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MEMORY FULL?

Design History Society

Dessobons and archaeodesign

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Abstract | Western design (the only one) projects its own
assumptions over the ways in which people that live in their own
traditions and customs, spiritualize, dispose, prefigure and
materialize things. Under the pretext of co-design with them, more
and more adjectives are added to the word design, and because of
that an enormous, untranslatable, and immeasurable plurality,
vanishes or goes unnoticed. To avoid that, I propose to stop seeing
in everything that others do variations of design and begin to see
design as variations of what others do. Departing from different
ideas about the south, as what is denied, despised, discriminated or
ignored by Modernity, I take a trip along the way of some
provocations as the designs of the south, designs-others, and
designs with other names, until reach what I ultimately call
Dessobons (DEsigns of the South, of the Souths, Others, by Other
NameS), as a way to approach other stories with a transitory and
non-invasive name. From there, I try to answer if it is possible
for us to remember other futures? or can we anticipate other pasts?
Then I elaborate on the frontier between archaeology and design, and
about declassified and decolonial possibilities of delinking,
archaeology from past to design futures, and design from future to
archaeologize pasts. Afterwards, I use the archaeodesign, proposed
by Professor Fernando Álvarez, to name an in-between field of
knowledge and inquiry in two ways: first, "the design of
archaeology", to question the way archaeology has been designed (as
a device to capture pasts) and to confront the orthodoxy that
privileges few explanations and material configurations while
denying many more. And second, "The archaeology of design", as a
perpetual questioning of the materializing historical project of
modernity (Eurocentric, racist, patriarchal, etc.) that turns design
into a device for capturing everyone's futures. In the end I open
myself to the possibility of recognizing, on the ideas of Professor
Tomas Mercier, an exorbitant, non-ontological heterogeneity beyond
pluralism, through which infinity of human groups do things where
the term design has no power nor meaning. So much has been designed
where design never was.

Keywords: Dessobons, Archaeodesign, Designs of the South,
Designs-other, Designs by other names.

1. First steps

The expression Dessobons, an acronym that emerged from combining three ideas that I have worked on for years (DEsigns of the South, of the Souths, Others, by Other NameS), arises from my attempts to escape the disciplinary designation of "design", drawing on those of archaeologists who proposed to escape from the disciplinary designation of archeology. At a crossroads between the *archeology of design* (a questioning of the canonical past of the term design) and the *design of archeology* (a study of the way in which archeology was designed to capture the past of many human groups). This meeting was called by my colleague Fernando Álvarez, in Spanish: arqueodiseño, which in English would be archaeodesign. The same term in English was proposed by Professor Rich Potter of the University of Southampton, as an approach to applying computer technologies to archeology (which in 2010 he also formalized as ArchaeoDesign). Same word, different meaning.

I am interested in approaching the design of Euro-western origin (for me the only one) as a modern device for capturing the future of all human groups. By simplifying I will say that if archeology begins with unearthing artifacts and ends with words that classify them, conversely, design, and especially industrial design, begins with ideas, words and images and ends with artifacts. Remember that in old Latin industry meant ingenuity, so there was industry in people before the birth of modern industries and the industrial design. Through a relativization of the omnipresence of design, I try to question its supposed universality.

The road to dessobons is toward the outside of design, Was the design always there? In 2008, the 6th International Conference of Design History and Design Studies, ICDHS in OSAKA, Japan, had as subject: Another Name for Design: Words for creation. For its organizers, the English word "design" with its basic meanings "arrangement, drawing, plan, model, pattern or intention" was expanded beyond its traditional meaning, to encompass cycles of life, production, of human beings, and societies, and all kinds of planning, development, manufacturing, and means of logistics, marketing, purchase, and consumption. The organizers, among whom I highlight Professor Haruhiko Fujita, also pointed out that while the word "design" has expanded its meaning and become internationalized, the nuances that once existed to some degree equivalent to "design" in many human groups are disappearing as they are being mistranslated as "design" (ICDHS, n. d.)

In its leitmotif (ICDHS, n. d.) that conference proclaimed that each culture had ways of relating its senses and intelligences to things and events, which the organizers added did not deny "design", nor the universality of the world, but rather sought to share the diversity and importance of design: since all cultures have their own history and design ideas, from their own ways of doing and creating.

I doubt about the universality of the world, of cultures, of societies and even of the universality of the universe, because regardless of what they designate, these terms are abstractions that distance us from how each group understands what we call reality. Such generalized abstractions, Josef Estermann will say, are "represented" through cognitive efforts, especially the "concept", the preferred form of cognitive representation in the West, which in idealism replaces reality. For me, on the other hand, reality emerges only in every locality, spoken with specific words by each human group (Estermann 2006, 104).

Now I travel back a decade, to my master's studies in gender at the National University of Colombia, when I learned, based on the ideas of Gottfried Leibniz, how Boaventura de Sousa Santos, at the beginning of the 21st century, questioned Western reason as lazy in four senses: first, as impotent reason that does not exercise itself because it feels that it is impossible to act against needs external to it; second, as arrogant reason that does not exercise itself because it imagines itself free and without the need to prove its freedom; third, as metonymic reason because being a fraction of the available reason, it assumes itself as unique and does not seek or dialogue with other forms of rationality, and, fourth, as proleptic reason that values the future as a prolongation of its own ideas, as linear and mechanical overcoming of the same type of present (Santos, 2016, 164).

For Santos, Western knowledge from 1800 to the present has been mobilized by this lazy reason. In 2012, we began to talk about it with my colleague Fernando Alvarez, who from his teaching experience of several years in Ecuador, was approaching to design from interculturality and Andean thought. Together we sought to adjectivize a design external to the Western one, then the idea of the south appeared: presented by Santos as seminal to confront lazy reason and open the way to new subjectivities. Thus, we began to talk about the design of the south and move this idea, each one at our own pace, for me it was the base of my PhD studies research

in design and creation at the University of Caldas in Manizales Colombia, which after 7 years I am near to finish. I considered it along with the other two modalities that I integrated into dessobons: the designs-other and the designs with other names.

By Dessobons I mean go beyond relations between design and history, go to relations external to the ideas of design and history. I am searching for design where it is not, and I think that much of what we call design is not such. This drift to the south, took me in 2014 to Coimbra, Portugal, where Boaventura de Sousa Santos organized an International Colloquium on Epistemologies of the South, there I met Arturo Escobar (since then my teacher and friend) who then was ending the work initially published in Spanish as *Autonomía y diseño la realización de lo comunal* (Escobar, 2016), that in 2018 appeared in English as *Designs for the pluriverse* (Escobar, 2018) In Coimbra, I presented my work *The south of design and the design of the south* (Gutiérrez, 2015a) where in a hypothetical design map, I shown the south of design as everything excluded and silenced from the mainstream design, and the design of the south as not only the whole of what is designed and coming from any south, but as the recognition that the same ideas of south have been likewise designed.

Arturo included this in his book. And since then, I have collected souths everywhere as an umbrella term that groups possibilities, which seen from the global framework organized from Western codification, allude to the peripheral,

marginal, and forgotten, and the alternative… I considered many Souths, that's why the plural Designs of the Souths.

2. Paths to otherness

I reject an adjective for the south, even if it allowed to overcome the discrimination established by the Cold War and the ideas of the Third World, or Developing World: the global South, of which many friends of emancipation are so devoted of. Yes, it made it easier to link peripheral economies through horizontal south-south cooperation (Fabian, 2020, 7). But, as the Brazilian thinker Camila Amorim Jardim points out, the whole Global South idea totalizes and homogenizes, and becomes an imitation and response to the idea of the Global north, that denies differences and divergences (Jardim 2017).

Jardim (2017, 2) says that when speaking of the Global South, often academics and politicians end up referring not to weaker countries and the minorities that the term supposedly favors, but to the more powerful emerging countries and the elites of the southern countries, which that way gain grip inside the dominant discourse, by deprovincializing the global south and presenting it as a united narrative which consolidates local hegemonies, close to modernization and the Western capitalist project from which they benefit, and excludes the particularities of many vulnerable groups and minorities. I prefer to speak of clusters of souths, without abstractions nor generalizations. If anything, I would grudgingly accept just the idea of "Global Souths" in the plural (Andean, Mediterranean, Polynesian, etc.).

The question of the south flows in a polycardinal way (in many directions), polysemic, full of definitions and relationships based on place. In Abya Ayala according to the indigenous name extended to the American continent, the inverted America of Uruguayan painter Joaquín Torres García is a milestone. In anthropology, theories of the south have been elaborated by authors such as: Esteban Krotz (Krotz, 1993), Jean Comaroff and Jhon Comaroff (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012), and Juan Obarrio (Obarrio, 2020), who emphasizes that southern processes are not degraded copies or imperfect and unfinished imitations of western modernity, and Marcio D'Olne Campos who proposes the verb sulear (southing) to question vertical logics (Campos, 2019). All of them have generated reflections that destabilize the center-periphery pair.

From the arts and thinking about arts biennials, several thinkers summon the south, such as Kevin Murray (southern perspectives) (Murray, 2008) and Nikos Papastergiadis, for whom the idea of the Global South infiltrated by neoliberal and authoritarian regimes leaves without force the idea of the south as a site of emancipatory resistance and cultural difference (Papastergiadis, 2017). Or Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, who present the south as a method (Gardner & Green, 2015), and Sabrina Moura and Thereza Farkas who propose an improbable design of the

south (Moura and Farkas, 2013), and Marina Fokidis who in Greece promoted the South
as State of Mind (n. d.) magazine.

Alan Mabin, in architecture, asks for an Urbanism of the South (Mabin, 2014), Francisco Sierra's group from Ecuador, speaks of a communicology of the South (Sierra, 2014). While in Philology and Literature, Luis García Montero, finds in the south an essential slowness for the care of others and to avoid the dogmatisms to which the rush pushes us (García-Montero, 2008), Dieter Richter, from Germany, makes the history of the south as a cardinal point (Richter, 2012), and Roberto Dainotto, argues that leaving both universalism and the dialectic of the same are the theoretical challenge of looking from the south, drawing on ideas of Franco Piperno, Dainotto also affirms that the global south allows us to think non-labor economies, productive of values, outside the market and salaried work, related to self-recognition rather than money (Dainotto, 2017).

In Intercultural Philosophy Josef Estermann, from the Andes details how for Quechua and Aymara people realities emerge outside the abstraction of the concept in ritual and encounter (Estermann, 2009). Edgar Morin also thought of souths in plural (Morin, 2018). In International Relations, Arlene Tickner and Karen Smith edited the book *International Relations from the Global South: Worlds of Difference* (Tickner & Smith, 2020). And in sociology: Boaventura de Sousa Santos, presents the epistemologies of the south as a stage for the production and validation of knowledge arising from the experiences of resistance of groups harassed by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy (Santos, 2016). Raewyn Connell from Australia characterizes an emerging southern theory where dependency is challenged, and local arguments are followed wherever they lead, taking them as theory, to learn from them and not just about them (Connell, 2007). According to the vertical of modern cartographies, the south and its people remain below, because they are below and behind, all peripheral peoples are south, such as the indigenous people of the entire planet, including the Inuit even though they live near the north pole. The indigenous as another generalization for peoples more linked to the place. From Brazil, Marcelo C. Rosa on ideas of other southern thinkers (Santos, Connell, Comaroff and Comaroff etc.), raises something that greatly influenced my approach: non-exemplary southern sociologies, through which he emphasizes that southern knowledges are disobedient to the north archives, they are not another case of, another type of or another example of what north knows or does (Rosa, 2018).

Before them from the south of Italy the also sociologist, recently deceased Franco Cassano, proposed his southern or meridian theorization, which rejects the idea of seeing the south as the "not yet" north, Cassano (2007) reaches the south and his thoughts not from a we or from an identity claim but from the shadow side that any identity, to claim the voices of the South against their representations by the hegemonic culture, always charged with subtle racism even in its most politically correct forms. Cassano's idea influence the design of southern Italy where around the University of Palermo, in 2020, the regional magazine "Sicilia InForma - Notizie on island design" was transformed into the international magazine "Southern Identity - News on meridian design", this meridian design presented as human in scale, ethical and social, based on critical thinking, and linked to the specificities and resources of each territory, to the strengths of the stage where it takes shape, is promoted, among others, by architecture professors Dario Russo (from Palermo) and Rossana Carullo (from Bari).

Carullo proposes a meridian model of interaction between design and territory, which beyond of generic know-how, thinks the ancestral doing that expresses the territory, from the particularities of southern Italy, where techne transformed into humanitas becomes a cultural feature that confronts the languages and innovation processes of contemporary design, this meridian design offers alternatives to the globalization and standardization of goods and languages (Carullo, 2018). Gian Paolo Consoli also from the Polytechnic University of Bari, thinks the South as an ambiguous term, not usable as a category in the absolute sense, with its own specific values and qualities, diverse and contrary to the North, but in relation to any geographical reality, and I would add epistemological, ontological, etc. (Consoli, 2020).

In Latin America the southern particularities of design have also been thought by Luján Cambariere who scrutinizes the specificities and productive practices of the different Souths of Latin America (Cambariere, 2017), and from an Asian POV Ahmed Ansari who in his text *Towards a Design Of, From & With the Global South* denounces the impoverished understanding that the North and the West have of the South and the East, and how the stories that from there are made of the world outside the Anglo-European sphere, are framed in the language of development, such as spaces

for which to design, cultural curiosities or places to rescue foreign practices (Ansari, 2016).

With my text *Resurgences: souths, as designs and other designs* (Gutiérrez, 2015b) I continued my own theorization on a design of the south struggling to go beyond the ideas of south and design. Here I introduce another strand of what I call dessobons: the designs-others, on the idea of the an-other-paradigm by Walter Mignolo (Mignolo, 2017) which in turn draws on the thought another of the Moroccan Abdelkebir Khatibi, these "designs" are not more of the same, not other designs but others of the design. Antecedent of this is in the special issue of Design Philosophy Papers (DPP) Vol 1, Issue 6, of 2003/2004 edited by Tony Fry and Anne-Marie Willis with the theme Design's other, there Fry (2003) finds it impossible to free ourselves from the agency of the modern construction of the category of design, as a dominant form constituted from the discourse of modernity, and affirms that we can only speak of the otherness/difference tension in reference to the norm. In turn, Willis (2003) notes that human groups make sense of each other's cultures on their own terms and adds that all ethnocentrism results from an act of unconscious translation of the other's logic to ours.

Regarding Fry's idea, I think that we can recognize the existence of the modern category without ignoring it, but we can question its omnipresence in all space and time. I question calling design, activities carried out by prehistoric people throughout the planet, according to authors and canonical books, from which the condition of design led to humanization, applying the same word to them as the modern Western discipline of design, regardless of the fact that today is present all over the planet, since the history of the discipline can locate its various linguistic and geographical origins, in some places in Europe, and with an antiquity that perhaps exceeds by far three centuries.

Clive Dilnot scoffs at this in his essay: *History, Design, Futures: Contending with What We have Made*, when he writes that assume that contemporary manifestations of "design" and its professions as we know them today are direct descendants of toolmaking practices from the first hominids, would be laughable if it weren't for the fact that many believe it at face value. (Dilnot, 2015: 152). But if all the prehistoric peoples designed, why could only people like the ancestors of the founders of the Bauhaus bequeath the privileged tradition to their descendants?

These designs-other are not another case or type of design, they are not even designs, that is why I speak, and that is the third strand within the *dessobons*, of "designs with other" names, which is still misleading. Apart from words that recently became equivalents of the English word "design" such as the Chinese word "sheji" and the Japanese word "sekkei" (I doubt they mean exactly the same thing) used by a larger population than that of Europe (Fujita, 2016), I am concerned about the capture by the word design of ancestral practices whose lineages do not respond, neither by etymology, epistemology, or ontology to the idea of design, because they arise from relational entanglements external to modernity, and are violated by incorporating them into it.

In these years I approached (Gutierrez, 2015b) what I call "relational conceptions" such as the *va* or relational space of Polynesian culture, especially Samoan, from which the expression *Teu le va* ("Nourish the relationship") or the North American idea of the Mitakuye Oyasin (translated as "All our relationships") of the Lakota people, or the Mino-Bimadiziwin (translated as "The good life") of the Ojibwe people... or of the natives of the Andes the Sumak kawsay that emerged among the Kichwa of Sarayaku in Ecuador, or from Bolivian Aymara people ideas of the Suma Qamaña (both translated as "good living"). I will say that among the peoples who live these conceptions, although they are called like that, I find not designs but the others/differents of designs or their *equialtervalent* ones. An approach to the peoples diluted in their particularity with the generic of indigenous, often shows that where Western time advances forward as an arrow to the future, in various traditions, it is conceived that in front is the future and not the past, because the future we will never inhabit and when more we carry it on our back. Also, unlike the westerners, many native peoples understand the human as the most dependent creature and not as the administrator of creation. These relationalities would be alien to the more nuclear ideas in designing such as project and projection, which are often invasive, since they do not consider the effects of their projection on that which receives it. I am not talking here about a deductive or creative sequence, but to the ideal of control of change that underlies the habitual action of design. Like Cyclops, the X-Men character, traditional design (and almost all design indeed) operates in a kind of setting otherness on fire with his burning gaze.

Thus, the word dessobons (Gutiérrez, 2021) mixes the designs of the south, the designs-other and the designs with other names. I do not seek other names for design, nor the others of design, but other names for other things, things that do

not turn out to be the others of design, but practices for which design is the other. Ruptures of reference, ways of avoiding the error of assigning to the other my own categories of thought, as if their practices derive from my own history, etymology, and epistemology.

I speak of practices of disposing, prefiguring, and materializing (abbreviated as *dipremas*), fugitive from the idea of design and Western concepts, including the concept of concept. I infer them, for instance in the revival of Polynesian ancestral navigation in the 1970s of the XX century (Gutiérrez, 2018) or in the non-architectural originating conical dwellings of the Arctic Circle examined by Tim Ingold (Ingold, 2013), are not others of design, but those for whom design is the other. Dessobons would have to be spoken without -nomies, -sophies, nor -logies.

Indeed, adding adjectives to the word design makes all otherness accessory to the disciplinary noun that is strengthened. I take this idea from the encounter with post-archaeologists, such as the Colombian Cristobal Gnecco whose affirmations about archaeology I apply to design: to be an alternative to archaeology, a practice cannot be called archaeology, but be designated with terms foreign to the disciplinary denomination, based in other languages and regimes of signification (Gnecco, 2016, 93). Another post-archaeologist Nick Shepherd adds that modern colonial disciplinarity tears artifacts from their natural regimes of care, mutilating their relationships, and thanks to disciplinary experts and a sort of conceptual abstractions, such as "heritage", "science" or "material culture" and for the case of design, reinserts them altered within the network of disciplinary care (Shepherd, 2016, 32).

In the face of this, the disruptive approaches worth talking about in design (since I expect nothing from mainstream design) look weak. Autonomous, ontological, indigenous, decolonial and pluriversal designs lose strength becoming adjectives of the same monological monoculture of design that they try to destabilize. As black thinkers like Bayo Akomolafe (Garrison Institute, 2021) or Grada Kilomba (Kilomba, 2008) say, alluding to the monocultures of sugar cane or cotton with which the colonial powers oppressed the peripheries, we must leave the plantation, move away from the monoculture, enter the fugitive thought to avoid flawed freedoms within the same.

3. What comes back from there

I doubt that the word design, which has advanced colonially over the planet, can be stripped of its colonial condition. I think that design should be provincialized, that is why I propose to call design only to Western practices in Westernized contexts all over the planet and to think of dessobons as practices that will never fit into the idea of design, not even in the one of practice. And it is that in examining the works collected in DESIGN STRUGGLES Intersecting Histories, Pedagogies, and Perspectives edited for Claudia Mareis and Nina Paim (Mareis & Paim, 2021), I find that no matter where they start from, in every critical approach it is almost impossible to criticize design without criticizing the West, in a way design is the West, and under the figures of project and the projection as Jiovanny Samanamud says, development travels unnoticed (Samanamud, 2018).

Mareis and Paim (2021, 19) in the introduction of their book, thinking about the search for designs otherwise, ask themselves about how design can propitiate fairer societies of life, without compromising the initiatives arising from below or excluding the voices of those who are most affected, and about how to reimagine design as an open queer practice that operates from within the world instead of assuming itself superior to it, or if it can be a situated practice instead of being an escapist strategy of the global north to solve problems... and their answer is that design can hardly change something without first changing itself.

On this subject, I consider that design does require changing itself, but also recognizing outside of itself, what it occupied and captured within its own designation. It is to facilitate such recognition that I propose the term dessobons to designate that accumulation of practices that have always been there. Now, I would never speak of a Maori, Lakota, Andean or Polynesian dessobon. Because dessobons is a generalization that I propose for intra-academic use to designate not alternative designs but alternatives to design without devouring them with the disciplinary noun, as a generalization ready to be substituted with local words wherever they are found.

Now I want to refer to a text by philosopher Thomas Mercier: *Uses of "the*
Pluriverse": Cosmos, Interrupted-or the Others of Humanities where the author
criticizes the uncritical massification of the idea of the pluriverse (Mercier,
2019), what my friend Fred Van Amstel calls: The Universalization of the
Pluriverse, which reinscribes the same thing under another name. Mercier points out
in it the tendency of the Western logos after generalization, to continue to
classify the other in its own terms, the discrete unit of pluralization and
comparison remains the Western universe (which even within its variations turns out
to be the only one within which everything else becomes the same), without
considering that each "same" is different, even divergent.

I presume that the idea of universe is not generalizable to the ways in which all
human groups live their relationship with whatever their wholenesses could be, the
same happens with ideas like worldview, and world. In fact, the idea of pluralizing
universes often travels along with the Zapatista aphorism of "creating a world
where many worlds fit", which transforms in just one thing that what Mercier calls
an "exorbitant plurality, before the pluriverse and before being", all is
manageable by reducing complexity to a set of terms comparable to each other, from
a meta-point of view that articles them all: and which happens to be none other
than the Western way to compare.

That is why I would replace the phrase "a world where many worlds fit", with
perhaps the most appropriate phrase of: A "what?", where the western worlds and
many other "whats?" fit, and even then, I would add, why only one? The proposal is
to dispense with the translation in this case and speak several languages, so the
Samoan *lalolagi*, or the Maori *Ao*, or the Andean *pacha*, or the Lakota Makȟá, are not
homologable as worlds, nor should they be unified as such, they are other "wholes"
incomparable, untranslatable, each one unique, so I would not speak of a "lalolagi
where many lalolagis fit" nor about a "pacha" where many pachas fit.

It is misleading to think that everything can be designed, especially when
heterogeneity is eliminated through a classification that uses only discrete
Western units of comparison: histories, cultures, societies, worlds, universes and
even pluriverses. I insist on the incomparability of all those "wholenesses". Again
with Akomolafe it is important what collapses the totality that we assume, it is in
the abandonment of the idea of completeness or totality that what Akomolafe calls
generative incapacitation happens.

The pluriverse, which Mercier (2019) questions valued in this way, would be a
permanent pluriwhat? Perhaps an unpluralizable, regardless of unifying
abstractions, embracing the radical divergence, it would be better to value
encounters between particularities, the dessobons, those for which the design is
the other, are not cases, they are not types, or examples of design... They are
other ways to bring to presence with other names that we call artifacts, Akomolafe
reminds us that in between breaks and fissures we could notice the multiplicity of
the unparalleled. For this reason, I do not consider "other stories of design" but
stories (for which the story is the other) about practices for which the design is
the other. By dwelling in incompleteness and separating ourselves from the
referent, we notice that we are not talking about different perspectives on the
same thing, but about different "the same" recognizable in their
incomprehensibility, thus, by abandoning at least partially the obsession to
totalize by means of discrete units of comparison, the possibility arises. That
would allow the meeting and the interaction on what we would call the elaboration
of the same materiality (in which we would discover several overlapping wholes)
between the world and simultaneously those "all" or "wholes" for which the world is
the other, an encounter between the dessobons (those for whom design is the other)
and design.

And that brings us to the end, for now.

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