Jun 17th, 12:00 AM

Introduction: Design-ing and Creative Philosophies

Betti Marenko
University of the Arts, London

Follow this and additional works at: https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/drs-conference-papers

Introduction: Design-ing and Creative Philosophies

Betti Marenko

University of the Arts, London
DOI: 10.21606/drs.2016.602

As this strand concerns an encounter between design as a process (design*ing*) and philosophy as a creative act, the question we wish to ask is: what might emerge as these practices collide, fuse or repel? To answer this we will map some of the ways of bringing together design and creative philosophies.

We recognise that the term 'creative philosophies' might not be common usage, however. For us organising and participating in this strand it highlights philosophy as a pragmatic activity of creating concepts that have material affects in the different milieus in which they are deployed. As such, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari – thinkers for whom philosophy was a profoundly creative practice – write that philosophy is determined not by truth or falsity, but by success or failure. Similarly, we think about design as a creative enterprise that needs creative conceptual inputs to evolve and expand, because once we open philosophy up to the creative, the creative is also affected by the philosophical. Let's name some names, as with these, we will locate some ways of thinking and doing creativity that are resolutely intertwined.

So in the roster of creative philosophies we will find Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (as mentioned), Michel Serres, Alfred North Whitehead, Baruch Spinoza, Isabelle Stengers, Gilbert Simondon, Georges Canguilhem, Jane Bennett, Bruno Latour, Brian Massumi, Peter Sloterdijk, Rosi Braidotti, Manuel De Landa, Sanford Kwinter, Lars Spuybroek, to name but a few, and also Jorge Luis Borges, William Burroughs, Alfred Jarry, Lucretius and many more.

What all these thinkers have in common is an affinity to an explorative, nonlinear, affirmative, creative thought.

Why, then, might it be so important to think differently about design?

Design as a set of disciplines, discourses, practices, concepts and ideas, acquires tangibility in its own making. Further, design, even as a set of diverse things is mutating and expanding. Which is why we insist on the gerund form – design*ing* – to indicate its inherently processual and future-related nature. In a way we have no choice but to think differently about design,

as it is already thinking, doing, making, practising, and so on, differently about itself. A philosophy that creates successful (or otherwise), impactful (or not), memorable (or forgetful) concepts is ripe for an encounter with a practice, thinking and discourse-set that is a mutating, processual designing.

We have noted that, with Deleuze and Guattari, we consider philosophy as the practice of creating concepts; to this we add designing as the practice of materialising possibilities. It can be said, then, that both philosophy and design are concerned with expressing the *not yet* in many impactful and creative ways. Design and philosophy are already profoundly entangled and it is time, therefore, to investigate some of the ways in which this entanglement occurs, while offering new and unexpected trajectories. Both design and philosophy are creative practices: each a way of doing the other, using materials, skills and experiences particular to each, as well as engaging with discourses, themes, practices and concerns that cross them both. In so doing, they amplify the creative in the other, and allow for the unfolding of a creation that unfolds at once both in practice and in theory. In these ways, the possibilities of new futures can be thought and materialised: creatively *designed* in thought and materially *philosophised* in practice.

Indeed, we believe in the creative power of philosophy to inform design in a myriad of ways: for example, seeping through matter while allowing forms to emerge; mapping topologies of future actualisations; creating space for unforeseen creations to run wild and free.

It is a matter, then, of putting in place the conditions for an unexpected encounter between designing and creative philosophies to occur. An encounter between ways of thinking and ways of doing, so that through such an encounter theory gets re*designed* and design gets re*thought*: a two-pronged reboot. For if we follow Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that a philosophy can only be pragmatic if it creates concepts that can always be intertwined with other practices, then the creative, pragmatic philosophy that ensues will itself also be disruptive and intensifying: it cannot help but have a feedback affect upon the multitudes in which it is embroiled.

One of the key concerns underpinning this strand is to explore ways to interrogate the rapidly evolving world of design. As such, design demands new and flexible bodies of theorisations capable of articulating its mutating nature and propensity to capture the future. This does not mean to say that current or past theorisations are redundant. On the contrary, what it suggests is that an exploratory adventure into creative philosophies can supplement, expand and recraft design, keeping pace with emerging discourses within design, and ultimately, with design's appetite for changing the world, one project at the time. Neither an approach to design nor philosophy should be used to totalise the other, we posit; so finding ways of colliding philosophies into mutating designs to see where each cluster might go seems to respect the differences in possibilities that we see.

Sure, the coming together of creative philosophies and designing does not produce easily defined relationships. Their encounter is not, and cannot be, a linear affair. Rather, what is envisioned is a series of ripples, swerves, strange hybridisations and collisions that are as

unpredictable as potentially enriching – as well as disruptive. It must be clear that there is no prescription in force here. We do not propose a superior philosophy supervising what design is doing; neither are we looking to extract ready-to-use ideas from established thoughts to apply them to design; nor do we want to produce a branded, scholastic form of design loyal to a specific school of thought. Instead this is about thinking design *with* creative philosophies, inspecting the points where they touch and repel, and exploring the possible alignments, discordances and crosspollinations between them. This is a processual way of proceeding (albeit not a method), a way of re*designing* the relationship between thinking and doing from a nonlinear, emergent, open perspective.

This echoes what Deleuze asserts about philosophy: that philosophy is always concerned with the outside, it exists only *through* the outside. Which does not mean that philosophy needs to appeal to outside disciplines to seek for authority or validation. On the contrary, as the practice of creating concepts, philosophy possesses a performative force that acts in the world, with concepts becoming thought-experiments unleashed in the world, cascading from one practice to another, requiring risk and adventure. What philosophy does in its relations to its outside – such as designing, we claim – is to extract potential, to recraft it, to push it in unexpected directions, trafficking it across disparate territories. Practised in this way philosophy is utterly metabolic, it is about provoking change and inducing transformative effects: an alchemical laboratory, a fablab of thoughts. This is a striking view of what philosophy is, and what philosophy can do: philosophy as an inventing machine, as designing.

Unlike a philosophy that tries to establish truth or falsity, a creative philosophy is concerned with the *how*. The key question becomes: what *can* philosophy do? To which we add: what can *design* do with it? And we might answer: it can cast new light on future making and articulate the conditions under which the new is created. If all this rings plausible, then philosophy needs designing as much as designing needs philosophy.

Designers, practitioners, critics and theorists, operating in contexts increasingly marked by complexity and contingency, are coming together to reflect on, and to respond to, the changes traversing established modes of practice within design, either by rethinking the economic models upon which design is predicated (planned obsolescence, anyone?), pushing the technological boundaries within which it operates, or questioning the traditional top-down attitude of designers and manufacturers towards end-users. Design is shifting its loci of impact on the world, and at the same time undergoing further ontological disruption.

What is remarkable is that this shift we are witnessing (and are part of) is no longer based on what design is, but on what design is becoming because of what it can do: a shift from design as problem solving to design as problem finding. The former is a rational and linear interpretation that evaluates design's activities in terms of efficiency and performance, and has dominated the world of design since the advent of modernity. In this sense, design is a task-oriented, performance-measured, linear exercise that ultimately reduces uncertainty by promoting functional competence. This is the conventional view of design as enforcing and reproducing market ideologies and working as a technology of affective capture. On the

other hand design as *problem finding* has to do with increasing complexity: problematising the existent, developing a critical and conceptual perspective, first of all on design itself. For example, design for debate and critical design use their materials, whether objects or concepts, to raise discussion on specific issues and to frame new problems.

The interdisciplinary nature of design and design research has been highlighted many times, we have already underlined the ways in which it is never quite able to inhabit one set of rules, practices or agendas. By advocating an open-ended enquiry that reflects the participation with the practices of 'making worlds' and 'creating futures' found in designing, the encounter with creative philosophies will highlight those aspects of designing that are both ontologically dynamic and create dynamic ontologies.

Designing as we are envisaging it here, is a creative act that has the possibility to disrupt the present. It becomes an articulation of myriad creative responses to any (proposed) opportunity space: in other words, the tangible embodying of speculative operations upon possible futures. Thought in this way, designing as creative process comes close to philosophy as creative process. This is not to demand that they operate under one, all-encompassing schema, but that they allow for their possibilities to connect – even momentarily – to see what might happen, what could be done.

Design has done well throughout its history in incorporating within itself, its selves, a multiplicity of different thoughts, activities, processes and outcomes. This strand situates itself within such an activity, so to emphasise and intensify it. The more design changes, expands and broadens its scope and field of action, the more it needs to collide with what philosophers, critical thinkers, theorists, and designers of concepts are developing.

And to catalyse this encounter is precisely what this strand aims to do.