



EDITED BY
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DESIGN AS FUTURE- MAKING

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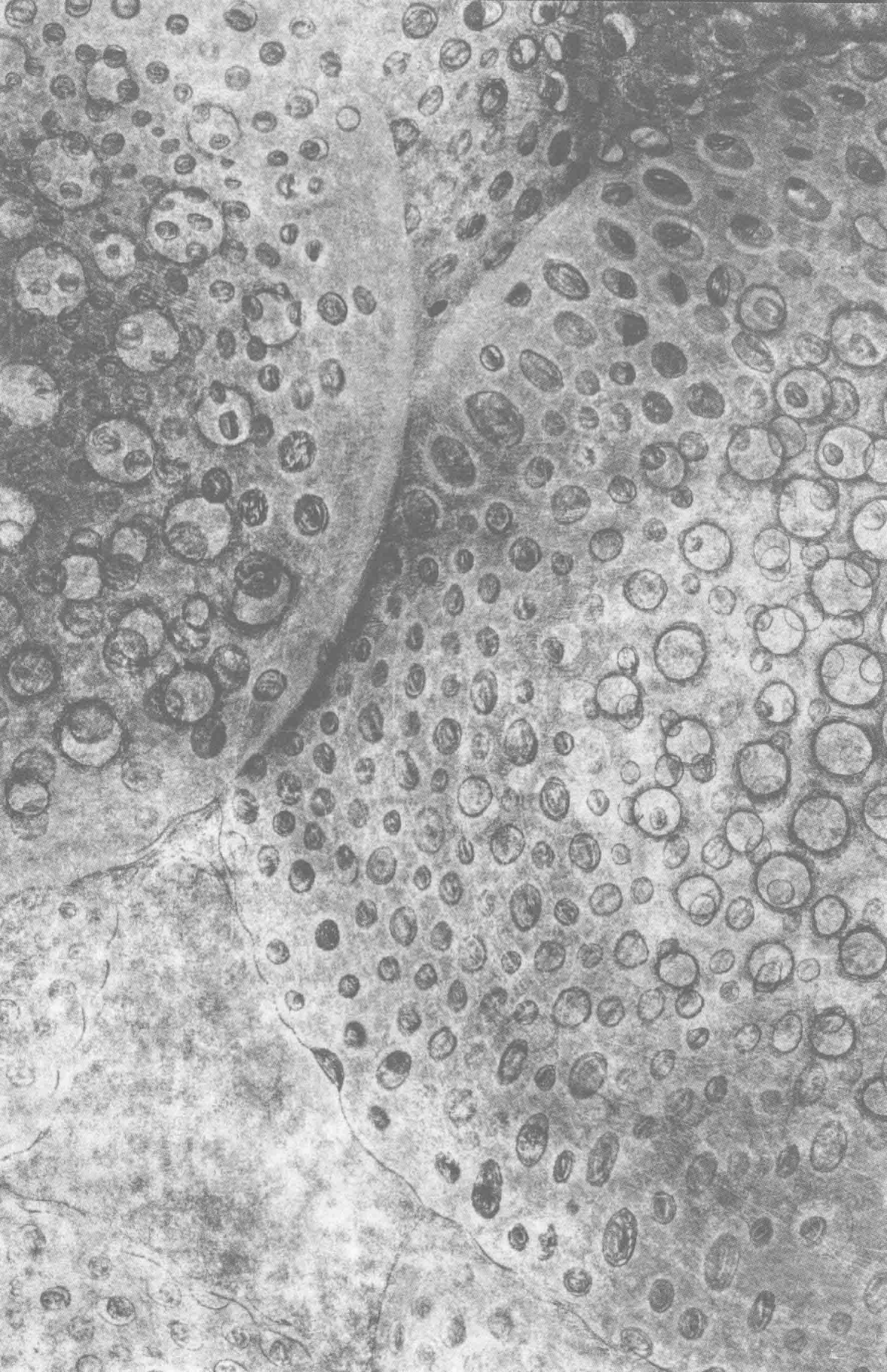
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Out of those multifarious conversations emerged a groundswell of voices calling for a more expansive and relevant role for design and designers—one that is more fully situated in the social, political, and environmental contexts of the people with whom they work. So our first debt of gratitude is to the contributors to this volume: Arjun Appadurai, Anna Barbara, Elio Caccavale,

Hazel Clark, Teddy Cruz, Clive Dilnot, Sean Donahue, Jamer Hunt, Ivan Kucina, Sze Tsung Leong, Tim Marshall, William Morrish, Tom Shakespeare, Mette Ramsgard Thomsen, Bruce Sterling, Cameron Tonkinwise, Jilly Traganou, Grace Vetrocq Tuttle, and Otto von Busch. Hazel Clark, in particular, receives our special thanks for her encouragement to pursue this project as a book. At the time she suggested the idea, Parsons' Masters of Arts in Design Studies was in the process of inception. Now that the MA Design Studies is a reality, this project has immediate relevancy to a new and growing body of scholars of design at Parsons and around the world. Another early supporter, and briefly a collaborator as well, was Julia Dault. A treasured friend and colleague, Julia has since left Parsons to devote her energies to her highly successful career as an artist. We thank her specifically for her help during the critical stage of framing the book's thematic structure.

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FOREWORD

Arjun Appadurai

This important collection of essays marks a new moment in design studies in which design is fully conceived as a practice that continuously reimagines its own conditions of possibility.

Designers and design scholars have always understood that there is an obvious kinship between design, innovation, and newness and, thus, that design is a natural ally of futurity. The essays in this collection take this insight out of the domain of common sense and move it into the space of creative and critical reflection.

One way in which this space is created is by reopening such issues as ephemerality, artifice, and innovation to deeper scrutiny. Several of the authors use these lenses to suggest that the relationship between fashion and time is not necessarily smooth or coherent but can be asymptotic and critical. In these perspectives, design and temporality can be seen as co-productive, and design can reopen the dialogue between memory, futurity, and newness, rather than serving as a mere mirror of commodified duration.

In a similar manner, several essays in this volume invite us to rethink the problem of materials and materiality by suggesting that design is not a mere operation upon preexisting materials of an ideal (or idealized) series of creative operations. Rather, whether in the matter of clothing, architecture, or digital design, materiality can be viewed as a design context, and design can be treated as a form of vibration (in the sense of Jane Bennett's idea of "vibrant matter")



Barbara Kruger, *Past/Present/Future*, 2010, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

that disturbs and creatively animates the material world and adds new forms of movement to already moving and dynamic materials.

It follows too that the thinking behind this volume unsettles the ways in which space and time have been segregated in prior design thinking. By looking at the future less as an abstract topology and more as an embedded property of the life of things, space appears in this volume as a “fold” within time, as a medium that shapes, and is shaped by, temporal processes. Design thus emerges as a mediator of the relationship between space and time and not just as a manipulator of the temporality of things.



Photograph Hanny Breunese. Courtesy Hanny Breunese.

Finally, reading these essays together produces in the reader a deep sense of the potential liberation of design thinking from the short-term tyranny of the cycles of fashion. While those cycles, no doubt, are an unavoidable part of the logic of late industrial consumerism, the authors in this volume, by reanimating the ideas of sustainability, materiality, and context, show us how design can begin to realize its most interesting potential, which is to mediate the relationship between long-term logics of sustainability and the short-term logics of fashion. Looking both ways at once, design can open up a new ethics of thingness, which might make social life both more exuberant and more just.

INTRODUCTION

Susan Yelavich

Design is always future-making. Present and powerful, it is the economic stimulus *du jour*. Silent and ubiquitous, it is perpetually underestimated as a social, political force. We live in a culture that waits for the next name-brand designers to lend their names to big-box retail, yet few people think about the pervasive conditions—the openings and barriers, physical and virtual—that shape and inhibit their lives. Which, of course, are their futures.

This paradox of visibility and invisibility is not just a reflection of the differences between design understood as commodity and design as social practice; it is inherent in the ways of acting *in* and *on* the world that are peculiar to design. Designers deploy knowledge derived from actions that literally change things and, therefore, behaviors. At the same time, they are never solely observers; they are interventionists who never act alone.

Design as Future-Making is a testament to the breadth and scope of design's social nature or, better put, the social relationships embedded in and mediated by the spaces, places, messages, and things encountered everyday. This collection of essays from designers and theorists hailing from various practices and places in the world is less concerned with design per se than with how and where design can contribute to conversations larger than itself.

The previous century listened patiently to the perennial complaint of the adolescent design field that no one understood what it was. Finally recognized—often under the glare of celebrity floodlights—design finds itself



Alex S. MacLean, *Landslides Aerial Photography*. Film capture, Pivot Irrigators in the Desert, Strauss Area, New Mexico, 1994. Courtesy Alex S. MacLean.

in an identity crisis. This is something of an ironic state of affairs, considering that branding is now one of design's core specialties. Perceived as a holistic makeover, design has become a panacea for whatever ails. Politically neutral, never demanding, the popular perception of design threatens to override its criticality and obscure its capacity to engender *agency*, in the best sense of that word. We are at risk of losing sight of design's part in enabling us to live well with each other and to live wisely with finite resources.

Design as Future-Making offers emergent models of design that are much needed today. It positions contemporary practice within a pan-disciplinary framework. This is especially critical now that virtually every object, place, and phenomenon is understood to exist in an ecology of forces and counterforces. Of course, it was always so, but the situation is far more complicated today. Networks are no longer metaphors but a vast agglomeration of cables, extruding untold billions of electronic exchanges that can and do alter the world at breakneck speed.

The resulting convergences, frequently blamed for accelerating market-driven conformity, have also had another effect. From the torrents of information, certain lively new tributaries can be identified. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, whose work was a critical catalyst for this book, calls these new "sodalities."¹ Designers of conscience are seeing their concerns echoed across the particularities of culture and traditional measures of distance. The same global flows that accelerate consumption are also creating a climate that supports the reinvigoration of design as a fundamentally ethical activity.² I deliberately write "reinvigorated," since so much of the history of design is a history of reform.

However, the ideas and the work represented in *Design as Future-Making* differ from the past in two important respects: they reject the idea of proselytizing in favor of conversation and healthy dissent, and they eschew the idea of a yet another unified design movement to attend more closely to the social interactions that occur within the microcosms of context. The risks of fragmentation and isolation are increasingly mooted by the growing presence and exposure of these projects to one another, a welcome, if backhanded, gift of globalization. If this portrait of a groundswell sounds utopian, it is, but only in the sense of what architect and critic Michael Sorkin calls "eutopian." In choosing *eu*, the Greek prefix for "better" over *u*, meaning "best," Sorkin calls for a plurality of visions for *topos*, or "place."³ However, where Sorkin locates *topos* in architecture and urbanism, *Design as Future-Making* also includes all that is implicit in those spaces: the messages, objects, images, and conversations that reverberate and crisscross within them. They are all sites of potential.

Certainly, the authors included in *Design as Future-Making* view the fusions and collisions of networked culture as a source of new understandings

and new possibilities. Challenging the limits of professionalization without eschewing their craft, they are opening the field to other voices and other conditions. Masses are understood as publics, practitioners as collaborators. They see issues—social justice, environmental health, political agency, education, and even the right to pleasure and play—not as dematerialized ideas and values but as occasions for design. *Design as Future-Making* demonstrates how each of those realms of daily life is affected by, and indeed determined by, their physical and virtual contexts. But for all its quotidian presence, design is ultimately the art of the possible. If design is to be relevant to the twenty-first century, it must be as multifarious and complex as the challenges ahead.

Organized by three interrelated themes, Crafting Capacities, Shifting Geographies, and Up-Ending Systems, the essays in *Design as Future-Making* show that design can promote individual agency, engage communities, and propose systemic changes within a global framework of mutual obligations. The approaches discussed in each section range from the pragmatic to the poetic, but they are unified by the conviction that design must embrace the immanent nature of its work: never finished, always in progress, open to alterations, and always conscious that making entails destruction.

To that end, the work featured in Crafting Capacities challenges design production that is done out of sight. It augurs direct engagement with the tangible and visceral, maintaining that things have things to teach us. These authors believe that the sensory qualities, physical behaviors, and the cultural connotations of materials should be considered in tandem with the virtual technologies that increasingly govern daily life. Otherwise, design risks encouraging the kind of social amnesia that comes with uncritical consumption.

Product designer Elio Caccavale and bioethicist and sociologist Tom Shakespeare use provocative objects to pose thought experiments that enable the public to reflect on the merits and risks of a new medical device, practice, or system before it becomes a *fait accompli*. Media designer Sean Donahue shares design techniques and strategies with marginalized communities so they can fully engage in civic life, not merely respond to civil laws. Instead of perpetuating the idea that new fashion design is *sui generis*, hactivist Otto von Busch taps into its gene pool. He breaks its codes—the signs, structures, and strategies that come to define a label—to give people the means to make themselves “fashion-able” and to introduce injections of micropolitical will into the channels regulated by industry. Architect and computer scientist Mette Ramsgard Thomsen focuses her research on material intelligence to explore how structures might *behave* (as opposed to how they might *appear*) as part of her long-term investigations into more sustainable ways of building. My own essay on the relation of textiles and architecture questions whether the digital algorithms that

now allow buildings to be woven and knitted risk producing a sterile virtuosity if the culture of cloth and its history in architecture is overlooked.

The contributors to *Shifting Geographies* recognize that, even with the flattening of distances and time zones that has come to define twenty-first-century life, the human psyche is not quite prepared to dispense with geography and the associations attached to it over time. The reality is that notions of national identity, cultural habit, and all manner of political claims are being transported and reconfigured, sometimes hybridized and sometimes hardened. This condition presents designers, in concert with communities, opportunities to critique the discriminatory role of borders, to question the difference between human rights and legal rights, and to recognize the pleasures of difference and foster conditions for cosmopolitan hybridity.

When we hear the word "geography," we tend to imagine it as "topography." Urbanist and architect William Morrish reminds us that underneath our increasingly artificial landscapes is a largely invisible infrastructure, which is becoming the critical determinant of the health of our towns and cities as they are buffeted by the affects of climate change. Here, he discusses the urgency of making infrastructure and its affects not just visible to, but also actionable by, communities. Inextricable from structures, geography becomes political. Architect Ivan Kucina is likewise committed to the emergence of the citizen-designer and the designer-citizen; however, instead of directing attention to the unseen, he is concerned with the visible but overlooked. Informed by his experience of informal (and too often dismissed) building initiatives during the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s, Kucina writes of a new self-regulated urbanity. He looks to what can be gleaned from the informal strategies with which everyday people customize their cities and the services and events they offer. Architect and spatial studies scholar Jilly Traganou and design researcher and strategist Grace Vetrocq Tuttle look at the opportunities afforded by the design of the Olympic Games to draw attention to unsupportable and deeply problematic claims by nations to monolithic cultures in a globalized world and the protests designed to contest them. Teddy Cruz is an architect who works in geographies of conflict, in particular the border region between San Diego and Tijuana. He explores and initiates ways in which each side of this artificially bifurcated geography can *constructively* contaminate each other's dwellings and cities. In her essay on Peruvian fashion designer and activist Lucia Cuba, fashion studies scholar Hazel Clark offers a case study of conflict of another type altogether: a program of forced sterilization, which became the impetus for a critical line of clothing. Concluding the section is a series of urban portraits by and an interview with photographer Sze Tsung Leong, whose work centers on global cities past and