DESIGN (ANTI) PANISM

AN INCOMPLETE TIMELINE

Information Design
19 – 20 September 2022
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Two oft-heard assertions inform today's understanding of design: “everyone is a designer” and “everything is design”. It is within such professed design panism that designers (struggle to) articulate their role and position. But more than being a mere description of a reality, design panism is an interpretative framework, a rhetorical instrument and a semi-conscious expansion agenda. In a two-day seminar, we broke down the conflicting meanings of these statements in order to elucidate their consequences on the designer’s identity and sense of realization. By analyzing texts spanning more than half a century – from Norman Potter to Keller Easterling, from Victor Papanek to Ruha Benjamin – we critically into design culture's fractures and continuities.
“Every human being is a designer. Many also earn their living by design – in every field that warrants pause, and careful consideration, between the conceiving of an action and a fashioning of the means to carry it out, and an estimation of its effects.”

Norman Potter (1962)
Norman Potter’s lively and instructive guide shows how
“Everyone is a designer, says Author Grillo in What is Design? Design is not the product of an intelligentsia.”

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The Architectural Forum (1962)
In order to serve a general manual for upcoming designers, the French architect PAUL JAQUES GRILLO [1908–1990] structured his approach on Design. This idea arose relying on his lecture on Theory of Design at an American University for architectural students. As for Grillo there was a lack of tangible and summarised knowledge in the field of design which he tried to overcome.

In his book WHAT IS DESIGN? he introduces his major aspects:

- Archetypes
  [as the essential element of design],
- Proportion
  [and its good or bad utilisation] and
- Composition
  [in a comic law relying on the intuitive decision of a designer].

>Everyone is a Designer«
>»Design is not the product of an intelligentsia.«

>»It is everybody’s business, and whenever design loses contact with the public, it is on the losing end. […]
When I say that design is everybody’s business, I don’t mean that design is a do-it-yourself job. I mean that it affects everybody, at all times, in our lives.«

By his honesty in forming a new way of thinking, he makes himself vulnerable to the reader and opens a place to make mistakes—a gentle gesture of trying and maybe failing together. In the end, design seems to be a discourse and a discipline with a mutual impact: to the environment, to society and to oneself.
“All men are designers. All that we do, almost all the time, is design, for design is basic to all human activity.”

“Many books on industrial design suggest that design began when man began making tools. While the difference between Australopithecus africanus and the modern designer may not be as great as one might think or hope, the idea of equating man the toolmaker with the start of the profession is just an attempt to gain status for the profession by evoking a specious historical precedent. ‘In the beginning was Design,’ obviously, but not industrial design.”

Victor Papanek (1971)
Design is composing an epic poem, for executing a mural, painting a masterpiece, writing a concerto. But the design is also cleaning and reorganizing a Real desk drawer, pulling an impacted tooth, baking an apple pie, choosing sides for a World backlot baseball game, and educating a child.

Victor Papanek

Thames & Hudson

Inspired by the cover design by Michael Bierut and Sachi Chandiramani, a politically correct and equivocal re-writing of this Victor Papanek quote from his seminal book ‘Design for the real world’:

“All men are designers. All that we do, almost all the time, is design, for design is basic to all human activity.”

Design for the real world was first published in 1971 and then again in 1985 and once more in 2019 after Papanek’s death in 1998. Let’s change “men” to “humans” in the name of gender equality standards of 2022.

“All humans are designers. All that we do, almost all the time, is design, for design is basic to all human activity.”

Papanek contradicts himself here. He says that all that we do is design but he introduces doubt about whether it is design all the time. Does this mean that in fact not everything we do is design? Let’s change “All that we do, almost all the time” to “A lot of what we do”. That feels nicer.

“All humans are designers. A lot of what we do is design, for design is basic to all human activity.”

Design is basic or fundamental to all human activity and this appears to be true when it is viewed as a problem-solving, ordering and form-giving skills or as “planning and patterning” as Papanek put it. But Papanek is not saying that all human activity is design. Just like knowing English grammar is basic to writing an English-language book, we don’t say that every English-language book is an exercise in English grammar. Let’s just say that “design contributes.” No one from the other modes of human activity can be insulted if we write it this way.

“All humans are designers. A lot of what we do is design, and design contributes to all human activity.”

All human activity? Surely love and sex and carnal activities are not contributed to by design. Better to say again that it contributes to “a lot”. It feels a little less deterministic, no?

“All humans are designers. A lot of what we do is design, and design contributes to a lot of human activity.”

This is a lot of “a lot”. But a lot is not all. So if there are activities out there that might have nothing to do with design, not everyone is a designer, right? In this scenario I’d prefer to say that not every one is an active designer. We all “are capable of being” designers. Yes, that’s a little softer.

“All humans are capable of being designers. A lot of what we do is design, and design contributes to a lot of human activity.”

Actually, what was Papanek thinking? Using the word “designer” sounds too much like the profession of the designer. He should have spoken in broader terms. The more the merrier. Let’s say “All humans design”.

“All humans design. A lot of what we do is design, and design contributes to a lot of human activity.”

Let’s homogenise and harmonise. What is “human activity” if not “what we do”.

“All humans design. A lot of what we do is design, and design contributes to a lot of what we do.”

Isn’t “all humans” kind of a tautology? Cut the “All”.

“Humans design. A lot of what we do is design, and design contributes to a lot of what we do.”

Unspecific design kind-of-panism. Perfect.
“Contra the widely promoted belief that design is something all human beings do and have done throughout history, but now must do more consciously and thoroughly than ever before, design is something that has had a history. Its beginnings can be traced to the rise of modernity, and it will almost certainly come to an end with the modern project. Indeed, we have an obligation not so much to promote designing as to learn to live without it, to resist its seductions, and to turn away from its pervasive and corrupting influence.”

Ivan Illich & Carl Mitcham (1994)
CONTRA THE WIDELY PROMOTED BELIEF THAT DESIGN IS SOMETHING ALL HUMAN BEINGS DO AND HAVE DONE THROUGHOUT HISTORY, BUT NOW MUST DO MORE CONSCIOUSLY AND THOROUGHLY THAN EVER BEFORE, DESIGN IS SOMETHING THAT HAS HAD A HISTORY. ITS BEGINNINGS CAN BE TRACED TO THE RISE OF MODERNITY, AND IT WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY COME TO AN END WITH THE MODERN PROJECT. INDEED, WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION NOT SO MUCH TO PROMOTE DESIGNING AS TO LEARN TO LIVE WITHOUT IT, TO RESIST ITS SEDUCTIONS, AND TO TURN AWAY FROM ITS PERVERSIVE AND CORRUPTING INFLUENCE.
“We are all designers. Designing is integral to every intentional action we take.”

Tony Fry (1994)
How do we define design? Can it be defined? Can it be defined in a sense that fits the terms complexity?

How broad should the understanding of this term be? How broad could the understanding of this term be?

Heidegger states
Being is always relational. One cannot be without being in the world. Does simply being in the world also mean designing it?

Does design simply mean making something? If design simply means making something, one could say we are all designers.

Does design simply mean creating something? If design simply means creating something, one could say we are all designers.

Does design simply mean shaping something somehow? If design simply means shaping something somehow, one could say we are all designers.

Fry sees design as a meta-category consisting of three elements: design object, design process, design agency.

It can be a futuring activity extending possibilities for a prospering of life a defuturing activity causing harm

Design in a traditional way seems to be linear. Design in an ontological way is seen as circular.

Design designs. Is our surrounding forming us just like we are forming our surrounding? Are we shaped by objects as much as objects are shaped by us?

Willis states
Designing is fundamental to being human. But is design fundamental to human beings? By designing tools, we design possible ways of being.

Regarding Frys statement what is the difference between designing and creating? Is there one?

Design in a common sense is always related to visual outcome. But does design need to be visible? Or tangible in some way? Are our thoughts designed?

Commonly spoken: the difference between design and art lies in its function.
“Everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones.”

Herbert Simon (1996)
“There is a risk of falling into the trap of vague generalizations like ‘everything is design.’ Not everything is design, and not everyone is a designer [...] Every one can become a designer in his special field, but the field that is the object of design activity always has to be identified [...] The inherent components of design are not solely concerned with material products, they also cover services. Design is a basic activity whose capillary ramifications penetrate every human activity. No occupation or profession can claim a monopoly on it.”

Guy Bonsiepe (1999)
STOP DANCING AROUND THE PROBLEM; CHALLENGE THE EUROCENTRIC VIEW OF DESIGN; GO TO THE PERIPHERY; DECOLONIZE; EMANCIPATE; ACCEPT THAT WE ARE CULTURALLY HYBRID.

Bonsiepe’s views are indeed part of the known design pioneer periphery in the 1970s. Included in this is the book “Design for theperiiphery. This criticism is also a charge of design discourse, as the critical this activity in determining terms with design’s includes a component of hope—a global future” (Chapter 1, p. 13). This tension is thus greatly a matter to how a discourse over design is produced, maintained, and eventually challenged.

In his Milan discourse over design unfolds the future” (Chapter 1, p. 13). This tension is thus greatly a matter to how a discourse over design is produced, maintained, and eventually challenged.

Pursuing a radical cosmopolitanism is, instead of performing some nostalgic version of modernity, the best way to honor the ethos and legacy of the HfG Ulm (and, also, of the Bauhaus). This entails making design political.

HUMANIZE DESIGN; DESIGN HUMANISM.

Guy Bonsiepe
“Everyone is a designer!”

Mieke Gerritzen and Geert Lovink (2000)
“We are all designers. We manipulate the environment, the better to serve our needs. We select what items to own, which to have around us. We build, buy, arrange, and restructure: all this is a form of design.”

Don Norman (2003)
We form emotional connections to all objects we use, touch or interact with. There are a multitude of things we connect to it. It starts with thoughts and ends with feelings. Norman identifies three of them: The visual appearance, the pleasure of using them and the self-image one gains when you use something.

All in all, it’s a handbook of tricking people into liking objects or things, not really mentioning that it is all for a capitalistic purpose! Even the Philippe Starck’s citrus press (I have one myself) is nothing more than a conversation starter, because it is so useless, but pretty and makes you feel something (very very very simply put). Put in 2022 terms: a like-machine.

And in an epilogue, Norman points out—we are comming to the quote now—the ability to customize and make objects (or websites) makes everyone a designer. If you consider design as just making something, yeah maybe there is a point.

Though, I have a huge struggle to believe the we are all designers thing and that everyone is equal. It’s a bit superficial. Most design schools are eletarian Institutions and surviving without ever setting foot in one, seems—now more than ever—unlikely. Is this theoratisation of everyone is a designer a method of coping with the guilt. Yes if you look for it and define design very broadly, everything can indeed be design.

However if design is considered a process of very critical reflection of the surroundings, environment and carefully considering everything (not to make something more likable i.e. more monetizable), but to actually make something good—which comes closer to my vaguely defined concept of design—then not everyone can be a designer.
When we perceive something as “pretty,” that judgment comes directly from the visceral level.

In the world of design, “pretty” is generally frowned upon, denounced as petty, trite, or lacking depth and substance, but that is the designer’s reflective level speaking (clearly trying to overcome an immediate visceral attraction).

Because designers want their colleagues to recognize them as imaginative, creative, and deep, making something “pretty” or “cute” or “fun” is not well accepted.

But there is a place in our lives for such things, even if they are simple.”
“Design has emerged as one of the world’s most powerful forces. It has placed us at the beginning of a new, unprecedented period of human possibility, where all economies and ecologies are becoming global, relational, and interconnected.”

Bruce Mau (2004)
“That design is not only an activity that trendy metropolitan design ‘creatives’ engage in: it’s a universal human life skill, a way of ordering, interpreting and enhancing our artefacts, images and surroundings, in which all of us should have a stake.”

Rick Poynor (2007)
“Over the course of their century-long history of creative problem solving, designers have acquired a set of tools to help them move through what I have called the “three spaces of innovation”: inspiration, ideation, and implementation. My argument is that these skills now need to be dispersed throughout organizations. In particular, design thinking needs to move “upstream,” closer to the executive suites where strategic decisions are made. Design is now too important to be left to designers.”

Tim Brown (2009)
Constraints can best be visualized in terms of three overlapping criteria for successful ideas: feasibility (what is functionally possible within the foreseeable future); viability (what is likely to become part of a sustainable business model); and desirability (what makes sense to people and for people).

A competent designer will resolve each of these three constraints, but a design thinker will bring them into a harmonious balance.
“Looking back at the first edition of Everyone Is a Designer in 2000, when we proposed the idea of democratization of design, a decade later this programmatic statement has become reality.”

Mieke Gerritzen and Geert Lovink (2010)
I see an object. I have a tool. I can take a picture, scan it, upload it, save it, print it, send it, and share it. I choose the format, filter, composition, and number of frames. I have the software. I can deform it, modify it, copy it, vectorize it, put it in motion, and project it into a 3D digital environment.

What is the context of my work with the object? Is my need to work with the object essential? Am I bringing a solution to the problem with my work or am I contributing to its existence? Am I creating innovation with my work or am I just a part of social evolution without self-reflection?

With my work, I contribute to the creation of a creative mass. I work on collectively created imagery using tools that I have assimilated into my own identity. Am I a tool of a tool or do I democratically contribute to collective work?
“We are a designing species”
An Interview by Max Bruinsma

Victor Margolin

2015

What would be a specific role of designers in this world?

There are two kinds of design. One is official practice of professional design with mass production and with mass communication and so on. The other one is what people all over the world have been doing since the beginning of time. Design is often seen as a purely functional economic activity as value to market product. However in the fact, it is cultural and social activity. We have been put on the earth with the obligation to design our way forward. In this sense, we are a designing species. We couldn’t live without design.

2015  “We are a designing species” – Victor Margolin

However, the public understanding of design is quite a trivial one. Therefore, any profession including designers that seeks to move itself forward has to develop techniques for arguing why that should happen. The last thing is that we are now living in a world that Margolin calls “perpetual problem situation.” We’ve got population growing the climate changing, refugees moving around, we cannot just sit back and settle in and say that we could live here for another 30 or 40 years as one thought you could do in the 50s. As Camus said, we are just condemned to act and this means that we are condemned to design. We have to do it.

The question arising here is who can make the best arguments for what to design? All this suggests that this design next to being a functional and economic practices also in quite essentially a discursive practice in developing a discourse on how we could see the world.

“Riko Tamekuni”
“In a world in rapid and profound transformation, we are all designers. Here, ‘all’ obviously includes all of us, individuals but also organizations, businesses, public entities, voluntary associations, and cities, regions, and states. In short, the ‘all’ we are talking about includes every subject, whether individual or collective, who in a world in transformation must determine their own identity and their own life project.”

Ezio Manzini (2015)
Design when everybody designs

Ezio Manzini

2015

Collaborative organizations are social groups emerging from the need to connect with others to achieve shared goals. Their members choose to collaborate, not because they are forced by the market to do so, but because they choose to do so. Their members choose to collaborate, not because they are forced by the market to do so, but because they choose to do so.

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“Design has gone viral. The word design is everywhere. It pops up in every situation. It knows no limit.”

Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley (2016)
This André Leroi-Gourhan’s phrase is not original to this book, it is quoted on page 48 by the authors, and is maybe the most essential introduction to the topic of pan-design. Colomina and Wigley argue that design is what makes the human, and thus design is everything we create. With this interpretation design spread throughout the world just as humanity grew and expanded, reaching every corner of our space and of our experiences, becoming the way humans ask questions and thereby continuously redesign themselves.

In this sense, it is viral.

The human hand is human because of what it makes, not of what it is.
“[...] design is literally everywhere; from the largest structures to the humblest aspects of everyday life, modern lives are thoroughly designed lives.”

Arturo Escobar (2018)
“[...] DESIGN IS LITERALLY EVERYWHERE; FROM THE LARGEST STRUCTURES TO THE HUMBLEST ASPECTS OF EVERYDAY LIFE, MODERN LIVES ARE THOROUGHLY DESIGNED LIVES.” – ARTURO ESCOBAR, 2018

Design influences the world

Design for the Real World
1

Socionatural: New role of design

Cross-disciplinary: Diverse cultural studies literatures cater to diverse audiences

Convergence of Tendencies: Critique discussions on dualisms fosters a new ways to re-conceiving the world

Concept of ‘Design designs’. (Anne-Marie Willis, 2006)

2 The Ontological Reorientation of Design

Reframing design in ontological way

Autonomous/ Transition Design: Realisation of Communal

3 Designs for the Pluriverse

Pluriversal Politics is a must-read for anyone willing to step out of their ontico-epistemic comfort zone. It makes you reflect on ontologies of separation that we, often unconsciously, carry within us and provides hope for the future. Because, like Escobar says.

Conclusion from Arturo Escobar:

“we may be witnessing the slow rebirth of the pluriverse”.

Alice Wan:

Sure, all objects are subjects themselves, it is never me petting cats, it is always cats petting me.

Ieva Valuė:

I can totally agree that the impact of our designs should not only be measured by the finished result and its properties, but also its impact on the environment where it is placed. However, not always it is attainable to shape the world around our creations.
“If one needs to ‘subvert’ design, this implies that a dominant framework of design reigns—and I think one of the reasons why it reigns is that it has managed to fold any and everything under its agile wings.”

Ruha Benjamin (2019)
When design is a colonising project we have to question our pre-existing assumptions and also think about what happens with our design after putting it out into the world. Will our design be for the better? What consequences could it have for society?
“Everyone can design, even designers”

Ernesto Oroza (2020)
Everyone can design, even designers.

Ernesto Oroza

2020
“Luckily, design is something anyone in any discipline already knows how to do.”

Keller Easterling (2021)
“Design alone cannot (and certainly does not) replace politics or economics or culture. Yet design is everywhere, and everywhere it is, it represents and enacts politics, economics, and cultures.”

Matthew Wizinsky (2022)
"They can easily fall in love with the moves they make in the game without really paying attention to the rules of the game—or what game they’re playing!"

When we magnify one thing infinitely, from the designer’s point of view, everything is decomposed into a simple curve, what we often do is to make this curve more perfect.

Everything has its own structure, background and context. We’ll think about how the curve bends, we’ll think about the pose of the characters, we’ll think about where we need to put people, we’ll think about why we put up posters like this in the subway.

Consider design as it meant to be embed into the context of policy, society and economics.

A poster was commissioned by the Underground in 1926. Frederick Charles Herrick’s bold design was issued in the summer. It promotes the Tube as a cool and comfortable means of travelling while the weather is hot.
Adam, Alice, Arianna, Azusa, Camilla, Carlo, Claudio, Dan, Elias, Eva, Gioele, Ieva, Jennifer, Junn, Kasia, Lea, Lili, Loren, Marco, Marta, Matteo, Miriam, Riko, Rossy, Runbin, Sara, Silvio, Sofia, Susanna, Thijmen