DISCIPLINARY DISOBEDIENCE
A Border-Thinking Approach to Design

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1. In this chapter, my definition of border-thinking draws on both the works of Gloria Anzaldúa and Walter Mignolo. Anzaldúa's concept of the borderlands is both spiritual (being and mind) and physical, where the border becomes a sort of redemptive space, whereas Mignolo defines it as a way of thinking about epistemic resources seeking transformation/dissolution as opposed to accommodation of both sides.

2. Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books 2012), 7.

3. Anzaldúa, 7.

4. Anzaldúa, 7.

5. See, for example, Michael Bierut, *79 Short Essays on Design* (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007); Craig Bremner and Paul Rodgers, "Design Without Discipline," *Design Issues 29*, no. 3 (Summer 2013), 4–13, doi.org/10.1162/DESI; Nigel Cross, "Design Research: A Disciplined Conversation," *Design Issues* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1999), 5–10; Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Alain Findeli, "Rethinking Design Education for the 21st Century: Theoretical, Methodological, and Ethical Discussion," *Design Issues* 17, no. 1 (Winter 2001), 5–17; Daniel Friedman, *Radical Modernism* (New Haven, MA: Yale University Press, 1994); Terry Irwin, "Transition Design: A Proposal for a New Area of Design Practice, Study, and Research," *Design and Culture* 7, no. 2 (2015), 229–46, doi.org/10.1080/17547075.2015.1051829; Eleni Kalantidou and Tony Fry, eds., *Design in the Borderlands* (Abingdon,

Introduction

Designers often live, to borrow a term from Gloria Anzaldúa,[1] within the borderlands. "Living in the borderlands," as she writes, "produces knowledge by being within a system while also retaining the knowledge of an outsider who comes from outside the system."[2]

Possessing an "'outsider within' status"[3] means designers stand at one end of a discipline and tackle problems overlooking others. In this process, however, designers realize they are not accepted by either. We exclude and include, we reject and we accept, and we struggle while negotiating. "The basic concept," argues Anzaldúa, "involves the ability to hold multiple social perspectives while simultaneously maintaining a center that revolves around fighting against concrete material forms of oppression."[4] This oppression in design, I would argue, are the borders of specialization.

Expanding design to encompass theories and practices from other disciplines has long been debated.[5] However, most of these discussions revolve around incorporating different methodologies and practices from other disciplines, or developing another "-disciplinarity" in design, rather than eroding the borders between different specializations within design. Specifically, while Bremner and Rodgers[6] describe design moving away from disciplines and into issue- and project-based work, there

is no discussion of the *how*, *what*, and *where* we think in design.[7] In this chapter, I propose the decolonial concept of border-thinking *within* design as a method of disciplinary disobedience for moving design towards more collective approaches.

Borders Imposed by Disciplinary Decadence

Borders indicate divisions; they "define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*."[8] Design specializations are narrow borders. Designers, I would argue, inhabit what Anzaldúa refers to as the borderland, "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition."[9] Those who inhabit it "cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal.'"[10]

Consider this scenario, all too familiar to designers:

What do you do?
I'm a designer.
What kind? Graphic? Fashion? Furniture? Interior?

Replying only with *design* means a designer is pressed for more details. For many, the question induces the same anxiety as the seemingly innocent question *Where are you from?*, where "the questioning, the interrogation, can stop only when you have explained yourself."[11]

Through our responses, we end up choosing containment.[12] But why are we afraid of crossing borders? These are predefined concepts that we think are unquestionable, and we leave them unchallenged. We are afraid of challenging them when our roles demand that we do.

The term "discipline" has many meanings referring to forms of control and punishment.[13] In academia, the term refers to the organization of knowledge into departments. As Lewis Gordon states, "disciplines, in this sense, become epistemological or knowledge-producing models that offer proven ways under the imposition of which reality … sighs."[14] The designations of theology, law, and medicine

Oxon: Earthscan, 2014); Adam Richardson, "The Death of the Designer," *Design Issues* 9, no. 2 (Autumn 1993), 34–43; Paul A. Rodgers and Craig Bremner, "The Concept of the Design Discipline," *Dialectic* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2017), doi.org/10.3998/dialectic.14932326.0001.104; Anne-Marie Willis, "Transition Design: The Need to Refuse Discipline and Transcend Instrumentalism," *Design Philosophy Papers* 13, no. 1 (2015), 69–74.

6. Rodgers and Bremner, "The Concept of the Design Discipline."

7. Walter D. Mignolo, "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking and Epistemic Disobedience," *Postcolonial Studies* 14, no. 3 (2011), 273–83, doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2011.613105.

8. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 25 (italics in original).

9. Anzaldúa, 25 (italics in original).

10. Anzaldúa, 25.

11. Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 116.

12. I use the term "we" to refer to designers, and include myself in this category. Moreover, I am conscious of universalising the term "designers" and the design experience, acknowledging that design is taught and learned differently across the world. In this chapter, I speak from my experience learning from and teaching in a Western design context.

13. Michel Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969); Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975); Lewis R. Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2006); David R. Shumway and Ellen Messer-Davidow, "Disciplinarity: An Introduction," *Poetics Today* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1991), 201–25, doi.org/10.2307/1772850.

14. Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence*, 3.

15. Julie Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory, and Practice* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1990).

16. Armin Krishnan, "What Are Academic Disciplines? Some Observations on the Disciplinarity vs. Interdisciplinarity Debate," working paper (ESRC National Centre for Research Methods, NCRM Working Paper Series, 2009), 32.

17. Takuo Hirano, "The Development of Modern Japanese Design: A Personal Account," *Design Issues* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1991), 54–62, doi.org/10.2307/1511407.

18. Rodgers and Bremner, "The Concept of the Design Discipline," 21.

19. Francisco Laranjo, "Continuous Rebranding: Interview with Angela Mitropoulos," *Modes of Criticism*, no. 3 (2017), 34.

20. Rodgers and Bremner, "The Concept of the Design Discipline," 22.

21. Lewis R. Gordon, "Disciplinary Decadence and the Decolonisation of Knowledge," *Africa Development* 39, no. 1 (2014), 86.

have their origin in the late Middle Ages whereas further specialization and a whole range of new disciplines were established in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe.[15] The divisions were pragmatic, allowing "disciplines to develop a stable identity and an agenda for research and further development."[16]

Abolishing disciplinary boundaries enables designers to adapt early to the new challenges facing both our field and the world.[17] While design is beginning to "expan[d] its disciplinary, conceptual, theoretical, and methodological frameworks to encompass ever-wider disciplines, activities, and practice,"[18] the process is moving slowly. Moreover, when we borrow concepts from other disciplines, their appearance leads to a loss of "something that makes it possible to see the work those concepts do, or make us do when we use them."[19]

Design's encompassing of a wider range of disciplines produces new strands of design rather than a fundamental rethinking of how design specializations come together to address new challenges. As Bremner and Rodgers state:

> The edges between product design and service design … continue to be increasingly fuzzy. Mobile phone companies now offer more than a mere physical artefact (i.e. a phone), rather, they now regularly offer users the opportunities to subscribe to their services comprised of music and video downloads, among many others.[20]

We have forgotten the segregation that exists within our own discipline and have fallen into what Lewis Gordon refers to as "disciplinary decadence":

> the phenomenon of turning away from living thought, which engages reality and recognises its own limitations, to a deontologised or absolute conception of disciplinary life. The discipline becomes, in solipsistic fashion, the world. And in that world, the main concern is the proper administering of its rules, regulations, or, as Frantz Fanon argued, (self-devouring) methods.[21]

For Gordon, disciplinary decadence means treating a discipline as something that has always existed and is eternal. This eternalizing of a discipline leaves "no room for other disciplinary perspectives, the result of which is the rejection of them for not being one's own."[22]

An example of disciplinary decadence in design is all the forms that exist (listed in the image below).

These forms of design indicate that design is "los[ing] sight of itself" and "asserting [itself] *as the world*."[23]

Indeed, if we continue to pursue this decadence, we reach the conclusion that we must have a strand of design for anything that we come up with. Take the example of the call to decolonize design. Within design discourse, this is often interpreted as a proposal for yet another strand of design called "decolonial design." However, this proposition reduces the idea to additive changes rather than an ontological goal. But the inclusion of "a greater diversity of actors or perspectives" is not sufficient, as "this only goes to serve a delaying and offsetting demands for radical systemic change."[24]

Approaching design ontologically, as decolonial thinker Arturo Escobar writes, "destabilizes its comfortable niche within naturalized modern orders, demands a recentering of design education in order to bring it fully into the critical social theory space."[25] In other words, we must practice our disciplines differently. To tweak the words of

22. Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence*, 5.

23. Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence*, 8 (italics in original).

24. Decolonising Design, "Editorial Statement," *Decolonising Design* (blog), June 27, 2016, www.decolonisingdesign.com/statements/2016/editorial/.

25. Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 50.

Graphic & Fashion & Interior & Product & Industrial & Furniture & 3D & Spatial & Surface & UX/UI & Interaction & Human-centred & Service & Design Innovation & Critical & Speculative & Inclusive & Participatory & Co-Design & Transition & Information & Design Fiction & Environmental & Sustainable & Design Engineering & Digital & Web & Animation & Social & Transdisciplinary & Games & Jewellery & Textile & Design Management & Ceramic & Urban & Disability...

26. Zoe Todd, "An Indigenous Feminist's Take on the Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just Another Word for Colonialism," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29, no. 1 (March 2016), 8, doi.org/10.1111/johs.12124.

27. Tim Seitz, "The 'Design Thinking' Delusion," trans. Adam Baltner, *Jacobin*, October 16, 2018, https://jacobinmag.com/2018/10/design-thinking-innovation-consulting-politics.

28. C. West Churchman, "Guest Editorial: Wicked Problems," *Management Science* 14, no. 4 (December 1967), B141–42.

29. Nigel Cross, "Designerly Ways of Knowing," Design Studies 3, no. 4 (1982), 221–27.

30. Design Council, "Designing a Future Economy" (London: Design Council, 2018), 29, www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/report/designing-future-economy-report.

Zoe Todd, they continue to be practiced in "ways that erase Indigenous bodies within our lecture halls, [and] we unconsciously avoid engaging with contemporary Indigenous scholars and thinkers while we engage instead with [sixty-year-old] texts [and ideas] or two-hundred-year-old philosophical tomes."[26]

We deny space for alternatives, for thinking of possibilities. To destabilize and disrupt requires not just integrating relevant methods and practices from other disciplines into design, but the step that comes before: eroding these different fields of design to imagine design anew. Otherwise, as the adoption of "design thinking" as a corporate management tool has shown, it is merely a simplistic and superficial adoption of methods and practices from other disciplines, making it seem as if complex problems and challenges were easily solvable and manageable – "saving the world the easy way."[27]

Redefinition – Skills of the Future

Design education trains us to deal with ill-formulated and confusing "wicked problems."[28] Nothing is ever certain, and designers are not taught to discover the rule but to try out different solutions.[29] For designers to try out different solutions – to tackle ill-defined twenty-first-century problems – requires new knowledge and a new set of skills. A Design Council report on "Designing a Future Economy" highlights the following as required skills and knowledge for the future of the design industry:

> – design (techniques, tools, and principles)
> – operations analysis
> – programming
> – drafting
> – engineering and technology
> – fine arts
> – technology design
> – building and construction
> – computers and electronics
> – geography
> – visualization[30]

Since design "is no longer confined to particular sectors or occupations,"[31] the report calls on the field to deliver twenty-first-century skills for tomorrow's companies and organizations – designers with exposure beyond their individual specialisms, working in interdisciplinary teams where they "are comfortable deploying their innate creativity and flexibility."[32]

As argued earlier, design's decadence is making any skill or approach a "strand" of design rather than viewing design as fluid and evolving.[33] If design is to deal with complex, ill-defined problems, why do we continue to think of it in such rigid terms? In its current structure, design education cannot begin to teach future designers these skills. In addition, the Design Council report states that developing design skills is underresourced:

> Designers require more expensive training, but receive it less often. The most critical barriers to training identified by firms are a lack of money available to fund training, training not being considered a priority and a lack of time for management to plan and organise training. Given there is also a narrowing pipeline of designers coming through the formal education system, further action is required from employers to avoid the UK experiencing a skills crisis in one of the most productive and valuable parts of the economy.[34]

However, the report does not clarify whether it is the training after school or the training within school that needs adjusting. Under the heading "Understanding Educational Pathways," the report states that

> our analysis examined the range of degree subjects that were taken by people working in the sector. Employers in design skills-intensive industries are more likely to complain that the people they recruit from Higher Education lack the required skills and competencies, and there appears to be scope to improve the relevance of university qualifications.[35]

31. Design Council, 5.

32. Design Council, 26.

33. Rodgers and Bremner, "The Concept of the Design Discipline."

34. Design Council, "Designing a Future Economy," 10.

35. Design Council, 65.

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36. Design Council, 5.

37. Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*.

38. Escobar, 34–35.

39. Sara Ahmed, "White Men," *Feministkilljoys* (blog), November 4, 2014, feministkilljoys. com/2014/11/04/white-men/; Todd, "An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn."

The report warns of the impact of underinvesting in these future skills, "and the need to better prepare for the economic, technological and political changes ahead."[36] While designers cannot be taught everything they need to know in university, the report makes a strong case for design programs to revise what they are teaching. These changes must go beyond the cosmetic.

With designers looking to respond to the planetary crisis, to become more sensitive to their environment, and to understand the impact of their work on both human and nonhuman actors, they are beginning to shift their concerns towards serving society rather than solving problems for industry.[37] As Arturo Escobar states, "new methods highlight front-end research, with the designer as facilitator and mediator more than expert; conceive of design as eminently user-centered, participatory, collaborative, and radically contextual."[38]

However, I would argue that we give these new methods too much credit. Designers may indeed be interested in these ideas and methods, but how are they enacted in practice? Design remains industry-focused, with an emphasis on incorporating content as a patchwork onto the existing structure rather than changing the terms of the conversation, i.e., it remains within the models of Western modernity. Despite the growing list of skills that require a move away from specialization, few programs within design education teach design in broader terms. Worse, design's focus on social awareness is often shallow and devoid of any real politics. The growing number of designers interested in moving away from consumerism and towards the "social" realm are mostly not equipped with the right tools and methods to address the problems they are tackling.

Design skills and the design canon have not received enough scrutiny or reexamination; rather, we are all about "tradition as authority" – design can change slightly but within disciplinary dictates. The recent integration of underrepresented designers into the reading lists remains within the same structure: the celebration of the individual. Redefining design brings with it new reference points, new texts, and new ideas – ideas and references that do not reproduce citation.[39] In addition, it should acknowledge the intellectual labor of thinkers and activists who have been

ignored in favor of what Zoe Todd calls "the rock-stars of Euro-Western thought."[40] This is what it means to inhabit the borderlands: "thinking from the outside, using alternative knowledge traditions and alternative languages of expression."[41]

This becomes a "curricular action that challenges the dominant structure[s] of education,"[42] not to replace them, as they "will continue to exist and … will remain viable as spaces of, and for, critique,"[43] but to enable engagement with other epistemologies, knowledges, and understandings.[44]

A discipline is not eternal, it cannot outlive its purpose. Every discipline "faces the problem of having to exceed the scope of its object of inquiry."[45] Sometimes there are problems and questions that design cannot address on its own, "in spite of disciplinary dictates.'"[46]

Knowing One Another

Designers are masters of what Albert Rothenberg calls "Janusian thinking," an idea drawn from Janus, the Roman god with two faces.[47] Janus "look[s] and apprehend[s] in opposite directions" inside and outside.[48] Janusian thinking is "the capacity to conceive and utilize two or more opposite or contradictory ideas, concepts, or images simultaneously."[49] A swirl of opposites and contradictory ideas filling the mind creates possibilities for new points of view. In more designerly terms, it is the ability to observe details, coincidences, and rhythms that others "fail to notice."[50]

This is a characteristic shared by all design disciplines – *designerly ways of thinking and knowing*.[51] The question is, how much do graphic designers know about product design and vice versa? How much do we know about spatial/interior designers or fashion designers? From my experience as a graphic designer teaching in an industrial and product design program, and from speaking to academics and practitioners, I've realized how little designers know about design overall, and the discomfort they feel stepping into what they deem "unfamiliar." Yet we all share similar processes, ways of thinking, and ways of gathering design knowledge (through people, processes,

40. Todd, 8.

41. Lucy Mayblin, "Border Thinking," *Global Social Theory* (blog), n.d., globalsocialtheory. org/concepts/border-thinking/.

42. Ira Shor, *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 188.

43. Arturo Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise," *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (2007), 187, doi.org/ 10.1080/0950238 0601162506.

44. Walter D. Mignolo, "DELINKING: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality, and the Grammar of De-Coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (2007), 449–514, doi.org/10.1080/09502380 601162647.

45. Gordon, "Disciplinary Decadence and the Decolonisation of Knowledge," 86.

46. Gordon, 44.

47. Albert Rothenberg, "The Process of Janusian Thinking in Creativity," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 24, no. 3 (1971), 195–205, doi.org/10.1001/ archpsyc.1971. 01750090001001.

48. Rothenberg, 196.

49. Rothenberg, 196.

50. Nigel Cross, *Design Thinking: Understanding How Designers Think and Work* (Oxford: Berg, 2011), 13.

51. I am referring to the values and aspects discussed by Nigel Cross, see Cross, "Design Research: A Disciplined Conversation" and "Designerly Ways of Knowing."

52. Cross, "Design Research: A Disciplined Conversation."

53. László Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion* (Chicago, IL: Paul Theobald and Company, 1947), 67.

54. For a more comprehensive discussion of the terms, see Bremner and Rodgers, "Design Without Discipline."

55. Mignolo, "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing," 2.

56. Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise."

57. Ramón Grosfoguel, "Transmodernity, Border Thinking, and Global Coloniality: Decolonizing Political Economy and Postcolonial Studies," trans. Inês Martins Ferreira, *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, no. 80 (2008), 115–47; Madina V. Tlostanova and Walter D. Mignolo, "On Pluritopic Hermeneutics, Trans-Modern Thinking, and Decolonial Philosophy," *Encounters* 1, no. 1 (2009), 10–27.

and products).[52] Despite our commonalities, design remains a "strictly vocational education" that "breeds specialists with a rather narrow horizon"[53] – a caution from László Moholy-Nagy from over seventy years ago, and yet little has changed. Designers are specialized within design, and often are only familiar with their own field.

With all the changes in practice, why do we remain tied to these specialisms? How often do we work together? And most importantly, are specialisms still relevant? Design discourse uses the words crossdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary,[54] but these are not genuinely practiced to understand the true nature of collaboration. In current thinking, an interdisciplinary designer "crosses" a border by abolishing the divide between digital and print or design and illustration, rather than the larger issues of crossing specialism borders and other disciplinary boundaries.

Increased discussion of cross-, multi-, trans-, inter-, and post-disciplinary practices gives the impression that design is moving to redefine itself in radically new ways. But the opposite is occurring, as more types of designers and fields of design emerge; "fields" that are merely skills.

Border-Thinking as Method

A possible way out of this disciplinary containment and decadence is border-thinking. Border-thinking is a decolonial concept, a concept "focuse[d] on changing the terms of the conversation and not only its content."[55] Decoloniality crosses borders of thought to craft another space for the production of knowledge.[56] Therefore, it locates its inquiry on the very borders of systems of thought and reaches towards the possibility of non-Eurocentric models of thinking. This is a way of broadening the canon of thought by acknowledging the existence of other epistemologies, knowledges, and understandings, towards a pluriversal world – a world where many worlds fit.[57]

In *Design in the Borderlands*, Eleni Kalantidou and Tony Fry bring border-thinking closer to design, arguing that border-thinking

brings us to confront the knowing of the ground of what we know and how such knowing frames what we see, hear and understand in the spaces of our being and becoming. By implication, border thinking breaks out of disciplinary boundaries; it crosses borders, is nomadic … [and] is … a thinking along, within and about borders rather than a thinking of them. … [A]t the same time, it is … an automatic refusal of containment, ownership and institution. This means it cannot be fixed and "held in place…"[58]

Border-thinking unifies the *how*, *what*, and *where* we think.[59] This definition moves thinking about design beyond disciplinary boundaries, where it invites other disciplines into dialogue to inform the issues it tackles and to think and act decolonially.

Border-thinking is not additive, it is systemic. It requires a complete rethinking of design. Engaging in border thinking here is not a "rejecti[on] of modernity to retreat into a fundamentalist absolutism" but "the decolonial transmodern response of the subaltern to Eurocentric modernity," a redefinition of design and "of citizenship, democracy, human rights, humanity, economic relations beyond the narrow definitions imposed by European

58. Eleni Kalantidou and Tony Fry, "Design in the Borderlands: An Introduction," in *Design in the Borderlands*, ed. Eleni Kalantidou and Tony Fry (Abingdon, Oxon: Earthscan), 6–7.

59. Mignolo, "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing."

What we think of when we say "good design".
Image: Danah Abdulla.

60. Ramón Grosfoguel, "World-System Analysis in the Context of Transmodernity, Border Thinking and Global Coloniality," *Review* 29, no. 2 (2006), 178–79.

61. Madina V. Tlostanova and Walter D. Mignolo, *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2012), 36.

62. "Minor gestures" are context-based and somewhat subversive ideas that are presented as ways of expanding the limits of a given enclosed system, carving a pathway towards structural change (disciplines, higher education institutions, organisations, etc.). The concept of minor gestures is a work in progress that Pedro Oliveira and I are tackling and expanding on in a forthcoming coauthored paper.

63. Ashley Dawson, *Extinction: A Radical History* (New York, NY: OR Books, 2016).

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

65. Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, 35.

66. Kalantidou and Fry, "Design in the Borderlands: An Introduction."

67. Consider the attitude of engineers towards designers. Mike Nuttal claimed that engineers at General Motors called designers "clay fairies" (Harvey Molotch, Where Stuff Comes From [New York, NY: Routledge, 2005]). Despite the close relationship between design and engineering, engineers often refer to designers as "the people … who make the colors" (Mike Monteiro, "Design's Lost Generation," *Mike Monteiro* (blog), February 19, 2018, https://medium.com/@monteiro/designs-lost-generation-ac7289549017) and add the decoration, a definition still widely accepted by designers if we remain politically unaware.

68. Bierut, *79 Short Essays on Design*.

modernity"[60] – i.e., a different way of thinking and knowing about the world.

As a decolonial concept, border-thinking rethinks the existence of design as a whole rather than its compartmentalization – it is not about "changing" the discipline but "und[oing] imperial and colonial differences, ontologically and epistemically."[61]

My proposal in this chapter – to erode the boundaries between design disciplines – can be read as a minor gesture[62] within the existing system before embracing and integrating other disciplines and truly decolonizing design (by questioning the discipline itself), as new challenges cannot be seen in isolation from capitalism and imperialism[63] and coloniality hiding "under the rhetoric of modernity."[64] Questioning the discipline of design is crucial, as these new challenges bring forth "unprecedented methodological and epistemological issues,"[65] opening up spaces for other disciplines to enter into dialogue with design and moving beyond the models of Western modernity. To solve twenty-first-century problems is to look beyond twentieth-century solutions.

But before design goes beyond itself as Kalantidou and Fry argue,[66] it should break out of – and understand – its own containment in specialization (interdisciplinarity) before engaging with other disciplines (cross-/multi-/transdisciplinarity), and meaningfully decolonizing the discipline (beyond additive change).

A rethinking and dismantling of design specializations opens up possibilities: it could subvert the hierarchy not only within design but across disciplines that have a close relationship with it. If design were to redefine itself, it might subvert the hierarchy within academic disciplines. After all, not all disciplines are created equal, and design, unfortunately, is not high up in this hierarchy.[67]

Design education requires a broad scope, and without exposure to other disciplines that share a culture with design – and exposure to different design practices – designers will continue to speak and design for themselves.[68] In this way, students and designers can critically engage with their surroundings, and make sense of their actions and how these affect the people they are designing for.

Conclusion

By engaging with border-thinking, the definition of design, and our ability to articulate our value as designers, rests in our hands. Designers are collaborative by nature, and we have always had the ability to bring different fields together. Therefore, design crosses borders.

Luckily, the borders of specialization were drawn by us, which means that we can move the line, toe it, and breach it. Border-thinking is a way of creating collective practices. Before beginning to bring design into other disciplines, we should look inward to our own discipline and transform it. In this way, we can articulate our contribution. We assume we have reached the tipping point, past the point of being able to change anything, but this signals a lack of imagination, a feeling that design is eternal and unchanging.

Would designers be "better-informed [and] better-theorised"[69] and create more meaningful objects if they really understood the economic, political, and social implications of what they do? Designers cannot hold concepts and ideas in rigid boundaries. These disciplinary borders prevent us from building meaningful relationships, from developing real collectivity and collaboration. Most importantly, to quote Henry Giroux, "at stake here is a notion of pedagogy that both informs the mind and creates the conditions for modes of agency that are critical, informed, engaged, and socially responsible."[70]

Arguing that designers lack contextual understanding is not new, but issues of race and power remain of little concern to design education. To begin to address this task requires more than just applying certain theories to design. It is time to reorient design away from the solution-finding experts serving industry – the functional, rational, and industrial traditions – "toward a type of rationality and set of practices attuned to the relational dimension of life."[71] It requires a complete rethinking towards a radical imagination,[72] one, I suggest, that begins with abolishing the borders between design itself, and thinking of design anew.

69. Kalantidou and Fry, "Design in the Borderlands: An Introduction," 7.

70. Henry A. Giroux, "The Disimagination Machine and the Pathologies of Power," *Symploke* 21, nos. 1–2 (2013), 265.

71. Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, x.

72. Giroux, "The Disimagination Machine."

Acknowledgments

Apartheid wall, Pisgat Ze'ev settlement in the Shu'afat neighborhood of East Jerusalem, occupied Palestine. Photo: Lisa Nessan.

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