

On a conclusion...

Overall I really enjoyed this course. I felt like my ideas were challenged and I came out of it with a different, but more importantly, a better way of thinking about and practicing design. For the final blog post I wanted to look at stakeholders and responsibility as this theme came up more than once throughout the semester.

While the final debate topic was different, the debate framing what role/responsibility designers have in this current day and age felt similar to debate 1 and it affected our argument as the “against” side. As established in debate 1, designers have a diminished ability to affect change within a capitalistic system. This is not always the case but I think that those examples could be classified as outliers and speak more to the fluidity of agency than a move toward real change in the system. The final debate argument phrased the topic as future humans looking back favorably upon “us” as designers which effectively puts the onus back onto a group that was demonstrated early on to not have much control over the system. I think my teammate made an argument tangentially related to this saying that future humans will condemn the policies and institutions as well as designers but this was a difficult position to defend. It is most likely that future generations will condemn this and previous generations as whole with little distinction between who was doing what. I would be satisfied with people looking back favorably on the fact that designers did their best to not exacerbate the current crisis and to push for real change when they could.

In preparing my debate points I was browsing the COP28 website and although the location was a bit incongruous, they mentioned a gathering of people from politicians to scientists. Researching from the perspective of a designer I found that odd that our profession wasn't mentioned as an integral part of the conference. A quick scan of the Advisory

Committee reveals a solid lineup of politicians and business people but very few design industry professionals. My thought on our profession metaphorically is that we act as a bridge between scientists and policy makers. Designers are the only ones who can enact or make real the policies that are created and without us, they will definitely fail.



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I appreciated the debate topics as they did broaden my perspective on design as a whole. In the US design disciplines are siloed and interdisciplinary work is viewed skeptically so thinking about problems from the perspective of a furniture designer isn't terribly helpful until you realize that all design operates from a shared foundation of principles that can be applied to various areas. When dealing with a crisis on the scale of climate change, there needs to be a vast collaboration of shared expertise from across all design fields. Developing a worldwide accepted approach to protect the "sustainability of ecosystems" is an all-hands task (Stoermer and Crutzen 2000, 18). A 2010 report from the UK Design Council called for more education in this area in order to begin building this "worldwide consensus" and more locally the multidisciplinary element is why I wanted to be apart of D4C. Hopefully future generations of humans will understand the responsibilities of the key stakeholders and be kind enough to separate those doing the work from those

perpetuating the cycle.

Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer: "The 'Anthropocene'",
in: *Global Change Newsletter*, 41 (May 2000): 17-18.

On social bite & design...

On a recent walk through St Andrews Square in New Town I happened across Social Bite, a homeless outreach charity. I remembered them from our dLab1 project regarding homelessness but only knew about their coffee shop and donation arm. However, today I learned about their "Recovery Village", which has one location in Edinburgh and a new one planned for Dundee. What was so interesting was that they had one of the actual accommodation pods in St Andrews Square for the public to view.

While showing the proposed home is in fact an exciting way to garner public support, I was curious to know more about the infrastructure of support that the residents could expect. The Social Bite website has a good explanation of the services they will provide and great renderings of the village, highlighting the social component that is so crucial in recovery. They call the residences "modular homes", with 15 of these units gathered around a central community hub with pathways connecting the homes to give the setup a real community feel.



Courtesy of Social Bite

<https://www.social-bite.co.uk/what-we-do/dundee-village/>



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Being inside the model unit was a pleasant experience. The finishes were sturdy and sustainable, and the details were well considered. The website talks about providing a shelter with dignity and you can really feel that when you're in the

space. It appeared the structure would meet the new Passivhaus Equivalent Standards Scotland has pledged to adopt (www.gov.scot, n.d.) but the volunteers were not sure and my research could find anything definitive. That aside, the interior was warm, the natural light was great and it felt cozy without feeling cramped.

I know this is an environmental design course but with social design being such a heavy influence this semester I was curious to see if this project would be considered "social design". In my summative assignment 1 for dLab1 we were asked the question, "what is social design?" My argument was for three criteria to be applied to any given project, beginning with Armstrong et al's (2014) criteria, *modus operandi* and *aim*. I have been fascinated by this idea of removing the designer as expert (Design, 2019) for a truly collaborative effort so my argument was to include this as the third criteria for defining social design. In the few project I have analyzed with my "criteria" I have found that most do not satisfy all three, with most stumbling over the designer as expert in the process. The reason I think this is important is that it confirms the process to be truly social since the *modus operandi* and *aim* cannot eliminate the potential self-interest of the designer. I pleasantly surprised to find that this rehabilitation village did in fact reflect all three criteria when analyzed. Of course the goal of the project is social, as well as how they went about instituting it but most crucially, they displayed a truly collaborative spirit by including not only NHS workers in the process but also current and former homeless persons. This does not mean the project or process is perfect but I do think that employing true social design gives it its best chance for success.

Armstrong, L., Bailey, J., Julier, G. and Kimbell, L. (2014). Social Design Futures: HEI Research and the AHRC. *University of Brighton*. [online] Available at: <http://mappingsocialdesign.org>.

Design, D.I.B. (2019). *Designing For and With Society*. [online] Medium. Available at: <https://medium.com/grandstudio/designing-for-and-with-society-b644f4cd66e4>.

www.gov.scot. (n.d.). *Energy Standards Review – Scottish Passivhaus Equivalent: Working Group*. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/groups/energy-standards-review-scottish-passivhaus-equivalent-working-group/>.

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On tasting...

One element of Scottish culture that I am consistently surprised by is the food. From discussions I've had with Scots, I know this is a relatively new trend and that historically there was not a lot of attention given to innovation in the cuisine. However, as long as I've been visiting Scotland I have had many memorable meals at restaurants that I continue to patronize as a resident – with more being added frequently to my “must try” list. There are many different types of restaurants that fit this bill but the ones that I am going to focus on here are the ones that specialize in “tasting menus”. These menus are updated periodically in order to showcase meat and vegetables that are most in season and are delivered to the patron in courses. It is not uncommon for a meal to last hours as each dish is brought out and presented by the servers. Course portions can be small or even bite-sized, but quantity is not the point here. The talent of the chef is on display and the way they play with ingredients and combinations in new and innovative ways is why I visit these places.



Courtesy of
Timberyard



Courtesy of
Timberyard

As the semester comes to an end, we're looking at the Slow Food movement and I realized that these restaurants are practicing this to a high degree. A true collaboration between chef and producer is taking place of which I am reaping the benefits of their talents. In establishments like Timberyard, Heron, and Lyla, a shift to highlighting not only the ingredients but also the producers and the farmers is indicative of this movement (Petrini 2003, 51). In her piece titled *Speed*, Carolyn Strauss argues that the 'Slow paradigm' (of which slow food is a part) is not about speed but instead

allows designers a more “robust repertoire” to engage with richness and complexity (Fletcher et al 2016). Even applying that description on a surface level to an experience at any of the aforementioned places, I can recall the subtleties in the components of the dishes. Layers and complexities of flavor are presented alongside details of where the ingredients were sourced and produced. There is also a strong connection to Vibrancy of Matter here as well in the basic sense that acknowledgment of the ingredients, the special attention paid, not only by the chef but also myself, highlights them in a way that is greater than parts of a whole.

On the social side I know that my ability to connect these types of restaurants to the Slow food movement comes from a place of privilege. Having only begun reading about this movement I might argue that even being able to think about food in this way is privileged. I would be interested to research more on how this might work from the perspective of food insecure people.

Petrini, C. (2004). *Slow food : the case for taste*. New York ; Chichester: Columbia University Press.

Fletcher, K. and Tham, M. (2016). *Routledge handbook of sustainability and fashion*. London New York, Ny Routledge.

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On vibrancy, religion, &

economics

This week I am reflecting on our discussion from reading group, specifically my question about whether or not humans provide matter with agency by being aware. Working through the answer to that question, I quite liked the idea that matter demands our attention and it led me to think more about the question our group did not get a chance to discuss regarding vital materialism and its tension with religion. Because we did not get a chance to talk about this, the following are my thoughts as it relates to religion and environmentalism.

First, looking back at the passages from *Vibrant Matter*, the very rough main point I think Jane Bennet makes is that this idea of vibrancy and agency of matter through assemblages allows one to look at the world from a different perspective. A deeper, more thoughtful perspective, which should remove the person from the center of the observation and instill more empathy for all life and matter. One element of analyzing this work that I cannot quite figure out is who the audience is, but I can assuredly say that it is not religious folks en masse. While the question from our reading group precipitated my thoughts on the soul/religion, it was her question, "...what is the relationship between environmental protection and capitalist markets..." that began to connect economic and religious threads (Bennet 2010, 111).

As mentioned before, I come from a very capitalistic society and one where all aspect of American "values" are heavily tied to religion. As early as *Manifest Destiny*, religion has been the justification of our (white people) exploitation of non-white people. Bringing these ideas into the modern era and speaking as someone raised in a fundamentalist christian household, America's prosperity is tied to our relationship with God. This is completely nuts but it did make me wonder a while back why, if our economic prosperity is tied to God and

he gave people the earth, would we want to continue our destructive ways. Wouldn't God be upset with us for destroying the planet and thus punish us? Christians are notorious for not believing in most science but climate change is one that they actively rail against. So I've questioned this for a while because I thought if I could figure it out, maybe there would be an "in" for an argument for environmental stewardship within a religious framework that might spur them to action. This long-standing question was answered a couple of years ago after hearing a religious leader's thoughts on climate change and his justification for not taking action based on "dominion" in Genesis 1:26-28.

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

Basically, God gave man dominion over the animals and the earth so he can do whatever he wants, including destroying the planet. The real issue is that the Bible can be interpreted in so many ways but the most common interpretation is one that confirms the reader's bias. Combine that with their belief that there is an afterlife and there is absolutely no motivation for action. While Bennet's work is full of interesting ideas that I will utilize, the idea that matter can have agency, perhaps even a soul, will consistently be at odds with religion's views on the subject. My worry is that environmental stewardship requires buy-in from the United States of which the religious faction make up a large part. While we apply Bennet's theories, a large population of people will continue to hinder progress until an new argument can be made which supersedes their interpretation. While this seems impossible, I am still hoping to uncover one.

Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press.

On stakeholders...

“The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and with them the whole relations of society.”

-Karl Marx, Communist Manifesto

Personally I lean socialist and draw the line at communism. For reasons I will expand on later, communism has always had a negative connotation in the US but the irony is that watching the attempted regulation of our hyper-capitalist society by the government is the exact reason why I would never trust a communist system. Over the past few weeks I have begun to think more about globalization and economies of scale as it pertains to our current environmental crisis. More precisely I have begun to see the emergence of two distinct stakeholder groups and their roles in globalization and “progress”.

First, this idea was brought into focus after this week’s debate on enforcing the circular economy. The role of enforcer and specifically who that might be was a point made to address the ambiguity of our current situation. Maybe better described as the incongruity of environmental policy within the framework of globalization. Yesterday I wrote a wholly despondent draft post and sat with it overnight to think through my pessimism. It was along the lines of a mass con being perpetrated by “capitalists” on the rest of the population, manifesting in the paper straw and sorting plastic movements while billionaires shoot rockets off at their leisure. Revising this post today in a more optimistic and pragmatic head space, I still believe there is a tension

between the population at large and the billionaire class, but instead of spiraling into an apocalyptic scenario, I am resolved to look more closely at this gap. The outcome of this will in fact be a question but first I need to expand on the idea of enforcement and why the irony I referenced earlier exists.

Using my home political system as basis for this observation, I only need to look back to the previous administration to explain the irony. In terms of enforcement, I did wonder *who* would enforce and the logical answer is the government. This prompted a follow up question of how effective is the government at enforcement? From 2016-2020, 114 EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) policies were dismantled (Popovich, Albeck-Ripka and Pierre-Louis, 2020). The reversal of these policies was not done for any other reason except to benefit the oil industry. This is one of many examples but how can one trust a government to enforce systems when we watch them consistently work within their own self-interests? This is also the reason I would distrust a communist government – at the end of the day power anywhere but in the people's hands is misplaced. To be clear not all governments fall into this trap as easily but I am more concerned with governments and markets like the US where their influence and impact on a global scale is greater than in most other countries. The question I have been asking myself over the past weeks is how can environmental stewardship surpass profit has the main driver of markets? I'm not sure that it can so then the question becomes how can the two become symbiotic? Ideally, we would be able to find a way to remove their perceived mutual exclusivity in order to have each driver exert a proportioned pressure on the markets. Until then, I would expect to see more profit over planet governing, especially by one particular political party...

Popovich, N., Albeck-Ripka, L. and Pierre-Louis, K. (2020). The Trump Administration Is Reversing Nearly 100 Environmental

Rules. Here's the Full List. *The New York Times*. [online] 16 Oct. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/climate/trump-environment-rollbacks-list.html>. [Accessed 3 Nov].

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