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Daunted by design: creating tools of slow violence

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Design today is tackling increasingly complex societal issues; however, it is also prone to instrumentalisation in this endeavour. This paper examines how design practice and solutions can become a tool for daunted managerialism, a form of slow violence that conceals, prolongs, and even reinforces the complex and interwoven sources of social and environmental harm. It argues that design problem-solution spaces are often constructed with naturalised norms and subjectivities, which can lead to design processes and outcomes that incite cruel optimism, prioritise certain harms over others, and become tools for governing precarity. This argument is illustrated with examples from different domains of design addressing complex societal issues, such as sustainable design, social design, humanitarian design, and participatory design. We propose that design outcomes should not be regarded as solutions, but as intermediaries of engagement that can facilitate sociological and political imaginations that empower society in general, and marginalised people and communities specifically, to resist and transform violent systems.

Keywords: design thinking; managerialism; social harm; environmental harm; cruel optimism; precarity; sociological imagination

Introduction

The past couple of decades witnessed the design profession branching into many specialisations that tackle increasingly more complex, societal and political issues. This corresponds to the recognition, promotion, and adoption of *design thinking* especially in the 2010s, or more specifically its unique approach to problem-solving, beyond design-as-making and increasingly towards services, systems, and policies (Quaiser and Pandey 2023). Throughout the design process, designers reframe design problems and solutions to satisfy solution criteria (Cross 2011), and in this sense, design problems and solutions are co-constitutive in nature (Buchanan 1992; Dorst and Cross 2001). This creative reframing of problems and solutions is a key strength of *designerly* thinking that results in outcomes satisfying the needs and preferences of people affected by them. However, the increased adoption of design thinking has led to a more generalised understanding of its application for 'everything' as a way of thinking (Cross 2023). Such design applications, however, ignored the need to adapt and fit the necessary tools and techniques to a

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given problem (Laursen and Haase 2019), nor is it questioned if designers are equipped to tackle such large societal issues in the first place (Julier and Kimbell 2019). Even if design more or less sufficiently engages societal and political issues, its effectiveness remains questionable in their resolution due to a dependence on this problem-solution framing. Furthermore, this engagement of design in such problems can be assimilated as a solution-oriented management tool that reproduces the sources of violence and harm. While the more popularised conceptualisation of design thinking in the management discourse is widely criticised, and differentiated from the way designers think, in design research and scholarship (e.g. Cross 2023; Johansson-Sköldberg, Woodilla, and Çetinkaya 2013; Laursen and Haase 2019), this paper is more concerned about how this blurring around the contours of design practice resulted in the adoption of a certain kind of *managerialism* in return, which hinders the application of design in this recent venture of tackling larger societal issues.

The societal role and impact of design practice and the responsibility of designers have been critiqued ever since the 1970s (e.g. Papanek 1972; Rittel and Webber 1973). These critiques generally focused on how design solutions, as things produced, used, and disposed of, are impacting people's lives beyond what is perceived at first glance and how societal issues involve complex, interwoven and often contradictory aspects – the so-called wicked problems. In his seminal work, Papanek (1972) criticised the complicity of design practice in the violence generated by mass production and consumption and attributed an ethical responsibility to the design profession to put the wellbeing of people and the planet first rather than merely aesthetics or profit. However, as design attempts to address larger, complex societal issues, we also begin to witness its shortcomings and as well as its complicity in the reproduction of existing hierarchies (Ackermann 2023; Iskander 2018). Accordingly, the limits of design in spearheading societal transformation have recently begun to be sought at its root, whether the dominant theories and forms of practice or its limitations and adverse impacts (e.g. Lee 2020; Lee 2021; Najar 2022; von Busch and Palmås 2023, among others)

The way designers think is indeed the strength of the design profession, especially in its claims of problem-solving, but it is also extremely prone to instrumentalisation during the process of addressing larger and highly complex societal and political issues. Najar (2022) adopts a Foucauldian approach to 'problematise' the design problems addressed by designers in their creative practice and illustrates how the framing of problems is riddled with biases before, during, and after the act of designing. Following Foucault's (1988) dismantling of 'truth' and how a set of discursive practices within power relations establishes things that are taken as 'truth' *a priori*, Najar (2022) argues that design problems do not exist until an interpretation of reality occurs under the influence of power relations and historicity to discursively construct the problem of design practice.

While we agree with Najar that design might be daunted as practice, and problematising and de-naturalising the discourses and power relations birthing the design problem in a Foucauldian sense can help, this paper perceives not only the formulation of the design problem but also design practice and solutions themselves as discursive practices with their specific consequences, intentional or not. Even though the regime of truth is dynamic and the struggle for such truth harbours opportunities for certain degrees of novelty, change, and resistance, the discursive practices emerging among the power relations produced through this regime may not be radical enough to initiate sustainable political and social transformation. Thus, design itself might be daunted due to the myriad of power relations that are already naturalised as truths, which hinder the necessary sociological and empowering political imaginations for the development of more

radical, transformative practices. Especially in attempting to address larger societal issues, the ways design problems are framed mostly embody normative values and biases that reproduce harmful situations; as a result, design solutions might end up not only reproducing these harms but also hiding away the interwoven, temporally and spatially dispersed sources of harm. In an attempt to problematise the design practice readily oriented toward certain frames of solutions, this paper illustrates how design risks being reduced to a tool for *daunted managerialism* as a form of *slow violence.* In the next section, we introduce these terms to demonstrate how they constitute a fitting analytical framework to scrutinise the design practice. Then, we utilise various examples from several design domains that tackle complex societal issues, such as participatory design, social design, sustainable design, and humanitarian design, to support this claim. Our inquiry brings forward that the very construction of problem-solution space is prone to producing *design non-solutions* regardless of designers' intentions, and instead, we propose a shift in the perception of design outcomes – from 'solutions' to intermediaries of engagement. In order to avoid such daunted managerialism, we recommend the development of critical reflexivity on the existing orientations towards normative values and biases – as we attempt in this paper. However, we also discuss that a negative capability needs to accompany such reflexivity to contain the resultant disorientation throughout the design process, which can also pave the way towards more intermediary engagement to realise sociological and political imagination.

Slow violence of daunted managerialism

Slow violence refers to violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, dispersed over time and space, and therefore is not perceived as violence (Nixon 2013). It refers to violence that accumulates over time, goes unnoticed or is condoned, and eventually turns disastrous. Nixon coined the term to explicate the social and environmental harms that go unnoticed due to their dispersed and attritional nature and to reveal the complex, interwoven acts of human-induced abuse, neglect, and irresponsibility over time. He greatly benefits from Galtung's (1969) *structural violence*, as any obstacle to the satisfaction of basic human needs and the development of one's own capacity. Galtung extended the concept of violence towards ordinary consequences resulting from the routine functioning of social structure rather than direct acts of violence resulting in immediate harm. Structural violence is used to dismantle institutionalised forms of discrimination in society, such as capitalist exploitation, sexism, and racism. While sharing a similar ground, *slow violence* highlights a more dynamic and relational mechanism of violence and acknowledges that the relationships between the positions within the structure are far from fixed and predictable and their qualities transform with temporal and spatial course. It not only reflects the structural dimension of violence and its effects but also displays the traces of subjective (in)action and complicity both in the production of and response to such violence.

As the *conduct of conduct* (Foucault 2007), *slow violence* shapes, and is also shaped by, individual (in)action and subjectivity with a certain degree of embodiment, participation, agency, and engagement in both producing and maintaining violent and harmful situations. *Conduct of conduct* ensures that individuals act on themselves while internalising the power relations through a set of empowering techniques such as autonomy and self-realisation (Han 2017). Accordingly, *slow violence* is the violent mechanism that produces the situations of not seeing, not realising, being indifferent, accepting, tolerating, and making do that keep the social structure with all its violence and harms intact

(Yetiş and Bakırlıoğlu 2023). In doing so, it hides away the relations among varying forms of violence and social harm and prevents the acquisition of cognitive and emotional awareness about the presence of these relations. In the absence of such awareness, attempts at being more democratic, inclusive, and diverse through collective action and agency lose their transformative potential and end up being appropriated into the violence-producing system in ways that serve it. While slow violence has different yet interrelated forms of operation[1] (Yetiş and Bakırlıoğlu 2023), *daunted managerialism* specifically corresponds to the way design operates.

Daunted managerialism refers to discursive practices that reframe a structural violence phenomenon, the causes and effects of which can no longer be normalised and attributed to external factors. It is characterised by the management discourse that acknowledges the existence of the phenomenon and its harms yet calibrates their magnitude (Yetiş and Bakırlıoğlu 2023). It paints a picture of capably addressing the problem with e.g. revised policies, solutions, etc. within the violence-producing system and incites hope for a better future society that results in a form of *cruel optimism* (Berlant 2006). For example, this can be observed in how the most obvious and hostile forms of racism seemingly diminishing hide away the persistence of more systemic racial injustices in securitarian policies (Meer 2022), or how the promotion of necessity for and opportunities of urban renewal projects creates images of better lives while hiding away the displacement of vulnerable groups (Rannila 2021).

The more pessimistic side of this coin is about governing precarity in neoliberal societies within the framework of both subjects' way of managing their own lives and the principle of governing these subjects (Lorey 2015). Governing through precaritisation involves the management of a threshold avoiding societal resistance in the face of perceived harms and threats, yet not ending precarity and governing through a state of insecurity. When the concerns of subjects are somehow managed, they manifest a state of indifference towards others' precarious conditions, who experience them more severely at those moments. In such cases, a dominant perspective on 'tolerable' levels of violence is dictated from above to postpone the tipping point of accumulating harms.

A continuation of governing precarity can be observed in the form of prioritising certain harms over others due to perceived immediacy. This would require multiple forms of violence phenomenon concurrently happening, yet some are perceived and/or promoted as more important. This can be observed in both bottom-up and top-down responses, such as how residents of Global South choose to focus on faster disasters like floods, earthquakes, etc., and deprioritise the toxicity of the living environment (Hernández 2022), or how residents demand bottled, safe drinking water in the urban environment and deprioritise long-term harms of single-use plastics (Cairns 2021), or how zoning amnesty acts are promoted as easy solutions to the housing crisis in election campaigns disregarding the lack of oversight in the conditions of the relevant building stock (Yetiş and Bakırlıoğlu 2023).

In all these forms, the purpose of daunted managerialism is to somehow *manage* the attritional effects of violence and *delay* the timing of tipping points (i.e. the devastating consequences that may cause insurgency). It involves the identification of a novel tipping point and reframing the problem as tolerable until that tipping point. It creates situations of making do through either inciting hope or persisting on the impossibility or unaffordability of better alternatives. Such judgements are mostly made in terms of the perceived acuteness of the problem and/or prioritisation of the harms, which favours the continuation of the violence-producing system. Despite the acknowledged existence of violence, its attrition remains unacknowledged in its

entirety, and discursive practices of daunted managerialism (top-down or bottom-up) hide or postpone it once more. We argue that design practice can become complicit in this, sometimes regardless of the intentions of the designers and others involved in the design process.

Designing tools of daunted managerialism

As mentioned in the introduction, we perceive the act of designing, from the formulation of the design problem to the finalisation of a design solution, as a discursive practice and argue that it can turn into a tool for daunted managerialism. In the following lines, we will try to illustrate how design practices can potentially incite cruel optimism, how participatory approaches to designing can be instrumentalised for governing precaritisation, and how, in addressing complex social and environmental harms, it can be prone to prioritising the symptoms of structural violence by devising palliative solutions rather than thoroughly interrogating complex, interlocking, violence-producing systems.

Cruel optimism of problem reframing

As many design scholars have explicated in different words and theoretical approaches, the act of designing involves framing and reframing design problems and solutions concurrently to make sense of the complex relations among relevant actors (Dorst and Cross 2001). Designers identify the dimensions of the problem space for their creative practice (Schön 2017), and in doing so, inevitably frame the solution space as well. This is a strategic approach to developing richer perspectives in understanding a problem and solution space, which is demarcated by designers as a space of designing that is seemingly responding to the concerns of relevant actors. Throughout the design process, the initial problem and solution criteria are cascaded by designers, which involves the exploration and acquisition of additional circumambient knowledge. This practice brings about a different question: Are designers capable enough to develop epistemological and methodological tools to process that circumambient knowledge critically and dismantle the interwoven historicity of power relations and discourses? More critical approaches to designing are promoted in design studies (e.g. sustainability, decolonisation, and social inequalities), but more basic questions such as these are rarely asked (Julier and Kimbell 2019). While design is engaging larger societal and political issues through adopting various critical approaches, how such critical standpoints are being developed and utilised by designers is not discussed satisfactorily. Thus, we need to question if the engagement of design can be effective without exploring these in the first place. We argue that, without these, design practices and outcomes are inclined to turn into tools for the slow violence of daunted managerialism.

In attempting to demarcate the space for their practice, designers utilise many 'truths' already naturalised and institutionalised (Najar 2022). While Najar's suggestion to overcome this is to 'problematise' the design problem itself, he foregoes that designers themselves also embody such naturalised and institutionalised truths and they inevitably construct the problem-solution space for their practice laden with those. In their study on the injustice and discrimination embedded in the design of things, services, and systems, Costanza-Chock (2020) demonstrates how such institutionalised norms and stereotypes seep into this problem-solution space that results in design solutions that simply redistribute harms. Their example regarding the gender binary embedded in airport security scanners and how it reproduces harms to trans-individuals readily

prevalent in society was especially striking in this regard. These airport scanners are inevitably a product of increasing concerns of insecurity in air travel, designed with a design-against-crime approach to alleviate the sense of insecurity and soothe people's anxieties about air travel. It might have been 'successful' in doing so for a large portion of society but at the expense of discriminating against bodies not conforming to the white, able-bodied, gendered norms. These norms, however, are not imposed externally on the designers of that specific technology; rather these are naturalised within them and used to construct their problem-solution space.

As part of naturalised and embodied tendencies in such problem framing, the way framing feeds into *cruel optimism* lies in the sense of doing something better in the face of the framed problem. Designers are not practising in a vacuum; their actions, beliefs, and thoughts are embedded in the social body they live in, and their life worlds are inevitably part of this space (Agid 2015), which include many normative values and preconceptions they embody (Williams 2019). In doing so, these spaces reproduce the matrix of domination the designers are embedded. The act of problem reframing happens under the influence of multiple systems of oppression and, in an attempt to match the solutions seemingly possible within these systems, the problem is reframed iteratively. Williams's (2019) analysis of how post-raciality – i.e. the perception that racial prejudice has already been overcome – is interwoven into the problem framing, which results in re-inventing the neoliberal exploitation and hides away structural racism, is a great example of this. She dismantles the design of a financial literacy app for teens, the main demographic target for which is mostly black and Latinx teens. In this case, the design solution inevitably de-contextualises people of colour, especially teens aspiring for college, by disregarding the ever-present racial wealth divide in the US and builds a narrative of a better future for all so long as they can manage their money using various financial tools provided by the app. Williams (2019) points out how the design of the app and the narrative around it reframe the problems of college access, college success, and financial wellbeing as failures of the individual. The app "shouts empowerment, while whispering that poor black and Latinx kids and their families are to blame for their poverty and the unaffordability of higher education" (Williams 2019, 314). It also paints a hopeful image of diminishing structural violence of racialised financial inequalities by reframing the problem as that of financial literacy and individual financial behaviour. This is how problem reframing can paint a picture of a hopeful present towards the future while setting 'novel tolerable levels' for the attritional harms experienced by ethnic minorities and keeping the systemic sources of harm intact and their relations hidden through this cruel optimism. When the promised betterment fails to be achieved, cruel optimism likely produces disappointment, frustration, hopelessness, and fatalistic resignation mostly imposed upon the targeted group and may turn into backlash in the forms of victim-blaming and shaming that can induce stigmatisation and further social exclusion.

Participating in the precaritisation

Beyond the individual creative endeavour of the designer, the act of designing is increasingly regarded as a collaborative effort among different stakeholders that have conflicting values and concerns (e.g. Björgvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren 2012; Pedersen 2020; Storni et al. 2015). In this sense, the designer acts as the facilitator of a negotiation space among multiple actors, and the outcomes are not necessarily reached as a consensus but to a certain degree of alignment. In her dismantling of the co-design processes,

Pedersen (2020) uses the metaphor of 'staging' to explicate how design researchers and professionals frame multiple spaces for negotiation. This framing practice identifies relevant actors to participate in this negotiation space, as well as their arrangement in the space. And, as a result of the negotiations, the problem-solution space is collectively reframed. Pedersen (2020) also argues that this framing and re-framing process is iterative, potentially resulting in the inclusion (or exclusion) of other actors in each iteration as part of framing the negotiation space, as well as the problem-solution space in this regard. Her work provides a good overview of the strengths of co-designing and provides a robust framework for performing co-design. While we agree with such a process handing over the decision-making to those affected by the design solution, the power relations among the participating actors – including the designers – continue to be performed in these negotiation spaces (Del Gaudio, Franzato, and de Oliveira 2018). Participation can contribute to a sense of *false equivalency* in this regard, since bringing various groups together may not be enough to ensure equal representation or voice. Furthermore, the participants in codesign processes are the ones that *can* be reached, and the ones that cannot be reached (or that are considered intransigent) are, paradoxically, twice as excluded for the sake of participation.[2]

While participatory design (PD) has become increasingly focused on citizen-led initiatives in response to the limits the institutions impose on the PD processes that prevent any political opportunity, it remains important to work with them to scale up grassroots initiatives, especially at the city scale (Huybrechts, Benesch, and Geib 2017). However, institutions impose constraints on the PD process, from being highly determinant in the negotiation spaces to the ideological mismatches between the institutions and other participants (Lodato and DiSalvo 2018), which directly influence the problem-solution spaces by reproducing existing power relations and societal norms. These result in an uncontested approach that depoliticises PD, which designers often fail to recognise. Dore (2022) illustrates how PD was attempted to be instrumentalised as such in the recent case of a two-year participatory urban development of Waterloo Estate, New South Wales, Australia. She describes the meeting for the release of the master plans where a consensual narrative was performed by the organisers. This consensual narrative was constructed as an interpretation of the PD process by incorporating the values and needs of participants that align with neoliberal institutional frames and excluding the ones that conflict with them. Considering the neoliberal institutional standpoint, reduced social housing was a necessity for the success of the project, in order to create enough capital to renovate the estate according to the needs and wants of participants. This would inevitably result in the displacement of the Aboriginal and low-income residents of the estate and contribute to the historically occurring displacement of Aboriginal people. In terms of daunted managerialism, this case illustrates how some participants become quite willing to build a consensual narrative in pursuit of being proactive (also through cruel optimism), and thus contributing to the precaritisation of others by disregarding the dissenting voices, so long as they are benefitting more from unevenly redistributed perks or promises of betterment as some sort of compensation for other harms and violence produced by the system and are allowed to tread the waters. As a result, PD can be detracted from its radical democratic potential (Yetiş and Bakırlıoğlu 2015) and, thus, be reduced to a tool for governing precarity. When the outcomes of the PD process are in some sort of alignment with the neoliberal institutional values that are more determinant in the construction of the problem-solution frame due to existing power dynamics, said neoliberal values and means are reaffirmed through participation (Lukes 2021).

Social design as professional practice depicts more implicit practices governing precarity. Social design utilises co-design methodologies to address large policy challenges, such as homelessness, healthcare, and education. Julier and Kimbell (2019) argue that the rise of social design practice corresponds to the increasingly adopted austerity economics of neoliberal governance especially after the 2008 Global financial crisis, leading to outsourcing state's welfare responsibilities to smaller organisations such as local government units, NGOs, companies, and community groups. Social design rose to this challenge of resolving the problem of austerity in welfare services, by reframing the state-citizen relationships and developing solutions accordingly (Julier 2018). Through a critique of how the human-centred approach of social design detaches persons from their social, cultural, and political settings, Julier and Kimbell (2019) argue that the solutions address only the symptoms of inequalities but perform societal changes using these detached, virtual personas. In doing so, the resulting solutions become selective, modular services actual people can access as much as they conform to these personas, which ultimately reduces benefits for all, and even more for some, while hiding away the reproduction of varied but interlinked inequalities. In this regard, social design solutions do not eliminate the inequalities but truncate and replace them as tools to govern precarity, while also contributing to a sense of cruel optimism.

Prioritising 'faster' violence through design

Design practice has a long history of recognising and reacting to certain, symptomatic aspects of larger societal problems, rather than the cause. A great example of this is the historical evolution of the sustainability and circular economy discourse in design practice. In her earlier examination of the then-emerging ecological design movement, Madge (1997) traces the emergence and evolution of the sustainable design movements from the 80s till the end of the 90s. Despite the emergence of more critical approaches to the relationship between design and environment, she identifies the prevalence of soft, technocentric design practices accompanied by discourses attempting to reconcile sustainability, business success, and economic growth during those times. Such reconciliation mainly occurred from a design management perspective, ironing out any potential conflict between doing business and going green thanks to sustainable design. More than two decades later, we can actually observe a similar depoliticisation of the sustainability agenda with the rise of the circular economy (Corvellec, Stowell, and Johansson 2022). By moving the discussion around environmental and social sustainability on a technocentric plane, circular economy discourses work towards delaying the tipping point of catastrophic consequences by displacing the environmental and social harms of capitalist exploitation and abuse across time and space, while prioritising its economic growth agenda (Hobson and Lynch 2016). Design, being a central element of the circular economy discourse, creates a problem-solution space that problematises the accumulating waste and prioritises the value and resource recapture in alignment with an economic growth agenda. In doing so, it fails to address the underlying cause of the phenomenon, i.e. the capitalist modes of production, consumption, exploitation, expropriation, and dispossession, but it might also cause increased consumption due to lower-cost secondary raw materials and products made out of these, new markets for reused/refurbished products, and the misguided perception of 'conscious' consumer about doing no harm (Corvellec, Stowell, and Johansson 2022; Otto et al. 2021; Schröder et al. 2019).

In his recent analysis of humanitarian design practice, Keshavarz (2020) demonstrates how it serves to mask the violence of contemporary border politics using discourses of

crisis and compassion. He highlights that many designers have begun to focus on developing humanitarian design solutions since 2015; however, these solutions are part – or extension – of a 'crisis' narrative fuelled by media outlets. The 'crisis' narrative reduces the ongoing temporally and spatially dispersed harms of European border politics to symptoms of certain technical deficiencies in the system (such as accessibility to shelter, drinking water, etc.) and calls for innovative solutions that will not address and resolve the injustices of border politics but result in situations preferred by the powerful. The designers, then, build a narrative of 'compassion' at its core to develop and deploy designs that fuel a spectacle of vulnerability. Combined with a technocentric approach, this spectacle reduces refugees to "human beings who are understood to exist merely to be helped" (Keshavarz 2020, 28). He argues that humanitarian design is the act of continuously re-designing vulnerability in a way to establish control over the harmful situation. This is a great example of how the problem-solution space of design prioritises certain, faster harms over spatially and temporally dispersed ones since it embeds a narrative of faster violence, i.e. crisis, serviced by institutions and promoted by media, produces conditions of governing through vulnerability and hides away the larger structural violence of contemporary border politics. Humanitarian solutions designed in this way sustain the situation of vulnerability and dissipate the political agency of refugees, who are left to make do and tread the waters over extended periods and under strict governance.

A similar framing of the problem-solution space that results in prioritisation from the bottom up can also be observed in social innovation. Social innovation, for which the role of design was popularised by Manzini (2015), refers to a process of change emerging from the creative re-combination of existing assets (including social capital and historical heritage), the aim of which is to achieve socially recognised goals in new ways. Manzini (2015) highlights the increasing adoption of social innovation as a central agenda of many governments due to its effectiveness in solving social problems, as well as the existence of powerful actors that aim to hinder social change toward sustainability. Regarding the latter, the study of Fougère and Meriläinen (2019) on how social innovation is instrumentalised in a discursive manner illustrates this by highlighting the increased adoption of resilience discourse in social innovation projects. Through the case of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, they illustrate how more powerful actors can work towards weaving local dominant perspectives in support of racism and neoliberalism from the bottom-up, using the social innovation discourse. Think tanks that favour neoliberal governmentality and right-wing NGOs identified the welfare state policies as the problem that prevented local resilience against post-Katrina circumstances in the first place and advocated for looser government regulation to enable local, community-based innovative solutions (ibid). Considering that vulnerable communities are stigmatised (e.g. for the looting that happened after the disaster) and that they are the ones mostly displaced and cannot partake in such community-based rebuilding, we can see more powerful community actors, with various resources to mobilise and a say in decision-making processes, utilising the positive discourse of social innovation to build so-called bottom-up perspectives of exclusion and neoliberal ideology. The displaced and stigmatised communities are then left to their own capacity to discover and mobilise their own sources and end up in further exclusion and marginalisation as a result (ibid). Social change envisioned by social innovation may not match its real-world implications, and design for social innovation can end up reproducing the normative values and biases embedded in its site of implementation.

Designing intermediaries of sociological and political imaginations

Daunted managerialism as a form of slow violence hampers the necessary *sociological imagination* (borrowing from Mills 2000) which connects individual concerns and personal troubles to wider, structural social problems and most extreme, immediate harms to dispersed yet accumulating harms (Yetiş and Bakırlıoğlu 2023). This aspect of daunted managerialism operates only for treading water in a welter of detached individual concerns without providing radical and collective ways to understand and eliminate different forms of harm and violence. In the previous section, we tried to identify how design can become a tool for *daunted managerialism*, sometimes despite the intentions of design practitioners, due to the ways problem-solution space is constructed.

Design studies literature continuously calls for more critical perspectives and approaches to designing in recognition of the unintended consequences of – individual or collaborative – design practice (among others, Ermer 2023; Jakobsone 2017; Johannessen, Keitsch, and Pettersen 2019; Joshi and Pargman 2015; Kohtala 2017; Kraff 2020). For example, Julier and Kimbell (2019) argue the need for adopting a historical and geographical critical lens on conditions and contexts resulting in inequalities to understand the opportunities and limitations of social design. Keshavarz (2020) calls practitioners of humanitarian design to question whose political agendas are being prioritised in their practice and whose are ignored and veiled. Prendeville, Syperek, and Santamaria (2022) propose 'counter-framing' as an effective design strategy to organise dissensus and resist normative subjective and institutional frames that reproduce certain ideologies and worldviews. From a philosophical perspective, Najar (2022) questions the normative constitution of 'truths' that are embedded in the framing of design problems and asks designers to 'problematise' the problem in the first place.

We agree with adopting and maintaining more critical lenses in (co)designing; however, we question its possibility in real-world design practice. Following Julier and Kimbell's (2019) critique of social designers, we question if designers, in general, are equipped to recognise temporally and spatially dispersed, interwoven sources of violence and harm, to recognise their attrition in time and space, and then to dismantle them to address larger societal issues. What is considered to be the strength of problem reframing, that it cascades problem-solution space, is actually a cascading of severely under-defined symptoms of multiple, interwoven sources of harm and violence. As illustrated in the previous section, such cascading is almost always hindered by institutionalised norms, discourses of contesting values, and even the designers' own subjectivities. Even when the need for such critical dismantling of larger, complex societal issues is recognised, design practitioners out in the field may find less time or resources for critical self-reflexivity on existing exclusionary norms, discourses and practices. The tension between the need for in-depth, critical reflection in all steps of the design process and the tendency to generate and ascribe solutions sometimes results in missing out on or compromising such reflection. [3] Furthermore, even when such a critical lens is deployed, the process involves designers interrogating their existing orientations towards different norms, values and practices, which also requires containment of emerging disorientations during the process, and exploration of novel paths for reorientating their practices that can facilitate sociological and political imagination. Containing disorientation requires negative capability (borrowing from Keats, 2011), referring to the ability to tolerate and even enjoy uncertainty and feeling lost, which is fundamental to developing a critical yet imaginative response and can enable novel directions of reorientation. However, when emerging disorientations cannot be contained with such negative capability, they can

instead result in reorienting back and even reinforcing already existing orientations or lead towards a purely theoretical, critical stance not conveying to design processes and outcomes, which recur in the cycle of daunted managerialism (Yetiş and Bakırlıoğlu 2024). Hence, the problem-solution space ends up being constructed in a solution-oriented way that ceases to develop such negative capability to endure dissensus, conflict, ambivalence, and disorientation, which heuristically results in depoliticised design 'solutions' that hide away the complex relationships among violence and harms from the outset.

Due to the limited and exclusionary problem-solution space, it becomes problematic to ascribe design outcomes as 'solutions' as well. In this space, design outcomes are only reached in a reduced framing of the interwoven relations among multiple sources of harm, which inevitably excludes or ignores some to fit into an image of a solution. This image harbours cruel optimism as it projects capably managing problems, which may not have been properly identified in the first place. Since the problem-solution space, constrained by the very operation of *daunted managerialism*, inevitably embodies many institutionalised norms and prescribed truths of the neoliberal order, it might create an understanding of the 'best possible solution' and prime people to make do within their lives while sources of violence and harm are acknowledged yet cannot be diminished within the system. Or, the prioritised symptoms of the environmental and social harms are addressed, while neither the immediate sources of those symptoms nor other interrelated and dynamic sources of harm are directly addressed. The limited nature of problem-solution space daunted by, and in pursuit of solutions within, the violence-producing system results in *design non-solutions* that work to conceal the complex, interwoven, temporally and spatially dispersed, and slowly accumulating harms.

In this sense, the question becomes: If the constitution of problem-solution space is inclined to result in *design non-solutions* that serve as tools of daunted managerialism and that keep the harm-inducing sources of slow violence hidden, what should designers strive for? We propose a shift in perception of design outcomes from 'solutions' towards *intermediaries of engagement*. Beyond the facilitator role of designers themselves, the design outcomes should also have the capacity to incite and facilitate sociological and political imaginations, to support individuals and communities in developing cognitive and emotional awareness and fostering a deeper engagement in recognising the dispersed sources of violence. These intermediaries should also actively facilitate critical reflexivity on their actions, and the negative capability to contain resultant disorientation, which are prerequisites to devising *innovative reconciliations* (Yetiş and Bakırlıoğlu 2024) and building alternative coalitions or alliances against such violent systems. To clarify, we are not referring to one-off, speculative design objects that demonstrate alternative futures and trigger reflection for a select few. Rather we are referring to things that are actively used, that are open to generative iteration and critical transformation across sites, that can enable people and communities to empower themselves, and that can help create and maintain sites not restricted by the established power relations reproducing slow violence.

Conclusion

Design today is tackling increasingly larger, complex societal problems due to wider recognition of the potential of design practice and especially its approach to problem-solving. Throughout this paper, however, we tried to illustrate how design, in this larger scope of application, can not only reproduce structural violence but also hide away the interwoven, temporally and spatially dispersed sources of harm. We argue that design can turn into a tool for *daunted managerialism* as a form of slow violence, which involves the

postponement of awareness in the form of cruel optimism that harbours hope for gradual betterment both in the present and in the future, and the government of the precarious by keeping individuals and communities treading the water in their own troubles, and in that, preventing wider sociological and empowering political imaginations. We exemplified how problem reframing creates images of capably handling social issues, how participatory design can be utilised as a tool of governing precarity, and how design practice inevitably prioritises certain social and environmental harms over others. Through these, design outcomes risk being articulated into *daunted managerialism* that *manages* the attrition of slow violence and *delays* the timing of tipping points (i.e. the devastating consequences that may cause insurgency). Despite the acknowledged existence of violence, its attrition remains unacknowledged in its entirety, and discursive practices of daunted managerialism (top-down or bottom-up) hide or postpone it once more. We identify the way problem-solution space for designing is constructed as the root cause of this. In cascading the problem-solution space in attempts to tackle social and environmental harms, designers begin with severely under-defined symptoms of multiple, interwoven sources of harm and violence. This process is hindered by institutionalised norms, discourses of contesting values, and even by the designers' own subjectivities. This limited space can result in *design non-solutions* that both reproduce systemic violence and harms and hide the relationship among interwoven yet spatially and temporally dispersed sources of these. Thus, when tackling larger, complex societal issues, we call for re-thinking design outcomes as *intermediaries of engagement* that incite sociological and political imaginations rather than technocentric 'solutions' that can contribute to daunted managerialism.

Notes

1. The authors recently introduced three forms of discursive practices that operate as slow violence, namely fatalistic normalisation, daunted managerialism, and disingenuous condemnation. However, daunted managerialism is especially relevant to design, as we will try to illustrate in this paper. For more information about all three forms, please refer to Yetiş and Bakırlıoğlu (2023).
2. To clarify, we are not advocating for a standpoint to negotiate with 'everyone', especially not people with principally exclusionary views, such as fundamentalist and extremist groups, and groups that support racist and/or sexist arguments and discrimination.
3. Design practitioners out in the field may find less time or resources compared to design scholars, which might incur a skewed interpretation of reality and the problem at hand, highly affected by the subjectivity of the practitioner. This, however, does not mean that design scholars are exempt from this. We believe self-reflexivity is a crucial capability that designers and design scholars should develop, as well as other creative practitioners and scholars.

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