

# DESIGN-POLITICS NEXUS: MATERIAL ARTICULATIONS AND MODES OF ACTING

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is a theoretical attempt to formulate an ontological understanding of design as a set of articulations and modes of acting that manipulate the materiality of the world in order to re-direct and re-orient the possible ways of inhabiting, accessing and shaping the world. Such an understanding puts forward a way of approaching the question of politics in, of and for design that design and politics should be understood as a twofold embedded in one environment. This then has consequences both for design and for politics.

I argue that these consequences can be understood better through unfolding the political forms made possible by design as well as the material and designed forms that have become necessary given today's political situation. By drawing on a series of examples, I will argue how design is already a political form and how politics is a form of material articulation. Such an understanding then gives shape to the recognition of the activities and forces that already exist in the world and sketches out possibilities of acting upon that recognition.

## INTRODUCTION

Today the topic of design and politics is not unfamiliar to either designers or to those in politics. But despite

designers' engagement in community-based activities, design discourse has not yet been able to produce a useful lexicon of concepts that could offer possibilities of acting politically through design. However, there are various complexities and difficulties involved in such possible discourses. This paper tries to approach such difficulties and complexities from the particular point of interrogation of a possible ontological understanding of design and design actions and of activities.

In this paper, I define an understanding of politics based on the works of Jacques Rancière. By this I intend to discuss when and where the political or politics are enacted and performed and why it is important to distinguish the political or politics from mainstream politics or "police-politics," as I call it. Then, I give an understanding of design both as a noun but also as a verb and the ways in which it deals with social and material forces in a shared environment. I argue that design as a mode of acting in the world acts specifically on the mediations through which material and immaterial human needs are met. More specifically, I argue that design is the act of intervening in situations in order to orient a situation in a certain way: ideologically, on behalf of, interests and/or in terms of that situation's possibility. This designing runs the gamut from the configuring of artefacts and artefactual relations to environments, situation and policies. In fact, the key argument is that design cannot but be involved in these questions and that understanding "design as politics" (Fry, 2010) and politics as design (not merely "and") requires that design begins to take seriously its involvement in these questions. I introduce the nexus of "design-politics" in which what becomes importance is the "-of" of such nexus. This shifts the focus from design and politics as two separate realms of knowledge to what the twofold of design-politics produce in terms of "affects" and "affections". To put it simply, I try to show how design is already political and how politics is a matter of assembling material entities.

The question being interrogated in this text can be summarized as follows: what if design and politics, their meaning, devices, discourses and doing share the same

environment and reinforce each other constantly? And if this is the case, then how are we as design researchers going to understand such complexity and entanglement?

## THE POLITICAL AND POLITICS

It might be true that the very first impression that comes to mind when one hears the term politics is the regimes of “social engineering” and ideological administrations behind political parties, commenting on contemporary issues, and debating and supporting one particular proposal within parliaments and governments. Within such a sphere, cultural practices such as art, design or literary works are often assigned to politics as a mere ideological vehicle mobilising the crowd in favour of or against one ideology. Thus, the anticipated contribution of design to such an understanding of politics becomes, for instance, the designing of electoral campaigns and ballot boxes, propaganda posters and symbolic representations of parties’ values.

On the contrary, there are actions, protests, revolts and refusals to such thinking and doing of politics. As much as power shifting among parties goes on, there are certain revolts that do not identify themselves with these figurations. Short or long, brief or extensive, historical practices of refusal are evidence to the desire of those who do not see any identical relation between what has been assigned to them by politics, of what they are as demos, nations, women, workers, students, migrants, and what they possibly can be. It has been suggested that another name be given to these forms and practices in order to avoid confusion with first and mainstream meaning of politics, that is, party politics. “The political” is the term used by a wide range of scholars to differentiate the forms of doing and thinking politics from party politics. Starting with Carl Schmitt (1996[1927]), continuing with Hannah Arendt (1998[1958]), and reintroduced by Chantal Mouffe (1993), they suggest we should call those conflictual moments and procedures of demonstrating another possible politics “the political.”

However, the political becomes problematic in the case of Schmitt, who in order to run the political, needs to declare a state of emergency or exception announced by sovereign power to transform demos to political subjects. This is why he became a strong supporter of the Nazi regime in Germany. In the case of Mouffe, the problem is that the political requires an already reserved place to happen through on-going and always already conflictual consensus among adversaries.

Jacques Rancière (2001) proposes that instead of creating a new category for practices of revolt and refusals that are not new and that have been going on, we should call all of them politics. All those bureaucracies, power shifting, electoral campaigns, debating and arguing within the mainstream politics instead is called police by Rancière.

## A THEORY OF THE GAP: JACQUES RANCIÈRE’S TAKE ON POLITICS

Politics for Jacques Rancière starts from the question of “inequality”. Simply put, the political task lies in the inscription of what is excluded or not counted. In this sense, politics is about expressing the possibility of it by those parts that have no part in forming a society. Such an egalitarian axiomatic take on politics is about taking part in being-together through politics. For Rancière, political subjects are “fluctuating performers” who “bring the nonrelationship into relationship and give place to nonplace” (Rancière, 1999, p.89).

For him, the problem of mainstream politics or police-politics mainly reveals itself to us by the notion of inequality as he focuses on it. Mainstream politics acts as if certain persons know both the public good and the good of others, while those others are not strong enough to achieve this good by themselves. Then it means they need a certain intervention of those properly situated to run the affairs and policing orders of society. This mainstream politics, which is police for Rancière, is predicated on ignorance to recognize that people can run their own affairs, and it so assumes that they must have experts or politicians run for them.

Politics for Rancière refers to the breaking down, disordering and undoing of the order and stability of police-politics, of mainstream politics. When Rancière talks about visible and invisible, sayable and unsayable, audible and inaudible, and so on, he considers politics as a matter of intervention in distributing, partitioning, assigning and attributing parts, roles, names, identities, and so on. Therefore, Rancière argues for an antagonistic activity of the “re-distribution of the sensible”, of what can be said and what can be done, what can be thought and what can be heard, which is otherwise unsayable, undoable, unthinkable, inaudible:

*“I propose now to reserve the term politics for an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration—that of the part that has no part [...] an assumption that, at the end of the day, itself demonstrates the sheer contingency of the order, the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being.”* (Rancière, 1999, p.29-30)

This undoing of the police-politics practically and concretely happens through two main formulations that assign and define who is what: time and space. Traditionally, it has been sufficient to assert that those that we do not wish to recognize as political beings belong to a “domestic” space, to a space separated from public life: one from which only groans or cries expressing suffering, hunger, or anger could emerge, but not actual speeches demonstrating a shared aisthesis. And the politics of these categories has always consisted in re-qualifying these places, in getting them to be seen as the spaces of a community, of getting themselves to

be seen or heard as speaking subjects (Rancière, 2001). Workers, who are supposed to be in the factory, therefore appear not only in the streets but also in sites of entertainment, where they can pass time. It is in this regard that Rancière also speaks of time as another site of possibility of politics. Politics happens when those who have no time to do something else than their work – in a factory (in the case of workers) or in a house or a kitchen (in the case of women) – could overturn this presupposed classified order of time. An interruption in predefined partitions of time and space for a group that has no part in partitioning its own time and space to submit their discourse, to show they have something more than just mouthing their pleasure or pain, to own up the time and space which were not defined to be for them in a policing order could open a space for political experience. When Rancière talks about an interruption, mismatch or displacement in the sensible order, he essentially points to moments when a name, an identity or a role appears at the wrong time, in the wrong place.

This mismatch in regimes of identification or representation results in a form of disidentification or dissensus that expresses new possibilities of taking part in politics. Therefore, politics is not only declaring a break from what is assigned to that non-counted part but also staging and manifesting this non-counted part as a collective unity which consequently would be a gap or dissensus within the whole, which has had ignored this actual non-counted part. This is what Rancière (1992) means when he argues that the place of politics is that gap:

*“The place of a political subject is an interval or a gap (écart): being together to the extent that we are in between-between names, identities, cultures, and so on.”* (p.62)

To think about Rancière’s works as “a theory of the gap” reminds us to think of the division he makes between police and politics, not as two separate worlds but rather as an internal tension within what makes politics possible. The gap here does not refer to that act of bordering between enemy and friend, inside and outside or between us and them, but rather to the tension in the body of being-together as the very first feature of politics. In fact, the contradiction between politics and police-politics is internal to politics; it is politics and, as Jodi Dean (2009) writes about Rancière, “it makes most sense to think of the part that is not a part as precisely such a gap: a gap in the existing order of appearance between that order and other possible arrangements, the space between and within worlds” (p.30).

Thus, there is police-politics that is concerned with maintaining the order, the status quo, the state of situation in which it includes and suppresses possibilities under certain names, identities and defined places and spaces assigned to various parts. Politics, on the other hand, is the act of distancing oneself from such distributions and formations by re-qualifying the space and time of politics. This happens through a certain

undoing while it opens and creates its own spacetime as well. Parts appear in “wrong” places and “wrong” time; and by doing so, they reveal the hegemonic practices that try to keep such parts meaningful only through one name, one identity. Counter-hegemonic practices like these by distancing from the state of situation re-qualify the situation through certain acts of re-articulation of relations among parts. They can be understood as politics in the nexus of design-politics which will be explained later in this paper.

## DESIGN: MATERIAL ARTICULATIONS AND MODES OF ACTING

It is common to refer to design as an act of packaging certain instructions, desires, identities, and so forth. In its modern use, the term design is often associated with market, innovation and consumption. Such associations and assumptions happen in a material world where the designed thing, as an outcome of the skills and mastery of its designer(s) through manipulation and operation within the artifice, is programmed to do what a triangle of customer, client and designer plan directly or indirectly. Such planning might be connected to a variety of purposes, such as to sell, to experience, to seduce, to convey, to persuade, to impose, and so on. Being overwhelmed with commercial and capitalist driven forces, “alternative design approaches”, which are often generated within design academia, argue for the involvement of design with “other” areas than those design traditionally and discursively has been associated with. A range of social, political, environmental and economic approaches are argued for in response to design’s involvement with “wicked problems”.

Discussions on the necessity of a shift from design as a mere “service provider” to design as a more engaged activity in situations and systems is often present in such approaches (for instance, see Stolterman and Nelson, 2012). Such calls often forget that design cannot be seen and analysed only according to its intentions but that it must also be analysed according to what it does and does not to other actors and in other environments beside the actor, environment and function it was originally designed for. Because of its particular capabilities, design has never been and can never be a mere service provider. Criticisms like these are problematic because they fluctuate the problem inherent in the discourse of design by producing new practices and disciplines.

Design in its ontological condition that is connected with material articulations is always shared with other material entities within an environment. The appearance of any design activity is already changing the environment that designed thing is set to function in it. The concern – that is often overlooked by designers – is that no designed thing is isolated in the world by only being registered and functioning in a particular environment. Design is not and cannot be only a “service provider” despite its intentions. Design is always something more than services. Considering

design as a “service provider” and building critiques on such an assumption is the perspective of those who are only affected by design as a service and not, for instance, as a policing force or hostility device. Once a chair is designed, it might be considered as an artefact providing a particular service to its users and consumers. But it is always more than that. The designed chair has already performed some sort of designation because it has manipulated the environment by the resources it has used, the skills that were used, the labour that was invested, and so on. And because of this, the designed chair cannot exist only in interaction with the aimed environment or end-users. Moreover, a chair and the shape of it “is not the shape of the skeleton, the shape of body weight, nor even the shape of pain-perceived, but the shape of perceived-pain-wished-gone. The chair is therefore the materialized structure of a perception. It is sentient awareness materialized into a freestanding design” (Scarry 1985, p.290).

This ontological condition of design points out that the politics embedded in the chair is not enacted merely in the office, living room or kitchen by its use and function. Rather, the chair is spatially and temporally embedded and oriented in the politics of before, during and after design. This means that it is almost impossible to think of the space and time of design in a limited sense of the place and the time of use. The capabilities of wood, skills, labour, workshop as a site of production to be assembled in various ways and the possibilities of the designed chair to be oriented towards one direction and not the other, giving certain shapes to space in which some bodies can occupy and some can not (Ahmed, 2006) tell us about the complexities and difficulties that design and its internal relation to politics are involved in. Thus, design is not merely an outcome of environments but also a source of production of environments. Sometimes one is stronger than the other, but this mutual relation is always at place. Adrian Forty puts this clearly in *Objects of Desire* (1995) when he argues that design influences how we think, and he adds that “it can cast ideas about who we are and how we should behave into permanent and tangible forms” (p.6).

One of the reasons that such assumptions in design discourse appear constantly is the lack of reflection on two separate, and at the same time overlapping, uses of the term design: the designed thing and the design actions and activities. The latter can be understood both as the act and activity of designing and also as the actions and activities flowing from the designed thing. They are used and discussed interchangeably without much discussion on their differences, on what they do, what capacities they have and how they move from one environment to another. Consequently, politics and design are left with only two types of relationship: either design in the service of party-politics or the design carries explicitly political content.

Another example of such assumption and confusion appear in Carl DiSalvo’s version of political design

called “Adversarial Design” (2012). Adversarial design is the name given by him to a series of practices within computational design that perform certain acts: they reveal hegemony through critical information design; they configure the remainder through social robots and articulate collectives through ubiquitous computing. Drawing on Chantal Mouffe’s works on agonistic pluralism and the political, adversarial design is a way of understanding and examining practices that, by using design, create a space of agonism among human and non-human adversaries (Di Salvo 2012, p.18-20). The central idea behind adversarial design is that there is a difference between political design and design for politics. While the former is what Di Salvo traces in his book as the condition for democracy by setting up agonistic relations among adversaries, the latter is the traditional design in service, this time in the hands of political parties and the administration of affairs. DiSalvo, therefore, argues that there are conditions for political design and particularly adversarial design. This, unfortunately, gives adversarial design an important new role of political agency, as if the designed world of objects, services, relations, experiences and things is not political already. Di Salvo dismisses the fact that design does not become political merely by changing the content of the designed thing or situation into explicitly political issues. Treating design as a container of politicized ideology dismisses the whole potential and capacity of design as a material force in the environment that is co-inhabited by various actors.

#### MATERIAL ARTICULATIONS

Design in itself, in Herbert Simon’s words (1969), is always about “courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones,” and I add that this is the case no matter what ideology, content or orientation it takes. This means that designers should see the world as something that can be changed. To phrase it differently, designers should understand that the way things are now is not how they have always been. This ontological condition of design – that things are always subject to change in one direction or another due to their artificiality – therefore asserts what I call “material articulations”.

Material articulations are forming practices that distinguish design from other doings and makings. Articulations in fact are a set of negotiations that designers intentionally practice in the ways in which they manipulate the material and the environment in order to achieve their aims. However, such negotiations cannot always be intentional, and the environment that the matter is formed from/in/through can kick back and push some drives in relation to others. Designers redesign over and over again, re-articulate the form that they have given to matters over a period of time, but they often forget that the form that they impose on material and environment is only one produced form out of their imposition. Designers often dismiss that forming a chair does not only form the chair as a

designed, articulated object, but also it forms the environment because wood, steel, labour, etcetera, were produced, taken and transformed. They also dismiss that the chair forms the environment that the chair is oriented towards, as well as spaces and time that it consumes and is consumed by. Material articulations, therefore, are a set of negotiations, partly intentionally and anticipatory and partly invisible from designers' perspectives, which make various forms of being possible. They offer certain orientations and inhabitations while restricting others.

The "material" in material articulations insists on the artifice of things. The artifice of things affirms that things for the simple reason that they are made can be unmade and remade accordingly. But in fact, and above all, it states that change is the only possible condition for artifice. The materiality of articulation affirms the possibility of change, reformation, redesigning, reassembling, remaking and undoing in one way or another.

"Articulations" refer to the importance of decision, orientation, direction and negotiation in design actions. Samer Akkach (2003) points this out by drawing on the Arabic word chosen for design:

*"[T]asmum (design)...[in] current usage, however, seems to be based on tasmum as 'determining,' 'making up one's mind' and 'resolve' to follow up a matter. Thus in linguistic terms 'design' is an act of determination, of sorting out possibilities, and of projecting a choice. It has little to do with problem-solving, the prevailing paradigm, as the designer (musammum) seems to encounter choices, not problems, and to engage in judging merits, not solving problems. It is closer to 'decision-maker'".*

The modern use of the term "tasmum" in the Arabic speaking world reveals the directionality that design actions always have to take. This is quite the opposite to western-oriented education on design, where design often is a set of skills, techniques and qualities to solve a problem, a seemingly innocent term that refers to making things better in general. To think of designed things and design actions as material articulations tell us that design should be considered as a decision and direction embodied in all things humans bring into being. Design is conditioned by its orientations, directions and capacities, while at the same time conditioning human beings, things and the world. Design articulates possible conditions through materialities.

#### MODES OF ACTING

To unfold the mentioned complexities and confusion involved in the term and act of designing, one can describe the word design as the multiple shifting between the status of something that has happened (an X has been designed and manufactured: separation between the intellectual and technical labour) and the active sense of it as patterning and shaping the world in

complex ways. It is in the latter part of the meaning that Ben Highmore (2009) defines design "as a series of negotiations, as an orchestration (of sense, of perception and so on), as an orientation (something that encourages and generates propensities and proclivities), as an assemblage (and as an assembling activity, where it is always possible that combinations themselves combine), as an arrangement (a temporary coming together) and so on" (p.4).

This understanding of design then is entangled with an active environment where design takes shape and participates in ecological, social, political and economic contexts. Therefore, design in this sense can play the role of distributing the senses and values, partitioning the divisions in society from desires to labour and consuming behaviours. When, for instance, Rancière talks about design as an activity of configuration of divisions of communal space, he (Rancière, 2007) means the same:

*"[B]y drawing lines, arranging words or distributing surfaces, one also designs divisions of communal space. It is the way in which, by assembling words or forms, people define not merely various forms of art, but certain configurations of what can be seen and what can be thought, certain forms of inhabiting the material world." (p.91)*

Therefore, design beyond an icon, symbol, identity, profession or finished product is a certain form of acting in the world that distributes, configures and arranges social actions, sensual perceptions and forms of being together or being apart. The necessity to know and understand design as an internally political action and attempts to orient its capacities towards certain directions is what the task of design, which is concerned with possible political forms, could be.

In this way, design action is not a mere instruction embedded into the products, their interaction with users or environments and the way they orchestrate the experience of use or even disrupting the targeted situation. Rather, design (both as noun and two meanings of the verb) should be understood as a dynamic set of negotiations that are historically and politically concerned with "what [the] action creates beyond what it instrumentally directed" (Fry, 2009). To put it differently, design actions are those decisions and directions that take action and participate in acting rather than to act on designed instructions. Design due to its condition, as I discussed, is always a mode of acting, of doing and of configuring the situation in order to propose other possible situations. As Clive Dilnot (2005) writes:

*"Essentially design is nothing else but the encounter with given realities (actualities, situations, circumstances, conditions or experiences) in terms of their transformative possibilities and potentialities. Design opens these possibilities through initiating a process of negotiation with the given which extends the*

*boundaries of the previously possible. In so doing it transforms notions of actuality.*" (Chapter 4, para. 2)

These lines affirm the internal relation between design as a mode of acting and possible forms of politics: a relation that is about re-qualifying the situation through certain acts of reconfigurations and re-articulations of relations among parts, their localities and materialities.

## DESIGN-POLITICS NEXUS

So far, one might realise the difficulties and complexities that are involved in the question of design and politics. For approaching such difficulties, one needs to invent concepts in order to be able to work with difficulties. As far as my research is concerned and as far as I have discussed the ways I understand and argue for thinking politics and design, I propose the concept of 'design-politics'. The nexus of design-politics affirms that design and politics, however separated in the ways they perform and enact situations, both operate through internal relations in which they overlap in the questions of material articulations and local sites while seeking other possible ways of configurations. They both somehow try to affirm that things could be otherwise than the ways they are or the ways they have always been. What interests me in the concept of the nexus is the importance of the relation of forces and negotiations between two in which one cannot be reduced to another. I argue that the focus of the nexus of design-politics should be on the affects that such nexus produces. The nexus of design-politics is capable of producing multiple conditions of affect – to affect, to act upon – and affection – to be affected by. I understand affect here pretty close to recent theories on affect (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010; Thrift, 2008; Stewart, 2007) as:

*"Affect arises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves."* (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010, p. 2)

In order to understand and interrogate such nexus, I suggest that one needs to pick up a socio-technical artefact, a "thing" where, for instance, the thickness of politics are skilfully reduced and thinned by design practices. Such socio-technical artefacts are also capable of not only telling us that design and politics are inseparable but also how they reinforce each other constantly, producing various and multiple affections over the lives of individuals and communities. Moreover, the artificiality that they introduce to abstract discussions of political ideologies affirms the material

fabrication of political practices, revealing their power relations as well as affirming the potentiality of performing and/or enacting them in other directions and orientations.

To start with an understanding of what such nexus is capable of producing, I would like to draw on a fictive example: Kafka's design of the torture machine in his short story "In the Penal Colony" (2007[1919]).

This device, which is probably the most famous torture machine in the history of literature, is an apparatus for torturing those who disobey the rules. It calls our attention to the possible materialisation of the performance of torture. The story starts when a visitor in a penal colony is invited to observe an execution operated by the device. The victim is a soldier who failed to follow an order from his officer. The officer is responsible for the machine, and he is also the one who explains and presents to the visitor how the machine works in a very precise manner and almost in the same way in which inventors or designers present their works to their clients and customers. The device consists of three main parts: the bed, the inscriber and the harrow, all of which are placed below, above and in the middle, respectively. The harrow is composed of a series of needles that engrave the sentence on the back of the convict's body. However, the convict does not know about the sentence; rather, he or she has to learn it within his or her flesh. When the visitor refuses to speak in favour of the machine for the condemned, the officer, the presenter or executioner, frees the soldier and takes his place in the machine with the sentence "Be Just!" to be inscribed on his body. However, he dies in horrific pain due to a malfunctioning of the machine. The design of this apparatus and the way it is narrated in the story is extremely elaborated and almost fetishized by the officer, as he believes the machine brings the mystical experience of justice to the body of the condemned. For instance, he explains why glass material has been chosen for making the harrow:

*"[T]o make it possible for everyone to observe the sentence as it is being carried out, the Harrow is made of glass. This caused some technical difficulties in fixing the needles into it, but after a number of attempts it worked. There were no lengths we didn't go to. And now everybody can watch through the glass how the inscription is carried out on the body."* (p.81)

In another part, the officer explains the reason behind the two sets of needles used in the harrow:

*"... [T]wo kinds of needle in various arrangements. Each long needle has a short one next to it. The long one is for writing, and the short one sprays water to wash away the blood and keep the inscription clear at all times."* (Ibid)

Here, I understand Kafka's harrow beyond the spectacle of torture. Kafka's harrow uncovers the detailed practices of law and their effects on human bodies through a highly designated artefact. How law and rule

can be materialized in such a precise and pragmatic way reveals the non-transcendentally of law. Thus, the artifice of design and its power of articulation allow law to represent itself as absent from such devices and separates itself from the artificial world. As Katja Diefenbach (2008) writes, “The law unhinges its force of law, and transfers it to administrative measures that do not have the status of law”.

In a sense, we can look at this harrow as what Foucault calls “dispositif” and what Agamben calls “apparatus” (Agamben, 2009), that is, an organisation of practices, devices and meaning that is materially constructed and materially affecting. Kafka’s harrow and the detailed and developed design of it, which occupies the major part of the story in the form of presentation, takes us into an interrogative sphere where one can understand and unfold the transformation of rules to norms and the penetration of them into bodies in a very material sense and in sensible matters. The main part of the story is the gradual disclosure of how the machine functions, what kind of materials are used and how it supposed to bring justice, while there is no part describing the crime, law or norm of the penal colony to be followed and respected. From there we have the inscribed bodies, shaped and formed as a result of the design’s imposition to them. Design here is a possible violent agent for the material act of inscription but also an informing one that provides us with the possibility of unfolding the practices of law. There are these details and materialities that are enacted as witness to law and general socio-political structures. As a consequence of design’s overlap with politics, now we are left with new bodies that are constantly affected and defined by such materialisation, or as Léopold Lambert (2013) put it in a reverse formulation, this transforms “each architecture into penal colony machines” because they “somehow inscribe something of the norm in the bodies’ flesh”(p.46).

While this story might be fictional, the practices of design-politics nexus produce real effects in real life. The notion of practices within the design-politics nexus can be understood as a set of materially-constructed and materially-affecting procedures organised to produce certain effects; however, they might produce other unintentional effects as well. The production of other unintentional effects can be understood, for example in what Theodor Schatzki calls “spacetime” (2010). Spacetime are regularized phenomena that tend towards being inertia, dismissing the ontological condition of practices that they have become because of their coherency and banality in everyday life. What they really are is a set of actions done within the artificial and material world chunked into a semiconscious everyday activity.

In 2011, the Migration Board of Sweden (Migartionsverket) commissioned the producers of *Bamse* – a popular Swedish children’s comic book - to make a special issue on migration. Bamse, already a very well-known international cartoon character famous

for advocating such values as equality, was commissioned as a migration board officer to communicate a very strong message to children: “Those who deserve to stay, will stay and those who do not, will be sent back ‘home,’ but we will miss them as our friends”. In one scene, Bamse replies to a stressed and desperate asylum-seeking child, who, despite being the strongest bear in the world (his famous slogan or capacity also as the subheading of the series), cannot solve all problems. Such rationalizing of the children’s world when it comes to permission for residency is obvious in illustrations’ techniques too. Throughout the whole book, nothing is real except the migration board’s logo and some direct pedagogic asylum policies. The characters, which are animals, the cars and the airplane for the planned deportation are all cartoons. The relatives of the deported family welcome the deportees by the airplane, which is not even possible in the real world. The use of Bamse and the penetration into the imaginative world of children with laws and rules that are materially affective show the banality that the administration of such hostilities implies. The *Bamse* special comic strip on deportation tries to say that nothing is wrong with deportation. At one point, one of the characters advises the stressed asylum-seeking child that it should go out and play with its friend if it is stressed. The stress of deportation is just a part of the process as it is staged via the illustration. The technical rationality made through communication techniques and illustrations are nothing new. However, the Swedish Migration Board has been unique in using this technique to convey and persuade children of migrants that deportation is nothing but a normal part of their lives.

This rationalisation by apparently non-violent means is the other side of the militarisation of borders that adopts military technologies, armed forces and private security companies to stop asylum seekers and refugees from migrating.

This is not a mere co-option of design by violent forces as it takes away the manipulative power that design has and blames only those who co-opt the concepts for their own sake. Design has to face its internal relation to politics and its strong manipulative capacity due to its power over material articulations. Because of such power that design ontologically has, design is political already before engaging in any explicitly political issue. Design is engaged in making, dividing, and patterning the ways in which lives are organised according to certain directions or power positions. The task of design researchers who recognize design as a political agent is to show this internal capacity and at the same time intervening in it in certain directions or power positions.

One example where the reorientation of material articulations as a form of intervention within the design-politics nexus happens is the Savorengo Ker project.

The House of All (or in Romani language, Savorengo Ker) was an experimental self-built project initiated by Stalker/On (a group of designers and artists), the Urban

Studies Department of Rome University and the local Roma community in Rome, Italy. The project was a process of co-building a communal house in Casilino 900, the oldest Roma camp in Rome, during spring 2008. After it was finished in summer 2008, it burnt down on the night of 12 December 2008 according to the Casilino 900 blog, which states that the project faced hostility from both the local Italian population and authorities (Casilino 900, 2008). The process of building a house in the camp was perceived by the surrounding Italian population as a threat to the stability of the area. This was due to the fact that some groups of inhabitants expected the authorities to expel Roma inhabitants and demolish the camp. Later, the local council declared the house irregular and closed it. Even though there was a regular planning permission for a temporary construction, the authorities argued that the house had been built on illegally occupied land. The house and the act of making it reveals the contradiction of managerial power practiced by the public administration who, on the one hand, promised to solve the Roma people's situation but, on the other hand, developed repressive measures for the population of the camp, such as preventing car access to the camp, stopping the provision of water and electricity and initiating a census of the inhabitants. (Fioretti, 2011)

In February 2010, the authorities demolished the whole camp, and its 650 inhabitants had to move somewhere else. The communal house was designed, planned and built together with Roma inhabitants, and was a declaration of their house-building skills despite the general understanding of Roma as nomads not wanting to have housing or wanting to settle anywhere. In order to have a house, to have a home, one has to have history. Without home, one is left without history. That is why the nomad functions for nation-states and their citizens only as a geographical subject and not as a historical one. The nomads are considered as those who only move without any history, a population who "invented nothing" and, therefore, has nothing to contribute to the "public good," according to States' narratives. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1986) remind us that "[I]t is true that the nomads have no history; they only have a geography. And the defeat of the nomads was such, so complete, that history is one with the triumph of States" (p.73).

The House of All resembles a series of ideas that have been practiced in design for a long time under various titles or categories, such as Participatory Design (PD), Co-Design and, recently, Social Innovation. The concept of participation in design practices can be traced back to a series of design and research practices within the Scandinavian countries, focusing on "workplace democracy" since the 1970s (Bødker, 1996). In particular, "participation" has been adopted within many design practices in relation to claims or aspirations towards the social or social change. Participation, for example, is linked to a kind of "design humanism" aimed at reducing domination (Bonsiepe,

2006). Typically understood as developing methods for including the end-users of the designed products, systems and services, PD often discusses the process of inclusion of those voices that are not heard in the design process through engaging them into a series of workshops and tools such as mock ups, prototyping and sketching. Today, with more need to reformulate PD due to social, economic and environmental complexity and dynamics, some theorize participation as the objective of design itself (Björgvinsson, Ehn and Hilgren, 2010; Sanders and Van Petter, 2003; Margolin and Margolin 2002).

Participatory Design, Co-Design, Meta-Design and, recently, Social Innovation put forward claims for democratic forms of engagement among stakeholders of a concern, which eventually would initiate a process of bottom-up change. This is becoming more and more popular in governmental institutional agendas because "existing structures and policies have found it impossible to crack some of the most pressing issues of our times – such as climate change, the worldwide epidemic of chronic disease, and widening inequality" (Murray, Caulier-Grice and Mulgan, 2010).

However, the participation that is enacted within such approaches often is a form of engagement that is in line with a neoliberal understating of participation. People participate to express their interests and values and practice their rights in the social sphere (in the best case), while remaining recognizable by their very attributed identities that facilitate the status quo. Participation often becomes a form of affirmation of identities that is created to legitimize the practices of power. This can be thought of as the lack of conflictual and dissensual understating of participation, which in fact is inherent in the political nature of participation (Keshavarz and Mazé, 2013). Participation is not about making an agreement among "all" to move further; rather, it is actually about how the taking a part, sharing a part or acting a part in an already partitioned dynamic and environment can give us the ability to frame the problem, to not get involved with things that actually try to involve people in order to suppress or exclude them. What is needed is what I have already argued for through the theory of the gap in order to be able to think of other possible forms of engagement with situations: engagements that, while disarticulating and refusing relations and affairs subscribed to individuals and things by power positions, re-articulate new spaces and time for experiencing the very same situation otherwise.

Savorengo Ker, in contrast to many PD projects, enacts its internal relation to design-politics due to the very idea of practicing refusal through material articulations: refusal both in terms of refusing an identity that has been attributed to the Roma population and also refusing the identity of a camp for nomads. These refusal practices were performed and enacted in the form of a construction act of a communal "house" in a site that is not supposed to function as a home but rather should remain as a camp. The project developed a series

of communal methods to experience a shared space, the camp, in new ways of co-crafting materialities and performing them where they are not supposed to be. As politics is about wrong names in the wrong place and wrong time, the enactment and performance of housing is a form of political declaration to transform the camp into something else. The house unfolds the condition of Roma camps while it forms a new communal or shared space of experiencing the same site or locality. Participants, through materializing their manifest in a form of a materially made “home” in contradiction to a materially made “camp”, essentially create a clear distance from authorities and those who see the Roma population as a threat to society and thereby demonstrate a form of dissensus and disagreement. Therefore, the construction of the house is a form of mismatch or displaced communal crafting which does not necessarily argue for a “need to shelter” but expands the idea of shelter into the political realm of mobility and immobility. To perform and enact such distance is to operate within the “-“ of design-politics. To operate within the “-“ is to make an intervention. This intervention in return brings into being possible forms of politics through design as a mode of acting in the world.

Because design is already political no matter what it does or how it acts, it produces conditions of politics, of manipulation of lives of individuals and communities, of species and ecologies. Since the nexus affirms the internal tension and relation of design-politics, rather than defining each side, design researchers need to focus on the “-“, on the relation between the two, on their tensions and intersections, which is where practices, performances and enactments reside. It is also where “intervention” becomes possible:

*“To think intervention in the artificial is [...] to focus not on praxis (on will or acting through will – [which means subjective projection, the exercise of the drive—that is that it reaches its limit in action and remains enclosed in its own circle] but on production or poesis [which operates in the space of possible becoming and does not exhaust itself in the act of willing but creates ‘something other than itself’; it finds its limit outside itself. ]—on that which negotiates with what is possible to bring into being.” (Dilnot 2014, p.143)*

One can think of intervention as an attempt to simultaneously disarticulate materialities while re-qualifying, reconfiguring and re-articulating them within sites and localities of conditions. If design and politics are about the articulation of materials on various levels and in certain directions, the intervention in the design-politics nexus is about disarticulating such twofold products, while re-articulating it in other directions than those taken so far or those in which we are heading towards.

## FINAL REMARKS

There is no formula for understanding design-politics, nor are there conditions for making it. There are only eventually moments, situations, devices and things that can lead us to dis-articulate and re-articulate possible ways of inhabiting the world. In order to dis-articulate and re-articulate the in-between-ness, the “-“ of design-politics, one needs to formulate an entry point. While there are multiple entry points to this in-between-ness of design-politics, there is a politics embedded in what entry point to choose for dis-articulation and re-articulation as it influences the process of articulation: what is to be articulated, how is to be articulated and into what directions. For instance, the selecting of an entry point can be read based on lived experiences of a researcher and research participants.

This asserts that while such possibilities might offer new forms of politics, they also drive from certain forms of politics. Therefore, as much as there are possibilities of politics through design as material articulation and modes of acting in the world, there is politics of possibilities as well. Politics of possibilities can be defined here in line with Sara Ahmed (2010), who argues:

*“What we “do do” affects what we “can do.” This is not to argue that “doing” simply restricts capacities. In contrast, what we “do do” opens up and expands some capacities, although an “expansion” in certain directions might in turn restrict what we can do in others.” (p.252)*

Possibilities, therefore, are not simply a set of doing and acting that is actualised, nor are possibilities a set of not doing. They are rather certain spatial and temporal orientations that favour some capacities prior to others according to localities. Thus, the question what capacities to go for, to be potential about, is what should be at stake for design researchers working their ways into and through design-politics.

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