

Designing-With/In World Politics

Manifestos for an International Political Design

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Designing-With/In World Politics

Or, manifestos for an International Political Design

Jonathan Luke Austin and Anna Leander

How do we make history with things and not with each other?

- Stengers¹

If agency in all its forms is democratically distributed to all sorts of individuals, some of which may temporarily be assembled as humans and others as machines, animals, or other quasi agents, then do we need to permanently bracket all forms of intrahuman judgment, accountability, and ethical discourse?

- Appadurai²

In 2018, a computer scientist presented his latest research at the *Conference on Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and Society*. The work introduced an algorithm designed “to automate the process of identifying gang crimes... based on only four pieces of information: the primary weapon, the number of suspects, and the neighborhood and location [of the crime].” The goal was to aid police forces in identifying crimes, predicting retaliations, locating perpetrators, and policing urban centres. Following the presentation, an audience member stood to ask whether the researchers had “considered the possible unintended side effects” of their work and, rhetorically, “whether the researchers were also developing algorithms that would help heavily patrolled communities predict police raids.” The presenting author replied, simply, “I’m just an engineer.” At this, the man in the audience quoted a lyric from a song about wartime rocket scientist Wernher von Braun, in a German accent – ‘*Once the rockets are up, who cares where they come down?*’ – and angrily walked out.³

At one level, this story is about the ways emerging technologies risk surpassing the normative status quo in ways that leave us all at sea. At another level, it reflects the gulf of political and ethical reasoning at the core of much ‘ordinary’ science. But at a third level, the story is about a social scientific failure. The response of the computer scientist that “I’m just an engineer” is echoed in the ways social scientists are specialized in enumerating what is *wrong* with action X, practice Y, or object Z, but who would be unable to carry out action X, practice Y, or create object Z. We are just social scientists. Our specialty is theory, inquiry, analysis, and critique. It is manifestly not taking up the task, even if we feel it the most analytically, politically, or socially appropriate step, of developing “algorithms that would help heavily patrolled communities predict police raids.” By contrast, we want to begin our discussion by advocating that social scientists of world politics (International Social Science – ISS)⁴ start taking rhetorical questions like this very seriously indeed.

Why? Placing ourselves in the uncomfortable position of asking whether or not we should be aiding in the creation of counter-political algorithms forces us to ask what options there might be for scholars of ISS to *practically* (not solely analytically) engage with materiality, (emerging) technologies, and aesthetic-affective politics, factors that are rapidly morphing the global political assemblages we inhabit. It also forces us to ask

¹ Isabelle Stengers, ‘Another Look: Learning to Laugh’, *Hypatia* 15, no. 4 (2000): 47.

² Arjun Appadurai, ‘Mediants, Materiality, Normativity’, *Public Culture* 27, no. 2 (76) (1 May 2015): 234.

³ Matthew Hutson, ‘Artificial Intelligence Could Identify Gang Crimes—and Ignite an Ethical Firestorm’, *Science | AAAS*, 27 February 2018.

⁴ In the spirit of this journal, we use International Social Science (ISS) to refer to a set of disciplines focused on exploring transversal spatially-distributed phenomena. This includes work across many subfields of disciplines including International Relations (IR), International Political Sociology, Anthropology, Sociology, Geography, Social Theory, Media Studies, and beyond.

if remaining outside and at a distance amounts to not contributing to these processes.⁵ Specifically, we are forced to ask if we can do something more constructive than falling back on a problematic division of labour which allows ISS to ‘judge’ the politics of these phenomena from the outside, angrily walking out when our own political, ethical, or reflexive preoccupations are not taken into account, without ever dirtying our own hands with the lived complexities, potentialities, and politics of material, technological, and aesthetic social praxis. Put differently, these questions force us to consider ourselves, our own (socio-political) praxis, and where we might – or might not – be radically falling short of the demands of contemporary world politics.

Such self-interrogation is urgent. Today, the “planetary cognitive ecology” of world politics has radically shifted in ways that have seen the intellectual practices dominant across ISS gradually withdraw into an “ecological niche.”⁶ Despite its growing conceptual and empirical vitality, ISS remains wedded to an archaic vision of intellectual design, exhibition, and making-public. Central therein is what we describe as a nostalgic attachment to an alphabetical mode of research: we write, speak, and advocate through words mediated via obsolete standards (page budgets, paywalls, paper itself) that alienate our interpretations from the world. Intellectually, much of ISS now knows this well: talk of post-humanism, affect, practice theory, material agency, assemblage theory, ecological entanglement, visual and narrative engagements, anthropocene politics, etc. all involve at least a minimal recognition of the limits of alphabetically-mediated epistemic knowledge to make itself felt within the world. Yet – somehow – taking the consequences of these insights for our own activities seriously and, as such, adjusting the core praxis of ISS appropriately, seems to be something exceedingly difficult for scholars across social science to debate, let alone actively move towards.

The purpose of this (yes) text is to suggest that doing so is nonetheless both possible and crucially politically important. If we are to move beyond passive observation of the limits of alphabetically-mediated epistemic knowledge and the aporetic helplessness vis-à-vis “the horrors of global politics” that they evoke, then we must accept that sharp divisions of intellectual and practical labor, and the offended walkouts they often generate, are not good enough political responses.⁷ Instead, a substantive restructuring of the praxis of ISS is required. A restructuring that would turn ISS into a discipline actively engaged in the concrete praxis of material, aesthetic, and technological making. In this vision, ISS would not only point to the existence and importance of affective and aesthetic political forces beyond alphabetical language but also accept its complicities with that politics and so its responsibility to actively re-order its contours. To achieve this, we suggest that ISS must not only study, advise, or ‘engage’ architects, artists, computer scientists, industrial designers, commercial designers, or cognate figures but also begin to integrate core material-aesthetic components of their practices into its own disciplinary fold.⁸ By enmeshing ourselves corporeally, practically, and intellectually alongside these fields we may be able to help to “reshape the discursive chessboard, at least in some small but structural way, and not just... move the existing pieces around.”⁹ We may be able to become something more than ‘just social scientists’ by integrating a greater appreciation of materiality (*materia*; ‘stuff’), aesthetics (*aisthetikos*, ‘perceptibility’), and poetics (*poietikos*; ‘creativity’) into not simply our theories but also our praxis. This will demand reckoning with the division of ISS into particular

⁵ As one of our reviewers pointed out, ISS in this respect is ‘a latecomer’. In other disciplines, reflections around involvement with making is central. There, the sharp division between theoretical academic work and practice is questioned and the possible innocence of scholarship with it. Action research in anthropology and development studies is one expression of this trend.

⁶ N. Katherine Hayles, *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious* (University of Chicago Press, 2017); Friedrich Kittler, ‘Benn’s Poetry: “A Hit in the Charts”: Song under Conditions of Media Technologies’, *SubStance* 19, no. 1 (1990): 6.

⁷ Debbie Lisle, ‘Waiting for International Political Sociology’, *International Political Sociology* 10, no. 4 (2017): 418.

⁸ Jonathan Luke Austin, ‘Towards an International Political Ergonomics’, *European Journal of International Relations* 25, no. 4 (2019).

⁹ Esmé Hogeveen, ‘Feminisms of the Future, Now: Rethinking Technofeminism and the Manifesto Form’, *C Magazine* 132 (2017).

intellectual camps that limits its ability to “bring its variegated knowledges to bear on the world.”¹⁰ But more importantly, it requires “a dramatic change of mindset” that would allow us to “make a crossover between different genres, disciplines and languages.”¹¹ In short, it demands a profound “gesture of disidentification.”¹² And, for all this, the manifesto form is singularly well suited.

Of Manifestos

This essay is grounded on the proposition that ISS has ‘lost touch’ with the world. By this, we do not mean that ISS cannot diagnose what is happening to the world. For all its blindspots, the field is especially adept at enumerating what is wrong in the world: ecological crisis, radical conservatism, patriarchal hegemony, neo-imperialism, global militarism, economic inequality, racial injustice. More than ever, ISS is a worldly, grounded, and diverse field. But, at the same time, ISS finds itself at a loss. Though we are continuously “striving to make [the] things [we say] stick” to the world, very little appears to change.¹³ In fact, things seem to get worse. The result is often an embrace of the “position that the game is over, it’s too late, there’s no sense trying to make anything any better, or at least no sense having any active trust in each other in working and playing for a resurgent world.”¹⁴ By losing touch with the world we are thus referring to the diminishing capacity of ISS to make its knowledge ‘felt’ within the world as an object of real politicality.

This is a manifesto for something different. One allied with many others who wish to engage and entangle-with the world and its politics more closely. It begins with the proposition of designing algorithms to “help heavily patrolled communities predict police raids” not because we necessarily suggest doing so (though, why not?) but because such an algorithm might represent a manifesto more powerful than any linguistic statement about racial injustice. From the Latin, the verbal *manifestō* means to exhibit, make public, and show clearly. Consider *that* manifesto. Heidegger once critiqued Marx’s dictum that the point of philosophy is to change the world, which underlay *The Communist Manifesto*, thus: “[Marx] overlooks the fact that a world change presupposes a change of the world’s conception and that a conception of the world can be won only by” interpreting the world sufficiently.¹⁵ But Heidegger himself overlooked the fact that any interpretation is nothing until one makes it public. Change involves a making-public of novel interpretations. Not solely, but certainly integrally. Hence *that* manifesto: an object that did not dwell on “professional disputes between life and social science” but embedded itself performatively into the world, realizing its claims not just textually but through the resonant tenor of its diverse, impure, and self-transforming social entanglements.¹⁶

This essay is thus a manifesto for manifestos; a manifesto for an exhibitionist ISS; a manifesto for radically diversifying the ways in which ISS makes public, and so political, and so more critical, its knowledge. To get there we need to first turn the diagnostic flair of ISS back upon itself to discover what is limiting the ability of ISS to engage with/in the world. Two inter-related issues form the basis of our diagnosis. The first concerns the retreat of ISS into more ever-more abstract forms of theorizing. We engage in sophisticated

¹⁰ Christine Sylvester, ‘Experiencing the End and Afterlives of International Relations/Theory’, *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 3 (2013): 615.

¹¹ Anna Leander and Donatella Della Ratta, ‘Art as Expertise? Creative Expression in Syrian Conflict Resolution’, in *Assembling Exclusive Expertise*, ed. Anna Leander and Ole Waever (London: Routledge, 2019), 190–212.

¹² Hogeveen, ‘Feminisms of the Future, Now: Rethinking Technofeminism and the Manifesto Form’..

¹³ Karin Barber, ‘Improvisation and the Art of Making Things Stick’, in *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*, ed. Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 25–41.

¹⁴ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* (New York: Duke University Press, 2016), 3.

¹⁵ See <https://tinyurl.com/yxwwdij7>.

¹⁶ Donna Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century’, in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, ed. Donna Haraway, 1991, 183–202.

conceptual work, develop schools, and enroll disciples. Disciplines, disciples, and bibles.¹⁷ Schools of thought then orchestrate turns. The linguistic, post-structural, practice, aesthetic, emotional, ontological security, etc., etc. turns. Turning their back on what was before. Neither the detailed statistical analyses of Baele and Bettiza, nor the sociology of Bourdieu, are necessary to note the ways this process involves fencing off of territories across the academic field.¹⁸ Scholars (young and not so young) sustain their careers by promoting new theories and novel concepts, often with an emphasis on overthrowing and undoing what went before. While these theories and concepts may certainly do important ‘work’ in reorganizing the world – as Anne Laura Stoler¹⁹ puts it – that work is very often overshadowed by the social effects of the branding efforts that are undeniably key for anyone working in what is the thoroughly commercialized academy.²⁰

This situation erases the “joy” that lies in the possibility of co-creating “a shared reality” and “the taste of co-presence and the shared building of other worlds” it entails.²¹ Gone is the playfulness Haraway renders when interweaving stories about her dog with stories about Bateson’s games with his daughter. We must be professionals, self-serving entrepreneurs. Gone therein also is any curiosity and ambition to venture out and beyond our own networks and crowds. To engage with the radically different. As the dancing dervishes in Konya or the lonely cowboys in Kansas, disciplinary turns and individualistic pioneers are self-contained. They neither invite nor reach out. At best, they lose touch, at worst they alienate. While they may play a core part of the “universal history of intellectual change”²² across the (social) sciences and the arts, their predominance is of concern.²³ The narrowing of our preoccupations that these dynamics generate makes shoving responsibility for politics, ethics, resistance and more – supposedly specialties of social science – onto the engineer, law-maker, epidemiologist, or architect our standard response. Walking out is the go-to solution. And so emerges one core reason behind the difficulty of ISS to make its knowledge ‘felt’ in the world as an object of real politicality: if we can’t even talk to each other, how could we talk to anyone else?

In all of this, a “loss of horizon” has inevitably emerged in which, by disembedding ourselves from the world, we also abandon the “capacity to see ourselves as *acting* rather than querying, searching, waiting for action to happen.”²⁴ This question of how we might see ourselves as *acting*, rather than simply passively observing, sequestered within the comfort of our own particular schools, takes us to the second aspect of our diagnosis. To politically *act* has, across social science, long been associated with the use of alphabetical language.²⁵ Indeed, our praxis remains orientated principally around writing or speaking. This, as we’ve

¹⁷ This connection is well established in a range of research traditions ranging from Habermas who recalls it when elaborating on the connection between *theos*, *theoria* and hence the research interests and problematizations to Agamben whose political theology is focused on unpacking that connection. See Jürgen Habermas, ‘Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective’, in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, ed. Jürgen Habermas, 1972, 301–47; Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory* (Stanford University Press, 2011).

¹⁸ See Stephane J. Baele and Gregorio Bettiza, “‘Turning’ Everywhere in IR: On the Sociological Underpinnings of the Field’s Proliferating Turns”, *International Theory*, undefined/ed, 1–27; Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Stanford: Stanford university Press, 1988).

¹⁹ Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

²⁰ Anna Leander, ‘Afterword: The Commercial in /for International Political Sociology’, in *Routledge Handbook of International Political Sociology*, ed. Pinar Bilgin and Xavier Guillaume (London and New York, 2016), 376–87.

²¹ Donna Haraway, ‘Training in the Contact Zone’, in *Tactical Biopolitics: Art, Activism, and Technoscience*, ed. Beatriz Da Costa and Kavita Philip (Boston: MIT press, 2010), 458.

²² Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2000).

²³ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

²⁴ Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2013), 122 emphasis added.

²⁵ It is difficult to find an appropriate term here. As we will discuss below, ‘writing’ is too broad for encompassing almost any form of materially-inscribed semiotics. Computer programming (‘coding’), for example, is a form of writing. Hence our prefixing writing with ‘alphabetical’ in order to gesture at forms of writing that encompass ‘regular’ (however ‘high’ in style) language-use (i.e. that echoes modes of verbal communication between human beings). Generally, we are referring to all forms of language-use common

already said, is the case in spite of the growing empirical and conceptual awareness we possess of the weakness of alphabetical language in *alone* effecting change. As Bigo writes, politics remains viewed as a “contest between ideas and norms” in which “academics can play a leading role” by challenging existing norms ideationally, despite the fact that it has long been self-evident that “academic and alternative discourses” have had “little effect.”²⁶ Indeed, a nostalgic attachment lingers that the place of scholarship is to disassociate itself from “norms” (i.e. society as it actually turns) by creating novel “ideas” that are expressed alphabetically (via articles, monographs, lectures, seminars, op-eds, policy reports, etc.) and which might, if only people would listen, change the world (viz Heidegger). The fullest expression of this belief rests in ideas of ‘critique’ as involving our own desubjectification (and so liberation from ‘tradition’), a desubjectification that can then be shared through a logic of argumentation, typically achieved through alphabetical language.²⁷ Such a view is not without reason. The rise of alphabetical writing represents “the historical origin and structural possibility of philosophy as of science, the condition of the episteme.”²⁸ But that’s just it. Writing is the originary tool of (modernist) scientific acting. At that time, in those particular social conditions, writing represented was enabled by a novel set of technological apparatuses that (mass) produced objects whose operations possessed substantive political power. But times change. Alphabetical writing as a mode of political action is now archaic. As Kittler, put it:

The phonograph and the kinetoscope... broke the monopoly of writing, [and] started a non-literary (but equally serial) [form of] data processing, established an industry of human engineering, and placed literature in the ecological niche which (not by chance) Remington's contemporaneous typewriter had conquered.²⁹

The decline of the “monopoly of writing” or, more precisely, “the alphabetical monopoly” is intimately linked to our inability nowadays “to see ourselves as acting” in/on the world. At one time, to write had the potential to be an especially central form of political action. Today, to write is to act only within an ever shrinking “ecological niche” marked by the disciplinary boundaries we have just described. We write to those who are part of our own intellectual camp, not into the world at large. Modernizing Kittler, Hayles associates the acceleration of this change specifically with computational forces:

Computational media have a distinct advantage over every other technology ever invented. They are not necessarily the most important for human life; one could argue that water treatment plants and sanitation facilities are more important. They are not necessarily the most transformative; that honor might go instead to transportation technologies, from dirt roads to jet aircraft. Computational media are distinct, however, because they have a stronger evolutionary potential than any other technology, and they have this potential because of their cognitive capabilities, which among other functionalities, enable them to simulate any other system.³⁰

The ‘cognitive capabilities’ of computational technologies have effectively supplanted those that were once vested in alphabetic technologies, producing a new and potentially radical type of resonantly thinking-with the world. “Computational media, then, are not just another technology. They are the quintessentially cognitive technology, and for this reason have special relationships with the quintessentially cognitive

both to the internal operations of academia (academic articles, monographs, etc.) and to its efforts to exert external influence through ‘popular’ or ‘policy-relevant’ forms of communication (policy briefs, presentations to practitioners, op-eds, etc.).

²⁶ Didier Bigo, ‘When Two Become One: Internal and External Securitisations in Europe’, in *International Relations Theory and the Politics of European Integration*, ed. Morten Kelstrup and Michael Williams (London: Routledge, 2001), 64.

²⁷ Daniele Lorenzini and Martina Tazzioli, ‘Critique without Ontology Genealogy, Collective Subjects and the Deadlocks of Evidence’, *Radical Philosophy* 2, no. 7 (2020). Jonathan Luke Austin, ‘A Parasitic Critique for International Relations’, *International Political Sociology* 13, no. 2 (2019): 215–31.

²⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, MA: John Hopkins University Press, 2016), 4.

²⁹ Kittler, ‘Benn’s Poetry’, 6.

³⁰ Hayles, *Unthought*, 33.

species, Homo sapiens.”³¹ These technologies force us to think differently, resonate-with us differently, store and circulate knowledge differently, and their capacities therein have indeed relegated alphabetical writing to an ecological niche. Intuitively, we know and lament – of course – this reality. While ISS is increasingly “querying, searching, [and] waiting for action to happen” those fluent in computational technologies are in no way shy about self-defining as the ‘change-makers’ who *really* act in/on the world.

Bracketing the politics of this situation for a moment, our claim here is simply the minimal one that by remaining too closely within the bounds of a politically archaic praxis – alphabetical writing – ISS inevitably distances itself from the world and its politics.³² We become observers rather than participants, wedded to a disembodied, retrospective, and distant mode of doing social science. We do not make-public but *follow*.³³ To be clear, we are not opposed to language, alphabets, or writing. Nor do we deny the mutually constitutive nature of logos and praxis. Instead, we are (deliberately provocatively) gesturing at something rather more precise. Alphabetical language is *politically* archaic. This does not mean it is cognitively, socially, or – even – technologically archaic. Indeed, as Science and Technology Studies (STS) has extensively shown, the applied scientific laboratories that build up objects from transistors, stones, and plastics are flooded with alphabetical writing and their documentary traces.³⁴ Those inscriptions, however, are part of an epistemic infrastructure that politically acts through its material, technological, and aesthetic embedding. It is the symmetrical embrace of (fluid and constantly shifting) alphabetical *and* material-aesthetic forms in which political power appears to lie. The challenge is thus not to surpass the alphabetical but to ‘rebalance’ its relationship with the material-aesthetic across ISS (and – indeed – other politically-oriented spheres).³⁵

Importantly, this second aspect of our diagnosis is intimately related to our first. The diminishing politicality of ISS that stems from the archaic nature of its praxis encourages a turn towards theoretical/conceptual abstraction and specialization. Without the sociological limits that are unavoidably imposed when our praxis is intimately and publicly bound to the political sphere, the stakes of scholarship are circumscribed to the value that can be accrued from the *internal* (to the academic field) circulation of alphabetical texts. Thus, school building, disciplinary turns, and a demarcation of turf become inevitable, generating a territorializing power politics that also blocks attempts at de-territorializing. There is thus a direct and circular line between the loss of our ability to make-public and the loss of trust we feel in academic others, a loss that erases the prospect of working and learning together, as captured in the idea of the (public) collective intellectual.³⁶

So, archaic disciplinary praxis and the self-commercialization of that praxis. These two things are things *in common*. The problem of disciplinary division has been articulated elsewhere, and the problem of limiting political action to the textual-alphabetical has been articulated in innumerable turns. Transcending these two issues should *unite* social scientists studying world politics, at least those interested in the politicality of science. Orientating us away from the limits they impose on our ability to make-contact with world politics is thus at the core of our invocation of the genre of the manifesto. After all, the cliché of the manifesto is

³¹ Hayles, *Unthought*, 33.

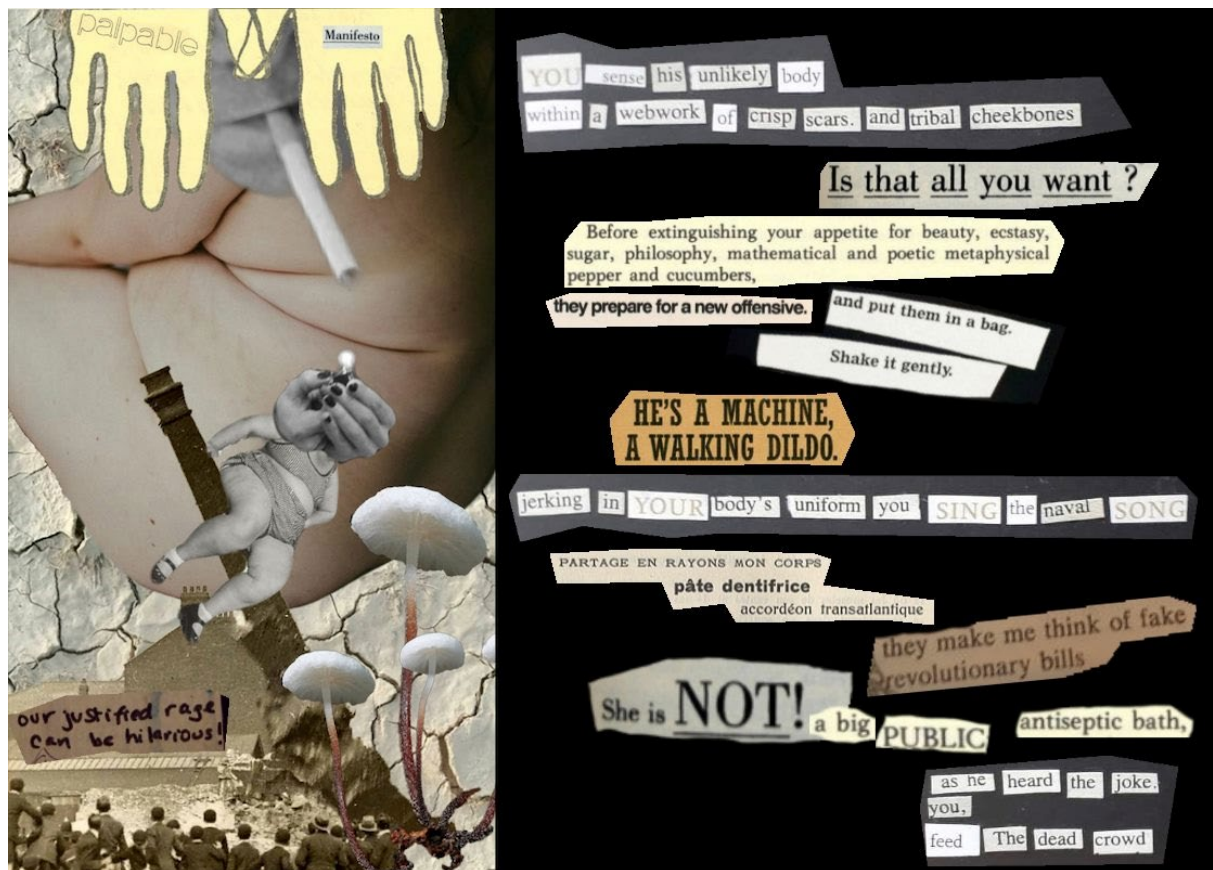
³² Austin, ‘Towards an International Political Ergonomics’.

³³ Austin, ‘A Parasitic Critique for International Relations’.

³⁴ Dominique Vinck, *Everyday Engineering: An Ethnography of Design and Innovation* (MIT Press, 2009).

³⁵ Although we do not have the space to dwell on it, it is obvious that the use of alphabetical writing within ISS has always been materially, aesthetically, and technologically embedded. Alphabetical artifacts are technologies. And academia as a whole is socially visible through material-aesthetic infrastructures (the lecture theatre, the written book, the embodied styles of academics, etc.). These material-aesthetic infrastructures are, however, equally historically archaic and increasingly lack socio-political ‘credibility.’ For a more sociologically grounded discussion of this issue see Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans, ‘Assembling Credibility: Knowledge, Method and Critique in Times of “Post-Truth”’, *Security Dialogue* 50, no. 1 (2019).

³⁶ Didier Bigo, ‘Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations,’ *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 3 (2011): 227.



Alg, *You Human Kind a Young Manifesto* (2020)

Including excerpts from: Mina Loy, *Feminist Manifesto* (1913); Valerie Solanas, *S.C.U.M Manifesto* (1967); Ribemont-Dessaignes, *To The People* (1920); Tristan Tzara, *Bilan* (1919) and *How to Make a Dadaist Poem* (1920); Neagu, *Palpable Art Manifesto* (1969); Rich, *The Phenomenology of Anger* (1973)

always at its conclusion: so and so of the world *unite!* Manifestos posit and make-public a specific position, launch novel ideas, provoke and make calls for change and unity.³⁷ They are especially common across the arts and design. But it is impossible (even ludicrous) to venture a generalization about how a manifesto looks or what it is intended to do. As one collection of (art) manifestos describes:

... there are themes, ideologies and influences that bind and overlap: but the geographical expanses are too wide, the political circumstances too specific and the manifestos too idiosyncratic to be neatly categorized. And that is how it should be, for even the most directive art manifesto is a chimerical exercise.³⁸

Precisely this indeterminacy renders the manifesto a helpful form for scholars searching for alternative ways of doing things. Indeterminacy allows for expression that is not primarily articulated in the negative; against earlier schools, theories, concepts, or against engineers who do not see the broader social and ethical implications of their work. In the most simple, common, and blunt sense, manifestos articulate a position *for* something. Turning away from earlier practices, or altering them, may be explicitly part of that. But the core aim is not turning away or staking out novelty but articulating alternatives and ways of doing differently. Simply, the manifesto works affirmatively in ways that can often generate (but obviously not guarantee) partial connections, alliances, curiosity, and generosity towards the radically different, to odd-kin, and other

³⁷ Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (Cornell University Press, 1999).

³⁸ Jessica Lack, *Why Are We 'Artists'? 100 World Art Manifestos* (London: Penguin, 2017), xiv.

genres. Even *that* manifesto was clear here – “the Communists *everywhere* support *every* revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things.”³⁹ Manifestos seek alliances, points of commonality, above all else. This radical openness to the world is reflected, for further example, in the proliferation of Dadaist manifestos well beyond what the originators of the movement could possibly have foreseen and probably also beyond what they might have wanted. Again, it’s reflected also in the genre’s cliché: workers, animals, cyborgs of the world *unite!* Moreover, and perhaps most importantly for us, manifestos often exceed language. They even enter the corporeal, as the French term *manifestation* (demonstration, protest) makes etymologically clear. A manifesto is a kind of productive declaration of alternatives. Such is the case of the relational sociology, cyborg, compositionist, or slow science manifestos that advocate for changes that touch the core of academic practices.⁴⁰ It is in this heterogenous, affirmative, linguistic and extra-linguistic, and affective tradition of *making-public* that we situate ourselves.

So, again, this essay is a manifesto for manifestos.

A manifesto for a profound gesture of dis-identification.

A manifesto for making-public differently.

A manifesto for escaping scholarly parochialism.

In a sentence, a manifesto for *designing-with/in* world politics.

Design Practices

Designing-with/in world politics. What do we mean? As a term, design (*designare*) is always about making-public. It is about marking (*signare*) out (*de*). This task of marking-out involves a “search for the common” that makes a particular idea, desire, or proposition something able to partially connect with something else.⁴¹ Thus, design must be carried out in collaboration *-with* something and have the goal of working *-within* something. Whatever its consequences, design cannot begin as an outside imposition. Instead, design begins with a consideration of materialization and aestheticization – form and object – guided towards the task of building directly into the world a kind of resonance with those — and/or that — it desires to commune-with. Thus, the “aestheticization of certain technical tools, commodities or events means an attempt to make them more attractive, seductive, appealing to the user” and so to “enhance and spread [an] object’s use.”⁴² The iPhone is ‘Designed by Apple in California’ and ‘Made [by the poor] in China’ under a commercial logic desiring the unending enrollment of new consumers (*marking-out* to encourage a turn (*vertere*) towards (*ad*). But the commercial is only one particular, if certainly especially pervasive, manifestation of the ethos, potentiality, and power of design. Nonetheless, it is a very important one. So, and in order to

³⁹ Available at <https://tinyurl.com/opzl2g2>.

⁴⁰ See among many: Mustafa Emirbayer, ‘Manifesto for a Relational Sociology’, *The American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 2 (1997): 281–317; Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century’; Bruno Latour, ‘An Attempt at a “Compositionist Manifesto”’, *New Literary History* 41 (2010): 471–90; Isabelle Stengers, *Une autre science est possible: Manifeste pour ralentissement des sciences* (Paris: La Découverte, 2013); Andrew Abbott, ‘Against Narrative: A Preface to Lyrical Sociology’, *Sociological Theory* 25, no. 1 (2007): 67–100; Cadena, Marisol, and Mario Blaser, *A World of Many Worlds* (Duke University Press, 2018).

⁴¹ Latour, ‘An Attempt at a “Compositionist Manifesto”’, 484.

⁴² Boris Groys, *In the Flow* (Verso Books, 2016), 90.

provide (and eventually – we hope – disrupt) a little... contrast... with the self-perception of ISS and its place in the world, let's stay with the commercial and its manifestos, just for a moment.

Google has never had a formal manifesto. Its ethos was instead expressed in a 2004 letter by its founders, released as part of the company's Initial Public Offering (IPO), and titled "an owner's manual for Google's shareholders." At the core of that manual was the slogan, *don't be evil*. Things have not been smooth since then. Google's activities coalesce around developing what the architect Keller Easterling calls 'active forms'.⁴³ An active form is a kind of connective force: "like bits of code in the software that organizes" little material objects. Active forms are the verbs that order – structure – the objective nouns of the world (including humans). Easterling continues that "spatial products, repeatable formulas that are contagious around the world" through their 'active' qualities constitute *the* core "structures of power" in contemporary society.⁴⁴ By working to stick-together, compose, collage, and partially connect different and heterogeneous types of agencies (material, human, aesthetic, etc.), active forms seem to mold the ways in which global assemblages coagulate. Vis-à-vis commercial praxis, these acts of partial connection seem to be homogenizing forces: the monoculture of mainstream digital platforms, the architectural qualities of detention camps, the standardization of supermarkets, the logics of financial institutions. These are grand acts of making-public by marking-out possibilities. Google is very adept at this task of "making forms that unfold over time and large territories." Somehow, its work creating active forms ties together – *unites* – otherwise disparate contexts, competing or conflicting desires, and distinct political projects in ways that don't simply 'smooth over' but actively leverage inter-contextual social and political frictions. Indeed, thanks to this power, the company is now contracted by multiple nation states to manage core bureaucratic and security infrastructures. Their algorithms have even helped to actively animate military drones. Google, in a sense, is one especially powerful

Don't be evil.

Don't be evil. ; believe strongly that in the long term, we will be better served-as shareholders and in all other ways-by a company that does good things for the world even if we forgo some short-term gains. This is an important aspect of our culture... We aspire to make Google an institution that makes the world a better place... With our products, Google connects people and information all around the world for free... We know that some people have raised privacy concerns, primarily over Gmail's targeted ads, which could lead to negative perceptions about Google. However, we believe Gmail protects a user's privacy... By releasing services, such as Gmail, for free, we hope to help bridge the digital divide... Last year we created Google Grants-a growing program in which hundreds of non-profits addressing issues, including the environment, poverty and human rights, receive free advertising. And now, we are in the process of establishing the Google Foundation. We intend to contribute significant resources to the foundation, including employee time and approximately 1% of Google's equity and profits in some form. We hope someday this institution may eclipse Google itself in terms of overall world impact by ambitiously applying innovation and significant resources to the largest of the world's problems... Google is not a conventional company.

- *Letter from the founders, an owner's manual for Google's shareholders.*

⁴³ Keller Easterling, 'The Action Is the Form', *Continuum*, 2004, 85; Keller Easterling, 'We Will Be Making Active Form', *Architectural Design* 82, no. 5 (2012): 58–63.

⁴⁴ Easterling, 'The Action Is the Form'.

international political designer whose activities are constantly transforming world political dynamics.

Few within ISS are especially happy about this state of affairs. Dominant designers like Google are accused of blunt problem-solving, nonsense managerial-speak, rampant consumerism, and “eschewing politics almost compulsively.”⁴⁵ To see why, let us begin with one (critical) definition of design practice:

Design has its roots in rational problem solving... What designers do is solve problems by inventing objects or systems that make the world function more smoothly. Industrial designers conceive of and build better machines, graphic designers enhance better communication... Designers, then, are those who utilize their techno-rational know-how for practical ends... But design is about more than production... Design is also about seduction. The point of design is not necessarily to build a better mousetrap. The point may just be to build a better-looking mousetrap. What this means is that design is most often a mix of applied techno-rationality and applied aesthetics.⁴⁶

These words are critical of designers in at least three ways. First, they situate design within a rational problem-solving (modernist) view of social organization, structured by a belief in incremental positivist scientific progress. Much of ISS has long been suspicious of these precepts. As James Scott put it, “designed or planned social order is necessarily schematic; it always ignores essential features of any real, functioning social order” in ways that risk dangerous consequences.⁴⁷ Second, design is critiqued for its focus on seduction, considered as a misuse of aesthetics for the purpose of (intentional or unintentional) behavioral manipulation. Designers use aesthetic tools to en-roll individuals into practices of co-creation, co-production, and prod-using, building a ‘sticky’ attachment to particular products, projects, or processes.⁴⁸ Today we are thus told that ‘big tech’ has designed technologies that have ‘broken’ democracy” due to the ways those platforms aesthetically promote an unfiltered and un-reflexive circulation of (misleading) information. Indeed, some accuse these aesthetic designs of being partially responsible for

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MADE-BY- HAND, NO GOOGLE MANIFESTO

Enough already with the ones and zeros – for this workshop, we’re going to do an experiment in getting “real”. For the next month, in honor of the history of zinemaking and all the zinemakers that have come before us, we’re going to jump off the Shanghai-Maglev bullet-train of technology and take an experimental break from the 2010’s:

1) WE DON’T USE COMPUTERS

Our type is found or made, our images are found or printed, and we know the true meaning of cut-and-paste.

2) NO GOOGLE

We research at the library, we find stuff on our own, we talk with people, we look to our surroundings for answers.

3) WE PROTOTYPE, WE MAKE

Our ideas are tested with paper, glue and staples, we draw and diagram to figure things out.

4) ANALOG IS ENDLESS

There are a million ways to do what our computers do – *without* computers. Our job is to think creatively and come up with amazing, unexpected, beautiful solutions.

5) LIMITATIONS ARE A GIFT

Limits give us structure, and point the way. We embrace them!

ONWARD! ...

⁴⁵ Ann Thorpe, ‘Applying Protest Event Analysis to Architecture and Design’, *Social Movement Studies* 13, no. 2 (3 April 2014): 279.

⁴⁶ Cynthia Weber, ‘Designing Safe Citizens’, *Citizenship Studies* 12, no. 2 (1 April 2008): 127.

⁴⁷ James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State* (London: Yale University Press, 1998), 6.

⁴⁸ Anna Leander, ‘Sticky Security: The Collages of Tracking Device Advertising’, *European Journal of International Security* 4, no. 3 (2019).

the world political disorientations caused by post-truth politics.⁴⁹ In short, these critiques suggest that design:

Is responsible only for the appearance of things, and thus it seems predestined to conceal the essence of things, to deceive the viewer's understanding of the true nature of reality... [through] the creation of a seductive surface behind which things themselves not only become invisible but disappear entirely.⁵⁰

Finally, design praxis is ever-increasingly associated with 'big tech' entities like Google and so with our technological enmeshing. For many, this valorization of the technological has long been deeply dangerous. As Heidegger put it, "everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it."⁵¹ The fear here is simply that the proliferation of design articulated in what is presumed to be a naïve techno-utopian manner is increasingly en-framing world politics beyond the possibility of reflexive debate. As Mbembe writes, there is an alarming "dismissal of critical reason in favour of programming," technesis, calculation, and instrumental reason that is slowly generating a "monopolisation of thought within technical infrastructures."⁵² What we essentially see is thus a coupling of long-standing trepidation about politics being colonized by technology due to its variously defined ontological capacities and the fear that this process is being enabled and deepened through designerly practices that legitimate that process through rational problem-solving discourses and aesthetic modes of affective enrollment.⁵³ An inescapable 'en-framing' of politics and life.

So, there's a reason, many would say, that Google (supposedly⁵⁴) deleted the words *don't be evil* from its code of conduct in 2018. But before we fall back into denunciation, before we walk out of this more metaphorical room, can we look at things differently? Might we learn anything from the kinds of active form that Google is so adept at designing into world politics if we step back, for a moment? To begin getting there, we might want to start with the fact that – again – Google doesn't really have a textual manifesto. It had that slogan, and a few principles, which others would later describe as a manifesto. But Google's actual manifestos, its actual acts of *making-public* a certain vision of the world, are material-aesthetic above all else. They come in gleaming (white) black boxes. Very seductive boxes. So seductive that we are all indeed deeply complicit with the vision of the world they represent. We all 'make real' Google's designs as we hand over our meta-data when we search the internet, login to our Gmail accounts, store our work on Google Drive, or commercialize ourselves and our work further via Google Scholar. In these mundane gestures, we feed our gendered, racial, and social academic and personal identities into the Google design process.⁵⁵ We are all active "citizen designers" of the world and its politics.⁵⁶ So, Google's true manifestos are indeed found in what it builds into the world with our assistance; concretely, digitally, cybernetically. It is something about their/our extra-linguistic acts of design that create contagious spatially-distributed power structures. And

⁴⁹ Jonathan Luke Austin, Rocco Bellanova, and Mareile Kaufmann, 'Doing and Mediating Critique: An Invitation to Practice Companionship', *Security Dialogue* 50, no. 1 (1 February 2019): 3–19; Aradau and Huysmans, 'Assembling Credibility: Knowledge, Method and Critique in Times of "Post-Truth"'; Amanda Phillips, 'Playing the Game in a Post-Truth Era', *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 6, no. 7 (2017).

⁵⁰ Boris Groys, *Going Public* (Sternberg Press, 2010), 22.

⁵¹ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1977).

⁵² Sindre Bangstad and Torbjorn Tumyr Nilsen, 'Thoughts on the Planetary: An Interview with Achille Mbembe', *New Frame*, 2019.

⁵³ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1979); Mark Hansen, *Embodying Technesis: Technology Beyond Writing* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000).

⁵⁴ In fact, the words were moved elsewhere, to a more discrete part of the document in question. They remain, but they are no longer, we might say, the slogan driving Google forward.

⁵⁵ Mark Hansen, *Feed Forward* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Ed Finn, ed., *What Algorithms Want* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017).

⁵⁶ Ezio Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs* (MIT Press, 2015); Steven Heller and Véronique Vienne, *Citizen Designer: Perspectives on Design Responsibility* (Skyhorse Publishing Inc, 2003).

it's that process of *making* active forms that we think ISS can learn something from vis-à-vis its own praxis and its connection to socio-political life. Learning from Google in order to engage the politics of Google.

Of, course, this proposition that we might learn analogically from Google will cause immediate trepidation. So, let's be clear. What we think we can learn from Google has nothing to do with "problem-solving" or 'impact' as many immediately fear. We are not in awe of Silicon Valley or its lexicon. We're not advocating for disruptive unicorns, open-plan offices, or tech-solutionism. Please, no more webinars. Instead, what we are interested in learning from is what is revealed when we parse back to the actual praxis of *making* active form at the core of design. It is a common prejudice across ISS that designers like *Google* invest themselves in a hylomorphic (form + matter) understanding of making. This is the earlier cited 'rational problem-solving' critique in which it is assumed that designers like Google believe they – as human agents – are able to impose a 'form' (a plan, a schematic, a set of desires) upon an inert set of 'matter' (silicon, glass, atoms) that will neatly and without unintended consequences carry out what is wished. On this account, 'form' has come to be seen as something "imposed by an agent with a particular design in mind, while matter... rendered passive and inert, became that which was imposed upon."⁵⁷ Much of ISS now believes it knows, conceptually and empirically, that this is false. But it also believes designers like Google, Lockheed Martin, or the European Union are ignorant of the fact. It believes there is a profound naivety at the heart of design.

However, this prejudice is often untrue at multiple levels. While many designers do subscribe to this naïve view (see, indeed, our discussion below), this is equally true for many – perhaps even most – scholars within ISS and the sciences at large. The General Linear Reality model of the world remains much in vogue.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, long before ISS got involved, it was technologists who were writing about the ethical dangers of Artificial Intelligence, and more, specifying precisely that the designs emerging in the early millennium were having consequences far beyond those intended.⁵⁹ More than this, almost all designers know the hylomorphic model to be false at an *intuitive* level. Consider computer programming and, specifically, the two segments of code pictured above and below. These screenshots are segments of the source code for a game called *Doom 3*, released in 2004. For the unversed, these strings of letters, numbers, and signs will

⁵⁷ Tim Ingold, 'The Textility of Making', *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34, no. 1 (1 January 2010): 92.

⁵⁸ Andrew Abbott, 'Transcending General Linear Reality', *Sociological Theory* 6, no. 2 (1988): 169–86.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Andreas Matthias, 'The Responsibility Gap: Ascribing Responsibility for the Actions of Learning Automata', *Ethics and Information Technology* 6, no. 3 (1 September 2004): 175–83 and/or the historical example of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs (<https://tinyurl.com/35pnz7q8>), or the present 'future of life' petition by scientists against lethal autonomous weapons (<https://tinyurl.com/1ciu7duo>).

```

for ( i = 0 ; i < in->numVerts ; i++ )
for ( i = 0 ; i < in->numVerts ; i++ ) {
    dot = plane.Distance( in->verts[i] );
    dists[i] = dot;
    if ( dot < -LIGHT_CLIP_EPSILON ) {
        sides[i] = SIDE_BACK;
    } else if ( dot > LIGHT_CLIP_EPSILON ) {
        sides[i] = SIDE_FRONT;
    } else {
        sides[i] = SIDE_ON;
    }
    counts[sides[i]]++;
}

{
    sides[i] = SIDE_ON;
}

counts[sides[i]]++;
}

```

probably mean very little. Indeed, while digital technologies are underwritten by strings of code like these, they are ‘packaged’ as black boxes in ways that obscure these building blocks. What makes them work is largely hidden from view, few see code in its raw form. What counts in recognizing their function is how they are branded. Google, Facebook, Microsoft *et al* therefore employ thousands of designers to semiotically code these objects as serving meaning X or Y. Thus commercialized, everything going on behind the box is categorized as something technical, as engineering, as the task of individuals with a set of mysterious skills. Technology becomes experienced as any other commodity, as something we don’t really wish to understand: incomprehensible. This act of hiding away (or hiding from) what governs particular objects obscures the fact – we now want to suggest – that while these technological tasks do require particular technical skills to work with, those skills are not so far from spinning a pot on a wheel, writing a poem, or learning to dance.

How so? Let’s go back to those screenshots. What is interesting about *Doom 3* is that computer programmers describe its code as ‘beautiful.’ Why? To begin, note that the two figures in question actually show the same sequence of code. The first has been modified to expand the code by adding redundant blank spaces, here and there. The second is the original. As one admirer writes, “*Doom* does not waste vertical space... I can read that entire algorithm on 1/4 of my screen, leaving the other 3/4s to understand where that block of code fits relative to its surrounding code.”⁶⁰ This is important because the code immediately following these lines “makes no sense” unless this code is visible ‘on-screen.’ Thus: “If id [the developer of *Doom*] didn’t respect vertical space, their code would be much harder to read, harder to write, harder to maintain and be less beautiful.”⁶¹ While this example is very basic, it reflects how computer programming and – indeed – all other ‘technical’ tasks (including writing alphabetical language in paragraphs, long or short) are also aesthetic and negotiated activities. The material-semiotic medium of code (straddling, as it does, ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ ware) imposes its own conditions on the act of making that demand aesthetic modifications to the process of forming an artifact. Those aesthetic considerations do not refer to any “formalist understanding focused [of aesthetics] on art, beauty, or taste”⁶² but rather to an understanding of aesthetics as “mode of experience

⁶⁰ Shawn McGrath, ‘The Exceptional Beauty Of Doom 3’s Source Code’, *Lifehacker AU*, 2013.

⁶¹ McGrath, ‘The Exceptional Beauty Of Doom 3’s Source Code’.

⁶² Jonathan Luke Austin, ‘Security Compositions’, *European Journal of International Security* 4, no. 3 (October 2019): 265.

that rests on the directness and immediacy of sensuous perception.”⁶³ Designing things into the material world demands a very concrete aesthetic appreciation for how that world’s conditions (of possibility, emergence, etc.) will impact upon, disrupt, deviate from, etc., human purposefulness. It is thus that:

Some people have different opinions about what makes the structure [of a computer program] beautiful. There are purists who think only structured programming with certain very simple constructions, used in a very strict mathematical fashion, is beautiful. But to me, programs can be beautiful even if they do not follow those concepts if they have other redeeming features. It’s like comparing modern poetry with classical poetry.⁶⁴

Now, we have chosen computer programming to discuss the aesthetic elements of making because this is a skill that, within ISS and other fields, is most frequently seen as problem-solving and technical. The lived experience of making a computer programme, and thinking-within that process of making, however, contradicts these prejudices. Indeed, it would be better to consider almost all acts of making as involving acts of bricolage, composition, or collage. As Ingold put it, “as practitioners, the builder, the gardener, the cook, the alchemist and the painter are not so much imposing form on matter as bringing together diverse materials and combining or redirecting their flow in the anticipation of what might emerge.”⁶⁵ Sentiments like these connect what seem intensely modern modes of design back to the oldest. As De Landa writes of pre-Grecian philosophies of craft and design:

Instead of imposing a cerebral form on an inert matter, materials were allowed to have their say in the final form produced. Craftsmen did not impose a shape but rather teased out a form from the material, acting more as triggers for spontaneous behavior and as facilitators of spontaneous processes than as commanders imposing their desires from above.⁶⁶

The skilled praxis of making, in this view, is a question not of “imposing preconceived forms on inert matter but of intervening in the fields of force and currents of material wherein forms are generated.”⁶⁷ In this light, designers are “wanderers, wayfarers, whose skill lies in their ability to find the grain of the world’s becoming and to follow its course while bending it to their evolving purpose.”⁶⁸ Such a perspective implies very strongly that designers *think-with* the world, and all its lively material, *as they engage in acts of making*. Not just before, in their heads, or via a schematic, but throughout the process. Designed objects are emergent things, negotiated with-extra-human entities. As Richard Sennett has written “thinking and feeling are contained within the process of making.”⁶⁹ *Making is thinking*, and vice-versa. Design, thus, is about the “materiality of ideas” as a textbook in the subject underscores.⁷⁰ It is by doing things that we begin to (get to) know them and their contents, which is obviously much broader than what we can consciously think about or put words on. Such knowing is thus embodied and affective. Even when done alone, making is contextual and related to the practices of others. In this view, the thinking-with the world that making produces revolves around a kind of combinatorial hermeneutics in which what matters is the modes through which different forces are combined, counter-posed, associated, etc.⁷¹ Again, this is largely an aesthetic process: the production of a ‘collage’ or ‘composition’ demands being sensitive to both the material elements involved in its production as an artifact and the interactions it will inevitably have with other artifacts.⁷²

⁶³ A Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense* (Exeter: Imprint, 2010), 195.

⁶⁴ Susan Lammers, *Programmers at Work: Interviews* (Microsoft Press, 1986), 13.

⁶⁵ Tim Ingold, *Being Alive* (Taylor & Francis, 2011), 91.

⁶⁶ Manuel De Landa, ‘Philosophies of Design’, *Verb: Architecture Magazine*, 2001, 135.

⁶⁷ Ingold, ‘The Textility of Making’, 92.

⁶⁸ Ingold, ‘The Textility of Making’, 92.

⁶⁹ Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), 7.

⁷⁰ Daniel Cardoso Llach, *Builders of the Vision: Software and the Imagination of Design*: Routledge, 2015.

⁷¹ Austin, ‘A Parasitic Critique for International Relations’.

⁷² Leander, ‘Sticky Security: The Collages of Tracking Device Advertising’.

Understanding these aesthetic qualities of the ways in which making involves composition or collage reveals, most importantly, how acts of making are not founded in instrumental reason, even though this may be the (scientific) rhetoric that surrounds the professions who engage in those actions. Instead, “form-giving activity, of a kind that constitutes cultural entities which are recognized as preceding and outlasting the moment of their performance, always draws upon the conventions of genre, and... subtly modifies them.”⁷³

This embedding of the act of design in an improvised, aesthetic, embodied, and affective set of practices is what we want to stress and what we, indeed, think we might be able to learn from *Google* by studying its praxis. This side of its activities situate it within a far broader and entirely politically open understanding of design. One that does *not* in fact have “its roots in rational problem solving.”⁷⁴ Indeed, as Arturo Escobar has written, at its base, “more than about objects, buildings, industry, services, even art, design is about the active production of life itself.”⁷⁵ Throughout history, “humans have always been radically reshaped by the designs they produce.”⁷⁶ As such, design involves “the creation of worlds” by standing as the age-old process of working “to change reality, the status quo” through a complex process of experimenting with different ways to make-public particular desires that may or may not inaugurate novel collective compositions and entanglements. In this vein, Haraway’s call for a liberatory feminist-socialist cyborg politics manifested for the re-design of world politics because:

Any object or person can be reasonably thought of in terms of disassembly and reassembly; no ‘natural’ architectures constrain system design.⁷⁷

For us, designing-with/in world politics thus refers to this broad understanding of design as something not necessarily commercial nor rationalistically problem-solving nor manipulatively seductive nor even strictly speaking technological. We are speaking about a different kind of designing-with/in the world that addresses the flux, fluidity, and frictions of politics through the contingent, creative, and aesthetic praxis of making. In this, we are advocating thus for an ISS that instead of stopping at a critique of the design activities of Google, works instead to actively appropriate those designs, to work with them, and endeavor to make them work differently, with the goal of contributing to the production of viable alternatives from – yes – with/in existing constraints. Indeed, we would wager that this focus on working *with/in* is especially important for ISS to move its praxis towards acts of design and material-aesthetic making. It is notable that a host of other social scientific disciplines have more readily embraced design as a means of augmenting their praxis over the last few decades. Likewise, practical and professional fields – from military organizations, through development and humanitarian specialists, and towards governments themselves⁷⁸ – have quickly been enamored by the notion of ‘design thinking’ as a tool for innovative policy-making. In what follows, we will critique some of these developments (especially those related to design ‘thinking’) but the question remains as to why ISS has been rather less willing to shift its praxis towards design and material-aesthetic making.

The comparative resistance within ISS to embracing such a shift is partially linked to the continued preoccupation of the field with questions of scale. This is not solely meant in a classical sense, where debates

⁷³ Barber, ‘Improvisation and the Art of Making Things Stick’.

⁷⁴ Weber, ‘Designing Safe Citizens’, 127.

⁷⁵ Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Duke University Press, 2018).

⁷⁶ Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley, *Are We Human? Notes on an Archaeology of Design* (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2016), 9; Tristan Garcia, *Form and Object* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

⁷⁷ Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century’, 31; Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁷⁸ Michael McGann, Emma Blomkamp, and Jenny M. Lewis, ‘The Rise of Public Sector Innovation Labs: Experiments in Design Thinking for Policy’, *Policy Sciences* 51, no. 3 (1 September 2018): 249–67.

continue over the linkages between micro, meso, and macro ‘levels’ of analysis. As Jef Huysmans and Joao Nogueira⁷⁹ write, critical approaches within ISS have “experienced an intensified interest in situated and micro analyses” but engaging “the fragmentation of the international... has gone hand in hand with pulls towards thinking big and wholes as a condition for critical analysis.” A fear remains across the field that focusing too fully (either analytically or normatively) upon the local, the micro, and the materially-embodied risks occluding the political impact of structural forces. This remains the case in spite of the field’s embrace of assemblage thought, field theory, ecological approaches, and cognate ‘flat’ ontological precepts. Within the terms of this debate, it makes little sense to focus on the design and making of material-aesthetic objects for ethico-political purposes, as it is generally assumed such objects possess *in and of themselves* no capacity to provoke change. It may be permissible for an architect, so the logic goes, to dedicate themselves to designing material-aesthetic forms but the architect is not a figure concerned with spatially distributed or (structural) change. In this view, likewise, the power of Google *et al* does not stem from any ‘autonomous’ power embedded within their material-aesthetic designs but – bluntly – from their economic, political, and structural power. But it is here that we situate the Easterling’s aforementioned notion of ‘active form’ at the centre of what it might mean to design-with/in world politics. Easterling has written that:

It has become clear to me that some of the most radical changes to the globalizing world are not being written in the language of international law or diplomacy but instead in the language of architecture and urbanism.⁸⁰

She associates this power with the capacity of architecture to transmit ‘active form’ across space. One of her favoured examples is the Walmart corporation’s decision to install skylights across its vast network of supermarkets. As she writes:

Someone convinced Walmart that their products would sell better in daylight. That would have been a good day’s work for an architect as well as a good example of the discrepancy or duplicity that one can instrumentalize with active form. One could forthrightly sell daylighting to Wal-Mart while covertly calculating the surface area of all the Walmart roofs all over the world and the resultant impact on their energy use. The declared, visible form is the mechanism for daylighting. The active form, the ulterior calculation, travels on the Walmart multiplier fulfilling an undeclared script with a capacity for discrepancy.⁸¹

In this example, a form of ‘structural’ change that can be associated with the goal of tackling climate change was achieved through the injection of a very simple architectural object (the skylight). Achieving this required working with/in particular constraints by overtly stressing the economic benefits of daylight to a corporation. With these examples, Easterling articulates the “trick” of “straddling two scales at once” as being about “one... making objects, the protocols for their propagation and their programmatic valences” and two... “massaging their aesthetic reception.”⁸² Achieving this kind of effect requires understanding how “ideas generate spatial consequence[s]” through their material-aesthetic embodiment in ways that consider the “multiple scenarios for propagation” latent within objects.⁸³ Easterling encapsulates this process as being not only about wanting to design “the shape of the chess piece but how the chess piece plays. You are then designing the delta – the active form that travels as detail, contagion, program, etc. as

⁷⁹ Jef Huysmans and Joao P. Nogueira, ‘International Political Sociology as a Mode of Critique,’ *International Political Sociology*, 2, accessed 26 September 2020.

⁸⁰ Easterling in James Lucas, Mark D. Linder, and Cameron Lassiter, ‘Graduate Sessions 9: Keller Easterling,’ *Syracuse University*, 2009, 3.

⁸¹ Easterling in Lucas, Linder, and Lassiter, ‘Graduate Sessions 9: Keller Easterling’, 18.

⁸² Easterling in Lucas, Linder, and Lassiter, ‘Graduate Sessions 9: Keller Easterling’, 20.

⁸³ Easterling in Lucas, Linder, and Lassiter, ‘Graduate Sessions 9: Keller Easterling’, 11, 18.

well as the form that manifests as object.”⁸⁴ But – to repeat – this can only work from ‘within’ as a compromising, impure, and flexible practice focused on producing an “alternative repertoire” for normatively-minded social scientific engagement: “one that’s less about being righteous and self-congratulatory and more about being sly, entrepreneurial, and effective.”⁸⁵ A mode of critique that imitates – and then inverts – Google’s power.

Consequently, speaking about such active forms does not mean imagining a ‘grand design’ (see below), whether articulated in a single object or infrastructure, that can transform the world and its politics. Nor is it about imagining we can ‘control’ our designs. Indeed, studied carefully, the work of making active form encapsulated by entities like Google makes it clear that such a possibility is illusory and that it is, more often, the contextually-sensitive, textured, and improvised work of design that produces “contagious” forms of power. We thus understand form-giving activities as demanding a concrete, non-logocentric, and aesthetic appreciation for how that world’s conditions (of possibility, emergence, etc.) always deviate from any general schematized design. We understand it as a process of thinking-with/in, very literally, the multitudes of the world. Acts of designing-with/in world politics can only emerge – successfully, in one way or another – from the “meshwork” of practices that entangle those acts.⁸⁶ This process will require conceptual, theoretical work and abstraction. It will also necessarily involve alphabetical writing. However, the aim of these conventional scholarly practices — and therefore also their dominant forms and their relative weighting in academic ISS — require fundamental rethinking. What is at stake in designing-with/in world politics is harnessing this mix between of the ideational, material, aesthetic, and affective, expressed through concrete acts of thinking-with (things) and form-giving (however articulated), in ways that inject our praxis directly into the ebbs and flows of the world as it turns, situating us imminently and immanently to politics.

Design Affects

So, design can be thought about differently. As a term that gestures at the connection of ideas in the abstract, the imaginary, or the speculative, and the world, in its concreteness, its unpredictability, its reality. But there remains the obvious problem. While “almost everything that we use” may have been designed – turbulently, by thinking-with the world, affectively, and pragmatically – those objects are indeed nowadays mostly designed by figures who have a limited, partial, and often commercially oriented set of political interests.⁸⁷ It’s not a good thing, we agree, that though we all participate in ‘making real’ its designs, *Google* is the ‘obligatory passage point’ for that participation. Indeed, the ever-accelerating domination of design by commercial, governmental, etc. interests is now colonizing more and more of life. Notably, this includes specifically international political realms in ways that extend beyond “unintended consequences” (e.g. rising far-right populism caused by social media). Take an example. At the core of representative democracy is the institution of the election. But elections are under threat, often due to a combination of classical logics of realpolitik and novel technologies (viz Russian electoral interference, enabled by commercial Israeli spyware, mediated via Californian social media). While we have seen a set of more-or-less predictable responses to these threats – attempts to secure technological infrastructure, the use of sanctions against entities presumed responsible, etc. – there are also more radical proposals. Consider *Horizon State*, a for-profit entity that is

⁸⁴ Easterling in Lucas, Linder, and Lassiter, ‘Graduate Sessions 9: Keller Easterling’, 15.

⁸⁵ Easterling in Lucas, Linder, and Lassiter, ‘Graduate Sessions 9: Keller Easterling’, 4.

⁸⁶ Lucas D. Introna, ‘On the Making of Sense in Sensemaking: Decentred Sensemaking in the Meshwork of Life’, *Organization Studies* 40, no. 5 (2018): 745–64.

⁸⁷ Groy, *Going Public*, 46.

essentially proposing to globally privatize electoral infrastructures by designing novel election architectures that draw on non-financial deployments of blockchain technology. *Horizon State*'s designers do not shy from hyperbole in marking-out their goals: "a vote cast to the blockchain is unforgeable and... voting results... are undisputable."⁸⁸ These (already piloted) technologies hope to remove the need for 'trusted authorities' (who count and verify election results) by allowing any citizen to verify whether their own vote has been counted and the overall result.⁸⁹ Setting aside their specifics, however, interventions like *Horizon State* are based on a "perception that our modern forms of constitutional governance are declining in their ability to secure desired societal outcomes, which results from a growing misalignment between the nature of the issues that governments confront and the nature of government."⁹⁰ While this sentiment is widespread, it is principally technophiles who are confronting it and – indeed – literally manifesting for their preferred solutions:

A distributed model with a central committee may be an approach to developing a 'guiding hand' for blockchain technology. If we are to strive for a blockchain utopia, we need more than an agenda. We need a genuine global answer on who guarantees the system, as well as [to] consider how this can be underpinned by 'good' at its heart... what we... need is a manifesto.

- *Blockchain for Good*

Central committees, guiding hands, manifestos, and utopias: the commercialization of Che Guevara has had some rather unexpected effects across Silicon Valley, perhaps. It's easy to be cynical about this "comic faith in technofixes."⁹¹ But it's also all too easy to pretend that the naivety of what is powerfully manifested for in different (tech-orientated) design circles can be kept at a distance, imagining the intellectual as an individual able to keep herself separate from the impure entanglements of world politics, critiquing the way the world is changing while remaining *just a social scientist*. It's too easy to embrace a different kind of manifesto, a manifesto for withdrawal:

The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race. They have greatly increased the life-expectancy of those of us who live in 'advanced' countries, but they have destabilized society, have made life unfulfilling, have subjected human beings to indignities, have led to widespread psychological suffering (in the Third World to physical suffering as well) and have inflicted severe damage on the natural world. The continued development of technology will worsen the situation.

- *Industrial Society and its Future*

But, etymologically, utopias and dystopias are always the same thing: non-places. Distancing ourselves from both without, nonetheless, abandoning a search for possible visions of futures transformed – which, naturally enough, is the attraction of the terms – is the crucial political task of the day. As a member of the Laboria Cuboniks collective at the origin of the *Xenofeminist Manifesto* puts it: "No more reification of the given masked as critique... not a bid for revolution, but a wager on the long game of history, demanding imagination, dexterity and persistence."⁹² These words evoke a politics of alternatives – of the future –

⁸⁸ See <https://horizonstate.com/>.

⁸⁹ Blockchain technologies theoretically operate 'trustlessly.' However, the infrastructures underlying that possibility require a social authority to curate the distribution of 'tokens' to electorates that would enable elections to proceed. This opens one immediate flaw in the technological design. See inter alia Nir Kshetri and Jeffrey Voas, 'Blockchain-Enabled e-Voting', *IEEE Software* 35, no. 4 (2018): 95–99; Teogenes Moura and Alexandre Gomes, 'Blockchain Voting and Its Effects on Election Transparency and Voter Confidence', in *Proceedings of the 18th Annual International Conference on Digital Government Research*, Dg.o '17 (New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2017), 574–75; Gautam Srivastava, Ashutosh Dhar Dwivedi, and Rajani Singh, 'Crypto-Democracy: A Decentralized Voting Scheme Using Blockchain Technology', 2018, 674–79.

⁹⁰ Richard A.K. Lum, 'A Futures Perspective on Constitutional Governance', *International Journal of System of Systems Engineering* 7, no. 1–3 (1 January 2016).

⁹¹ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (London: Routledge, 1991), 3.

⁹² Laboria Cuboniks, *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation*, 2015.

rooted in a certain kind of pragmatism, both aspects central to the successful designing of (world) politics. Let us take both in turn. Design praxis is intimately concerned with the future. As Buchanan writes, “the problem for designers is to conceive and plan what does not yet exist.”⁹³ This involves giving active form to what is emerging and cultivating an ability to find the grain of the world’s becoming and to follow its course while bending it to their evolving purpose, to speak again with Easterling and Ingold. “History” conceived, as what went on in the past is therefore “not something that designers particularly want to be associated with. They are more interested in the future, in new technologies and opportunities.”⁹⁴ The weight of the past readily puts constraints on the pursuit of that interest. “When you look too much into history you run the risk of idealizing it.”⁹⁵ Or, on the opposite side, flying backwards with the angel of history means focusing on past destruction and violence. The difficulty of extricating oneself from these tendencies makes what lies ahead seem uninteresting, even beside the point. And so the task of preparing for or even actively shaping the future often becomes perceived as irrelevant. Looking beyond all this, design focuses forward, on fashioning futures rather than on idealizing or resisting the legacy of the past. In the vocabulary of anthropologist Ghassan Hage, design shifts the emphasis from an anti-politics focused *solely* on domination to an alter-politics concerned with alternatives.⁹⁶ The two are inseparable, of course. Past, present and future are not neatly compartmentalized but folded into each other, so are domination and alternatives. Alter-politics is no *ex-nihilo* creation but more like a “shamanic act of inducing a haunting”, mobilizing matter and myths.⁹⁷ Design, as “every human attempt at framing is itself always and already enframed.”⁹⁸ Nonetheless, design still strives towards embracing a “prefigurative politics” that “is essentially about being or doing the change.”⁹⁹ One key implication of this temporal positioning is that ‘hope’ is always central to acts of making.¹⁰⁰ Because acts of making deal not only with the immediate contingencies and indeterminacies of negotiating with different forms of matter but also with their possible future contingencies and past legacies, engaging in acts of making requires a refusal to accept paralysis.

That refusal to be paralyzed demands, therein, pragmatism. Design is unconcerned with revolution conceived as a unitary event conjured *ex nihilo*. Such visions represent only what Harold Garfinkel termed “possible futures.”¹⁰¹ A possible future is any future that can be ‘imagined’ in a broad sense. It’s entirely possible to imagine the emergence of a “world state”¹⁰² or a “planet politics.”¹⁰³ But “these as of here-and-now possible future states are only sketchily specifiable prior to undertaking the action that is intended to realize them.”¹⁰⁴ Possible futures are entirely underdetermined until action is taken to make them operable (unless one subscribes to a teleological or quasi-deterministically evolutionary understanding of life). As Garfinkel thus continues:

There is a necessary distinction between a ‘possible future state of affairs’ and a ‘how-to-bring-it-about-future-from-a-present-state-of-affairs-as-an-actual-point-of-departure.’ The ‘possible future state of affairs’ may be very clear indeed. But such a future is not the matter of interest. Instead we are concerned

⁹³ Richard Buchanan, ‘Wicked Problems in Design Thinking’, *Design Issues* 8, no. 2 (1992): 15.

⁹⁴ Marjanna van Helvert, ‘A Two-Sided Monologue on the Future of Design’, in *The Responsible Object: A History of Design Ideology for the Future*, ed. Marjanna van Helvert (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2016), 256.

⁹⁵ Marjanna van Helvert, ‘A Two-Sided Monologue on the Future of Design,’ 256.

⁹⁶ Ghassan Hage, *Alter-Politics. Critical Anthropology and the Radical Imagination* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2015).

⁹⁷ Hage, *Alter-Politics. Critical Anthropology and the Radical Imagination*, 55.

⁹⁸ Intra, ‘On the Making of Sense in Sensemaking: Decentred Sensemaking in the Meshwork of Life’, 750.

⁹⁹ Margaret Davies, *Law Unlimited* (Taylor & Francis, 2017), 16.

¹⁰⁰ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996).

¹⁰¹ Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967), 97.

¹⁰² Alexander Wendt, ‘Why a World State Is Inevitable’, *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 4 (2003).

¹⁰³ Anthony Burke et al., ‘Planet Politics: A Manifesto from the End of IR’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 44, no. 3 (2016).

¹⁰⁴ Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, 97.

with the ‘how to bring it about from a here-and-now future.’ It is this state – for convenience, call it an ‘operational future’ – that is characteristically vague or unknown.¹⁰⁵

Design is concerned with these ‘operational futures.’ It is concerned, again, with *action* that *builds* towards something, however slowly, however uncertainly: “a wager on the long game of history.” This requires alliance-building, across seemingly vast divides, and the pragmatism to accept the impurity of that process.

An example.

The commercialization of science is something we all know about. But how do we fight it? Perhaps the most successful challenge has come not from conceptual critiques issued within the pages of journals, or laments on social media, but from an unassuming Kazakhstani computer programmer, Alexandra Elbakyan. Elbakyan founded the website *Sci-hub* in 2011. Sci-hub provides free access to, as of writing, 86 million scientific articles. The site is simple: a single line, a motto-manifesto – *to remove all barriers in the way of science* – and a search bar. But the politics of the site are explicit:

Those with access to these resources — students, librarians, scientists — you have been given a privilege. You get to feed at this banquet of knowledge while the rest of the world is locked out. But you need not — indeed, morally, you cannot — keep this privilege for yourselves. You have a duty to share it with the world... Meanwhile, those who have been locked out are not standing idly by. You have been sneaking through holes and climbing over fences, liberating the information locked up by the publishers and sharing them with your friends. But all of this action goes on in the dark, hidden underground.

Sneaking through holes and climbing over fences, burrowing *from within*, and working to transform. Sci-hub follows a guerrilla logic of making-public, recognizing that resistance “is not born spontaneously; rather it must be armed from the enemy’s arsenal.”¹⁰⁶ It does not pretend that any moment of grand enlightenment will change the world but, nonetheless, does not lose sight of a different future to which it pragmatically moves. Indeed, the design of the site actively co-opts the design principles of those it seeks to overthrow: simple, functional aesthetics, carefully crafted with ease of use in mind. It works, often, *better* than the platforms (*Jstor*, *Elsevier*) filing lawsuits against it. Sci-hub represents, in short, an impure politics, sustained by impure tactics, with the emergence of any general strategy becoming a vanishing point constantly evolving through the “development of the struggle.”¹⁰⁷ In one sense, *Sci-hub* is thus the opposite of *Horizon State*. It is anti-commercial, anti-centralization, and driven from the ‘bottom up’ by a nameless collective of contributors. It represents a form of “critical thought translated into materiality.”¹⁰⁸ As such it is a lesson of how design praxis can be re-routed towards something else. Sci-hub is the kind of thing that can happen if you take everything that makes *Google* tick but inject it with a different kind of politicality. A really very different transformatory – and, eventually, maybe revolutionary – kind of designing-with/in world politics.

But *Sci-hub* also reflects something else especially significant: beyond function and pragmatism, all design is *affective*. As our discussion of the aesthetic qualities of making made clear, the ‘effects’ that any designed-object has are achieved not principally rationally or reflexively. They emerge unpredictably. Designs have ‘lives and loves’ that escape and also transform their makers.¹⁰⁹ They have consequences their makers could not have foreseen and often also contrary to what they intended. In short: designs affect. They lend the infrastructuring of our lives its shape. They modulate the formation and disintegration of assemblages. They

¹⁰⁵ Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, 97.

¹⁰⁶ Ernesto Che Guevara, *Che Guevara Reader: Writings on Politics and Revolution* (Ocean Press, 2003), 78.

¹⁰⁷ Guevara, *Che Guevara Reader*, 78.

¹⁰⁸ Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* (MIT Press, 2013).

¹⁰⁹ W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).



The homepage of Sci-Hub (c. 2020; see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sci-Hub for latest links).

create the atmospheres coloring the “affective lens [... that] allows for the world to appear in this or that way.”¹¹⁰ Designs shape practices, including the practices of design itself, in ways exceeding the interests and intentions of the designer. What matters about the active forms injected into the world are thus the ways in which they do, or do not, resonate with particular ‘publics’ (conceived very broadly) so as to draw those publics into some form of symbiotic affective relationship that, in a sense, *demands* we pay attention to something we hadn’t previously considered.¹¹¹ Active forms, recall, are those things that are able to unite and partially connect publics (of multiple kinds), a process that only occurs through an improvised and immanent combination of functionality – materially or otherwise embedded into the world – and affect.

The ways in which design circulates affectively takes us back to the second critique commonly lodged against its praxis: that design is somehow manipulatively ‘seductive.’ But – again – this critique can be seen as negative only when lodged against an ideological structure (the commercial) that one opposes. Just as the process of making (or ‘forming’) described earlier, the affective qualities of design have always been an intimate part of life, long before commercialization. An example. Mexican architect Tatiana Bilbao has written, seemingly simply, that “a house is not just a house.”¹¹² Instead, a house creates atmospheres. It invites and suggest possibilities, relationships, roles and understandings. It can also (dis-)empower. But a house is also a designed object. For Bilbao, a core aim is thus to relocate socially engaged decisions about how to live and what to want from a living space from architects to inhabitants.¹¹³ More broadly, it is to displace the dominance of architectural designs associated with capitalism.¹¹⁴ The point is obviously not restricted to housing but pertains to the design of our surroundings more generally, whether those happen to be those of the Swedish ministry of migration¹¹⁵ or FabLabs found in Brazil.¹¹⁶ Wherever we want to look, designs affect the corporeality of social arrangements, or what we might call our “social flesh.”¹¹⁷ Our

¹¹⁰ Sara Ahmed, ‘Not in the Mood’, *New Formations* 82, no. 82 (2014): 14.

¹¹¹ Austin, ‘Security Compositions’.

¹¹² Tatiana Bilbao, *A House Is Not Just a House: Projects on Housing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

¹¹³ Bilbao, *A House Is Not Just a House: Projects on Housing*.

¹¹⁴ Gernot Böhme, *Ästhetischer Kapitalismus* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 2016).

¹¹⁵ Lotta Hultin, Lucas D. Introna, and Magnus Mähring, ‘The Decentered Translation of Management Ideas: Attending to the Conditioning Flow of Everyday Work Practices’, *Human Relations* 0018726719897967 (2020).

¹¹⁶ Andrea Bandoni, ‘The Digital Age Reaches the Fringes: A Public Fab Lab in Brazil and Its (Possible) Implications for Design’, in *The Responsible Object: A History of Design Ideology for the Future*, ed. Marjanna Helvert (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2016), 209–27; Jesse Adams Stein, ‘The Political Imaginaries of 3D Printing: Prompting Mainstream Awareness of Design and Making’, *Design and Culture* 9, no. 1 (2017): 3–27.

¹¹⁷ Chris Beasley and Carol Bacchi, ‘Envisaging a New Politics for an Ethical Future: Beyond Trust, Care and Generosity—towards an Ethic of Social Flesh’, *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 3 (2007): 279–98.

bodies not only adjust to them. They incorporate them through the doings they invite, suggest and impose. Another example. The “occupational repertoire” of the bodyguard is embodied. It “is etched into tissue and flesh” as Higate puts it.¹¹⁸ Again, his observation about bodyguards echoes scholarship stretching from Mauss¹¹⁹ work on the “technologies of the body” to M’charek’s on the distributed and technical making of race and the racialized body.¹²⁰ They remind us that while affects may generate “creative path from within the body... a line of resistance against the controlling striation of space” they may “also, and rather unspectacularly, be anticipated, planned, and instrumentalised.”¹²¹ Design, indeed, is always somewhere ‘in-between’ in its effects and affects. But, most importantly, this means its politics is always indeterminate.

Engaging with design is thus about taking up the challenge of understanding/researching these ambiguous processes by making them, fashioning, redirecting, diffracting or interrupting them. It is about acknowledging a mode of politics of knowledge that goes beyond academic writing but that also does not take the form of “a boycott, strike, protest, demonstration, or some other political act; [but...] lends its power of resistance by being precisely a designerly way of intervening in people’s lives.”¹²² This involves working directly *with* affect, materiality, embodiment, and the future. As Levi Bryant repeats for us, the absence of social and political “change suggests that... meanings, signifiers, signs, narratives, and discourses are not the entire story.”¹²³ This is the basic lesson of feminist theory, science and technology studies, and cognate perspectives: there’s always something outside the text. And it is that *something* – which we are locating in the process of design – which produces certain “basins of attraction” into which societal collectives can sometimes fall.¹²⁴ But the challenge remains not simply recognizing this fact, conceptually, theoretically, or even empirically, but actively “thinking strategies of composition” that would allow us to imagine and concretely fabricate *new* “basins of attraction” into which social life might fall (differently).¹²⁵

Another example.

The Brazilian hacker collective Maria[lab] seeks to foster change through a feminist re-ordering place of the technological. As their manifesto puts it, “we understand that technology is every knowledge organized over a making. It is a making that, somehow, changes the world.”¹²⁶ *Knowledge* becomes through its *making*. The making they undertake nonetheless involves coding which is mostly alphabetical and mostly occurs in English. Pragmatically, they work within these constraints to shift what it means to design *with* the technological. Analogously, their Manifesto thus shifts the gendered connotations of words from masculine to feminine, replacing *Manifesto*, *Coletivo*, and *Espaço* with *Manifesta*, *Coletiva* and *Espaça*, respectively. Such adjustments alter the affective qualities of the alphabetical with which they must work, working to “reshape the discursive chessboard” by exploiting and subverting its own terms, tools, and processes.

¹¹⁸ Paul Higate, ‘Co-Constituting Bodyguarding Practice through Embodied Reflexivity: Methodological Reflections from the Field’, *Conflict and Society* 3, no. 1 (2017): 42–60.

¹¹⁹ Marcel Mauss, ‘Les Techniques Du Corps’, *Journal de Psychologie* 32, no. 3–4 (1934)..

¹²⁰ Amade M’charek, ‘Race, Time and Folded Objects: The HeLa Error’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 31, no. 6 (2014): 29–56; Amade M’charek, Katharina Schramm, and David Skinner, ‘Topologies of Race: Doing Territory, Population and Identity in Europe’, *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 39, no. 4 (2014): 468–87.

¹²¹ Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, ‘Atmospheres of Law: Senses, Affects, Lawscapes’, *Emotion, Space and Society* 7 (2013): 40..

¹²² Thomas Markussen, ‘The Disruptive Aesthetics of Design Activism: Enacting Design Between Art and Politics’, *Design Issues* 29, no. 1 (2013): 30.

¹²³ Levi R. Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Open Humanities Press, 2011), 289.

¹²⁴ Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects*, 289.

¹²⁵ Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects*, 289.

¹²⁶ See <https://www.marialab.org/manifesta>.

Manifesta

Somos feministas interessadas em cultura hacker e os conhecimentos que unem política, gênero e suas tecnologias.

Pautamos a interseccionalidade nas nossas ações, não toleramos machismo, homofobia, transfobia, misoginia, lesbofobia, psicofobia, capacitismo, xenofobia e racismo.

Nosso objetivo é semear conhecimento, autonomia com corresponsabilidade e caminhos de mudanças sociais.

Consideramos necessário oferecer um espaço de acolhimento, diversidade e troca através de tecnologias por uma perspectiva feminista.

Nos baseamos em políticas anti-opressão para tornar esses espaços, sejam eles físicos ou virtuais, em ambientes politizados e inclusivos.

Entendemos que a tecnologia é todo conhecimento organizado em torno de um fazer. E um fazer que, de alguma forma, altera o mundo.

Somos uma coletiva hacker feminista

Maria [lab] Coletiva Hacker Feminista (<https://www.marialab.org/manifesta>)

Examples like *Sci-hub* and *Maria[lab]* thus provide us an alternative way of thinking about what an International Political Design might mean. Symmetrically, *Google*, *Horizon State*, *Sci-hub*, and *Maria[lab]* are all engaging in acts of designing-with/in world politics. All work with/in, drawing on the particular power that making – that act of imminently injecting oneself into the current of ‘sociality’ (in all its entangled material, fleshy, aesthetic, sensual, etc. elements) – creates to ‘think’ differently, as well as the affective qualities that designed things produce. But, again, almost all these acts of designing-with/in world politics are being *led* by those outside ISS. We stress ‘*led*’ here (though being composed by, crafted by, reimagined by, might all be better terms) because our argument is not a voluntarist one. As we discussed vis-à-vis *Google*, we are all always actively involved and responsible for the design of world politics and the particular basins of attraction that are most powerful at one time or another. We are thus not suggesting that ISS can choose whether or not to be implicated in the politics of design with all its affective, material, and corporeal implications. We are also not advocating that we all now retreat to our offices, open-space working tables or student rooms to draw up the grand design of world politics. Quite the contrary, our point is that we are all already implicated, through our embodied selves, through our language, through our endless Google searches and through the computers we are writing our texts on, through the drinks we consume and cigarettes we smoke. We are all already participating in the design of world politics. There is no centralized locus of praxis dictating precisely the ends towards which world politics is trending, nor is there a ‘pure’ outside unimplicated in those design practices. Again, both utopias and dystopias are always non-places.

The fact that we are always already implicated in design presents, then, an opportunity. The reality that political designs of all kinds are indeterminate makes it possible to work with the designs we have rather than just against them. Their originators do not determine their affects. But, again, this is true only if we do not angrily walk out of the room. Instead of stopping at a critique of the activities of the dominant designers of the world, we want an ISS that appropriates design, owns it, and works with it to contribute viable alternatives. We want the guerilla design ethos of *Sci-hub*. Working from within, co-opting, turning designs back upon their makers, imagining designs that would do just the same. What all this does imply is that we move far more *actively* into the process of designing-with/in world politics. By delegating the core tasks of design (making, affecting, pragmatically imagining) to spheres outside of our own, we participate in the design process *on the terms of others*. This not only means that our knowledge-production activities are impoverished in their politicality but also that we ourselves become ‘experience-distant’ to the world as it is lived, separating ourselves from an immanent engagement with world politics. One consequence of this is

that ISS habitually finds itself playing catch-up, restricted to a retrospective looking-back on what has-become rather than what-is-becoming, forgoing the futurist politics of movement that engaging with making imminently and in improvisational terms opens up.¹²⁷ Because we are no longer surrounded by the epistemological furniture that today drives the world, we are always thinking consequences rather than possibilities. It is thus that – for example – the insights of Kittler could not have been derived from within ISS. Kittler directly attributed his extensive and indeed prophetic meditations on the autonomy of technological apparatuses to the fact that “at night, after I had finished writing, I used to pick up... a soldering iron and build circuits.”¹²⁸ Kittler was building circuits as part of his hobby modifying musical instruments in order to create new electronic music. It was this leisure activity, which forced him into a very practical engagement with the material, aesthetic, and the technological, that he specifically credited with helping him understand “what was in store” for society as it became increasingly digitally mediated.

The lesson?

By actively designing-with/in the world on its own extra-epistemic terms, immanently and imminently, we may transform not only the world but, just as crucially, the degree to which we can actually know it.

Design Openings

Imagining an ISS that would work to make-public its ideas through design is speculatively all well and good. But now we get to the trickiest social and political question: what scope for some kind of agentic political control would exist in that brave new world? And to whom would it be attributed? What kind of exclusions might that create? And, moreover, how do we know what kinds of designs we should be introducing? Could we ever predict their effects? Is the entire proposition here not simply naïve but fundamentally dangerous? Do we really want, as a colleague once posed the question, to join the designerly arms race? One way of dealing with questions like these is simply to avoid posing them, implicitly or explicitly assuming that whatever answers emerge during the design process are the correct ones. Head in the sand. A variation on this theme is to embrace – without problematization – a universalised vision of design that actively forgets the unavoidably embedded politics of using decontextualized methodologies that work to naturalize further the continued (foundational) dominance of white, male, upper or middle-class, and heteronormative social science.¹²⁹ In this view, designers can be entrusted with finding solutions for any political challenge. ‘Global Designs’ are possible and desirable.¹³⁰ Importantly, this claim is not abstract but a practical-professional reality: “design thinking is being promoted in countless possible situations, fields, and professions. It assumes that design thinkers possess unique and universal problem-solving skills which can offer creative solutions in any discipline.”¹³¹ Designers naïvely imagined as modern heroes of Herculean dimensions.

Undeniably, some designers embrace this image of a global designer able to provide a solution to any problem. This includes not only entities like *Google* but also those advancing more actively political projects. The practical implications that Tony Fry draws from his otherwise compelling argument for understanding “design as politics” in order to achieve ‘sustainment’ (an adapted understanding of sustainability) is a case

¹²⁷ See the discussion to follow and Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*.

¹²⁸ Friedrich Kittler, ‘Technologies of Writing’, *New Literary History* 27, no. 4 (1996): 731.

¹²⁹ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

¹³⁰ Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton University Press, 2012).

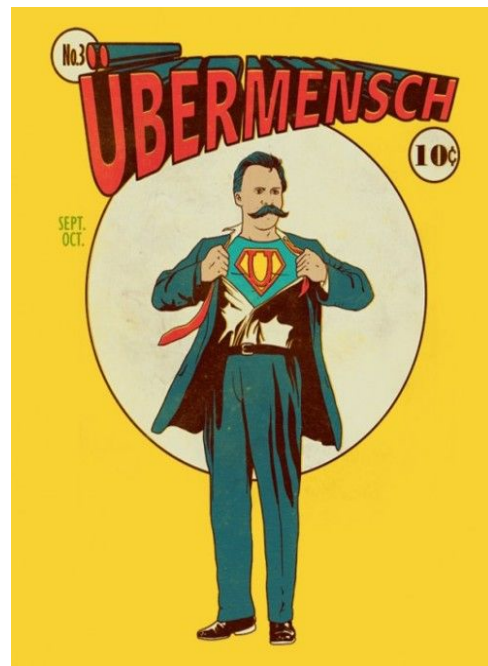
¹³¹ van Helvert, ‘Introduction: A History of Design for the Future’, 21.

in point. Fry thinks the designer could – no, *should* – play the role of the Nietzschean ‘superman.’¹³² He does us the favour of explaining what this would amount to in terms of actual political practice. According to Fry “making Sustainment sovereign” is necessary to get out of the paralysis resulting from pluralist democratic processes skewed by social, economic and symbolic inequalities that all militate against the pursuit of sustainment. In case this left any doubt, Fry further specifies that what is required is a “dictatorship of Sustainment” exercised through the “authority of a World Council of Sustainment.”¹³³

The pedigree and political power of global design projects like these take us full circle to the general critique of design *tout court*: as a universalising, modernist, rational-problem solving praxis. And the critique is clear and well-taken. What would a “dictatorship of sustainment” amount to for anyone who is not a member of the ‘World Council of Sustainment’ and for their own – perhaps contradictory – design ambitions? Would there be any way of contesting privilege and power in the frame of such global design schemas? If not, the potential of designing-with/in the world for political transformation would seem restricted,

to say the least. But, again, design is not a monolithic thing and such concerns are widely voiced by those seeking to contest the field’s hierarchies. These dissenting voices worry, expectedly, about the marginalization of alternative political projects and communities. But they worry equally or more about the ways in which such alternative political stakes are actively and productively integrated into innovative commercial initiatives, bolstering the very design politics they would like to contest: they worry about the co-option of design itself.

Indeed, and following the argument laid out above, the worry that these alternative voices express is that though the actual process of making, forming, and thinking-with the material-aesthetic world is a deeply radical and often politically transformative one, connected to far older, diverse, and sometimes liberatory practices, it has now itself been en-framed by its commercial, governmental, and political co-option. Even the most radical design ideas, such as those surrounding Mignolo’s *Manifesto for De-Colonial Design*, can (and have) been integrated in the very practices they purport to contest. Google hosts podcasts pondering the relevance of critical and speculative design approaches for its work.¹³⁴ These ideas are ‘mainstreamed’ into the policies of international organizations, NGOs, companies, and the teaching curricula and research agendas of the educational institutions catering for them, successfully commercializing even ideas critical of commercialization. The consequences are damning for designers *tout court*:



ScriptKitty *Fuck Yeah Superheroes*

¹³² Tony Fry, *Design as politics* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 171.

¹³³ Fry, *Design as politics*, 171–89.

¹³⁴ See <https://tinyurl.com/yxls3gcw>.

The prevalence of ‘design thinking’ makes designers think society is gaining more respect for design, but in reality, it has reduced design’s contribution... As design thinking becomes *de rigueur* in business and MBA programmes, design and designers become irrelevant.¹³⁵

Irrelevant in the sense of politically impotent: design as a “manifesto for change” being quickly converted into “design imperialism.”¹³⁶ This process of co-option is one that ISS has much to say about, and one which most explicit discussions of design within the field have focused on previously.¹³⁷ Indeed, in the face of these co-options and colonizing dynamics, the usual ISS response has been to advocate for greater reflexivity among those involved in the design process. Why? Because reflexivity is how scholars of ISS are trained to problematize the politics of their doings. It is how we handle the realization that embodied experiences and points of view are not universal, that one cannot directly share those of others, or even understand them, and that this has far reaching implications for not only our own doings, but also for their connections to politics and society.¹³⁸ Positionality and intersectionality matter. Reflexivity is an invitation to face their consequences and to acknowledge that all modes of doing, scholarly and practical, including abstract or conceptual work, are *in* and *of* the world and thus that our politics is inherently ‘dirty’ in the sense of being not only part and parcel of power relations but always and unavoidably complicit with them. There is no view from nowhere and no making in no-place. As such, reflexivity over positionality is an indispensable starting point: it prompts us to acknowledge and query the politics of our situated makings.

In response to these reflexive questions of positionality, some have sought to develop a radically situated form of design, in which “every community practices the design of itself.”¹³⁹ Termed an ‘autonomous’ design by Arturo Escobar, the intuition here is that the localization of design to situated social collectives might allow for the construction of new active forms that would better fit the everyday lives of the many worlds of the world. The ethos is linked to the indigenous *Zapatista* movement and its anarchist politics.¹⁴⁰ Autonomous design remains, however, a utopian idea. This is the case because it attempts to proceed from outside existing power structures. As Escobar himself writes, “the question remains” whether or not “it is possible to think about design under the conditions of repression and violence that often affect” the communities autonomous design promises to liberate.¹⁴¹ This reality takes us to the fundamental limitation of reflexivity: it is as situated and ‘dirty’ as any other practice. It necessarily takes place with/in our own contexts, mobilizing our knowledges, experiences, and sensemakings. There is no ‘pure’ territory outside the commercial-governmental matrix of dominant design today that could serve as a safe locus for developing an autonomous design, particularly given the complex intersectionalities that mark any discussion of positionality. As Escobar thus continues, the challenge is to somehow ‘localize’ design as sensitive to non-universal needs and politics but to do so through and in relation to a “successful structural coupling with... globalized environments.”¹⁴² Somehow, designing alternatives requires we move beyond specific positional contexts without abandoning them. Again, this is what Google is adept at. To return to Easterling, the ‘active forms’ contagious across world politics today are simultaneously sensitive to the

¹³⁵ Danah Abdulla, ‘*A Manifesto of Change or Design Imperialism? A Look at the Purpose of the Social Design Practice*’, 2014, 253, <https://bura.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/17959/1/FullText.pdf>.

¹³⁶ Abdulla, ‘*A Manifesto of Change or Design Imperialism? A Look at the Purpose of the Social Design Practice*’.

¹³⁷ Weber, ‘Designing Safe Citizens’; Cynthia Weber and Mark Lacy, ‘Securing by Design’, *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 3 (July 2011): 1021–43.

¹³⁸ Inanna Hamati-Ataya, ‘Reflectivity, Reflexivity, Reflexivism: IR’s “Reflexive Turn” — and Beyond’, *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 4 (2013): 669–94.

¹³⁹ Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 5.

¹⁴⁰ James C. Scott, *Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play* (Princeton University Press, 2012).

¹⁴¹ Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 167.

¹⁴² Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 188.

functional, affective, and practical needs of positioned individuals and groups whilst also being “embedded in space” and so transcendent of particular localities.¹⁴³ They are local and universal, without contradiction.

Put in less conceptual terms, the process of designing alternatives into world political structures requires ‘bringing in’ a (probably) shifting range of other people and materials that would always take us beyond our own context. Indeed, perhaps most fundamentally, the point of design is giving form to something that is *not yet* there: to reconfigure what is *not yet*. Design, recall, is about “the active production of life itself” rather than the reification of what exists. Therein, it is fundamentally about shifting contexts. Indeed, designers face ‘wicked problems’ as their work involves contexts “where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and

What is at stake in Decolonizing Design?

Just imagine:

“The Decolonizing Design Toolkit” (featuring Venn diagrams, bite-size lines of inspiration, and witty one liners, set in Champion and Bryant and poppy colors) provides a step-by-step method on how to decolonize design. Or: “Now you too can Decolonize Design in six weeks! Sign-up to our new class online.” Or: “Announcing a two-week summer school where designers can decolonize their designs. Location: an independent art college. Price: £2,000 without accommodation or travel.”

Danah Abdullah in (Schultz, et al., 2018, 89).

where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing” as Buchanan puts it.¹⁴⁴ In this emerging and prefigurative politics that spans many contexts, the reflexive exercise is of little help and may do more harm than good. It repeats, reinstates and possibly reinforces a specific situated point of view while preventing us from noticing, let alone understanding, its broader implications. It leaves us focused on this point of view; enclosed by it. Arguably, it also nurtures the illusion that if we were just reflexive enough, if we could just go a little further into mapping the full range of positionalities, we could mastermind the ‘thoroughly confusing’ ramifications of our doings. It reinforces the view that we might be able to reconcile the complexities, fractures, and contradictions of politics once and for all. In one sense, then, the idea of ‘reflexivity is no less reliant on the image of a cognitive ‘superman’ able to reconcile the contradictions of the world than universalizing design projects like Fry’s.

These concerns are – unsurprisingly – most clearly articulated in arenas where politics and praxis require *both* identifying (however complex and unstable) positionalities *and* making (partial) connections that extend far beyond, and so transform, those positionalities. Feminist theory, for instance, has always straddled this complex boundary. As Elizabeth Grosz thus puts one alternative (to typical renderings of reflexivity):

Instead of a politics of recognition, in which subjected groups and minorities strive for a validated and affirmed place in public life, feminist politics should... now consider the affirmation of a politics of imperceptibility, leaving its traces and effects everywhere but never being able to be identified with a person, group, or organization.¹⁴⁵

In this argument, Grosz insists that while it “may be a useful fiction to imagine that we as subjects are masters or agents of these very forces that constitute us as subjects, [... it is] misleading.”¹⁴⁶ Instead, she proposes her politics of imperceptibility. Such a politics would have the virtue of not fixing the subject but instead supporting “the struggle to render more mobile, fluid and transformable the means by which the

¹⁴³ Easterling, ‘The Action Is the Form’.

¹⁴⁴ Buchanan, ‘Wicked Problems in Design Thinking’, 16.

¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, ‘A Politics of Imperceptibility: A Response to “Anti-Racism, Multiculturalism and the Ethics of Identification”’, *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 19 August 2016, 471.

¹⁴⁶ Grosz, ‘A Politics of Imperceptibility’, 470–71.

female subject is produced and represented.”¹⁴⁷ Combined – we think – with the ethos of design, this is politics that without ever denying the place of positionality, strives to prefiguratively move beyond it. It represents the possibility of a politics based on finding things *in common* that can be manifested for, whether on the streets, in our debates, through our bodies, or through the designs we might create. With Anna Tsing, the politics we are getting at here involves cultivating the ‘frictions’ that come from collaborative encounters, frictions that sensitize us to the ‘fertile unruly edges’ of shifting ‘webs of interdependence’ and the political possibilities they open as they generate failures, frictions, fissures — unruly edges — in otherwise settled orders.¹⁴⁸ Taking these frictions more seriously makes it possible to “ask about universals [our own and those of others] not as truths or lies but as sticky engagements.”¹⁴⁹ This, of course, is precisely where the power of Google lies: it asks and composes ‘universals’ that somehow unite us around, and encourage our participation in, its designs, by imagining ‘sticky’ infrastructures’ that work to make global frictions productive, at least vis-à-vis its own political and economic goals. Taken beyond Google, understanding design in these terms would be about actively asking how such “sticky engagements” emerge, operate *and* fall part. Frictions actively nurture the open and transformative politics that imperceptibility makes room for.

Getting to such a re-positioned understanding of the politics of design is complex. But there are key precedents. Donna Haraway’s “relentlessly collaborationist” ethos to inquiry is focused precisely around cultivating such a politics.¹⁵⁰ Her approach turns the frictions that come from ‘making odd-kin’ (with cyborgs in SciFi, onco-mice in the labs, with dogs in the contact zone etc.) into both a heuristic device and a strategy for exploring the scope for political agency. Indeed, Haraway’s term odd-kin fruitfully conveys that for such collaborations to fill this productive role requires both accepting the fundamentally different (odd) and nonetheless treating it as a close relative (kin). It requires resisting the temptation of glossing over these figures or erasing them by

A Two-Sided Monologue on the Future of Design (extract)

SCEPTIC: Who is going to believe another design book ending with a call for ‘change’?

ACTIVIST: This is not a call for change. This is a call for continuity. Let’s continue to be utopian... and revolutionary... and uncompromising... and perfect a socialist experiment... and be techno-optimists... and Do-It-Yourselfers like the hippies... and romanticize craftsmanship. We have to become Anti-Designers as well as humanitarian ones. Let’s take the moral high ground, be spectacularly modest, become politically correct, think and talk about obsolescence, about queer theory, about vernacular design, the next industrial revolution, about privilege and emancipation. Pick one, or try them all. Together, they spell progress, which is the only way forward.

Marjanna van Helvert (2016, 256)

¹⁴⁷ Grosz, ‘A Politics of Imperceptibility’, 459.

¹⁴⁸ Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁴⁹ Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, 6.

¹⁵⁰ Nicholas Gane, ‘When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done?: Interview with Donna Haraway’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 7–8 (1 December 2006): 156.

subsuming them into our own perspectives. It assumes epistemic “good faith and bad will.” Good faith in the knowledge of the odd-kin and bad will in relation to the temptation to impose the own.¹⁵¹ Now, of course, it may be easier to place our trust in the knowledge of dogs (as Haraway), Yolngu teachers (as Verran), or subterranean deities of “places that seem exotic to us” than the engineers we usually walk out on, or – even worse – those working away at the CIA.¹⁵² They are, as it were, too close to us for us to believe that they have knowledge about a world that is different from ours, and that merits serious attention. This is true also for the technological object which, despite our preoccupations with the ways in which it appears to risk eclipsing human agency, is something whose emergence is inextricably bound up with human praxis.¹⁵³ Again, the technological is too close to us and our own failings. But all these objects with which we seek to avoid engagement often, and perhaps increasingly, embody the power that we – in our dreams, politics, and theories – might wish to re-route elsewhere. If we are seeking to mobilize design praxis towards alternative political projects, they thus cannot be ignored or condemned. They must be actively co-opted just as they, today, are actively co-opting us all.

But making affirmative pledges and generously extending curiosity to the full gamut of world political actants (including the powerful or the ‘evil’) is profoundly destabilizing. Particularly so for critical scholarship that is accustomed to acting from the moral and ethical high grounds.¹⁵⁴ Our argument indeed is that it may be politically essential to climb down from these high grounds and acknowledge that true political work is often (mostly) taking place with/in contexts imbued with power and evil (*viz. Sci-hub*) and that we therefore need to trust the powerful enough to work with and challenge them. “Trust is transformative.”¹⁵⁵ But it demands a radical “disidentification” with our self-image and the will to work with the radically different.¹⁵⁶ Across design, such demands are less surprising, controversial or challenging. Design has a long tradition of cultivating ‘co-creativity’ across disciplines, genres and technologies by “socially engage[ing] objects and environments.”¹⁵⁷ Many designers not only accept but embrace and thrive on the multiple, contradictory, and politically decentred. The stylized activist in van Helvert’s two-sided monologue about the future of design states such as position in unambiguous terms (see above).¹⁵⁸

For ISS, it will be less straightforward. We are prone to “bring... [our] own complex expertise to the table but take away little that is new” and therefore see collaborative “discussions run aground because terms, categories, and concerns are perceived as [or indeed actually are] incommensurable across disciplinary paradigms.”¹⁵⁹ Even when we aspire to work across radical difference, our scientific commitments militate against this and often for good reasons. Nonetheless, as Stengers points out regarding scientific responsibility vis-à-vis our contemporary ecological crisis:

We cannot deny that we ‘know’ something is coming with a rather awful speed that will put into question the ways of life of most inhabitants of this earth—while we also know that this knowledge situates us in our own temporality, which should not engulf other peoples.... We cannot dream—let alone think—this

¹⁵¹ Helen Verran, ‘The Politics of Working Cosmologies Together While Keeping Them Separate’, in *A World of Many Worlds*, ed. Marisol Cadena and Mario Blaser (Duke University Press, 2018), 14.

¹⁵² Vinck, *Everyday Engineering*, 209.

¹⁵³ Hansen, *Embodying Technesis: Technology Beyond Writing*; Mark Hansen, “‘Not Thus, after All, Would Life Be Given’: Technesis, Technology, and the Parody of Romantic Poetics in *Frankenstein*”, *Studies in Romanticism* 36, no. 4 (1997): 575–609.

¹⁵⁴ Austin, Bellanova, and Kaufmann, ‘Doing and Mediating Critique’.

¹⁵⁵ Isabelle Stengers, ‘The Challenge of Ontological Politics’, in *A World of Many Worlds*, ed. Marisol Cadena and Mario Blaser (Duke University Press, 2018), 106.

¹⁵⁶ Austin, ‘A Parasitic Critique for International Relations’.

¹⁵⁷ Tamie Glass, *Pompt. Socially Engaging Objects and Environments* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2018), 11.

¹⁵⁸ van Helvert, ‘A Two-Sided Monologue on the Future of Design’.

¹⁵⁹ Beatriz da Costa and Kavita Philip, ‘Introduction’, in *Tactical Biopolitics: Art, Activism, and Technoscience*, ed. Beatriz Da Costa and Kavita Philip (MIT press, 2010), xx.

tension away with sophisticated arguments about cosmopolitics or ontological politics. We have to accept and think with this perplexing situation.¹⁶⁰

Analogously, ISS cannot deny that it knows some ‘rather awful’ things about violent, gendered, colonial, racial and commercial processes. Just as for environmental scientists, we cannot ‘dream away’ the resulting ‘tensions’ but have to ‘think with the perplexing situation’. We have to find ways to think-with, collaborate-with, and design-with the world. And, crucially, there are many possible designerly-allies with whom to collaborate in these tasks. Designers of all (present) kinds are far from unaware – as we’ve said – of the impurity of their positionality. They also worry actively about it. However, given the unusual social status of their professional field, designers largely remain in “bondage to service.”¹⁶¹ Put simply: there is (almost) always a ‘client’ for the designer, most usually a corporation, a state, or some other similar conglomeration. They’re the ones who front the money and work to take functionally-differentiated activities and functionally-associate them towards particular social goals: the conservative extension, in most cases, of “official values.”¹⁶² This problem – moreover – is worsening. There are growing concerns that the pool of designers “willing and able to devote time to social and environmental projects” is dwindling given corporate (and technologist) co-option of not simply their concepts but also the human figures of designers themselves.¹⁶³ Today, most designers work *for* corporations or governments, even if they’d rather not. However, and in spite of that, it is not unremarkable that the theoretical and conceptual work of designers is increasingly converging around concerns core to ISS. To return to Easterling and quote her now in full:

I have long been looking at spatial products, repeatable formulas that are contagious around the world, and wondering what kind of form we would have to design to manipulate them. Since we are people who know about space, there is a chance that we know how to alter those structures of power – maybe as well as those who know only about econometrics or law... powerful kinds of form are embedded in space, [but why] don’t [we] have a robust artistic approach to making forms to deal with that power. We know how to make form as a shape or outline, but we are under-rehearsed in making forms that unfold over time and larger territories.¹⁶⁴

Perhaps because of their growing cooption into globalized governmental and commercial politics, designers like Easterling are increasingly preoccupied with how to counter-act the forces they are complicit with. As such, designers are paying increasing attention to specifically international issues, including climate change¹⁶⁵, challenges facing the global south¹⁶⁶, wealth inequality¹⁶⁷, international public policy¹⁶⁸, and human rights.¹⁶⁹ In short, designers *of all kinds* are now no longer simply seeking to “build a better-looking

¹⁶⁰ Stengers, ‘The Challenge of Ontological Politics’, 97.

¹⁶¹ Tony Fry, ‘Design, a Philosophy of Liberation and Ten Considerations’, *Strategic Design Research Journal* 11, no. 2 (2018): 176.

¹⁶² Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Design Noir: The Secret Life of Electronic Objects* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2001), 6.

¹⁶³ John Mathers, ‘DESIGN INTERVENTION’, *R&A Journal* 161, no. 5561 (2015): 29; Robert Fabricant, ‘The Rapidly Disappearing Business of Design’, *Wired*, 29 December 2014, <https://www.wired.com/2014/12/disappearing-business-of-design/>.

¹⁶⁴ Keller Easterling, ‘Empowering Design – Interview with Keller Easterling’, Volume Project, 2018, <http://volumeproject.org/empowering-design/>.

¹⁶⁵ Rolando Vazquez, ‘Precedence, Earth and the Anthropocene: Decolonizing Design’, *Design Philosophy Papers* 15, no. 1 (2 January 2017): 77–91; Sidney Dekker, Peter Hancock, and Peter Wilkin, ‘Ergonomics and Sustainability: Towards an Embrace of Complexity and Emergence’, *Ergonomics* 56, no. 3 (2013): 357–64; Roger Haslam and Patrick Waterson, ‘Ergonomics and Sustainability’, *Ergonomics* 56, no. 3 (1 March 2013): 343–47.

¹⁶⁶ Tony Fry, ‘Design for/by “The Global South”’, *Design Philosophy Papers* 15, no. 1 (2 January 2017): 3–37; Samer Akkash, ‘Design and the Question of Eurocentricity’, *Design Philosophy Papers* 1, no. 6 (2003): 321–26.

¹⁶⁷ L. B. de Guimaraes and M. M. Soares, ‘A Future with Less of a Gap between Rich and Poor’, *Ergonomics* 51, no. 1 (2008): 59–64.

¹⁶⁸ Derek B. Miller and Lisa Rudnick, ‘Trying It on for Size: Design and International Public Policy’, *Design Issues* 27, no. 2 (2011): 6–16; Mark Considine, ‘Thinking Outside the Box? Applying Design Theory to Public Policy’, *Politics & Policy* 40, no. 4 (2012): 704–24.

¹⁶⁹ Richard Buchanan, ‘Human Dignity and Human Rights: Thoughts on the Principles of Human-Centered Design’, *Design Issues* 17, no. 3 (2001).

mousetrap” but to contribute towards making better worlds.¹⁷⁰ But designers need allies to fully realize that ambition and ISS may be especially well situated to serving that role given, indeed, the emergent elective affinities between the conceptual, empirical, and political focus of the two fields. This is thus a moment of opportunity to cultivate novel and productive frictions between design and ISS, to push us towards developing new ways of thinking-with/in and designing-with/in the world. To repeat, this task will be an uncomfortable one. We know full well that expanding the reach of our praxis through this collaborationist ethos will mean engaging with persons, animals, objects, technologies, affects, aesthetics, and more that are – at their base – “the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism.”¹⁷¹ This will worry, haunt, and even seem to paralyze us. But, in the end, “illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential.”¹⁷²

Design and ISS

The proposition that we should begin designing-with/in world politics, however abstractly possible, must now be made ‘operational.’ In short, we must turn back to the question of “how-to-bring-it-about-future-from-a-present-state-of-affairs-as-an-actual-point-of-departure.” We reach the issue of pragmatism and the task of playing the “long game of history.” Without addressing this issue our proposition could easily be read as a purely abstract meditation of reduced relevance for anything ISS scholars are doing, or could possibly be doing. We therefore wish to conclude by establishing how, a little more precisely, designing-with/in world politics could become possible for ISS. Doing so underscores both that developing an International Political Design does indeed require and presuppose a far-reaching rethinking of academic praxis but also – and very importantly – that such a rethinking has been *de facto* ongoing for quite some time already. While developing an International Political Design more centrally within ISS may thus indeed be a delicate and demanding task, it is therefore – we want to say – certainly far from being an impossible one.

At the most basic, locating design more centrally in ISS will involve actively reshaping its concrete, embodied, and quotidian praxis. Most obviously, as we have stressed, this means developing new modes of ‘making’ as core to ISS, modes that go beyond alphabetical language. We want to see an ISS engaging in acts of making that integrate a larger variety of material, aesthetic, and other forces – metals, pigments, bodies, stones, strings of code, paints, batteries, algorithms. This task of ‘making international things’ – as we might term it – demands that ISS shift away from a privileging of pure, basic, or fundamental analytical social science (inquiry, explanation, prediction), which is typically then ‘reported on’ linguistically, and instead embrace the tools of both applied sciences and the arts (with, notably, the distinction between the two not being as sharp as many think¹⁷³). These are fields that actively materially-aesthetically ‘construct’ particular idea(l)s in ways that 1) themselves produce new social scientific knowledge and, 2) more effectively normatively and politically engage with the state of contemporary world politics in many different ways.

¹⁷⁰ Weber, ‘Designing Safe Citizens’, 127.

¹⁷¹ Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century’.

¹⁷² Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century’.

¹⁷³ See, inter alia, Eric Schatzberg, ‘From Art to Applied Science’, *Isis* 103, no. 3 (2012): 555–63; Vesilind Aarne, ‘Engineering As Applied Social Science’, *Journal of Professional Issues in Engineering Education and Practice* 127, no. 4 (1 October 2001): 184–88; M. Bunge, ‘Technology as Applied Science’, in *Contributions to a Philosophy of Technology: Studies in the Structure of Thinking in the Technological Sciences*, ed. Friedrich Rapp, Theory and Decision Library (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1974), 19–39; Donald A. Schön, ‘Toward a Marriage of Artistry & Applied Science in the Architectural Design Studio’, *Journal of Architectural Education* (1984-) 41, no. 4 (1988): 4–10.

Naturally, we are not suggesting that achieving this requires *every* scholar of ISS be trained both as a social scientist and an architect, engineer, or artist. Developing an International Political Design would require – at some point – that individuals with expertise in those areas become considered, indeed, fully-fledged scholars of ISS. Nonetheless, more immediately central to our argument, recognizing that few of us possess the requisite skills necessary to write algorithms or carry out similar tasks, is the prospect of cultivating active trans- or even anti-disciplinary collaborations with those who can. What we envisage is scholars of ISS becoming “bricoleurs of work” possessing a range of “portable rituals” that they can bring from one context to the next.¹⁷⁴ This is – in fact – the standard position of the designer: “despite the fact that technology involves many people, only a few are actually technicians.”¹⁷⁵ Instead, most are designers, figures who often lack ‘technical’ expertise but work instead to bring together different technical skills, aesthetic forms, social understandings, and beyond. A figure whose skill lies in creating modes of partial connection: active forms.

Moreover, it’s not without irony that one of the foundational figures of design theory – Herbert Simon – was originally trained as a political scientist. Simon once wrote that “historically and traditionally, it has been the task of the scientific disciplines to teach about natural things: how they are and how they work. It has been the task of engineering schools to teach about artificial things: how to make artifacts that have desired properties and how to design.”¹⁷⁶ Simon was concerned about this divide, stressing that “genuine design problems” were fundamentally political and exceeded the realm of technical engineering: “design... is the core of all professional training: it is the principal mark that distinguishes the professions from the sciences.”¹⁷⁷ Simon’s fear was that most fields, including business, engineering, law, medicine, education, etc., were at that time *all* becoming too concerned with ‘naturalistic’ scientific preoccupations rather than “genuine design problems.”¹⁷⁸ The problem here was not that older forms of ‘vocational’ training in particular applied fields (including political science) were better *per se*. Those older models lacked what he understood as a certain scientific rigor. However, turning in the opposite direction and abdicating any attempt to work to (re)design social worlds was similarly nonsensical in his view. Simon’s solution rested on the idea of developing what he called a ‘science of the artificial’ or what would later be termed a design science: a science of materiality, affect, aesthetics, and prefigurative change. Such a science would seek to understand how we might implement socio-material changes in *both* conceptual and practical terms.

Presciently, Simon was writing in 1969, he went on to suggest that such a science of design – “a body of intellectually tough, analytic, partly formalizable, partly empirical, teachable doctrine” about how to change worlds – was emerging in the fields of computer science and systems engineering.¹⁷⁹ Those are, indeed, precisely the fields largely responsible for the most dramatically visible of social changes today, those who have ensured that almost every object inhabiting our world today has been shaped by one designer or another, and who are increasingly coming to directly influence the course of world politics, as we have by now described at length. Despite his training in a field intimately concerned with the international, however, Simon’s work has had very little influence within ISS. But it is precisely the development of a kind of design science that sits at the intersection of purely analytical (or ‘basic’) science and purely practical (or ‘applied’) science that is currently still missing from the field, we have been arguing. Without the development of such

¹⁷⁴ Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*, 204–14.

Richard Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (Yale University Press, 2012), 204–14.

¹⁷⁵ Vinck, *Everyday Engineering*, 2.

¹⁷⁶ Herbert A. Simon, *The Sciences of the Artificial* (MIT Press, 1996), 67.

¹⁷⁷ Simon, *The Sciences of the Artificial*, 67.

¹⁷⁸ Simon, *The Sciences of the Artificial*, 67–68.

¹⁷⁹ Simon, *The Sciences of the Artificial*, 112.

a field, world politics will increasingly come to be governed by designers from, indeed, computer science, systems engineering, and cognate fields, who are characteristically accepting of existing political doctrines rather than open to the possibility of change, aware of existing pathologies, and critical of solutionism. Or – perhaps more likely – governed by commercial designers working away at Google or Horizon State, figures who work to connect forms of political governance ever more closely to the markets they are operating in.

Although himself a partisan for a deeply rational understanding of the social, the ethos that Simon describes, of creating a field that links together basic social scientific knowledge and technical skills and knowledge, bringing them into symbiosis, is at the core of the alternative we propose; that is to designing-with/in world politics. But getting there requires sensibilizing ISS towards Haraway’s ‘relentlessly collaborationist’ ethos in practical and pragmatic terms. This is not something that will be straightforward. For while the idea of ‘talking to others’ is always seen as a good thing, many nonetheless believe that a division of labour must be maintained in which ISS stands outside design praxis proper to provide a kind of ‘check and balance’ over that praxis. Quite often, when specifically directed at questions of design, this view is focused on a need to introduce design or applied sciences to an understanding of ethics, given a presumed “stymied adequate reflection on their activities.”¹⁸⁰ An assumption still exists that the role of “human scientists” is principally to “reflect on the relationship between what is being made and the kind of ethical reflection appropriate to such knowing and making.”¹⁸¹ Again, the injunction is reflexivity. This is true even where social scientists engage in direct contact with designers, technologists, and natural scientists. Recognizing the “problems with approaches in which humanists stand aloof from technological projects and deliver judgements on them from an exterior perspective,” an increasing number of scholars advocate for a kind of ‘embedding’ of social scientists within different applied scientific laboratories.¹⁸² As Hayles writes, the hope here is that social scientists will ‘find their way’ into these laboratories, attend “the weekly lab meetings,” ask “questions,” engage “in discussions” and perhaps even suggest “readings for the group to consider.”¹⁸³

While clearly preferable to a position of detached judgement of work already done, the kind of collaboration Hayles describes does not fundamentally change the praxis of social science. Designing-with/in world politics refers to something more than setting up a reading group with engineers. Despite *engaging* ‘within’ different fields, the core of social science remains, from this perspective, *outside*: somewhere else, somewhere more appropriate to “adequate reflection” divorced from the immanent and imminent nature of making. This separation maintains, then, a strong division of labour. Nonetheless, these kinds of collaborations are important, and widely advocated for across many fields, not only those involving technological projects in labs. They are also embraced by many ISS scholars, as well as (and perhaps more significantly) by the many funding agencies, research councils and university administrations who encourage and sometimes even generously fund ‘interdisciplinarity.’ The result has been a gradual proliferation of transdisciplinary research platforms, educational programs, and projects that is nothing short of a ‘transversal exuberance’.¹⁸⁴ Advocating change in this direction is therefore hardly a solitary or revolutionary move, at least at first sight.

This said, designing with/in the world requires rather more far reaching changes. For example, throughout we have insisted that working with design, involves valuing and working with our affective sensibilities

¹⁸⁰ Paul Rabinow and Anthony Stavrianakis, *Demands of the Day: On the Logic of Anthropological Inquiry* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 9.

¹⁸¹ Rabinow and Stavrianakis, *Demands of the Day: On the Logic of Anthropological Inquiry*, 3.

¹⁸² Hayles, *Unthought*, 131.

¹⁸³ Hayles, *Unthought*, 131.

¹⁸⁴ Braidotti, ‘A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities’, 8. Rosi Braidotti, ‘A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 6 (1 November 2019): 8.

beyond the alphabetical and the epistemic. To truly integrate that insight into our praxis requires we do not take the places where things are made (whether labs, building sites, computer screens, court rooms, or otherwise) as objects of study with which we ‘engage’ but actively blur the distinction between these sites and ourselves. We need to allow them to affectively change also our own understanding of the world. We need to be far more open. This is a rather more exacting task. It requires a rethinking and, more importantly, radical rearranging the vast network of epistemic furniture (meant quite literally) underlying the production of any type of knowledge to make space for such sensibilities. Involved is a re-furnishing not only of our professional spaces but of their connection to the way we live our lives, to all the practices and experiences that come to materially, socially, affectively, aesthetically, etc., surround us, and make us think something. This may be more easily said than done. While the mainstreaming of ‘visual literacy’ in ISS is encouraging, it leaves the hegemony of visibility untouched.¹⁸⁵ To move beyond it would require that we begin dealing with the “cultural anaesthesia” that has created a “vast secret museum of historical and sensory absence.”¹⁸⁶

Here, perhaps, ISS could draw inspiration from Charles Gaines’ conceptual art installation that combines political manifestos (from Martin Luther King, James Baldwin, and the Black Panthers) with musical scores in a “completely arbitrary manner” to explore the production of “affects” and “the emotional aspect” of the political issues he engages. Gaines’ work involves, put differently, “a systematic transliteration of revolutionary manifestos into musical notation.” The goal of the work is not only to take “social justice and politics on as its subject” but also to critique “our understanding of the relationship of the practice of art and politics.”¹⁸⁷ As the installation is described:

By converting these powerful and poignant texts into music, Gaines unites the rational, mathematical, and lyrical structures of music with the irrationality of violence, racial tensions, and social injustice. The predetermined process developed by Gaines widens the distance between concepts and their interpretation, effectively removing the artist’s subjectivity while empowering the viewer’s. The combination of the elegiac music with the stirring words of the scrolling manifestos creates an unexpected conflict for the viewer; it is within this dissonance that the indelible truths of Gaines’s work are revealed.¹⁸⁸

And, in Gaines’ own words:

My work is about combining things, or making relationships between things that are completely unrelated. In this case, the combination, of course, is the political manifestos and the music that is produced by them... We’re used to believing that the power that we feel in reading or experiencing these political issues is implicit in the issues themselves, and when I apply my systems and produce the affect from another source, what one realizes is that there are other properties that produce the emotional aspect of the content that really have little to do with the content itself.¹⁸⁹

This embrace of political dissonance that, nonetheless, cannot be separated from a certain universal truth, as well as the way the work empowers the viewer, rather than the artist, reflects the vision of design we have laid out. It rests on “combining things” and “making relationships between” the seemingly unrelated.¹⁹⁰ Following this, designing-with/in world politics requires ISS abandon the pretence of isolated scholarly wisdom, giving-up the historical privilege endowed on social sciences, and instead play with affect, materiality, and aesthetics in ways that tease out alternative political futures from the complexities of (world) politics without subsuming them into fixed doctrines. Indeterminacy, again, is central to design. However,

¹⁸⁵ Roland Bleiker, *Visual Global Politics*: Routledge, 2018.

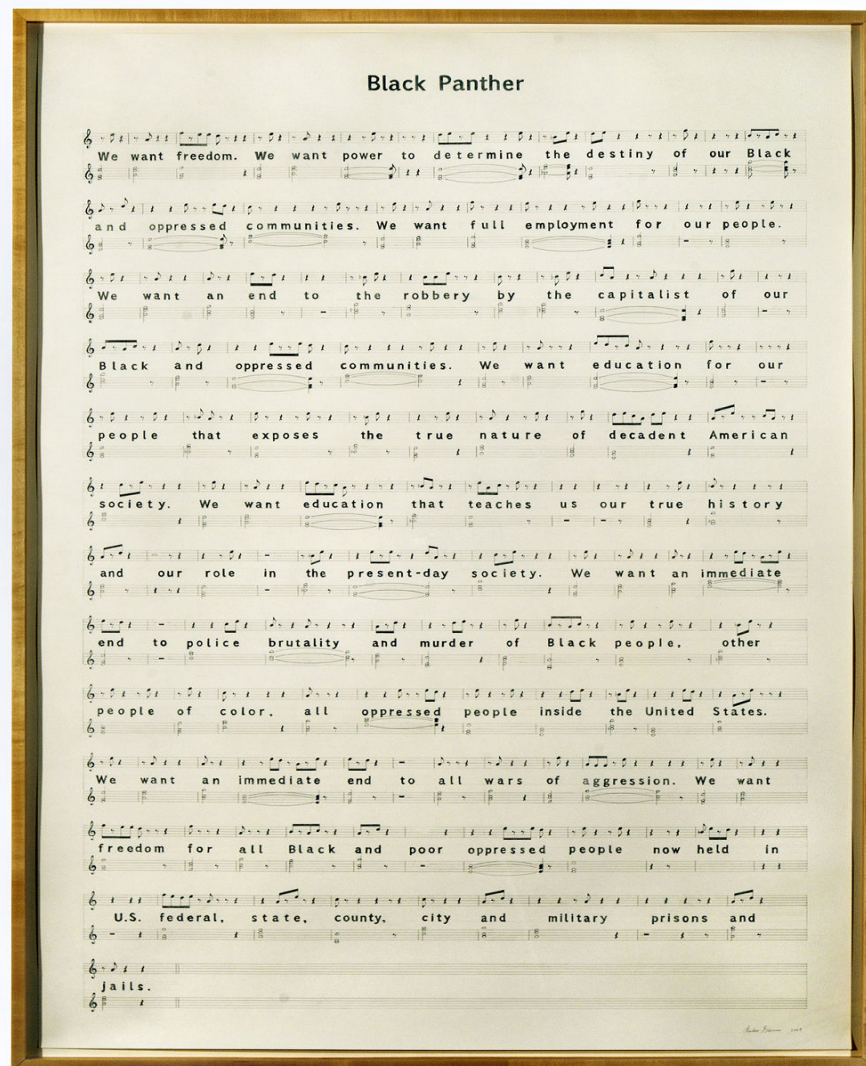
¹⁸⁶ Allen Feldman, ‘On Cultural Anesthesia: From Desert Storm to Rodney King’, *American Ethnologist* 21, no. 2 (1994): 404–18.

¹⁸⁷ See <https://tinyurl.com/vfqwj7k>.

¹⁸⁸ See <https://tinyurl.com/vfqwj7k>.

¹⁸⁹ See <https://tinyurl.com/y4e768je>.

¹⁹⁰ Austin, ‘A Parasitic Critique for International Relations’.



Charles Gaines, *Manifestos* (2013). For the full performance, see <https://tinyurl.com/y4pn32h6>.

as Howes reminds us: “it is not easy to cultivate such cross sensory awareness, because one of the defining characteristics of modernity is the cultural separation of the senses into self-contained fields” and a proclivity “to associate the senses and sensuality with only certain social domains, most notably aesthetics and sexuality.”¹⁹¹ Revisiting such foundational cultural assumptions, which also deeply permeate ISS scholarship, will obviously be no minor feat. But it will be crucial step in moving to designing-with/in world politics.

Intimately related to this focus on the synaesthetic and affective is our focus on design-as-making. Design pushes affect into the world materially, functionally, and autonomously (i.e. knowing that once something is made and ‘let loose’ our ability to control it collapses). The largest obstacle in moving ISS towards such an embrace of making relates to this last point: its indeterminacy and uncertainty. If we did actually go about setting up an algorithm to help heavily patrolled communities predict police raids, we would have to accept that the algorithm might fail, might make things worse, might implicate us further into the politics we seek

¹⁹¹ David Howes, *Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); Walter D. Mignolo, “Aesthetics decolonial” *CALLE 14: revista de investigación en el campo del arte*, vol. 4, 2010.

to contest. It would be a gamble. As Isabelle Stengers puts it, this process demands that we “*cast our lot* for some ways of living and dying and not others.”¹⁹² Making is a leap of faith. And this includes the very process through which making proceeds. As Karin Barber writes, “improvisation and the art of making things stick cannot be separated: we find them everywhere fused and intertwined.”¹⁹³ Indeed, ‘making things’ involves in her terms making things that ‘stick’ in the sense of “producing forms that will endure” by existing as objects that extend beyond the mind of the individual or group who help create them.¹⁹⁴ Achieving this requires – to return to our earlier discussion – that we inject ourselves immanently to the multiplicity of the world such that we improvise *with* its limits, rather than having a preordained vision of what should/could/must be made. We must be open to being changed by the frictions and flows of making. We may even have to accept that the improvising subject “is the *effect* rather than the *source* of the improvisation.”¹⁹⁵

But this is not something ISS is easily attuned to. Indeed, the centrality of improvisation to making is often missed due to “a tendency, evident in much of the literature on art and material culture, to read creativity ‘backwards,’ starting from an outcome in the form of a novel object and tracing it, through a sequence of antecedent conditions, to an unprecedented idea in the mind of an agent.”¹⁹⁶ This oversight allows ISS both to 1) criticize those who do engage in making for not having been adequately reflexive enough about their task in the first place (ironically reinforcing a hylomorphic view of making), and 2) rest easy vis-à-vis its own straightjacketing of the possibility and significance of introducing greater improvisation and creativity to ISS itself. Indeed, as most (perhaps all) academic fields, ISS remains preoccupied with discipline. With ‘applying’ and revisiting ‘frameworks’ in a ‘rigorous’ (rigid) manner. This standard conception of scientific work — also in ISS of the more critical and non-traditional kind — leaves little room for posing new questions and reaching out beyond our own turf, let alone for improvisation and creativity.¹⁹⁷ This kind of methodism, in short, must be abandoned in the active task of making, something that – notably – occurs across many natural sciences, including many technical fields, such as information system development.¹⁹⁸ Abandoning it also in academia may be a challenge. Nonetheless, there are allies here, as we have stressed throughout.

Relatedly, we have insisted throughout that design is prefigurative. The act of successfully making an object requires the maker situate herself not only immanently but also imminently to the object under construction, its capacities, and the environment it will be thrown-into. Making requires a kind of ‘futurist’ sensibility. To produce an object always involves encountering matter “in movement, in flux, in variation” such that “this matter-flow can only be followed” however much we might wish our pre-defined plans would provide some certainty.¹⁹⁹ As we argued above, collaborating and cultivating the frictions of those collaborations could help us both to imagine the *what* of intervening into an underdefined future and help us in the task of constantly adjusting, adapting, and re-transforming those whats in ways that prevent nascent ideas becoming boulders that might block the openings and political potential of designs. However, developing ‘futurist sensibilities’ demands a further radical distancing from scientism and methodism alike, as well as – more

¹⁹² Isabelle Stengers, ‘Gaia, the Urgency to Think (and Feel)’, *Os Mil Nomes de Gaia*, 2014, 8.

¹⁹³ Barber, ‘Improvisation and the Art of Making Things Stick’, 25.

¹⁹⁴ Barber, ‘Improvisation and the Art of Making Things Stick’, 25.

¹⁹⁵ Davide Spati, ‘Improvvideo. Etica e Estetica Dell’improvvisazione Coreutic’, *Aisthesis. Pratiche, Linguaggi E Saperi Dell’estetico* 10, no. 2 (n.d.): 144.

¹⁹⁶ Ingold, *Being Alive*, 215.

¹⁹⁷ Anna Leander, ‘Composing Collaborationist Collages about Commercial Security’, *Political Anthropological Research on International Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2020): 73–109.

¹⁹⁸ Lucas D. Introna and Edgar A. Whitley, ‘Against Method-ism’, *Information Technology & People* 10, no. 1 (1997): 31–45.

¹⁹⁹ Ingold, ‘The Textility of Making’, 94.

broadly – established conceptions of what the ‘ends’ of ISS are. Rather than privileging ‘analysis’ of any kind, designing-with/in world politics demands that ISS become better attuned to working with scenarios, speculation, and the creation of possibilities.²⁰⁰ This in turn requires devaluing values such as linearity, consistency, precision, accuracy, and generality, and instead making space for messiness, tensions, paradoxes, contradictions, radical difference and playfulness, as contemporary corporate management indeed does.²⁰¹ It requires that we become intensely speculative about the possibilities of the world. In this, designing-with/in world politics requires we cultivate a more hopeful outlook on the world because:

Only thinking directed towards changing the world and informing the desire to change it does not confront the future (the unclosed space for new development in front of us) as embarrassment and the past as spell... only knowledge as conscious theory-practice confronts Becoming and what can be decided within it, conversely, contemplative knowledge can only refer by definition to What Has Become.²⁰²

Put differently, designing-with/in world politics demands a “virtual politics, a politics of the not-yet” and so not “a politics we can choreograph but politics in the making.”²⁰³ While such future-oriented ambitions have previously had a role in ISS, and associated professions, they remain very controversial and so difficult to anchor and generalize across the field. Herman Kahn’s reliance on intuition, developed through gaming and simulations developed to formulate U.S. thermo-nuclear strategy, is a case in point, on both accounts. Durably instituting and accepting the place of uncertain knowledge in academia is exceedingly difficult, particularly when those promoting it do not conceal their anxiety regarding the validity of their findings, defending it as preferable only to available alternatives.²⁰⁴ But how could speculative and prefigurative knowledge geared to the development of futurist sensibilities ever lay claim to certainty? How could it offer precise methodological guidelines to the improvisation and creativity located at its core²⁰⁵? Kahn never solved this conundrum. And, indeed, it is bound to haunt all who want to design-with/in the world.

Nonetheless, ISS has changed considerably since Kahn’s time. As the references throughout this text indicate, there is no shortage of allies for ISS scholars who wish to make designing with/in the world more central to the academic world. However, at the mundane and practical level, the widespread move towards professionalization and the managerial governing of the university is a major hindrance. Methodological standardization has become key to the assessment of research generally and especially in the competition for competitive funding. ISS is increasingly structured through the standardized (yes) *design* of courses, educational programs, application forms, publishing practices, research evaluation criteria, and so on. We all – as students – sit through research *design* courses, which indoctrinate particular understandings of what, and what is not, a legitimate part of social science. Many of us have taught such courses with the ambition of doing things differently, invariably facing colleagues and students griping about deviations from (their own version of) the standards of the discipline. Analogously, what we can publish is marked by particular standards. To methodologically justify the work undertaken and provide recipe-like guidance for anyone wishing to ‘replicate’ the research is one. Writing authoritatively is another. “The main objective of an

²⁰⁰ See, for example, Erik F. Øverland and Iver B. Neumann, ‘International Relations and Policy Planning: The Method of Perspectivist Scenario Building’, *International Studies Perspectives* 5, no. 3 (2004): 258–77; Philip E. Tetlock, Richard Ned Lebow, and Geoffrey Parker, *Unmaking the West: What-If Scenarios That Rewrite World History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

²⁰¹ Åkerström Andersen and Niels, *Power at Play: The Relationships Between Play, Work and Governance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

²⁰² Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 8.

²⁰³ Erin Manning, *Relationcapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (MIT Press, 2009), 27.

²⁰⁴ Sharon Ghamari-Tabrizi, ‘Simulating the Unthinkable: Gaming Future War in the 1950s and 1960s’, *Social Studies of Science* 30, no. 2 (2000): 203.

²⁰⁵ When improvisation is important, strict guidelines are not only counterproductive, they are detrimental as Sparti underlines discussing the disdain of tango dancers for the overly ‘choreographed’ that appears to follow a ‘recipe’. See Sparti, ‘Improvvideo. Etica e Estetica Dell’improvvisazione Coreutica’.

academic journal is to communicate clearly with an international audience. Elegance in style is a secondary aim. The basic criterion should be clarity of expression.”²⁰⁶ We could go on: the layout of conference rooms, the structure of lectures, the collaborations with journalists. The self-branding in e-mail signatures, on social media, on glossy personal websites and beyond. All these things are about materiality, aesthetics, and performativity. Indeed, an underlying irony of our discussion here is that ISS already is and always has been a design field. It is not just that we are always already complicit in the kinds of designs that Google is setting loose upon the world, but that we have wedded ourselves to an especially standardized, professionalized, neo-liberal but – as we have said earlier – also archaic set of principles around which work in ISS must be designed. This latter fact is indeed the final issue we must grapple with. The changes we are discussing are not small. And though – as we have said – steps towards them are already being taken, perhaps the biggest obstacle is a kind of nostalgia dominant across social science. A nostalgia vested in the ways we design our own work. The questions that emerge here are blunt: Should we *really* change? Would that not, in fact, be a kind of *surrender*? A surrender of all that is valuable about the social sciences and the humanities? If we must work-within, then can we not do so with the goal of returning to the past and the greater privilege associated with the social sciences? Would it not be better to actively resist technological encroachment on our praxis?

Perhaps.

But are we happy with where we are/were, anyway? The challenge faced by ISS is escaping what is essentially a kind of prejudice: the idea that reflexivity, reason, progress, possibility, knowledge, etc. cannot be articulated adequately outside the alphabetical, developed in a scholastic realm separated from the world.²⁰⁷ Overcoming this prejudice is crucial, for it is the only means by which ISS can regain political resonance as a knowledge-producing field by re-entering the immanent flow of sociality. Times change. And with those changes, so must our trade and its tools. That’s hard, of course. When we face a situation in which the monopoly of a communications technology is ending we are left with “an aesthetics of shock.”²⁰⁸ That shock often leads to a desire to reject the world as it has changed around us. And, indeed, even if all of the above is acknowledged, many see this fact as not a reason to complement the alphabetical with something else but, rather, a change to be reversed. One manifestation of this is the wish to put ‘technology in its place’ by returning writing, literature, and other technologies to dominance. The general insight underlying this sentiment is – to repeat Haraway – the fact that contemporary material, aesthetic, and technological forces are “the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism.”²⁰⁹

But, dissimilarly to Haraway’s philosophy, this fear of the technological within ISS is coupled with a nostalgia for a (mythical?) privileged scholarly past of scientific credibility and dream that alphabetic communication might create a community of reason.²¹⁰ That nostalgia induces a kind of forgetting. Indeed, even if we could overcome the limits that history has placed on the resonances of alphabetical making, and the ways those limits have slowly eroded the politicality of scholarship, would we really wish to return to that classical world? Alphabetic writing is also a deeply impure and violent technology. It is also an illegitimate thing. There are too many examples of this fact here to choose from. But, well, a few. Kittler wrote once that “an omnipresent metaphor equated women with the white sheet of nature or virginity onto which a very male

²⁰⁶ Taken from the *Author Guidelines* of the journal *Security Dialogue*. See <https://tinyurl.com/y4yyfd59> [accessed 24.08.2020]. For a discussion see PARISS Collective, ‘The Art of Writing Social Sciences: Disrupting the Current Politics of Style’, *Political Anthropological Research on International Social Sciences (PARISS)* 1, no. 1 (11 July 2020): 9–38.

²⁰⁷ Austin, ‘A Parasitic Critique for International Relations’.

²⁰⁸ Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 29.

²⁰⁹ Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century’, 151.

²¹⁰ Aradau and Huysmans, ‘Assembling Credibility: Knowledge, Method and Critique in Times of “Post-Truth”’.

stylus could then inscribe the glory of its authorship.²¹¹ No wonder that psychoanalysis discovered during its clean-up operation that in dreams, ‘pencils, pen-holders... and other instruments are undoubted male sexual symbols.’ It only retrieved a deeply embedded metaphysics of handwriting.” Writing has always been a mode of homogenizing the world through particular ideologies (patriarchal, imperial, racial) in ways that have regularly erased other worlds quite completely, often literally. This is the lesson of postcolonial thought across the ages: “the alphabet is an aggressive and militant absorber and transformer of cultures.”²¹²

This violence remains strong across ISS (and science as a whole) today. For example, despite growing interest in indigenous, subaltern, or – simply – non-hegemonic knowledge (systems) throughout the social sciences, that interest is an extractive one in which the alphabetical elite express in written form something articulated elsewhere. Things formulated in a different alphabetical or non-alphabetical language (*viz* the anglophone character of our discussion and of academia generally), or in non-linguistic forms of knowledge, cannot enter the intellectual field on their own terms. They are translated (betrayed) and converted into useable epistemic products. The “alphabet and print technology [have always] fostered and encouraged a fragmenting process, a process of specialism and detachment” that necessarily excludes certain voices.²¹³ In many ways, debates over the decolonization of knowledge are thus fundamentally dependent on escaping from language as the pinnacle of intellectual axiology. The ideas of inclusion or diversity in which knowledges that have previously been excluded from European and North-American intellectual history are re-integrated and gifted back value rest on the false image of the ‘academy’ as a purely social space whose violent erasures are a consequence of discourses that can be overcome through (yes) our enlightenment. But when we consider the ‘academy’ as also always being a technological space, one today still dominated by the monopoly of writing, it becomes clear that expanding what constitutes acceptable knowledge requires a modification of those technologies. Thus, even if it was possible to imagine a radical de-technologization of the world, a return to the alphabetical might pose (or resurrect) more problems than it would solve.

But let us be very clear. None of this should be read as a call to abandon theory, critique, or epistemics. Nor an abandonment of writing. To return to our introduction, the call here is for a ‘re-balancing’ between the alphabetical and alternative forms of material-aesthetic expression. And we think such a re-balancing is urgently needed. Are we not – indeed – already living with/in the ‘ruins’ of academic praxis? Are we not situated within an “unhomely, paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition” of flux?²¹⁴ Many would say so. But – if true – that sentiment demands we radically re-think our praxis in one way or another. Nonetheless, it should be said that we are not naïve about this task. Indeed, caution and humility will be required throughout because, as Stengers puts it:

Ruins are not safe places. Distressed colleagues lurk, made furious by the destruction of what they took for granted, of their ‘ways of assessing as usual,’ and caution is needed when you meet them, they may have turned into cannibals, whose only satisfaction is to attack those who threaten the certainty of their despair.²¹⁵

Stengers’ caution returns us to the importance of building alliances across divergences and of incorporating generosity into academic praxis. Indeed, one of the consequences of the territorialized structure of contemporary academic knowledge economies, as well as their intermeshing with para-academic forms of exchange, has been a rise in the personalization of academic discourse. Acrimony and toxicity are all too

²¹¹ Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 186.

²¹² Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (University of Toronto Press, 1962), 64.

²¹³ Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium Is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (Gingko Press, 1967), 8.

²¹⁴ Isabelle Stengers, ‘A Constructivist Reading of Process and Reality’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 4 (2008): 108.

²¹⁵ Stengers, ‘A Constructivist Reading of Process and Reality’, 108.

common in our modes of speaking to one another, across all disciplinary divides. To overcome this state of affairs, we need to begin cultivating what Wendy Chun calls a “politics of fore-giving” in which “to fore-give is to give in excess, to give away – to create give in the system by giving way, by giving more than one gets.”²¹⁶ Open alliance-building across divides can support us in this task. And generosity can relieve (inevitable) distress. In short, both are fundamental for making life in the ruins of social science less unsafe. And, with this, we have come full circle, almost. We are back to the importance of the form of the manifesto for expressing “gestures of disidentification” that are affirmative in structure. Manifestos are things that hope to unite and so move us, slowly, beyond “professional disputes between life and social science.”²¹⁷

For an International Political Design

Back to the beginning. If there has been one thing that this essay has manifested for, above all else, it is that, just as we criticize those who design the world for claiming they are “only engineers,” so we must resist ever becoming “just social scientists.” In doing so, we have been seeking to grapple with how ISS might re-inject itself into the political flow of our hyper-technologically mediated, affectively-aesthetically formatted, and material world. Our concern has thus not been with the engineer who cannot express a political position, but with our own absence. With, put differently, our abdication of the responsibility to do more than simply critique from a position of scholarly distance. In this withdrawal we risk reducing ourselves to irrelevance. In the face of these dynamics, in which we are all complicit, this has been an affirmative statement sketching possible alternatives oriented around the idea of designing-with/in world politics. In that affirmative spirit, we have argued *for* acknowledging that ISS is already involved in design practices, *for* cultivating the openness necessary to do so more extensively, and *for* inscribing the conditions that would make that possible. In short, we have argued *for* the emergence of an International Political Design. We have done this in the form of a manifesto, of sorts. That genre has orientated us toward the demand of the day – *making-public* – its form offering an opening towards articulating that demand, a line of escape from modes of academic exchange organized around turfs and turns that undermine affirmative political projects which do not seek to, and indeed cannot, be premised on establishing themselves by turning against all that has gone before, the very things that make them thinkable. Indeed, as a project, International Political Design is premised above all on collaborative engagements and encounters that transcend the borders of any particular field.

The stakes of developing something like an International Political Design are high. Our opening vignette reflects a crucial political question. But the interaction it depicts is uncomfortably and commonly banal. It refers to a state of affairs, a structural condition, and a set of practices so pervasive that it is difficult to think of an area where this act of ‘walking out’ could not apply. But it need not be so. Beginning to more actively design-with/in world politics would reorient us towards the possibility of change, inaugurating a more radically politicized social science whose knowledge is meaningfully injected into the world. An ISS that makes-public at its very core. And, in doing so, an ISS that will come to know far more about the world. In short, the demand of the day is to design and make international things differently, in ways that both allow for the production of otherwise inaccessible social scientific knowledge and which actively interfere with established understandings of how world politics must proceed, politically, critically, and intellectually. We

²¹⁶ Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same : Habitual New Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), 159.

²¹⁷ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 152.

Statement by Anonymous *Laboria Cuboniks Member:**

The opposite of a manifesto is a conference paper. The most difficult part of writing these things is keeping questions open, not falling too deeply into old habits (e.g. academic or art world habits).

...

If you feel like you've been convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt by a manifesto, you've probably been played like a rhetorical fiddle.

...

[Manifestos] are not meticulously developed argumentative pieces. They're more like stand-up comedy [in that] their job is to point things out... [t]o nudge you into adopting a point of view that might not have seemed available beforehand, but which pulls things into focus in a way that makes you want to run with [an idea] and see where it goes.

*Laboria Cuneniks authored the *Xenofeminist Manifesto*, formally *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation*. The statements are from Hogeveen (2017).

need an International Political Design. A kind of ISS able to redesign “instruments... [of] power into instruments of liberation” or, rather more modestly, that works to evoke alternative political futures.²¹⁸

Getting there, of course, will take a little while. We see this manifesto as a step on the road. As most manifestos, it is less intended to convince through meticulous argument, and more designed as an affirmative statement of a point of view that the reader might want to run with to see where it goes. We hope this will eventually inspire others to formulate their own perspectives affirming a different point of view on designing-with/in world politics and on what we should be devoting ourselves to more generally. Indeed, we ourselves are not wedded to the term. We hardly need another label. But we have invoked it here under the intuition that the very term design might act as a ‘lure’ that draws “attention toward ‘something that matters’ [by] vectorizing concrete experience.”²¹⁹ The more-or-less alien nature of the term (for ISS) is useful in this regard. The ways in which it forces us to compare our own praxis to that of Google provides a productive kind of disorientation of our self-image. The demand it imposes to think through the relationship between social science and politics in more ‘dirty’ terms forces us to better understand our own, past and present, impurities. And its collaborative ethos pushes us towards the necessity of generosity and alliance-building. Towards unity and kindness. In the end, then, designing-with/in world politics is a profoundly political proposition. As such, realizing its underlying ethos requires a radical change of mindset. Nonetheless, the ethos in and of itself is not especially radical. Thus, while the kinds of changes in praxis we are proposing are novel for scholars across most of ISS, the reasons for embracing them are not.

²¹⁸ Bangstad and Nilsen, ‘Thoughts on the Planetary’; Susan Leigh Star, *Ecologies of Knowledge: Work and Politics in Science and Technology* (SUNY Press, 1995); Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*; Larry Diamond, ‘Liberation Technology’, *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 3 (2010).

²¹⁹ Stengers, ‘A Constructivist Reading of Process and Reality’, 96.