony of our neighbour as to an essay of, say, Michel Foucault. As for the notion of territory, Eyder invited us to critically question the extent to which we integrate it in our practices: do we really reflect on how what we do might affect the mother earth? Do we question the effects of our projects in indigenous communities and non-human agents? Does the territory 'need' what we are doing or are we negatively impacting it? These questions helped us to problematise the notion of territory in our design practices.



The choice of utilising the word 'mother earth' instead of 'environment' is deliberate, as the latter carries an interpretation of utility to human beings, considering to be where 'natural resources' reside, while the first is the one used by indigenous people's around the world to denote a direct interdependency with the earth as a living and sentient being. This is also related to the notion of 'earth beings' put forward by De la Cadena (2015), in referring to ecological formations like mountains and rivers.

Image 1. Círculo de la palabra (circle of the word) with Eyder and students.

The apparently bizarre question posed by Eyder, cited at the beginning of this text, aimed to demonstrate the fact

that trees -together with 'other non-human people', as misak people refer to them- have no agency in electing political representatives, yet are highly affected by the decisions they make (Duque has strongly defended fracking and mining in protected ecological areas and natural reserves, as well as promoted the construction of dams and other infrastructure projects that endanger natural ecosystems). In the Cauca region, the Nasa indigenous communities have been very active in an endeavour they call Proceso de Liberación de la Madre Tierra (process for the liberation of mother earth), a series of mingas through which they occupy plots of rich white landowners destined to monoculture of sugar cane, and heal the land by applying processes of what we understand as permaculture. Such practice, more than resistance, can be seen as a dispositif of re-existence, a notion first proposed by the Colombian philosopher and artist Adolfo Albán-Achinte, which questions if art (and design?) are really a resistance to the modern/colonial paradigm or if they actually reinforce it. Re-existence is the decolonial alternative through the sensible, which points at different ways of "knowing, doing, thinking, feeling and acting from differentiated historical experiences" (2016). By engaging in such grounded processes, the Nasa people have managed to reaffirm their lives and existence, as well as become agents in re-defining their relation to the territory (that for the rich landowners was purely economical).

Following this thought, I would like to single out one of the students present in the encounter: Maria Angelica Bautista -Maya- and her graduation project 'On tongues and languages: towards a decolonisation of the sensible'. In her project, guided by the question 'what effect has

colonialism woven in (our) subjectivities?', Maya attempted to question the prevalence of writing as a code and language, and foster a dialogue between other forms of expression and communication, such as weaving and knitting in different indigenous cultures. For doing so, she critically examined how categories such as handicrafts emerge and how these define the extent into which we make sense of the practices that underlay them (e.g. weaving). One of the instances of materialisation of her project took the form of a series of encounters with indigenous peoples, through which participants learned to weave in different techniques, not as a way of production of handicrafts, but as a way of better understanding other lifeworlds through making (image 1). Maya's trajectory implied a critical self-positioning that -seen through the four aspects proposed by Eyder- presents the possibility of a decolonial design practice in which the primary condition is an examination of the place of enunciation from which the designer operates.



Image 2.
Image of one of the encounters with indigenous weavers

A minga is a practice common in Andean native cultures of collective work. It is usually represented in acts of collective building (e.g. constructing a building for common use), but can also take the form of a social mobilisation and have a deeply political connotation of resistance (Murillo, 2010).

Her 'project journal' (a piece that documents her process) -instead of being a book composed of drawings and text as most of her classmates'- was a scarf woven with patterns representing each week of the semester (image 2), which she wore during her final presentation. By focusing on 'the sensible' instead of on 'the matter', she pushed the confines of design to a place in which its sole existence is put into question. Moreover, the lack of a clear 'product' of her design process (her deliverable became a choral video) emphasized on the importance of the different instances of materialisation and, in doing so, she questioned the product -and result- oriented nature of design; instead, she focused on thinking how each 'instance' of her project would be materialised and staged. This does not mean that materiality did not matter (mind the play of words): on the contrary, materiality -and corporality- were the central means through which the doors to other lifeworlds and design practices were opened, just that knowing -or showing- what was made (e.g. through weaving or staging) became irrelevant. In taking such position, Maya's design project became a dispositif of re-existence, insofar as it gave form to (or made sensible) the world-making practices of several indigenous groups in their own right and beyond their economic value as 'handicrafts'; moreover, she demonstrated how design can be in fact decolonised and redirected as a practice of re-existence by supporting other lifeworlds to emerge and reaffirm themselves through the sensible.

Let us situate ourselves back in the encounter I began describing: Eyder invited us to locate our place of enunciation as well as to ask what position does the notion of territory have in our practices/projects? For the latter, besides the questions posed before, there was no strate-

Perhaps someone might interpret such stance as 'process-oriented design', yet that would still imply a western and colonial gaze, which tends to constantly dichotomise and present incompatible dualities (e.g. process or product; research or design); instead, I would like to argue how a shift from 'materiality' to 'the sensible' and how this is manifested in different instances of a design process might support design as a practice of re-existence.

gy to approach it nor a tentative answer; however, he related it to the following provocative reflection: "What if, before starting any project, we would go to Guadalupe (a mountain-peak overlooking Bogotá) and ask the territory for permission to do so?"



Image 3. Maya showing her scarf as project journal.

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[BACK TO MAP](#)

ARCHIVE



These memories were not simple ones; each visual image was linked to muscular sensations, thermal sensations, etc. He could reconstruct all his dreams, all his half-dreams. Two or three times he had reconstructed a whole day; he never hesitated, but each reconstruction had required a whole day. He told me: "I alone have more memories than all mankind has probably had since the world has been the world."

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**TRADERS TALK: yet another
digital platform**

Intro

Just a few months after the start of TRADERS, Michael Kaethler and myself began working on a project aiming to foster the sharing of practices related to the central themes of TRADERS -design, public space and participation- at the same time as to trigger open discussions about these practices and the issues they bring to the fore. The result -perhaps unsurprisingly- is yet another digital platform that functioned, in turn, as the central website for the overall project. In the background of this initiative stood a concern for the archiving practices within art and design; Camerino & Medina, in discussing the Arte Útil Archive, argue that the importance of these sorts of archives lies in opening spaces for "contemporary (creative) practices that have been present for a long time, yet have not been properly visibilised nor legitimised".

What follows is an asynchronous conversation with Michael, recounting the process of development of the platform, the three exhibitions that used it as a resource and the final event of the project, the TRADERS Open School. Additionally, there is a selection of 18 practices sourced from the platform that relate -in one way or another- to my approach or framing of interventions.

Pablo Calderón Salazar

If I remember correctly (and if my memory fails, there is my email archive anyway), the first time we met to discuss about creating TRADERS Talk was around spring 2015 in the kitchen of Z33; we had begun to work together in 2014 -being the two ESR's based in Belgium- for a small TRADERS interactive exhibition as part of De Unie Hasselt-Genk project and, later, the issue of maintaining the website of TRADERS emerged. The maintaining of the website was one of our shared responsibilities, yet

we found the current one at the time (<http://tr-aders.eu>) insufficient for the activities and events we wanted to mediate, proposing therefore to create yet another digital platform. Our initial motivation was to create a digital place where artists, designers and architects could share their practices and openly discuss about/around them. Do you think we achieved that goal to some extent?

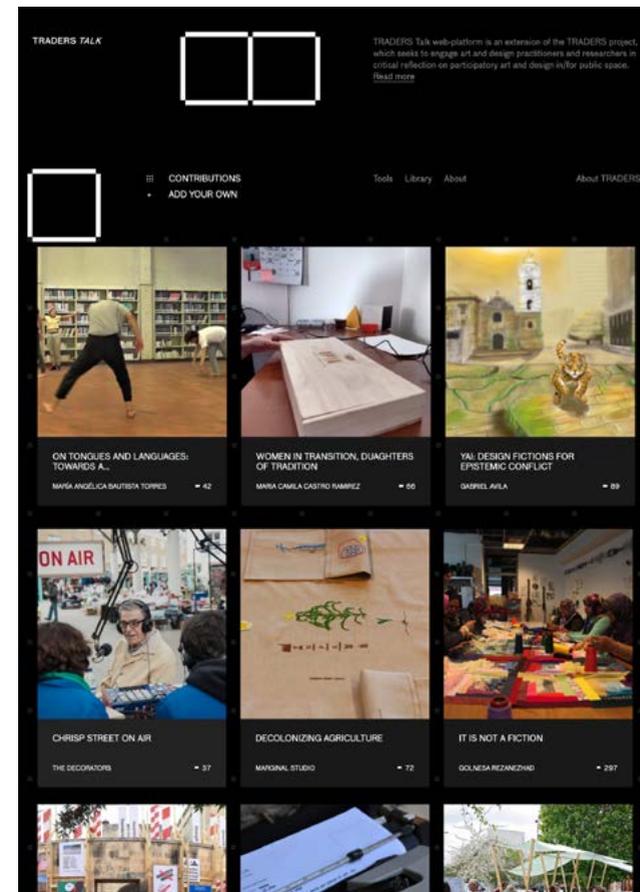


Image 1. Snapshot of Traders Talk.

Michael Kaethler

Yes and no. The platform was a great way to host projects that we saw as sitting on the fringes of current design practices and sitting outside of brief-or-market oriented design. We were able to use this as a repository of interesting projects but unfortunately it didn't garner the attention we hoped or the dialogue that we intended.

I often feel in design that there are two extremes: 1) that designers obsess over archiving and documenting their work but sometimes this comes at the cost of meaningful content, and 2) that there are so many great projects that exist but are never documented. I was personally hoping to capture this latter group, to provide a home for those weary designers who aren't naturally self-promoting but would like a venue to exhibit their work in a setting that fosters constructive dialogue (over shiny images and nauseating platitudes).

PCS

I do agree with the two 'extremes' you describe, regarding design and documenting, yet I do not feel the same in regards to archiving; in fact, I believe design in general has little experience in archiving its practices -opposite as has been the case of art. I also would have liked to 'reach' the latter group, but I think these practices (precisely, I think it is problematic to call them 'projects', let alone 'design projects') are usually located at the margins and have little to no interest in being showcased or exhibited within a fixed disciplinary framework.

One of the references that inspired us for designing the platform and further iterating on archiving the practices included there, was the Arte Util Archive; I think that's a

good example of how the (socially engaged) art world has taken much more seriously such archiving practices. And yes, perhaps many of the projects consigned there might also be considered within the frame of (social) design practice, but the initiative has not come from design researchers and/or practitioners. Another important reference for us -also coming from the world of art- was Creative Time's Living As Form initiative, which iterated as a book, exhibition and ongoing archive of socially engaged art practices - initially concerned with projects developed from 1991 and now as going back to the 1970's.

Is your intention then to bring these 'non-projects' into the spotlight, or at least bring attention to them through the platform? I see that is how the site is increasingly being used--to showcase lesser known work.

MK

I do see the platform having served -and still serving- a twofold function: for the practitioners it works as a place to showcase their projects and have a forum to openly discuss around them; for us, it has served to source practices to be able to better grasp and deal with the concepts and theories related to the overall TRADERS project. That was precisely the motivation behind the organisation of three interactive exhibitions we made, connected to the platform and around the three central concepts of TRADERS: the first one at PDC 2016 in Aarhus (on 'participacion'), the second one during the Dutch Design Week 2016 in Eindhoven (on 'public space') and the third one during the Mediations conference 2017 at the RCA in London (on 'agency'). I reckon it was these experiences that made sense of the platform, as it allowed us to deal with a different -and more grounded- way with the concepts and issues of the project as well as to identify

PCS

and articulate work related to TRADERS.

But these exhibitions also had to do with your wider research project, looking at the curation of knowledge within art, architecture and design practices; you've always insisted of the urgency of shifting the way we conceptualise and theorise design practices, arguing that instead of developing the work based on the practice, we might perhaps use the practices to make sense of the theory. Do you feel these exhibitions -and the platform in general- have supported this process?

MK

Yes, I feel that with enough different practices, we can develop a grammar and lexicon to think with for interpreting design. I think in this regard, curating can offer a totally novel way of thinking, which relies less on suffocating nouns (such as culture, design, art, or various 'isms') which trap dialogue in endless cul-de-sacs. Instead, an archive perhaps teaches us to use prepositions (to, from, with, through etc...) that force us to get out of our comfortable arm chairs and move and navigate the world through relationality. I love the notion of a prepositional form of engagement but sometimes it's just a lot easier (lazier) to go round-and-round with the same old substantives.

PCS

I see what you are saying closely linked to the approach we took with the TRADERS Open School (TOS -which we organised together as a closing event for TRADERS), when we spoke about the importance of 'thinking with our feet', grounding knowledge in concrete practices. One could see the event as a way of taking those reflections even further and bringing to life the online archive; also, the last adaptation and iteration of the platform was

7



Image 2. Pictures of the three different exhibitions. PDC 2016 (top), DDW 2016 (middle) and Mediations conference (bottom).

made for the TOS, hoping for it to serve as a browsable, printable and 'publishable' archive; this also highlighted the idea of its role being that of a resource for thinking-through-practice.

We could then think of the Open School and the iteration of TRADERS Talk as the closing of a trajectory; one that started with the first exhibition during De Unie Has-selt-Genk (taking [a]part), continued with the develop-ment of the platform and the organisation of the three in-teractive exhibits I mentioned before and ending with the Open School. Do you think there is some sort of central learning or thought we can take out from this process?

8

Image 3. Pictures of exhibition 'taking [a] part'



I would hesitate to reduce it to some singular notion but we did push some boundaries in relation to dialogical and transdisciplinary exhibitions, which arguably decentred some aspects of design epistemology--what is valid knowledge, who can be considered a knower and so forth. However, and perhaps more importantly, our work was done with a spirit of exploration and infused with a certain sense of 'joy' and playfulness--hence the strange roles like 'infiltrated catalysers' or provocative actions like 'performative dialogues/debates' that punctuated our collaborations. This spirit with which design was approached rejected many of the formal traditions of design research and cared less about clean outputs or outcomes (you helped me get over my obsessions with these) and more about the whole process from initial ideation to the cleaning up afterwards and after-party. In this way, it felt that the whole process led me away from a professionalised view of design towards one of informality, impromptu-ness, and ultimately to see design as a collection of bodies, ideas and objects negotiating their entanglements. This negotiation is strangled and suffocated by the white cubes and self-serving cultural 'professionals' (ugh!). We need to bring back the joy, curiosity and wonder within our spirit of assembly and in negotiating our socio-material entanglements.

MK

I do see design(ers) lacking that freedom of experimentation in their ways of operating, which is later represented in the ways they present, communicate and disseminate their work. I like the image that the idea of design as a collection of bodies, ideas and objects negotiating their entanglements evokes, as it reasserts my belief that a (design) 'project' is never finished, but simply has diffe-

PCS

rent moments when it is shared and ‘made public’. And, in fact, that was in great part one of our motivations to do an ‘open school’, instead of a ‘final exhibition’: not only challenge the ways in which design (as well as art and architecture) work can be shared, but also avoid any claim of ‘final outcomes’. I say this, as it must be said that one of the ‘deliverables’ of the project was a ‘final exhibition’, and the two of us were in charge of it; we decided, instead, to organise the TOS and challenge the format of the exhibition, as well as the idea of a final outcome (which we anyhow believed we lacked).

I was really satisfied with that process, as well as with the last iteration we did of the platform as an ‘open archive’. Yes, the base code has not changed since, but there have been new projects added and discussions started, which has reinforced that idea of a constant negotiation (in this case) of ideas around practices.

Image 4. Archive of practices of TRADERS Talk (left) and printing system for making your own catalogue (right). Made for the TRADERS Open School.



interpreting design. I think in this regard, curating can offer a totally novel way of thinking, which relies less on suffocating nouns (such as culture, design, art, or various ‘isms’) which trap dialogue in endless cul-de-sacs. Instead, an archive perhaps teaches us to use prepositions (to, from, with, through etc...) that force us to get out of our comfortable arm chairs and move and navigate the world through relationality. I love the notion of a prepositional form of engagement but sometimes it’s just a lot easier (lazier) to go round-and-round with the same old substantives.



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MK

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PCS

I definitely think this is a major issue, and I even think we should widen the question to the whole TRADERS project and each of our individual research projects: are the ways we research, design, intervene, work, archive and so on, reflecting Northern/Western values? I guess the answer to this question would not be so straightforward, but I guess there are some initial actions intended to avoid this; in relation to TRADERS Talk, by trying to open space for lesser known projects or what you previously called non-projects -or practices not necessarily recognised within the art or design domains-, the implicit intention was to challenge those Western values to some extent. Yet the categories that organise the archive (public space, participation and agency) are mainly stemming from -or built upon- western thought; so yes, perhaps if we were to do it all again, we might take bolder steps in decolonising the way the archive is constructed and organised. Including concepts and categories reaching beyond Anglo-European perspectives; making visible the work done by non-professional designers and artists (even if we gave a stage to lesser-known projects, they were still mostly done by professionals); including practitioners from outside Europe, particularly from subaltern contexts; and opening different ways of accessing the archive and taking part in the discussions. These are just some alternative pathways through which we might have led TRADERS Talk, had we been aware of the need of decolonising design practice and research when the platform was conceived.

I do agree with the two 'extremes' you describe, regarding design and documenting, yet I do not feel the same in regards to archiving; in fact, I believe design in general has little experience in archiving its practices -opposite as

has been the case of art. I also would have liked to 'reach' the latter group, but I think these practices (precisely, I think it is problematic to call them 'projects', let alone 'design projects') are usually located at the margins and have little to no interest in being showcased or exhibited within a fixed disciplinary framework.

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- 1 **The Archive of Arte Útil (AAU), was a spinoff project from the Museum of Arte Útil, an initiative founded by Cuban artist Tania Bruguera in 2013 in the Van Abbemuseum of Eindhoven (NL). The archive served as a major inspiration in the development of the platform, as it was also designed so that the projects could be searched and downloaded; moreover, through a series of events they called 'Broadcasting the Archive', they organised workshops wherein the projects were activated in live conversations.**

Notes

Camerino, A., & Medina, G. (2020). *La Asociación de Arte Útil: subversiones del archivo y uso*. Unpublished manuscript shared by the authors. 2

The three exhibitions we curated and organised, aimed at conceptualising (what we identified as) the three central notions of TRADERS, from the perspective of practices or projects. This meant that, instead of ‘theorising’ about the notions, we would use practical examples to conceptualise them in critically positioning them. The first exhibition took place during the 14th Participatory Design Conference in Aarhus, in 2016, and dealt with the notion of participation; the second exhibition was set during the Dutch Design Week of 2016 in Eindhoven, and took on the notion of public space; the third -and last- exhibition was hosted in Mediations, the TRADERS closing conference at the RCA, in London in 2017, and dealt with the concept of art and design’s agency. 3

If well the projects presented here are not explicitly discussed throughout the dissertation nor they are of my authorship, I considered it important to include them as a sort of annex that illustrates the logic under which we developed the platform, as well as share some of the discussions that emerged from these practices (mostly activated by myself). 4

De Unie Hasselt-Genk was a public art project built upon the provocative premise of ‘the union’ of Hasselt and Genk, two neighbouring -but rival- cities of the province of Limburg. Part of the project was an exhibition hosted in Z33 called “De Unie Hasselt-Genk: documents”, which I co-curated as part of my second- 5

ment, and of which the first interactive exhibition of TRADERS took part.

6 <https://creativetime.org/projects/>

7 <http://tr-aders.eu/open-school/the-school/>

8 The interactive exhibition ‘taking [a] part’ sought to engage visitors in framing the role of participation in art and design practices, by means of positioning the different actors involved in a creation process. More info: <http://tr-aders.eu/taking-apart-contemplating-the-participatory-in-design-and-art/>

TRADERS Talk: yet another digital platform

Online archive:
<http://www.traderstalk.org/tag/interventionarchive/>

[BACK TO MAP](#)

OUTRO



"Ontological design emerges from an apparently simple observation: when we design tools (objects, structures, policies, expert systems, discourses, and even narratives) we are creating ways of being."

Escobar, A. (2017). *Autonomía y diseño: la realización de lo comunal*. Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón.

Southern manners in northern lands: Design interventions for autonomía

*Paper written with Mela Zulevic & Liesbeth Huybrechts for the Strategic Design Research Journal's 2017 special edition on 'autonomía'

Abstract

This paper explores how the concept of autonomous design, as proposed by Arturo Escobar (2012, 2017a, 2017b) and inspired by the global South, can inform socially engaged design practices in the North. The concept of autonomy is approached from a southern perspective, not (only) from a geographical standpoint, but in understanding autonomous design as a relational practice that supports the self-realization of communities. We will inquire what are the potentialities and limitations that a southern approach to interventionist practices in design can have in supporting autonomous processes. In northern literature, autonomy is often seen as counter to interventionist practices in design. However, a southern perspective can give insights into how autonomy and interventions in design practices can inform and complement each other and we will develop this argument through a reflection on 'building' Non-Alignment. Furthermore, by presenting a project we have been involved in during the last two years, we will illustrate the process of developing a southern approach of interventions in northern lands, and discuss the influence this has had on a local autonomous process.

Introduction

In his first explicit incursion in design writing, Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar begins by positioning himself in regards to design. In the text, entitled Notes for an ontology of design (2012), he begins by clarifying that he is not a design theorist nor a practitioner, yet his work has been inextricably linked to a type of praxis which he will present in this particular text and later writings, namely autonomous design. In such framing, he stresses the need to question the role that capitalism has played in the development of design (2012, p. 5), which must be understood in its relation to a "patriarchal capitalist modern/colonial world system" (Escobar, 2017b); a system, in turn, interlinked with the 'rationalistic tradition' that sees the body, the mind, the soul and the world as separate entities and which prioritises rational (scientific) knowledge over any other experience

of/with the world (Escobar, 2012, 2017a).

Similarly to Escobar's positioning, we feel it is important to make explicit our own positioning within this paper. This text is a convergence of three different perspectives: one from the Global North and two from different latitudes of the Global South, working as colleagues in Belgium. Being southerners working together with northerners in the north, we constantly question what implications our experience and manners have in the practices we engage with to deal with certain issues and contexts. We see the southern perspective as an asset that brings to light other ways of doing and thinking (in design), and such awareness is a first step for developing a southern design practice (Gutierrez, 2015; Escobar, 2017b) in northern lands. De Sousa Santos uses the south as "a metaphor of the human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism at the global level, and a metaphor as well of the resistance to overcome such a suffering" (Sousa Santos, 2012, p. 51). So even if we use our geographical origins as departure points for such a discussion, the path will take us to the several souths present in the world, also in the north.

His scrutiny of the philosophical structures that support design is also attuned with other authors' critical approaches. A recurring example – cited by Escobar himself (2017a, p. 63) – is Papanek's critique to industrial design, as he labelled designers a "dangerous breed" (Papanek, 1973, p. 14). Resonating with the rationalistic tradition focused on separation scrutinised by Escobar, Papanek criticises the over-specialisation of design: "[...] the main trouble with design schools seems to be that they teach too much design and not enough about the social, economic, and political environment in which design takes place" (Papanek, 1973, p. 281). Fry (1999, 2008) has further elaborated on these arguments by accusing commercial design of being a "defuturing practice", which accelerates the devastation of our environment and therefore takes "futures away from us and other living species" (Fry, 1999).

Fry himself proposes an alternative paradigm based on a relational understanding of the world, presenting it (relationality) as "a way of thought which is not based upon cause-effect relations, but on correlative processes and structures" (Fry, 1999, p. 13). This proposition attempts to overcome the rationalist tradition by referring to a world intricately correlated, not

only between people, but also with other living – and non-living – entities. This responds to Escobar's call to question the philosophical bases of design and aligns with his argument for relational ontologies as understanding "things and beings as their deep correlations, without which they cannot exist" (Escobar, 2017a, p. 147). For us, relationality represents moving away from defuturing design approaches, and contributes to our exploration of alternative design practices where, instead of designing products (such as objects, buildings, cities, etc.), designers deal with building new relations between people in the city, as well as nurturing existing relations. This resonates with what is defined in the Participatory Design (PD) discourse as acknowledging the 'relational expertise' of designers – as they are not only able to recognise the existing knotworks and networks of relations (Bodker et al., 2017), but also to orchestrate and nurture new ones that might contribute to the development and sustainability of a given project (Dindler and Iversen, 2014). It is important to note that the propositions of Fry and Escobar are posing essential critiques to a certain (rationalistic) view of the world and see relationality as a more appropriate paradigm, while in PD relationality is referred to as a skill of designers. However – speaking with one foot in the south and one in the north – we consider this resonance helps in understanding the relevance of the proposals of autonomous design in the global north.

In the title we used the Spanish word *autonomía*, following the CfP and understanding that, as it will be argued on the text, southern understandings of *autonomía* have substantial differences with northern connotations of autonomy. In relation to the practice of autonomous design, Escobar himself translates it as such in English-written texts (Escobar, 2012, 2017b).

In his scrutiny of the aforementioned rationalist tradition, Escobar also questions the neglect of the study of ontology (Escobar, 2017a, p. 178), which refers to ways of being in the world (different to epistemology, which looks at ways of knowing the world). He follows with an argument for ontological design as "one possibility for contributing to the transition from the hegemony of modernity's One-World ontology to a pluriverse of socio-natural configurations" (Escobar, 2012, p. 3). Escobar presents the notion of ontological design as a means to overcome the rationalistic tradition. In such

framing, he references Willis (2006) and Winograd and Flores (1986) outlining that everything designers produce – even the most seemingly innocent artefact – defines to a great extent how a society will be organised (summarised in the dictum "everything we design, designs us in return"). The concept of ontological design and its relevance to our argument for autonomous design will be further clarified later in the text.

Informed by relationality – seen as a perspective that understands the world as deeply interconnected – and the proposition of ontological design – which invites us to look at the impact that design enacts beyond the object – Escobar (2017a) argues for re-directed design praxis. He calls for a reorientation of design towards autonomy (Escobar, 2017a, 2017b), understanding the resulting practice (autonomous design) "[...] as a design praxis with communities contributing to their realisation" (Escobar, 2017a, p. 317). His argument for the development of autonomous design as a relational practice triggers a wider debate on the role of designers in society. In this framework, ontological design should not be seen as a practice in itself, but as a lens to investigate design, a necessary groundwork to build an autonomous design practice.

In his elaboration on the notion of autonomy, Escobar (2017a) highlights the concept of autopoiesis, as described by Chilean biologists Maturana and Varela. In rough terms, autopoiesis refers to the capability of a system to produce and maintain itself (Maturana and Varela, 1980). This does not mean that systems (e.g., living organisms) exist in a vacuum, without any relation to their context; the environment and other systems structurally affect a given system, but there is a basic organisational unity that is auto-produced and self-managed. Escobar (2017a, p. 301) further illustrates this concept by discussing different social (afro and indigenous) movements in Mexico and Colombia: communities need to produce and govern themselves, as well as define the rules for their functioning and, based on such an autopoietic process, establish relations with other systems (other communities, the government, the territory, etc.). This exemplification of autopoiesis is crucial for understanding Escobar's call for autonomy as differing to northern understandings of autonomy, especially within design practice, which assume it from a perspective of the 'autonomous designer', working enclosed in his studio and isolated from the outside world (Glaveanu and Sierra, 2015). Countering

this approach, autonomy in this text should not be seen from an individualist perspective (the locked-down autonomous designer), but from a communal perspective (the capability of a system to govern itself, and in relation to the others). Such positioning suggests approaching autonomy from a southern perspective (Glaveanu and Sierra, 2015).

In addition to this debate on autonomy from different traditions of thought, Escobar discusses a critique posed by poststructuralists to system theories (sources of studies on autopoietic processes), in which they argue that such theories are aimed at control and organisation (Escobar, 2017a). However, Escobar points out how "poststructuralism deconstructs too much, yet doesn't reconstruct enough" (Escobar, 2017a, p. 297) and suggests how propositions on meshworks and assemblages, as well as complexity theory (Escobar, 2017a), contribute to nuance such positions. The latter, in particular, provides insights into how systems can act as a whole without totalising, hence understanding the complexity of systems and the interaction of their parts. Such understanding suggests exploring the potential of systems to produce new articulations that lead to self-organisation. It is therefore important to acknowledge and understand these critical stances in relation to the notion of autonomy: that which sees autonomy as individuality and that which warns of control and totalization; yet it is also important to point towards the alternatives suggested by Escobar (autonomy from a communal perspective and systems through a lens of complexity theory), in order to explore the potential of autonomous design. According to Bonsiepe (2012, p. 58), a good example of how design can contribute to autonomy (from a collective perspective and without aiming for control) was 'Project Cybersyn', where principles of biology – like autopoiesis – were applied to build a cybernetic system that would allow nationalising the Chilean economy, and therefore emancipating the country from international corporate control.

Project Cybersyn was a programme initiated by the Socialist government of Salvador Allende in 1970. The project aimed at developing a system to nationalize and manage the whole of Chilean industry and economy, and for it the Chilean government engaged the British cybernetician Stafford Beer, as well as Gui Bonsiepe to design the interface of the system and the operation room (OpsRoom). The project could indeed be seen as an au-

tonomous design endeavour at a large scale (national), as it aimed at developing a system that would give the Chilean economy a certain level of autonomy, without having to depend on external forces (it is important to mention that the US had imposed tough measures on Chile in the framework of its 'war against communism'). The whole programme came short of being in operation, due to the military coup d'état staged by Pinochet in 1973.

Interventions

In order to better illustrate how the approach of autonomous design can inspire and inform design and research projects, we will look into the practice of intervention. Design is an inherently interventionist practice: the designer is seen as an expert who enters a context not his own (being an institution, a company, a community, etc.) and acts as someone that knows what is to be done (Manzini and Coad, 2015). In this section, we deconstruct the concept of design interventions and discuss what are the potentialities and limitations of a redirected southern approach to interventionist practices in supporting designers aiming to foster the autonomy of communities they are working with.

The word intervention comes from the Latin *interventio*, meaning to "come [in] between" and suggesting an external actor entering an alien context. It is therefore more common to hear about interventions in the context of international geopolitics (outward), rather than on a local, municipal scale (inward). On a State level, such inward interventions take the form of regulations, taxes, subsidies and other controls attempting to insure the fair distribution of wealth; on a municipal level, actions may take the form of concrete infrastructural works (paving a street, fixing a street sign, expanding a sidewalk, etc.), changing or introducing new regulations (use of public space, mobility, housing, etc.) or the realisation of big urban renewal projects (Calderón Salazar, 2017).

Within our initial explorations of interventionist practices, we were first of all confronted by the connotations of the word itself, particularly its use in international geopolitics, where states decide to militarily intervene in another country (such as the US intervening in Iraq). Design scholar Jerry Diethelm makes a call to critically examine the metaphors used in design practice and research, amongst them that of intervention. Diethelm argues that "intervention as a colonizing metaphor in designing isn't, of course, as disastrous as the kind of

foreign intervention that was the invasion of Iraq, where the intervening power 'didn't know Shiite from Shinola', but it is a form of foreign intervention nevertheless" (Diethelm, 2016, p. 169). He presents a contrasting vision to design intervention as "sovereign autopoiesis", where the inhabitants of a given context are responsible for the organisation of their own life, without any external interference. The vision of intervention presented by Diethelm, influenced by geopolitics, is closely associated with the northern idea of autonomy from an individual perspective (the lone agent intervening in the alien context).

However, exploring other ways in which intervention is understood can help us examine its potential relation and contribution to autonomous design practices. Mouffe has made calls for designers (and creative practitioners at large) to "intervene directly in a multiplicity of social spaces, in order to oppose the program of total social mobilisation of capitalism" (Mouffe, 2010), favouring interventionist stances as acts of resistance. In Participatory Design (PD), interventions are seen as design experiments that allow designers and researchers to make contact with – and get direct feedback from – actors they are working with (Anastassakis, and Szaniecki, 2016). Interventions then manifest a will of designers to 'enter the real world', mainly represented by 'getting out of their studio'. Thomas Markussen has spoken about design interventions in the framework of what he refers to as design activism, where they are understood as 'direct actions'. Such interventions, he argues, "invite active engagement, interaction or simply offer new ways of inhabiting [urban] space" (Markussen, 2011). Design interventions can also be understood as dispositifs to place oneself in, and begin to understand, a given context (Anastassakis, and Szaniecki, 2016; Huybrechts et al., 2016). In this way, they can be seen as design experiments that do not necessarily enter a context to disrupt its functioning, but rather to ask questions, position a researcher or designer within it and to bring forms of public engagement a step further (Binder et al., 2015; Halse and Boffi, 2016).

Direct action is a (usually non-violent) tactic undertaken by social groups or movements as means to resist a ruling hegemony or to propose a different vision on a specific aspect of society. Such actions can take the form of sit-ins, strikes, protests, etc.

Traces of interventionist practices can also be found in Participatory Action Research (PAR) practitioners in Latin America, most notably of popular pedagogue Paulo Freire, who saw intervention as an ethical imperative: "my role in the world is not restricted to a process of only observing what happens but it also involves my intervention as a subject" (Freire, 1998, p. 52). PAR assumes that by engaging with the communities a researcher is working with, he/she is building worlds as much as inquiring into them, which represents a shift from an epistemological stance (wherein the goal is to understand a subject) to an ontological perspective (wherein our being-in-the-world is transformative). As such, a practitioner/researcher becomes an active participant in the process, where he/she does not study a context from a distance (as in traditional sociology), but from within it (Fals-Borda, 1985). Escobar has also recognized PAR as a fundamental influence in the development of his ideas (Escobar, 2007), while it also represents a "radical critique to positivism in social studies, coming from Southern epistemologies" (Gómez Obando, 2017, p. 149). This evidences how intervention has been explicitly studied in PD, but it has also been a central characteristic of PAR studies, most notably in the Global South.

When looking at design interventions from a perspective of autonomous design, we can understand their relational potential (as opposed to only their disruptive quality). Still, speaking in terms of interventions makes clear that the designer does not attempt to be neutral, but reveals his/her position in different – possibly conflicting – voices. Such awareness of the intervening processes designers engage with, demands understanding the kinds of power that they enact. Poynor frames the power exercised by design as 'soft power', in contrast with the 'hard power' held by "politicians, civic leaders, plutocrats and even crime bosses" (Poynor, 2012). Poynor calls for designers to embrace their (soft) power as public communicators, wherein their role is to convince, change behaviour and influence opinion, but he also warns that this cannot be done by imposition. Instead, he recognises the suggestive power of design to show alternative paths. The perspective of hard and soft power resonates with Holloway's differentiation of power over from power to. Holloway refers to power over as a top-down exercise of power, where an already powerful agent enacts power over a powerless one, and can be seen in Poynor's perspective as hard power. On the

other hand, power to refers to the possibility of an individual – or a community – to enact their capabilities: "whereas power to is a uniting, a bringing together of my doing with the doing of others, the exercise of power over is a separation" (Holloway, 2002, p. 29); power to, then, can be seen as a representation of soft power. Escobar recognizes in Holloway an important intellectual theorising autonomous practices (2017a, p. 317), making his stance on power relevant for our text.

If we were to transfer this distinction to interventions, we would frame those of a military or economic kind as representations of hard power/power over being exercised (by a powerful into a weak agent), hence as hard interventions. This approach could also be seen as characteristic of the rationalistic tradition scrutinized by Escobar and which we associate to a northern perspective. In contrast, design interventions can be understood from a southern perspective on autonomy and seen through the lens of soft power/power to; in such an approach, instead of aiming at radically disrupting the intervened context, interventions may contribute to nurture relations and processes. This understanding of interventions is important, as it avoids dichotomising design interventions or presenting them as counter to autopoietic processes (as Diethelm suggests) and instead proposes how situated non-invasive interventions can in fact support endogenous processes.

A southern perspective on interventions (as soft and non-disruptive) can also be informed by what Arturo Escobar, citing Spinoza et al. (1999), refers to as skilful disclosing:

"This ontological capability to 'make history' – to engage in conversations and interventions that change the way we take care of ourselves and of things— can be revived, as Flores and his co-authors suggested (Spinoza et al., 1999). The witty and effective disclosure (skilful disclosing) of new possibilities of 'being in the world', however, demands an intense engagement with a specific collectivity, instead of the so celebrated 'distanced deliberation' or the 'decontextualized understanding', characteristic of a considerable part of science and the debates on the public sphere. It demands a different type of attitude stemming from living in a place and having a commitment to a community with which we engage in pragmatic activities around a shared concern or around a disharmony (understood

as a central concern within a community)" (Escobar, 2017a, p. 130).

Understanding design as a practice of skilful disclosing, suggests working to make visible elements, issues and potentialities that would be otherwise invisible, therefore allowing imagination of different futures. In describing the role of designers as 'trigger of publics', Huybrechts et al. (2016) take a similar approach: from such perspective, designers engage in 'committing dialogues', contributing to disclose new attachments representative of certain publics, but also sustain and deepen the existing ones. Actions functioning within such processes (of skilful disclosing or committing dialogues) can be seen as soft interventions that, instead of disrupting a context and imposing a worldview, activate aspects of the community and allow for different initiatives to flourish within.

Before discussing our own experience of an interventionist practice and reflecting on it from the perspective of autonomous design, we will discuss our understanding of the relation – and conflicts – between autonomy and interventions, by looking into a specific example on a transnational scale. We will do so by introducing a particular debate on the role of architectural practice in the history of global movements – one dealing with the idea of 'constructing' and 'building' Non-Alignment (Sekulic, 2012; Kulic, 2014).

We can better understand how interventionist stances can contribute to autonomous processes, by looking at the specific example of a global exchange in architectural practice that took part within the Non-Aligned Movement in the second half of the 20th century. In particular, we refer to the role that Yugoslav architects and social corporations played in the process of 'constructing' or 'building' Non-Alignment (Sekulic, 2012, 2015; Kulic, 2014) and reflect on the possibility of understanding these practices as simultaneously interventionist (by coming from the outside to improve functioning) and autonomous (by fostering communities' self-realization and management).

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was formally established in Belgrade in 1961 by representatives of Yugoslavia, India, Egypt, Ghana and Indonesia. NAM, as a project of alternative globalization (Kulic, 2014), attempted to establish a new, third alliance based on solidarity among the post-colonial

countries of the global South and the refusal to accept the dominant hierarchies of the Cold War bloc division. It came about as a request for a different distribution of global power, which would enable the underdeveloped countries to activate their political role and self-manage their economic and cultural progress. The President of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito was highly engaged with NAM, on one hand, with the aim of gathering allies in the global South and thus strengthening the specific geo-political position of the country. By doing so, NAM was seen on the one hand as a platform for articulating the Yugoslavian ideology of unity and self-management on a global level, while on the other hand for arguing for the progress of the decolonized world.

Within the ideological framework of NAM, concrete actions were taken by its members to establish a fair economical exchange of knowledge, goods and labour between the member countries, as a counterpoint to the global market dominated by the confronted powers of the West and the East and a 'third way' different from capitalism and socialism. Construction companies from Yugoslavia became important actors in this economic network, quickly developing strategies for entering the large new markets in Africa, where their skills in modernising the built space were highly welcomed. Although most of the work by Yugoslav companies can be framed within the realm of international instrumental modernisation (Sekulic, 2012), the architects nevertheless approached their assignments from the position of cooperation, and never as a colonising power (Sekulic, 2015). It is important to note a nuance here, however, as cooperation is presented as the opposite of colonisation: in an interview included as a preface for the newest edition of the book *Autonomy and Design*, Escobar (2017a) presents three different models of cooperation: assistance for development (e.g., the World Bank), cooperation for social justice (e.g., Oxfam) and cooperation for autonomy. We understand NAM fitting in the second category, and therefore still seen as an outside agent intervening with a certain idea of 'development'. However, most of the projects (realised by one specific company, Energoprojekt) were deeply engaged with the local context, appropriating its aesthetics and construction techniques, and thus functioning as interventions while fostering autonomous processes to a certain degree.

This was brought about primarily by the fact that the architects had to learn how to plan for a tropical climate and living conditions drastically different from their own. This pushed their work not only to being informed by interactions with local communities, in the spirit of equal exchange and solidarity, "but also to develop comprehensive new planning tools customized to the specific location they were working in" (Sekulic, 2015, p. 28) and therefore to remain relevant after the architects' departure from the site.

The strategy of non-alignment into any of the two confronted powers represents the conviction – particularly present throughout the global south – of avoiding dualist perspectives. Such was also the case of the 'third cinema' movement, which emerged in Latin America in the 60's as an alternative to the two main powers controlling the film industry: Hollywood and European cinema. Furthermore, the third cinema movement saw movies as a vehicle for social change and activism.

Sekulic (2012), in her analysis on the work of the Energoprojekt company, describes how these companies worked as 'social corporations' competing for work in the country and abroad by offering the full service of design and planning, as well as complete construction work.

The practice of Yugoslav architects in non-aligned territories could thus be understood in line with De Sousa's call for 'sharing voice' (Sousa Santos, 2016), by sharing knowledge and setting the base for future development; in providing infrastructure, expertise and skills transfer, power was not given from above, but shared by an equal peer in an act of solidarity. The architecture of Non-alignment produced planning and building tools, opening space for new articulations of design that supported self-management without imposing control. Unfortunately, the length of construction processes and the political instabilities in some of the NAM countries often didn't allow for the research and planning process to be tested and carried out as it was envisioned. However, we understand the significance it had in instigating a transnational architectural collaboration between different countries of the global south, bypassing the apparent opposition of autonomy and intervention, as a valuable historical contribution to the discussion on autonomous design.

With the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the war in Yugoslavia, the Non-Aligned Movement was gradually transformed into an obsolete and mainly pro forma alliance of southern countries.

In order to better illustrate how the aforementioned southern manners have shaped a specific approach to interventions in a northern context, we will zoom in our experience working on a research project in Genk (Belgium) for the last three years (2014-2017). Genk is a small city in the east of Flanders, historically rich in coal. The discovery of three coal sources gave birth to the settlements that compose the city today. Propelled by the extractive industry, the city experienced a steady growth (demographically as well as economically) in the first half of the 20th century, which set the stage for the migratory flows that established the reputation of Genk (still present until this day) as a multicultural city. At the end of the 1960s, operations in most mines in the region started to slow down (the coal price had plummeted and labour cost had been steadily increasing), resulting in the progressive closure of most mines, including those in Genk. The process of absolute closure of the mines would take over 20 years, the first one closing in 1966 and the last one in 1988. To avoid a scenario of crisis, city authorities attracted the car manufacturer General Motors to open a Ford production plant in the city in 1968. The mines that were still active and the new Ford factory positioned Genk as an important economic player in the region. In mid-2012, however, Ford announced a progressive decrease in its operations, reaching its absolute closure in December 2014 and impacting the city with the loss of 4000 direct and 4000 indirect (subsidiary industries) jobs.

It is precisely in this context that we started to study the potential of design interventions in/for participatory practices in Genk. Having arrived in Belgium's 'motor city', largely organized around the emblematic Ford factory and its vehicles, was an important facet. The context helps further illustrate the aforementioned concept of ontological design, as it can be clearly exemplified with the vehicle: the designed object (the car) and its process of production (assembly line) have determined most aspects of society in the 20th century, from how the urban environments were built to our daily lives (think of the 9-to-5 working day). Tony Fry would present the car as the clearest example of how the designed designs, even beyond the intention of

Case study: De Andere Markt - Southern manners in northern lands

the original designer (Fry, 2008). Having arrived in a post-Fordist city, it was crucial to understand the paradigm present in the context, but it also became evident that it was important to put in place alternative practices – which we see as emerging from our southern manners – in order to repair the social fabric in the city. In Genk, the private company of the mines – and later Ford – dominated the public life of the city from the beginning of the 20th century. Without these large economic players, there was a need and opportunity to re-imagine the city.

The case we present has been made in the framework of TRADERS, a research project looking at the role that artists and designers can play in participatory processes within the city, and of which intervention was one of the lines of research and one of the authors of this paper one of the Early Stage Researchers.

Intervene to embed ourselves in the context

The act of entering a context not our own required for us to critically examine how we wanted to intervene. Close to our vision on design interventions as non-disruptive, we were further inspired by southern approaches of PAR wherein researchers contribute to bringing about the political awareness of the subjects of a community (Flores-Kastanis et al., 2009). For us, this was essential, as our main goal was not to ‘solve the unemployment issue of the city’, but to allow the citizens to reflect on the transition in place and the role they could eventually play in it. To embed our research in the context of Genk, we set up a lab in August 2015 – after a year of negotiations with the city authorities – called De Andere Markt (DAM) – ‘The Other Market’ in Flemish. DAM is located in a shop front in the neighbourhood of Winterslag, home to one of the former mining sites of the city. PAR became then a southern approach for us to intervene in the city and to begin rethinking the relations between designers, citizens, the private and public domain.

The choice of focusing on the issue of ‘work’ had to do with the moment that the project started (right after the definitive closing of the Ford factory), but it also aimed at responding to the lack of alternative approaches in dealing with issues of work (organisations would only deal with the aspect of employment and access to it). In structuring the lab, we did so as a ‘living lab’, estimating that the theme of work was an issue that demanded to be researched in a participatory way outside the walls of a university or city council, and also to be explored

within a physical space that would allow for long-term engagements (Björgvinsson et al., 2010). The shop-front that hosted the living lab also became a way of intervening in the context and, by doing so, embedding ourselves in the everyday life and practices of the neighbourhood. By intervening in such a way, we were appropriating northern methodologies of PD, while at the same time assuming the southern manners representative of PAR. Moreover, this approach is in line with what Escobar terms ‘skillfull disclosure’ as an instrumental practice for autonomous processes, which is only possible by living in a community and sharing their concerns (Escobar, 2017a). From the beginning of the project, we produced different interventions and actions that contributed to nurturing local processes, as well as kick-starting new ones. For this paper, we focus on the first series of interventions and their contribution in exploring a specific case study within the lab, namely FunghiLab.

This was clearly evidenced in a meeting organized by the city’s municipal authorities, where different organizations dealing with ‘employment’ where present sharing their activities and achievements, evidencing that their central focus was facilitating access to jobs for unemployed people. We certainly understand the importance of their work, but also consider it necessary to devise creative strategies that tap into the capabilities of the citizens.

Even though we attempted to put into practice a relational approach to interventions, our arrival in Genk was nevertheless a disruption of sorts, as we were entering a context not our own. Aware of our position, instead of immersing head-on to propose and produce actions and projects, we devised the first series of interventions as a means to “place ourselves in – and explore – the context” (Anastassakis, and Szaniecki, 2016). These interventions made use of an adapted cargo bike with a printing press mounted to it, and consisted of driving to different neighbourhoods of the city and encouraging people to discuss the theme of ‘work’ by speaking about their capabilities. During the interventions, we would go in different public spaces with the bike and a sign asking: “What are your (other) skills?” a question intended as an icebreaker and conversation starter. Throughout the conversation we would collectively summarise our interlocutor’s capabilities in a sentence, which would be immediately

Intervene to understand

printed in an A2 paper with which he or she would be portrayed. This process aligns with what Huybrechts et al. (2016) frame from the perspective of the designer as a trigger of publics engaging in committing dialogues and such "interventions [as] a first means to get to know the people, organizations and informal initiatives" (Huybrechts et al., 2016). The portraits of people and their skills were displayed online, as well as in the living lab space, in order to make visible the capabilities present in the city. This process set the first basis of what we consider the main resource and asset of the project today: a (local) network of people, organisations, spaces, skills, resources and tools, resonating with Terranova's notion of distributed networks as "abstract machines of soft control that represent a diagram of power that takes as its operational field the productive capacities of the hyperconnected many" (Terranova, 2004, p. 100). This approach, highlighted by Escobar (2008, p. 275), supports our approach to intervention and building of networks as an exercise of soft power, and reinforces the perspective of the network as an entity gathering its force from the capabilities of its actors and their intricate correlations.

The first series of interventions (involving the bike/printing press) served us to introduce ourselves in the city, as well as to begin inquiring on the issue of work. Having intervened in the context from a southern perspective of PAR – hence as soft interventions – it was clear that our goal was never to attempt solving a problem (aka. unemployment), but rather to problematize the reality of the people from the community and therefore encouraging them to assume a position in the transition the city is going through. Moreover, the network resulting from the first series of interventions did not impose 'a' vision on work; instead, it attempted to set the basis for different initiatives to flourish by means of encouraging new articulations and nurturing the existing ones. By organising such interventions, we attempted to activate certain sensitive elements in the context, and build a platform for longer-term collaborations and engagements; it is important to disclose, however, that at the time we were unaware that our work had similar characteristics to the approach of autonomous design .

It is important to note that the project was not conceived from a perspective of autonomous design, as we were not aware of Escobar's proposition then; however, in

reflecting on the project in retrospect we can find insights for the continuation of such an approach.

Within our interventions in Genk, our initial concern was making visible the capabilities of its citizens, approaching design as a practice of skilful disclosure (Spinosa et al., 1999) and the designer as a trigger of publics (Huybrechts et al., 2016). It is precisely in this respect that we consider relevant to refer to southern manners (Calderón Salazar and Gutiérrez Borrero, 2017), as to situate our thinking and doing. In such positioning, we recognize – together with Escobar (2016) – the importance of the epistemologies of the south as a path to open space for different (Sousa Santos, 2012) approaches for our research and practice as designers, as well as resist the universalization of knowledge. Furthermore, such deliberate framing (southern manners) is grounded on relational ontologies, which prioritize experiences of the world that expand beyond the rationalist tradition scrutinized by Escobar (2017a).



Image 1. Printing press / cargo bike.



Image 2. Detail of printing press.

To further illustrate the functioning of such interventions vis-a-vis the proposition of autonomous design, we will describe one of the projects that emerged out of the network resulting from the first series of interventions: FunghiLab. From the 1st of October of 2016 until the 9th of January of 2017 in Genk, took place an exhibition that aimed to explore new modes of production in cities and the role that artists and designers could play in them. As a local actor engaged

with the issue of work, DAM was invited to take part in the exhibition in collaboration with local designer and researcher Ben Hagenaars, and to use the location (C-Mine) as a production space. We saw the exhibition as an opportunity to build upon our local network, as well as to tap into the existing capabilities in the city. Moreover, being an exhibition of un-finished projects, favouring experimentation and a laboratory-approach at the location, it presented a perfect opportunity for us to prototype some of the ideas emerging from our work thus far.

With that in mind, we began a process of mapping the flows of resources of Winterslag (the neighbourhood where the living lab is located in) in order to find opportunities of action. Such an approach was inspired by the principles of the circular economy, but it also resonates with Escobar's critique of "conventional economy" for "completely forgetting that the economy is about flows of matter and energy" (Escobar, 2017a, p. 45). As a result of this process, we detected a considerable amount of coffee grounds being wasted every day in several cafes located in the adjacent street of the lab. Looking at the map of skills collected and visualised through our first series of interventions, we also found a

Image 3. Collaboratively mapping the flows of Winterslag.



Image 4. Map of flows and resources of Winterslag.



repeating pattern of capabilities related to the production of food (from cultivating to composting and from cooking to conserving). By taking into account both human (skills, stories, opinions, etc.) and non-human (of context, climate, raw and waste resources, etc.) aspects we deepened our approach in line with Fry and Escobar's perspective of relationality.

In an immediate testing experiment, we went around the cafes on Tuesday midday to collect coffee grounds, normally being trashed, and managed to gather 12kg.

We invited some of the actors to openly discuss and brainstorm the possibility of articulating their skills in a collaborative project, seeing ourselves as an actor that would support the process, rather than lead it. At the first gathering an interest arose in developing an initiative for growing mushrooms locally, which responded to our observations of the excess of coffee grounds (being these an ideal substrate for growing mushrooms). We saw this as an opportunity to re-weave the social tissue affected by the industry closures from a relational perspective and led us to start, together with a group of four local citizens (who named their group 'Fungimama'), the project FunghiLab as a laboratory for testing and prototyping a system for growing mushrooms out of local waste and materials.

During the first meeting, we analysed the mapping of flows in the neighbourhood and the skills collected (via the first series of interventions) to structure the collaborative project, which would run through the 100 days of the exhibition. In order to lay the groundwork, we collectively mapped our knowledge and ideas of the process of growing mushrooms out of coffee waste. During a follow-up workshop, we collectively mapped and structured the resources, tools and people related to the project. We later materialised the resulting network in an outline map milled in two wooden boards joined together (242*242cm), progressively updated it with the different elements and connected these with thread. Besides the spatial component, we also defined the roles and actions necessary for the subsequent stages, and visualised them through a flowchart, which was taken as a timeline to follow the process.

Staging Knowledge (FunghiLab: Preliminary stage)

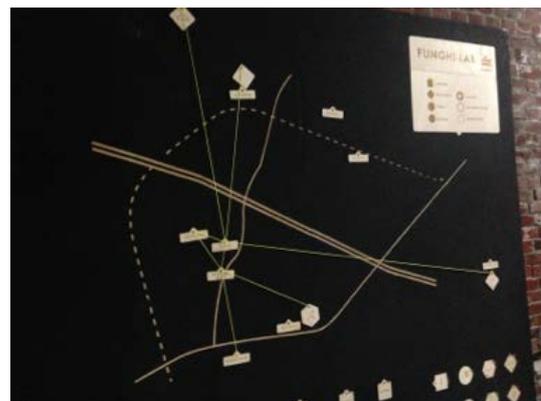


Image 5. Map made for -and used during- the exhibition

Positioning ourselves and the others (FunghiLab: Stage 1)

The two outcomes (resource, tool and actors map and process flowchart) evidenced our soft power as designers and our skill to map knowledge in a visual way, while still allowing us to learn new insights in the process.

The production process was structured around three stages: (1) collecting waste resources (coffee grounds, hay, organic waste, etc.); (2) preparing the mixtures, growing and harvesting the mushrooms; and (3) collectively designing a sustainable continuation of the project. For the first stage, we began by designing and building a module –which was subsequently mounted on a XYZ Cargo bike – as a tool to collect the materials and resources around the city and its surroundings. The choice of using a bike was a deliberate one, as it allowed challenging the dominance of motorized transport in the city. We also designed a series of labels to mark the buckets (upcycled from used sauce containers donated by fries shops) with information on the proportions of resources that would be used in each mix. This meant taking a position regarding the context and project, and deciding to kick-start the process with our design skills. But instead of imposing our expertise, this was done to explicitly encourage the community members to take on an expert role by being more vocal about their skills and knowledge: Wim, one of the citizens involved in the project, started to further research mushroom farming and shared his insights with us; another actor involved, Katrien, assumed a role of advertising and reaching out to other potentially interested parties; and Gerarda, became the main supplier of tools for the process. By inviting them to make a poster with our printing press, in which they defined their role in the project, the process was further strengthened. The posters and the portraits were all pasted on a wall of the working space, having a visual cue of the participants and their roles.

Image 6.
Wall of skills and roles of participants



The XYZ Cargo bike (<http://www.xyzcargo.com>) is an open source bike designed by

Danish collective N55. Several bikes were built and used by the local design school for a previous project and were donated to DAM for the FunghiLab project.

For the second stage, we organised a series of workshops to design and build two elements necessary for the production process: a laminar flow cabinet, necessary to mix the resources (inoculation) in a sterile environment; and a cabinet to store the buckets containing the mix under the right conditions (temperature and humidity) for their fructification stage. Both activities served as moments to engage citizens outside of the initial core group who had other skills, not necessarily related to mushroom farming, but useful for the workshops. Such was the case of Ief and Jan, who contributed to the workshops by lending their time and construction skills. By organizing the workshops, we were offering a platform, as well as taking up the role of co-designers: instead of taking the expert role, we were reaching out and inviting other experts to participate in the workshops (Huybrechts et al., 2016). Parallel to our contributions at this stage, the collective had taken charge of most of the actions for growing the mushrooms, supported by the map and timeline we had previously collectively produced. This stage saw us connecting our previous actions with the rest of the group, by using the process flowchart as a tool for self-organising labour.



Image 7.
Building the laminar flow cabinet

During the third stage, approaching the end of the exhibition and collaboration, we organised an open day aimed at introducing the initiative to the citizens and garnering local support for continuing the project. We provided our skills to make a poster to promote the event, but the members of Fungrimama were the ones who took the initiative to organise the space, receive the people and pitch the project. The event drew great attention of the local citizens,

Connecting with others (FunghiLab: Stage 2)

Sharing our voice (FunghiLab: Stage 3)

press and policy makers, resulting in an event with over 60 visitors. After the event, Fungimama was offered a space to continue the project and contacted several potential clients and partners. The new space, offered by the city authorities, allowed them to continue experimenting with the production of mushrooms from different local resources for eight more months, after which they stopped their collaboration. However, the eleven-month long work (three months with us and eight by themselves) produced an important exposure of the project in the city, putting the spotlight on the issue of work through non-conventional means and highlighting the potentialities present in city. Similar to the NAM experience, instead of pretending to 'give voice' to the rest of the citizens – which would reproduce colonialist patterns and therefore represent a northern approach – we wanted to share our voice with the rest of the group, assuming a southern perspective (Sousa Santos, 2016). In this stage we attempted to provoke new connections and foster an autonomous process of self-organisation.

The discussion on NAM represents a large-scale example of how interventionist stances stemming from a principle of solidarity can support autonomous processes, while our experience with DAM and FunghiLab represents a small-scale case to reflect on the process of intervening as designers from a southern perspective and how this supported a process of autonomous design. This is not to say that we take for granted such a concept and its relevance to the context where we worked, but it now provides us a retrospective to reflect on how a southern approach to design interventions can support autonomy within communities – also in the global north. Even though we were entering the context with a relational approach, we were nevertheless intervening. But by intervening from a southern PAR perspective (via the living lab) and devising 'soft interventions' based on our southern manners (the printing press and the cargo bike), we were sensibly embedding ourselves in the community as active participants, instead of studying the context from a distance or drastically disrupting it. Such an approach allowed for activating aspects of the community that were not necessarily evident, and provoked new articulations and connections between actors, tools and spaces in the city. This also supported the emergence of the spin-off project (FunghiLab), inviting experts and devising tools for producing new elements.

Even though most of the members of Fungimama had already expressed their intention of starting such a project, our intervention represented an opportunity for them to take a leap forward and test their ideas in a defined timeframe and a specific space. Moreover, the process of FunghiLab showed how we made use of the network and resources mapped and collected throughout the first series of interventions; this supported the self-organisation of the collective and we see it as illustrative of how a southern approach to interventions can nurture autonomous processes. While being unacquainted with Escobar's proposal for autonomous design when we began the project, our southern manners influenced the way of intervening and enacting our power as designers, therefore allowing us now to reflect on them from such a stand-point.

It is important to note the considerable contextual differences between Latin American communities, from which Escobar was inspired for his proposal of autonomous design; and communities in Genk, where we have been working in the last years and have inspired this paper. In Latin American (indigenous, peasant, afro) communities, struggles have been strongly attached to narratives of resistance within a territorio, and their fight for autonomy has deep roots in their resistance over control of ancestral territories, both by state and private interests (Sandoval et al., 2017). However, and far from attempting to propose totalising theories or analysis, we consider it important to explore – and reflect on – the potential alternative paths for design (as is autonomous design) and suggest how they can contribute to our practice and research. It is from such an understanding that we acknowledge the relevance of Escobar's proposals for autonomous design, also within a Nordic context:

From an autonomous design perspective, it is crucial for external designers to deeply understand the political project of the movement (not necessarily share it in its totality, but understand it), and submit design interventions and co-design processes to the same principles to those to which the movement submits his actions (Escobar, 2017a, p. 322).

In indigenous and peasant contexts, the term territorio is wider than the Anglo word 'territory', as it is anchored in history and not only geographically bound. However, for the remit of this paper we understand territory as

“the spatial reference of interventions aimed at place-based development” (Sandoval et al., 2017).

As previously explored, Escobar’s take on the ontological capacity within a practice of skilful disclosing (in which we engage with a community by embedding ourselves in its everyday life and sharing their concerns) as well as the conditions for an autonomous design process (in which interventions of designers external to communities ought to be submitted to the same principles as those of the community) can be insightful ideas for design practitioners and researchers around the world. In our trajectory with the case we have described, the first series of interventions served as a way to better understand the context and allowed for the project (FunghiLab) to follow the principles and values of the community, something also characteristic of the projects realised in the context of NAM. Furthermore, in order to play an active role within the community we had to first position our practice in their everyday life by embedding ourselves in the neighbourhood via the living lab. This evidences how certain PD practices, however originating and evolving in the global north, can share characteristics with southern approaches of PAR and Escobar’s proposal for autonomous design. These perspectives are therefore useful for us to inquire into the potential of design interventions in participatory processes, as they present an important vantage point from which to foster the self-realisation of communities.

However, our intention by presenting this case is not to reaffirm our position with a new conceptual framework (autonomous design), but to critically examine our trajectory and propose valuable reflections for the design and research community. As part of this critical analysis, it is inevitable to question why Fungimama stopped their collaboration eight months after the end of the exhibition and our collaboration. The network we were building through the first series of interventions – and which was visualized in different maps – served as an important resource to bring different people together and allow them to self-organise and kick-start the project; however, there was little incentive for the group to continue using the network, falling short as a tool to assure its sustainability. This observation led us to begin developing a tool to make visible and usable the networks present in the city, as well as the

ones created by different initiatives (as were our first interventions). Such tool is now on an early development process, but it is illustrative of how we can take valuable lessons from our experience and transform them into a potential asset.



Image 8. One of the mushroom harvests of Fungi-Mama working independently

But even if the initiative did not continue to this day and neither can nor should the impact of the project be evaluated in quantitative ways (in terms of jobs or money), we do see the trajectory as an example to discuss how a southern approach to interventions can contribute to autonomous process, as well as what are its limitations. Moreover, having all the process visible (in the shop front, but also in the streets and the exhibition) allowed for a wide range of citizens to reflect on their position in the work scenario in transition that the city was – and still is – going through. The way the issue of work was dealt with within the city represented a one-world vision and authorities responded to it by focusing on jobs and facilitating accessibility; through our process, we explored a pluriversal approach, where different types of articulations would allow for different perspectives and voices to emerge.

This text builds upon Escobar’s scrutiny of the rationalist tradition and uses his proposition on autonomous design as a lens to critically examine our experience with DAM and FunghiLab. In doing so, the text also presents an illustrative example of how his ideas can take shape in design practice and research in the global north, challenging the incumbent notion of PD. Within our analysis of interventions, we found in PD valuable resources to frame our proposal for non-disruptive interventions; however, stemming from a northern tradition

of thought, PD stances stay short in suggesting how interventions can contribute to autonomy from a southern perspective. Even though some stances of PD are interwoven within the argument of the paper, these are subsidiary to the central idea of autonomous design, acknowledging that – if well there might be coincidences and resonances between both notions – we find the latter a more appropriate approach for our examination and consider this paper an initial contribution to the growing discussion about autonomy and design.

Even though we can understand the relevance – or even urgency – for disruptive actions in some contexts (where unjust measures are put in place, for example), it was not the case in Genk, where the situation called for another kind of action, having in mind our position as outsiders and our role influenced by our southern manners. Such positioning allowed us to embed ourselves in the context, so as to understand it by sharing its day-to-day life, instead of studying it from afar. Furthermore, instead of intervening as an alien power to impose a desired solution (northern perspective), our interventions aimed to activate aspects of the community and allow the solutions (plural used deliberately) to emerge from within.

Someone might critically argue that in true fact there were socially unjust measures being put in place in Genk (the layoffs of Ford and lack of a systemic solution). Even acknowledging such a scenario (that could be controverted), the interventions we describe in this text make reference to ways in which we intervened in the community. A potential continuation of the project could involve the co-production of disruptive interventions with the community, which would have been irresponsible to do upon arrival, without the work we have done.

However Diethelm (2016) presents design interventions as counter to autopoietic (therefore autonomous) processes, in this text we have attempted to nuance that position. Part of that nuance is brought about through what we have outlined as ‘a southern approach to design interventions’ influenced by a relational understanding of the world, and which, instead of aiming to drastically disrupt a context, it attempts to activate the potentialities of the community. Within Diethelm’s scrutiny of interventions, he calls for decolonising design through an examination of the use of different

metaphors. Following his call to decolonise design, it is important to understand one’s own position and the power relations it entails (Mignolo, 2007), instead of erasing it. In that process, we understood that, as designers, we are always intervening. Therefore, we feel that instead of questioning the term or suggesting avoiding its use, we ought to favour a southern approach towards interventions that supports and strengthens local processes. Under this more deliberate framing, design interventions may actually become tools for supporting autonomous design practices.

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EPILOGUE

"The [creative] practices of re-existence consist on confronting all forms of domination, exploitation and discrimination, through actions that lead to building consciousness of being, feeling, doing and thinking from a concrete place of enunciation of life. They are actions that lead to decolonize the being, its imaginaries, its language, its fantasy, its creative capacity for ontological recovery, to insist in the right to occupy a place in society with dignity, prevent the renunciation to be what one should be and not to be what one is imposed as being."

Albán Achinte, A. (2017). *Prácticas creativas de re-existencia: más allá del arte...el mundo de lo sensible*. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Del Signo.

Epilogue: backtracking the word of design - a critical reflection

I am really bad at finalising things (or am I really good at prolonging things endlessly?). Critically inquiring why this happens, I come to realise that my problem is with the idea of 'conclusion', of giving a final answer to a previously posed question; that is the reason why this dissertation is seen as an assemblage of texts critically reflecting on -or performing and embodying- a research process. This resonates with Umberto Eco's proposal of the 'open work', insofar as the work remains open for the multiple interpretations that diverse spectators (or participants) might make of it (1989). But instead of using Eco's ideas as a scapegoat in my practice and research, I plead for its relevance for artists and designers working in the public sphere in participatory ways. In such a perspective, artists and designers would be in charge of "informing [the] material- in the very strict philosophical (scholastic) sense of the Latin *informare*, i.e., giving a form or shape to material or matter" (de Mallac, 1971), which would serve to unleash subsequent interactions, interpretations and responses. On a similar fashion, Richard Sennett argues that "asserting the value of incomplete form is a political act architects should perform in the public realm, because it confronts the desire for fixity" (2010). However he refers (mainly) to the built environment, I believe such reflection is transferrable to different types of creative practice, insofar as resisting the demands for definitive resolutions (in a doctoral dissertation, for example), becomes a political act. Without intending to give a definitive closure, then, this text aims to function as a thread that will connect the loose ends left throughout the dissertation (sometimes deliberately and sometimes not).

Throughout the time I have been enrolled as a doctoral student (2014-2020), the title of my research has remained something along these lines: Design interventions and long-term participation: an uneasy relationship? Why then, is there such a change in the title of this dissertation? The original working-title essentially reflected on the pre-conceptions related to the research track proposed in the initial TRADERS approach (of 'intervention'). In that sense, all the initial reflections and activities were aimed at understanding the relationship between the notions of 'intervention' and (long-term, sustained) 'participation'. That concern has remained until the end of -and is implicit in- this research, but the focus has slightly shifted, following the different practices I have engaged with and the reflections emanating from them. Having gained an awareness of the problematic history of design interventionism, the central concern in my dissertation became to reconcile interventionist practices in design with decolonial approaches in the social sciences. Additionally, gaining awareness of my position (as a white-looking, straight, Colombian male, living and working in Belgium) brought to the fore certain issues, notions, concepts and contexts that were 'hidden in the background' before. This became personally evident for me when I had to renew my Belgian residence permit in May 2017, and was -literally- kept from advancing in my research due to the bureaucratic puzzle I had to go through, only to receive my new resident permit in January 2018, five months before it expired again.

After a bureaucratically troublesome year in Europe (mid 2017 - mid 2018), I returned to Bogotá (Colombia), my hometown, to work for the last two years and a half (it is January 2021 at the moment of writing this text) as an Associate Professor at the university where I followed my undergraduate studies in Industrial Design. In the previous years I had become more sensitive to forms of knowledges and practices otherwise (Abdulla, 2018), which can be evidenced in some of the early texts and cases included in this dissertation. However, it were the aforementioned events that provoked the definitive shift for embracing subaltern (southern, indigenous, non-hegemonic, etc.) perspectives on my overall practice, in general, and my doctoral dissertation, in particular. The social and political instability in Colombia prompted a new wave of protests throughout the country -starting end-2018- of which the indigenous were one of the most visible groups. In their resistance practices, they have birthed and embodied a dictum that summarizes their struggle: *caminar la palabra* (walk the word). When the indigenous people from Colombia gather for a *minga*, they walk the word, they give shape to their discourses through practice: "in this sense, is putting

On the title of the dissertation

the verb, the concept, the idea and reason, in action" (Castillo, 2013). Choosing this as the title of my dissertation is a tribute to the ancestral inhabitants of Colombia and Abya Yala (Latin America) but, moreover, it represents one of the main arguments proposed throughout the thesis, namely the importance of grounding ideas and putting them into practice in specific contexts. Additionally, the dictum supports the spatial approach of the dissertation, of which I will further elaborate on this text.

I also consider it important to elaborate on the subtitle of the dissertation, as it refers more explicitly to central notions presented throughout the different texts. By saying explorations and reflections of a decolonial-interventionist practice, I want to highlight the fact that my research process has supported the consolidation of a creative (and) research practice that is, simultaneously, 'interventionist' and 'decolonial' (or at least tending towards decoloniality). In scrutinising the metaphors used in design, Diethelm et al argue that 'design interventions' are colonial practices, insofar as they represent foreign agents entering a context not their own (2016). However, throughout different texts of the dissertation (most notably *De Andere Markt: a log-book, Intervention as tactic, not as strategy and Southern manners in northern lands*) I have discussed the possibility for alternative approaches to design interventions. Seen as ways of understanding -and introducing oneself to- the context (Anastasakis & Szaniecki, 2016), as tactics to reclaim the city for its inhabitants (Calderón Salazar, 2017), as urban acupuncture (van Heeswijk, 2012) or as 'soft interventions' that support local processes (Calderón Salazar, Zuljevic & Huybrechts, 2018); the arguments presented suggest the possibility of a 'decolonial-interventionist' practice.

I find it important to discuss my choice to use the 'first person' throughout all the texts, including the academic ones. In her critical assessment of practice-based doctorates and their institutional legitimacy (in the UK), Candlin (2000) questions the naturalisation of academic writing codes and norms -in which the use of the 'I' or the active voice are seen as major faults-, particularly in practice-based doctorates. In arguing that "the acquisition of (academic) writing skills is not only a matter of style but indexes and implicitly subscribes to academic codes and procedures" (Candlin, 2000), she exposes how academic writing is about form as much as it is about content. Gutiérrez Borrero (2014) further vindicates the use of the first person as a means to be accountable for the ideas presented in a text, as well as to break the colonial reflex to use the third person as a (false) pretense of objectivity.

Lugonés (2003) also takes a stance against the use of the third person in writing as, she argues, it "seems to hide that the writing is itself an encounter, nonsensical apart from dialogue, heavily touched by uncertainty; the third person tends toward removal, toward a metapositionality that takes one out of the action" and goes on to defend her use of the first person: "I speak the 'I' at the level of the street and as moving through multiple encounters, geographico-historical paths to indicate the subversion of the theory/practice dichotomy and to express the writing itself as a tactical-strategic interactive performance" (Lugonés, 2003). Putting into question the hegemonic epistemologies and critically evaluating my positionality (as I do in several texts included in this dissertation), demands also to put forward other ways of documenting and presenting research: even if a small gesture (Sacchetti, 2020), using the first person of the singular is a step in that direction.

However, as Candlin argues, writing is as much about codes as it is about substance. In that line, she questions how, in several practice-based doctorates, writing is assigned the role of "explaining or underpinning" the (art) work (2000). I would argue this is problematic on several counts: for one, it reinforces the dichotomic separation between theory and practice, suggesting that the only way of giving academic legitimacy to a practice is by making a scholarly reflection through writing. Additionally, this approach hinders the possibility of exploring forms of writing that -even if they might not fit the academic cannon- may enrich the overall research and creative

work. Lastly -and most important for me and this dissertation- it does not allow for writing to be considered as a practice in its own right, but only as the academic proxy of a practice. In this regard, Candlin also reminds us "that writing also has a form and has a determining effect on the finished product" (2000), highlighting that writing can be a (creative) practice in itself. This understanding has become particularly relevant in my search for formats, structures, tones and narratives that embody the concepts and principles of my work. Rendell has further discussed this, by showing how writing can be understood as an architectural practice: "writing [...] is an architectural practice, in the sense that it involves the processes of thinking, designing and building - in short it can be understood as a spatial construction" (2007). This stance is reinforced by Indian writer Arundhati Roy who, in an interview included in a Random House edition of her book *The God of Small Things*, highlights how her training as an architect kicked in to structure the narrative itself, rather than to describe the spatial part of the storyline (2008).

Throughout most of the texts included in this dissertation I have attempted to approach the writing process as a practice in its own right; echoing late Argentinian writer Julio Cortázar, I have tried to "take from literature that part which is a living bridge from man to man, and which the treatise or the essay will permit only among specialists", by constructing "a narrative that will act as a coagulant of experiences, as a catalyst of confused and badly understood notions, which first off will cut into the one who is writing it" (Cortázar, 1966). The different forms of writing explored within this dissertation express a will to push the confines of what can be considered as valid in academic writing and, moreover, generate reflections that can overflow the walls of academia. Nepia argued for his use of creative writing on his (practice-led) doctoral dissertation, insofar as "it brought the action of writing closer to the creative investigation I was pursuing in the project as a whole, it provided me with a way to articulate, reflect upon and share insights with others, including my supervisors [...] and it deepened my level of engagement with the main subject of my investigation" (Nepia, 2013). The dissertation is designed (not only referred to the layout, visual and graphic design, but to the structure in itself) as follows: the prologue is written in semi-fictional narrative form and presented as a navigation guide; the intro and outro are written in academic form and provide theoretical grounding and conceptual horizon, respectively, to the overall dissertation; the case studies recount the lived experiences on the different projects; the articles represent non-academic reflections related to my practice; and the present text, the epilogue, is an essay, critically reflecting on the overall thesis.

The different forms and tones explored throughout the different sections (domains), manifest a will to vindicate the diverse positionalities taken throughout the process. In a similar fashion, Burroughs (2016) created three different characters (researcher, architect and teacher) to narrate the three different sections of her doctoral dissertation. However being an inspiring reference and experience, there are two essential differences with my approach: first off, most of the texts composing this dissertation were written, presented and/or published beforehand, when I did not yet have a clear overview of the form my thesis would have; secondly, instead of creating characters as alter egos, I suggest that the same person (myself) can take different roles: the introduction and conclusion are written from the perspective of the academic researcher, the prologue and case studies from that of the practitioner, and the articles from that of the critic. Particularly regarding the latter series of texts, which many were published in non-academic fora and publications, Biswas and Kirchherr (2015) point out how many scholars "frown upon publishing in the popular media", which results in their "absence [in] shaping public debates and policies". This position, still dominant in academia, hinders alternative forms of writing under the premise of 'publish (in academic journals) or perish'.

Further pleading for understanding writing as a practice, Rendell suggests that

"with words such as 'mapping', 'locating', 'situating', 'positioning' and 'boundaries', the language of these texts is highly spatialized" (2010). This argument becomes particularly relevant, on one side, for reasserting the importance for the author to critically position (or situate) him/herself in relation to a text and its subject matter and, secondly, for considering the spatial dimension of writing. In relation to the latter, Lugonés further calls for understanding the spatiality of theory as a means of grounding knowledge, denouncing how the "theoreticians of society and politics have often conceived of themselves as perched up high, looking at or making up the social from a disengaged position" (2003). The scrutiny of such disembodied position can be linked back to what Donna Haraway referred to as "the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (1988) and is addressed throughout the different texts, either explicitly by elaborating on the importance of positionality, or implicitly by structuring the overall dissertation through a spatial logic. Lugonés follows her critique by putting into question the tactical/strategic dichotomy proposed by de Certeau (1984), arguing that such distinction does not give space to theorise from a tactical perspective (given that from such position only resistance is possible). As a response to the dichotomic relation proposed by de Certeau, she pushes forward the figure of the (female) streetwalker theorist: "done as a pedestrian, una callejera, en compañía, in the midst of company, and obliterating the theory/practice distinction, this theorizing seeks out, puts out, entrusts, invokes, rehearses, performs, considers, and enacts tactical-strategic practices of resistant/emancipatory sense making." (Lugonés, 2003).

The conceptualisations for considering the spatial dimension of theory and writing, backdrop my choice to frame the dissertation as a territory. I am aware of the risks and perils of adding new concepts or metaphors to determine the form and structure, but it seems as the most consequent way of presenting the thesis. All the included texts are different manifestations of grounding knowledge and theory: be it for a conference, academic journal, popularised book or for the dissertation itself, each text sought to bring down to earth concepts and theories. Furthermore, considering the connotation of the notion of territorio in Spanish -particularly within the indigenous peoples throughout Latin America- as an "arena of dispute" (Sandoval et al, 2017), the metaphor functions as a means to turn the texts into a living thing, a dispositif that puts into question preconceived notions on concepts, methods, ideas, theories, etc. presented and discussed throughout.

Similar to writing, this doctoral research process has also allowed me to come to terms with another pillar of scientific research: the method. Following Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism (1993) and assuming the role of the 'reflective practitioner' (Schön, 1983), throughout my doctoral trajectory I have avoided to define a priori methodologies for inquiry. Instead, I have seen them as research traditions and approaches, and used them as frameworks to inspire and assess my ways of doing research. That being said, I will further elaborate on what has been the role of the two central research frameworks accompanying this process, namely arts-based research (AbR) and participatory action research (PAR).

AbR, more than a 'method', ought to be understood as a series of approaches involving artistic media as modes of research (Greenwood, 2019). It is a practice-led research approach that, through experimental actions, seeks to not (only) answer given questions in a research, but propose new questions and perspectives to address an issue or object of study. It is "most commonly used when the aim is to explore, describe, evoke, provoke, or unsettle" (Leavy, 2017). In the case study of De Andere Markt, I explicitly reflect on how AbR served as an useful framework and inspiration to conceive the interventions in public space. This was directly influenced by what Catharina Dyrssen calls "explorative experiments", actions that "subvert conventional strategies; shake up ingrained patterns of thought; provide quick feedback, increased curiosity, and discoveries of hidden possibilities; reveal possible links and points that need to be mapped; and get the creative process moving forward" (Dyrssen, 2011). Similar assess-

ment could be made on the other cases, insofar as I made use of explorative interventions as a mode of inquiry. Furthermore, Leavy highlights the use of literary writing as a mode of inquiry within the tenets of AbR (2020), which further grounds my writing explorations as, simultaneously, modes of creation and research.

In the intro and outro there is a detailed recount of the birth of PAR in Colombia; however, it is important for me to be more explicit on what its role has been during the research and its different phases. When I first started my research process, I did an initial search into participatory methods for engagement with communities, primarily from the social sciences. In doing so, I was enthusiastic to discover that PAR had been in fact birthed in Colombia (by Orlando Fals Borda) and was tied to social and political struggles, particularly in the Caribbean coastal region of the country. Understanding the contextual and historical differences with (northern) Europe -where most of my research activities took place-, PAR has served as an ethico-political and epistemological grounding throughout the project. Moreover, PAR plays a central role in the dissertation, as it has helped to critically assess the different activities and cases through the lens of its experiences and concepts (such as sentipensar, systematisation of experiences, hombre hicoitea, etc.). Similarly to AbR processes, through PAR there is also an explicit use of writing as more than a 'tool for reporting', instead seeing it as an honest and direct representation of the lived experience (Mejía, 2007).

Throughout the different texts composing this dissertation I have referred to -and made use of- different concepts and notions, stemming from different fields of knowledge, and somewhat argued for their relevance in design research in general and my own research process in particular. The concept that gave birth to my own research track within the framework of TRADERS, and curiously the most 'European' of them all, is intervention. A concept mainly used in the context of international geopolitics, in one of the texts (Intervention as tactic, not as strategy) I make a plea for understanding interventions in art and design from a tactical perspective, making reference to de Certeau's (1984) differentiation between strategy and tactic. This understanding is further articulated with the approach of the rest of the dissertation in another text (Southern manners in northern lands), wherein interventions are framed from a 'southern perspective', taking as inspiration Paulo Freire's ethical imperative to intervene in a world perceived as unjust (Freire, 1998). As it was roughly outlined before, these takes represent an opening for a decolonial approach to design interventions.

Which leads me to the hinge concept of my overall practice, strongly represented throughout this dissertation: the south. As it is comprehensively argued on the conclusion (Southern manners in northern lands), the south is not approached from an exclusively geographical perspective, but seen as a space for dispute of hegemonic perspectives, a figure representing resistance to colonialism and the hope for alternative ways of thinking and acting (de Sousa Santos, 2012). Furthermore, an epistolary text of the articles (Letters south of northern design) develops further reflections on the concept of the south, at the same time as it calls for valorising its relevance for design practice and research.

And it is precisely this southern perspective that has become the main source of the remaining central concepts of the dissertation. Such is the case of autonomía, a notion seen from the perspective of autonomous design pushed forward by Arturo Escobar and thus heavily inspired and influenced by the communitarian struggles in Latin America. Further discussed in the conclusion (Southern manners in northern lands), autonomía is presented as a collective endeavour and potential horizon for redirecting design practice and research, suggesting that designers take on the role of mediators that support communities in designing themselves (Escobar, 2017). Autonomía is further discussed (even if rarely mentioned explicitly) in the introduction (PD otherwise will be pluriversal or it won't be) from the perspective of the pluriversal

politics, understood as a practice engaged in "creating the conditions of possibility for the emergence of the pluriverse, other ways of making worlds" (Escobar, 2018). These two concepts (autonomía and pluriverse) are intertwined to each other, as the first can serve as a basis for action to make place for the latter, a world of many worlds.

A fundamental principle in my practice, manifested throughout the cases presented in this dissertation, is the acknowledgment of the practices that already support the birthing of the pluriverse, of which the minga is one of the most important and relevant for the present text. More than a concept, the minga is a practice of resistance by the indigenous peoples across Latin America. Further explained in one of the case studies (Chronicle of a northern minga), this ancestral practice is usually manifested through gatherings where a community engages in collective construction of common infrastructures (Murillo, 2010). But, as it is further outlined in the prologue, a minga can also take the form of a big scale social mobilisation to protest against neo-liberal and extractivist policies being pushed forward by governments (Castillo, 2013). It is, in fact, from this sort of manifestation of the minga, that I have borrowed the title of this dissertation, as *caminar la palabra*, walk the word, has become the motto for the mobilisation of indigenous peoples in Colombia.

However, the minga (as well as other ancestral practices of resistance amongst indigenous, afro-Colombian and peasant communities) are not limited to question the status quo, but they are practices of pluriversal politics 'par excellence', insofar as they hint into other ways of organising the territory, the economy and the overall society. In doing so, they engage in what Colombian artist and philosopher Adolfo Albán Achinte calls creative practices of re-existence. This notion, while it is only explicitly addressed in one of the texts (*Over the southernmost border of social design, trees are people too*), has nevertheless become one of the most important of my research process and overall practice. By engaging in a minga, communities are not only resisting the policies and measures put in place against them, but they are showing alternative ways of doing things and, by doing so, reaffirming their existence previously denied by the colonial matrix of power (Albán Achinte, 2017). Re-existence emerges therefore as a decolonial category for creative practices, as it points at ways of "knowing, doing, thinking, feeling and acting from differentiated historical experiences" (Albán Achinte, 2016). Engaging in creative practices of re-existence requires therefore an acute awareness of the (historical, geographical, epistemic, political, etc.) positioning, so as to resist the force of coloniality that strips-away the subaltern subject of its identity, at the same time as reaffirming his/her existence by showing other ways of being in the world.

Paolo Lugari is the visionary founder of Gaviotas, an ecovillage and sustainable design experiment located in Colombia's eastern savannahs (Romero, 2009). True to the spirit with which he founded -and has led for the past 50 years- Gaviotas, he is an iconoclast and anti-academicist. The few times he has been invited to academic fora, he has taken the opportunity to denounce how academia kills the enthusiasm to act and experiment. He even went to the lengths of drafting a proposal of a reality-show-like experiment, wherein two houses would be occupied -one with 10 PhD's and the other with 10 apprentices in crafts- and their occupants tasked with solving basic habitational issues; he said he would bet all his money on the apprentices. A couple of years before my first migration to Europe in 2011, I built a friendship with Paolo, who welcomed me -and occasionally my students- at Gaviota's Bogotá headquarters. By then, he was already weary of my decision to pursue my Master studies in the Netherlands, especially if I wanted to have any incidence in 'the tropics' (this term could be closely linked to that of 'the south', yet is more geographically-based). In my first trip to Colombia, when I had recently started in my role as researcher with TRADERS, I stumbled into Paolo in a bakery in the neighbourhood where he lives. After a quick exchange, I told him I had recently begun a PhD in the Arts in Belgium, already expect-

ting the road the conversation would somewhat take. His responses were somewhat in the lines of "I do not understand what is the need for PhD's in the world", "'PhD' and 'art'; isn't that oxymoronic?" and "academia kills your autonomy", and he said goodbye by saying "I hope your proximity to academic circles does not let your enthusiasm die down; as my father used to say: 'It is better to have an enthusiastic apprentice, than 10 depressed PhDs'" (personal communication, 2014).

Now, why am I sharing this encounter and, most importantly, why is it relevant? Am I seconding Paolo's arguments and ideas, and self-inflicting damage on the road to become a 'doctor in arts'? Or do I want to prove him wrong and make a solid defense on doctoral studies (in the arts and beyond)? Neither of both. I recount this experience as I believe it illustrates some of the tensions and contradictions surrounding the recent surge of doctorates in the arts, in general, and my own experience in this research, in particular. Friedman and Ox remind us that "the MFA (Master of Arts) is a degree in professional practice for art, design and some fields such as creative writing or theater performance and, in contrast, the doctor of philosophy (PhD) is a research degree" (2017). In putting forward this argument, they are shedding light over the apparent contradiction surrounding doctorates in the arts and design, where the students-researchers are often coming from practice-based backgrounds and/or followed studio-based master programs (as it was my case to a certain extent). However, we can find some hints to overcome this apparent deadlock in two different sources of this research: on one hand, the two main research frameworks on which this dissertation is built (PAR and AbR), question to some extent the positivist (research) tradition in the sciences, opening space for other ways of knowing and building knowledge. On the other hand, the regulations for obtaining a doctoral degree at the KU Leuven have integrated the particularities of the Faculty of the Arts, by which the component of creation is conceived as a unity with the academic reflections made through the thesis. These perspectives resonate with what Engels-Schwarzpaul calls for, wherein "new groups of non-traditional students mature into postgraduate researchers, enrich[ing] academic culture and research by bringing their own, distinct ways of knowing and getting-to-know into the research situation" (Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2013).

Broadly speaking, a PhD is assessed by the capacity of 'contributing new knowledge to the field' (Friedman & Ok, 2017). I believe my positionality as a designer-researcher (a Colombian in Northern Europe) has backdropped the contributions I have made to the discussion on the relevance of southern experiences in participation, for design practice and research in the Global North. This has certainly been the case of the critical reflection on 'decolonising design interventions', a central question present throughout the whole dissertation. More specifically, doctoral research ought to be seen as a training process for becoming a researcher. Occupying a space in academia and exploring ways of building new knowledge (aka research) through design, has allowed me to develop a profile as a 'border practitioner', walking along -and trespassing- the limits between academic and popular knowledge, theory and practice, teaching and creation, as well as between different fields of knowledge. This notion is inspired by Henry Giroux's understanding of Paulo Freire as a 'border intellectual', "who constantly re-examines and raises questions about what kind of borders are being crossed and revisited" (Giroux, 2009), and which points at a role in which there is a constant critical assessment of one's own positionality.

A (conventional) doctoral dissertation would normally be assessed for setting a clear research question at the beginning of the process, which is expected to be resolved throughout its texts, so as to articulate an answer (of sorts) at the end. The research question I define in the introduction, which overflows to most of the other texts, might have not been properly answered; however, it became a trigger that shifted my vision towards southern/subaltern approaches and experiences, and which I reflect on throughout the different texts. Having a distanced oversight of the whole process, I believe the intro (PD otherwise will be pluriversal or it won't be) serves to set the

ground, by defining the Colombian experiences of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a theoretical and historical foundation (not as a rigid and predefined ‘method’). The cases express different ways in which I have intervened from that concrete positionality, making sometimes explicit use of specific tools of PAR (as is the case with the ‘systematisation of experiences’). The articles explore some of the concepts that have been somewhat associated with PAR for different reasons (be it because Arturo Escobar was a pupil of Orlando Fals Borda, or because it emerged in similar historico-geographical conditions), in texts mostly written for non-academic fora. The outro, rather than give an answer to the initial research question, presents ‘autonomous design’ as a horizon for design practice and research, by way of illustrating the experience of De Andere Markt from that perspective.

I hope this dissertation contributes to the much wider debate on decolonising design, academia and other spheres of life; to make the (Anglo-European) design community more sensitive to the -often overlooked and understated- experiences in the Global South; in exploring and arguing that a legitimate scholarly reflection can be made via non-conventional forms of research and writing; and to collapse the dichotomy between theory and practice that hinder the potential impact academics can have in their contexts (and vice versa). The process of inquiry and experimentation throughout this research -and later writing and structuring of the dissertation- has certainly cut through me, as Cortázar would say, as it has allowed me to lay down the foundations for my own creative/research practice.

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