Biased design,

or the misery of neutrality

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The question of how design can respond to the prevailing social conditions has long been a focus of attention.[1] From the beginnings of the discipline of design to the present day, this question has been actively examined in debates and design practice. On the one hand, the discussion has been characterized by the goal of social improvement; on the other, by the attempt to display a certain neutrality. Designers are expected to create and implement specific improvements to society without losing track of the common good or leaving themselves open to the charge of one-sidedness. This chapter examines the contradictions that result from these dual desires and demonstrates that social engagement cannot be politically neutral in a complex social context. Rather, taking sides with respect to specific causes and the actors representing them is a precondition for negotiating social issues in design.

Political abstinence at the Bauhaus

In 1963, Thomas Maldonado, a faculty member and later dean of the Ulm School of Design, discussed several recently published Bauhaus books in an article in the school's journal. Under the not-so-original title of «Ist das Bauhaus aktuell?» (Is the Bauhaus Relevant Today?) (Maldonado 1963: 11), he offered a few observations about the importance of the Bauhaus and defended former Bauhaus director Hannes Meyer against aggressive attempts by West German Bauhaus historians to diminish his reputation and contributions. On October 6, 1963, Josef Albers wrote from Los Angeles, pleased that his own work had been honored in the article. Roughly one week later, Walter Gropius sent a letter from Cambridge, claiming, among other things, that Meyer had not brought social themes to the Bauhaus, contrary to Maldonado's assumption. Rather, Meyer had jeopardized them «by allowing partisan politics to divide the school» (Gropius 1964b: 70; 1964a: 63). In response to the charge that Meyer had politicized the school, Maldonado stated that, given the politically charged atmosphere of the 1920s, it seemed quite impossible to him «to speak of ‹social themes without more precisely defining these themes within the framework of a specific political idea» (Maldonado 1964: 66). In the letter that followed – now brusquer in tone – Gropius escalated the conflict and criticized Meyer for the partisan position he had revealed at the Bauhaus. According to Gropius, this had created such a dramatic situation that after Meyer's dismissal from Dessau, his successor, Mies van der Rohe, had confronted a situation that «compelled him to reestablish a modicum of

1 This chapter is based on a paper with the same title presented at the «Un/certain Futures» symposium at Braunschweig University of Art; a discussion event held at Designexport Hamburg as part of the «Bad Design/Good Design» exhibition; the essay «Parteiisches Design: Speak Up!» (Fezer 2017); and a lecture in the «Public Positions» series, organized by the Master's Program in Public Interest Design at the University of Wuppertal.

discipline with the help of the police» (Gropius 1964b: 70). In 1930, with Germany descending into fascism, this was hardly a glorious chapter in the school's history.

This public reevaluation of the Bauhaus's role in society was apparently fueled by personal disappointments and vanities, not by a desire to question design's social commitment.[2] Gropius did not abandon design's social goals; in his correspondence he regards design as a «new way of life» (Gropius 1964a: 63) and merely depoliticizes it slightly on the linguistic level by characterizing it as a lifestyle. For strategic reasons, though, Gropius demanded political neutrality. He argued against an overly political position, which he denounced as partisan. In his letter, he specifically mentions Meyer's «materialism,»[3] taking aim not only at the Communism with which Meyer and many students sympathized, but also at the Communist Party of Germany (though it must be noted that, at the time, Hannes Meyer was not a party member). The politicization fears expressed in his letter had long gripped the Bauhaus.

As early as 1925, the Berlin-based author Adolf Behne – who chronicled the *Neues Bauen* (New Architecture) movement – had accused Walter Gropius, a former colleague in the left-leaning Arbeitsrat für Kunst (Workers' Council for Art), «of keeping all politics out of the Bauhaus with a fearful vigilance» (Behne 1925: 57). According to Behne, this was pointless and testified to a problematic «bourgeois» understanding of art. «Art is deeply political and collective» (Behne 1925: 58), and no one could be apolitical in a political world. Practicing «political abstinence» (Behne 1925: 57) would reinforce existing power relations and the prevailing order; it was therefore highly political.

The dictate of neutrality from the right

What follows has almost nothing to do with Walter Gropius or the Bauhaus. Through his depoliticization strategy, Gropius hoped to protect the school from conservative and nationalist hostilities. Today, though, it is the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) that is vehemently demanding political neutrality as part of an attack from the right. This populist party, which was originally influenced by economic liberalism, has been represented in the German Bundestag since 2017 and has evolved into what is essentially a radical right-wing movement that has been using the argument of neutrality quite effectively for its political offensives. The party and its affiliates have done so on very different levels. For example, they set up the now-banned denunciatory website Neutrale Schule (Neutral School), which called on students

2 Gropius claimed to have put the «social idea» into practice at the Bauhaus (Gropius 1964a: 63).

3 «With his ideology of political materialism, which he hid from us, he destroyed the idea of the Bauhaus» (Gropius 1964b: 69).

and their parents to report teachers who did not conceal their political opinions or civic engagement (see AfD Kompakt 2018a, 2018b). In addition, throughout the year, the party puts official questions («Kleine Anfragen») to federal and state governments to exert a neutralizing influence on the programs of contemporary theaters and art institutions. According to its statements, the party's official goal is to enforce political neutrality not only at state, municipal, and local institutions, but in all organizations supported in any way by the state, including cultural institutions. The AfD is opposed to the existence or expression of any «party or ideological preferences» at these institutions (see AfD Kompakt 2018c).

This more recent attempt to depoliticize culture and education is absurd, and the standard counterargument – the freedom of art and scholarship – is valid and important. However, references to art are themselves a form of self-depoliticization, because the freedom of art suggests that we have no reason to get excited at all – it is, after all, «just» art, not politics.

Yet cultural institutions, schools, and government authorities are also political places. This is shown by the concerns of the AfD, which is clearly opposed to a liberal and inclusive principle of neutrality and is using the topic in an entirely biased way from a right-wing perspective. The so-called New Right is systematically working to shift ideas about normality and neutrality in our society. A recalibrated «center» is the unarticulated yet key goal of its neutrality demands.

The discourse is also shifting in the discipline of design. This is shown by the reconstruction debate surrounding the neo-historical center of Frankfurt, which was completed in 2018.[4] Plans to rebuild the Old Town were initiated by groups that advanced radical right-wing and ethno-nationalist arguments. Local right-wing populist forces have also supported the current project to rebuild the Garrison Church in Potsdam (Oswalt 2017), a dubious symbol of Germany's militaristic and Nazi past. Right-wing and conservative actors are using facade design and urban planning as tools to promote their own form of identity politics.[5] In the process, nationalist historical revisionism and far-right ethno-nationalist conceptions of space have merged with middle-class desires for an idyllic, orderly world.[6] The impact of such demands for alleged neutrality are also shown by an incident at the Bauhaus School in Dessau in 2018. Pressure from the right prompted the Bauhaus to cancel a punk concert it had agreed to host as part of a series of concerts televised by one of Germany's public broadcasters (Weißmüller 2018). Without being asked to do so, the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation portrayed its own institution as an apolitical place (Knipphals 2018), forgetful of its own history. It later attempted to

4 See open letter at change.org (Kuhnert / Ngo 2018). For an article on this subject and the subsequent discussion, see Trüby (2018).

5 As Stephan Trüby (2018) writes: «Reconstructed architecture in Germany is currently developing into a key medium for an authoritarian, ethno-nationalist, and historically revisionist right.»

6 See Arch+ 235 on «Rechte Räume» (Ngo 2019).

7 This was the reason that the Bauhaus was permanently attacked and condemned as Communist by the right during the short period of its existence.

justify the cancelation in entirely neutral terms as a precautionary measure taken to protect a landmark site (Perren 2018).

Neutral design

What can be done to counter this attempt to establish and shift what is neutral and normal in design? Are these not qualities that are more or less regarded as a basic requirement of good design? When architecture, planning, and design emerged as disciplines that shaped the cultural, technical, and social modernization processes of the early 20th century, the idea caught on that architects and designers could be neutral technicians. Their work and products were expected to be based on objective argument, economically and socially feasible, geared towards the prevailing conception of the common good, solution-driven, and technically optimized. This conceptual model of design, which continues to be influential today, emerged within the context of a social policy and a culture whose left-wing focus contributed to the internationalist and socialist character of the modernity that was represented at the Bauhaus and in other modernist circles and institutions in Europe.[7] This model was used by the designers who, while keeping a certain distance to the world, cast a scientifically structured and objective glance at it. Adopting this position and the related methods, they aimed to intervene creatively in the world for the benefit of the general public and the average person. They had universalist claims and worked in accordance with the current state of technology, rules of art, and existing ideas about the sociopolitical order. This trend towards «scientification» and «rationalization» can be seen as the main characteristic of modern social practice (cf. Reckwitz 2013: 31; Reinecke/Mergel 2012; Brückweh et al. 2012). The idea of «control through calculation,» which Max Weber in 1917 described as a sign of «the disenchantment of the world» (Kaesler 2002: 488), shaped the secular developmental dynamics of the scientification process that in the early 20th century brought people within «reach and the discursive context of science» (Raphael 1996: 193). In modern design, the goal was now to harness the idea of scientific neutrality and the ideal of absolute objectivity it promoted. In other words, it was to adopt a standpoint that was neutral not only in social, political, and ethical terms, but also with regard to gender, class, and origin; a standpoint that was explained and legitimized supra-individually and was founded on quasi-scientific and mathematical-logical knowledge. The success achieved by this rational approach in the fields of research, warfare, planning,

administration, industry, management, and government generated an excitement that spread to design. Scientificity and universality together formed an emancipatory concept that in the ideal case enabled a design for everyone, regardless of their social status, class, origin, or gender.

In this context, the key assessment criterion and thus the focus of the design debate was mainly technical feasibility. This idea is closely linked to the development of the specialized role of the expert. In the 1960s, the Swiss economist, urban researcher, and planning theorist Lucius Burckhardt took a closer look at decision-making processes in postwar planning and characterized planners as closely associated with the field of politics (Burckhardt [1967] 2004: 33).

In decision-making processes, they were assigned an important role outsourced from the political sphere and addressed as experts. According to Burckhardt, these planners were commissioned to «solve» social problems. On the one hand, the problem-solving method they used as designers reflected the modernist technical conception of architecture prevalent in the period; on the other hand, it accommodated the interests of political leaders and administrators who in their daily work required simple topics and divisible, implementable projects. The social «decision-making crisis» (Burckhardt [1961] 2004: 132) required design experts who, based on the conception of modern aesthetics popular in the period, sought to arrive at a design through a precise and objective fulfillment of their tasks. According to Burckhardt, examples of such rational «solutions» from the delegation of specialists include a nursing home, a special needs school, a home for former prisoners, an opera, a cafeteria, and wider streets (Burckhardt [1967] 2004: 32–33). The moral, ethical, social, and political questions inherent in these examples were increasingly delegated from the sociopolitical sphere to experts. Value judgments were supplanted by aesthetic and technical planning expertise. This resulted in modern design's ambivalent connection to the world: its clear sociopolitical concerns and moral ideals of an improved world could only be articulated and argued as a technical aesthetic practice. The consequences of this misunderstanding of the designer's range of possibilities as a technical problem-solver have been just as dramatic as the consequences of the designer's unacknowledged paternalistic view of others, who are treated benevolently but ultimately in a detached or patronizing manner.

A false dichotomy

The criticism of expertise and claims to objectivity in design is not anything new. It shaped the 20th century the same way as it influenced the spread of the major trend to scientification and rationalization during this period (Reckwitz 2013: 31; Reinecke / Mergel 2012).

However, it also led to the construction of what is possibly a false dichotomy, which continues to leave its mark on the discussion today. Again and again, the subjective, the intuitive, the emotional, and the artistic were seen in opposition to the objective, the rational, the universal, and the factual. As early as 1914, in the so-called Werkbund dispute between Henry van der Velde and Hermann Muthesius, a hostile divide opened between artistic freedom, on the one hand, and rational, industry-oriented design, on the other. The economically based development of standardized industrial products stood in opposition to the idea of artistic individuality, which defied standardization. This misunderstanding was propelled to the present by the conflict over scientifically based design versus artistic intuition that preceded Max Bill's 1957 departure from the Ulm School of Design, which he had co-founded. At the time, the design lecturers at the Ulm School of Design saw their means of creative expression restricted by the academic lecturers they themselves had appointed.

They soon managed to resist the further scientification of their discipline. However, even today, this superficial dialectic has continued to conceal what these two attitudes to design have in common – namely, a distance to reality, a detachment from social circumstances, and a lack of interest in others, the very people affected by design. The transformation of the world, whether artistically effusive or engineered and rational, always legitimizes itself through such social links and intervenes in the lifeworld. By relating to the lifeworld as an audience, as consumers, or as users, design always keeps its distance from it.

However, if that which is objective is equated with that which is scientific, universally valid, and neutral because of its truth, then the proper counterpart is that which is social, societal, and interest-driven – or, rather, as I prefer to see things, that which is biased. Biasedness is based on values and interests. It champions specific causes within the conflict with other lifestyles and ideas about society (see Jaeggi 2013). It focuses on the interests related to them instead of on a generalizing objectivity or an individualizing intuition.[8] Such radically biased design practices are rare. The Proletarian Building Exhibition held in Berlin in 1931 (see Hiller et al. 2005) and the advocacy planning project (Fezer 2013) pursued in the United States in the late 1960s exemplify conflict-based, interest-oriented design ideals. They developed a political understanding of design, which was seen as representing concrete causes as opposed to abstract ideals. Or, to return to Maldonado, they showed that it still is impossible to discuss «social themes withoutmore precisely defining these themes within the framework of a specific political idea» (Maldonado 1964: 66).

8 In 1965, Jürgen Habermas demanded the disclosure of cognitive interests in «Technik und Wissenschaft als ‹Ideologie›.» See Habermas ([1965] 1970: 150–152).

In the contemporary design discourse, the basic premise about modern design that Gropius claims to have implemented at the Bauhaus and, through depoliticization, aimed to rescue from its enemies, appears to have won the day: the belief in design's social dimension. What is remarkable about the current understanding of design as a tool for social change is above all its indisputability. What is justifiably uncontested in this context is the idea that design can change the world – that it inevitably has consequences. This aptly describes not only the potential, but also the problem of design. And although the world has been thoroughly defaced by the flood of badly designed products, systems, and lifestyles – and is being further ruined on a daily basis (see Davis 2009) – design has yet to be banned. On the contrary, we are hearing calls to «combat» design with more design, applied in even higher doses. This is the perspective adopted by so-called transformation design when it confronts us with the supposed choice between «design or disaster» (Sommer/Welzer 2014: 27ff.). This trend towards the expanded use of design, expressed in the stretching of the term's boundaries (see Latour 2010) and in a number of transgressive, transdisciplinary fantasies (including self-design, see Brock 1977: 446–449; Groys 2008: 7–24) is shaping our age. Creative action and aesthetic experience are no longer the exception, but the norm – indeed, they are a requirement for social participation. The creative imperative, spearheaded by design as one of its leading disciplines, is even transforming aesthetic experience – the innovation-linked sensory affect – into the motor of capitalist value creation (see Reckwitz 2013; Böhme 2016). The promise of social and economic value-added no longer comes from products or services, but from the design of the sensory dimension. Design is entering our social world as a demand raised everywhere, primarily as a result of the pressure to engage in self-design as a practical form of self-optimization (or, better yet, self-exploitation).

This modification, transformation, and recreation of the self, its material environment, and perhaps the entire social order is the drama of design. And it essentially makes design political. After all, this transformative perspective means that politics is possible and even necessary. The intentional transformation of the state of the world cannot be described as anything but political. It implies that we have ideas about the future that are worth striving for and thus about the direction that meaningful change should take. Every idea about what needs to be changed, regardless of the magnitude of this change, is tied to a conception of individual and social life. The entire framework of subjective and collective values, mastered social practices, social agreements, institutions, and hierarchies determines the imaginable and

desirable future (the «solution») and thus also the recognizable flaws and projections of the present (the «problems»). Here we must assume that present and future ideas about good and evil are extremely different. The values that form the basis for assessing conditions, as well as the procedures and possible social costs of every redesign, are highly controversial. According to Rahel Jaeggi, the lifestyles they touch on cannot be regarded as a neutral set of differentiated social practices, but represent problem-solving approaches on the social level (see Jaeggi 2013). Thus, in the course of transformation processes, especially those that are initiated deliberately, we engage with heterogeneous objectives. This process of negotiation is largely shaped by the struggle over hegemony and is therefore inevitably political.

We could also derive the necessity of the political nature of design from its problem-solving dilemma. This was the route taken by the design methodologist Horst Rittel in the 1970s when suggesting that we acknowledge the «wickedness» (Rittel/Webber 1973: 155–169) of design problems. With this term, Rittel emphasized how unlikely it is to find usable solutions to the complex problems of reality. The reason is that the entanglements of society – the moment they are named and particularly when they are evaluated and tackled – lead to the fundamental impossibility of a solution. Rittel recognized that the creative treatment of problems – i.e. design – could not be implemented without politics in the sense of socially deposited and negotiated value decisions. However, he could not really bring himself to call things by their name. It is both understandable and significant that as a mathematician and physicist who sought to understand the designers' «mode of thinking» (Rittel 2012), Rittel felt that the social sphere seeping into design was «wicked» in the sense of unpleasantly different and highly complex. Although Rittel was uncomfortable with this political dimension of design, he aimed to grapple with it on the argumentative level. But it is of course exactly the opposite: the reasons for design, its legitimacy and necessity, stem from its situatedness in society, which sets the stage for the political perspective of change and for action through design.

Separating «the political» from politics

Until recently, though, it was rather unusual and quite unpopular for designers to be – or want to be – political, or for them to establish a closer link between politics and design. This also seems to have changed. At any rate, theoretical observations, academic standards, and professional statements have taken on a political character. This new popularity has less to do with the obvious historical revelation about the inevitability of politics and more with an important theoretical

distinction between «politics» and the «political» (Marchart 2010). This distinction has been extremely helpful in reimagining the political, recognizing it in different spheres of society, and overcoming the tendency to reduce the political to something shunted off to separate institutions, where it is processed and administered by special groups of people on behalf of others.

«Politics» refers primarily to the institutional organization of society. It is a rather narrowly defined term that describes a functional social system that is connected to the institutions of power, enforcement, regulation, control, and surveillance, as well as to politically active groups such as politicians, their parties, and their constituencies. It is bound up with the state and constitutes a specific social sphere. It is mainly involved in the creation of a normative order and sets or deconstructs moral standards. By contrast, the concept of «the political,» as it has been used in recent years by theorists such as Claude Lefort, Jacques Rancière, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe, is not identical with that of politics. It preceded this concept and is aimed not at defining an administrative space for politics but at opening up a potentiality space for the political. It focuses on the social practices in which sociality is negotiated, on the debate concerning how we wish to live, who belongs to this «we,» what life means, and what paths can lead us to our goals. Chantal Mouffe proceeds on the assumption that the political, as a process of upheaval and change, interrupts the social and at the same time keeps it in motion, structuring and holding it together (Nonhoff 2010: 41). The political draws its dynamism and institutionalizing force from social dissent, which can be characterized as an agonism – a form of opposition that recognizes the legitimacy of opponents and fights for irreconcilable hegemonic projects and their implementation. The framework of Mouffe's reflections is the project of a radical democracy. She appeals to us to «give up the dream of a reconciled world that overcomes power, sovereignty, and hegemony» (Mouffe 2007: 170) – and to recognize and strengthen debate as a legitimate practice of the political. She analyzes how contemporary Western political models negate the possibility of conflict and opposition by working towards a morally constructed consensus. In doing so, these models ignore the existence of social power structures and contradictions and in this way close off the field of the political. The main obstacle to conflict- and dissent-based democratic politics lies in the neoliberal view that there is no alternative to the existing economic order (Mouffe 2007: 44). The construction and assertion of material constraints and the delegation of disputed questions to expert commissions are two additional forms of post-political politics that do not facilitate a debate on the direction of possible change, but constrict or even put an end to this debate.

It was this distinction between politics and the political that made it possible to develop a more compatible political concept that has little to do with the narrow understanding of politics conveyed on the evening news. Much of the appeal of the political lies in the fact that it refers to much more than just day-to-day politics, government agencies, parliaments, procedures, parties, and voters.However, things become problematic when the social positions represented in politics are no longer included. And although Mouffe sees the political as being rooted in conflict and contradiction, it is precisely these aspects of politics that are perceived as off-putting: the dogged struggles over the power to shape society. In this context, the sociologist Ulrich Bröckling distinguishes between «politics as a power struggle that is despised, and politics as a ‹transcendental concern for the whole› that is sanctified» (Bröckling/Feustel 2010: 16). The rise of the political in discourse has resulted in an aesthetically exciting concept that has been cleansed of the dirty day-to-day dealings of politics and is characterized by a growing distance to conflictual fields, problematic situations, and political actors. A principle of the political has emerged that is theoretically productive and broadly compatible, but has been stripped of its virulence and become harmless. Abstraction was probably necessary for the concept to gain appeal in the academic world, despite existing reservations. A mode of thinking and speaking about the political now seems possible which is in fact completely apolitical in the sense of defining a social position.

If we now return to Mouffe and others' argument that conflict is the driving force behind what is (democratically) political, we confront the question of what actors and topics are involved in these conflicts. In other words, what stances, distinctions, starting points, and negotiated subjects characterize them? The necessary endlessness of democratic political debate, as well as its constitutive force – i.e. the conflicts that create social cohesion (Marchart/Lefort 2010: 25) – raises the question of what political subjects are permissible and what the legitimate subjects of political decision-making processes are. How are these differences organized and represented in conflicts? This question is by no means trivial. With some justification, the historical answer has been interest groups and biased organizations such as trade unions, cooperatives, lobby groups, societies, associations, institutions, and, in particular, political parties.

It is from this perspective that I would like to emphasize biasedness as a possibility and necessity for the political and advocate «biased design» (see Fig. 14.1). Biased design does not mean the design of an arena for potential debate or the creation of the mediating

structures and participatory processes of exchange, compromise, and agreement. It does not view design as a sphere of action for aloof or empathetic observers or for courageous or sensitive interventionists. Nor does it regard design as an overarching approach to the social dance of differences. Biased design situates design directly in conflicts, in the topics and things negotiated by these conflicts, and amidst the participants and their attitudes. In other words, if design is political, there must be right-wing and left-wing design, just as there is conservative and progressive, social and neoliberal politics. Democratic politics cannot exist without social positions and the debates about them. Nor can design.

The problems of others

However, if we focus on the situatedness of design in society, we must mention a familiar, unresolvable conflict: the designers' self-referential interest in the problems of others. As the bearer of universalist and progressive ideals in the modern era, design was always a benevolently paternalistic practice linked to others and their perceived problems. These others and their problems were expertly identified. With the help of modern tools such as statistics, hygienics, ergonomics, and market research, they were described and evaluated. The value system that formed the backdrop to these problems and the strategies used to solve them was the «normalcy» of white, middle-class, male society. This is clearly shown by the debates on solving the housing problem in the late 19th century (see Engels 1872: 51–53), the early modern critique of ornament (Loos [1908] 1962), and, later, the Werkbund's «good form» initiative (Bill 1957: 138–140). The self-conception of designers, architects, and planners promoted a view of others as the recipients of their good deeds. However, because these others, whether male or female, were hard to understand, this fundamental external reference of design necessarily remained self-referential. To compensate, the lack of understanding was interpreted as neutrality, and the distance to others was presented as objectivity. Even committed contemporary approaches to design are plagued by this dilemma, because the focus is always on others. «Social design» is concerned primarily with those who are helped, who are supposed to benefit from design, or who need to be motivated (Feige 2019).

In critical and speculative design (Malpass 2017; Prado de O. Martins/Vieira de Oliveira 2014), by contrast, there is a stronger interest in the like-minded individuals who observe scenarios or products at exhibitions or in media publications, who have experience in the process and are given (critical) insights. The current imperative of self-design only seemingly resolves this contradiction, much like the previous

popularization of DIY. Both shift the principle of acting for others to the actors themselves, who now confront themselves in a benevolent, paternalistic fashion. Other approaches pursue a strategy of restraint, develop open systems, or aim at participation and co-design; each does so with the specific difficulties involved in avoiding hierarchies with others or at least in mitigating their impact. All of these practices form a referential framework for the more recent discussions on political design, to which this text belongs. They establish different relationships between design and the political. The 2012 book *Adversarial Design* by design researcher Carl DiSalvo presents an interesting working thesis that, like the argument made here, is based on an agonistic model of the political. DiSalvo first distinguishes between «design for politics» and «political design» (DiSalvo 2012: 8): the former is seen as supporting political institutions and processes and is described as affirmative; the latter is linked to conflict, dissent, and contradiction – i.e. to all that is «adversarial.» Using the example of robotics, computer-aided information visualization, and household-related information technologies, DiSalvo describes the possibility of politicizing issues and problems, articulating the hegemonies inscribed in these questions, and imagining and experiencing conflicts through the application of challenging counter-positions (DiSalvo 2012: 54). However, at the end of the book, the line of argumentation that earlier distanced itself from «design for politics«; that reduced such politics to elections to the US government; that was developed with reference to exciting, radical, yet harmless technical devices and experiences of dissonance – this line of argumentation comes into conflict with Chantal Mouffe's agonism model, which is only plausible within the context of a radical conception of democracy. The argument is weakened by DiSalvo's insistence on transferring socially antagonistic negotiation processes directly to design – «Design can do the work of agonism» (DiSalvo 2012: 115) – without addressing their social position. In addition, DiSalvo's text sets adversarial design in opposition to a distorted image of a romantically radical design. It rejects left-and right-wing distinctions, as well as pro and con comparisons, in favor of dynamic structures: «Adversarial Design is a theme and set of tactics, and it is inherently pluralistic and can be applied across the political spectrum and issues» (DiSalvo 2012: 121). DiSalvo correctly recognizes the possibility of different political attitudes in the production of dissent, but his trite rejection of traditional political positions and his emphasis on the pluralistic character of design results in a certain realpolitik arbitrariness. Not only does this program contradict Mouffe's critique of neoliberal attempts to relativize and contain political positional struggles, but it can also be understood as an explicit warning against biased design. Despite theoretical foundations that are similar to biased design, adversarial design appears to be a version of

critical design, which is known for its rhetorical appeal to an interested audience. Or it seems bent on providing a framework or creating the scope for participatory involvement. Put pointedly, its goal is to stage productive dissent with inspiration from and under friendly observation by design. In the meantime, DiSalvo has condemned critical design's focus on products and other sensory formats as agents of political conflict. He has called for a pragmatic activist approach with a real-world link (DiSalvo 2018).

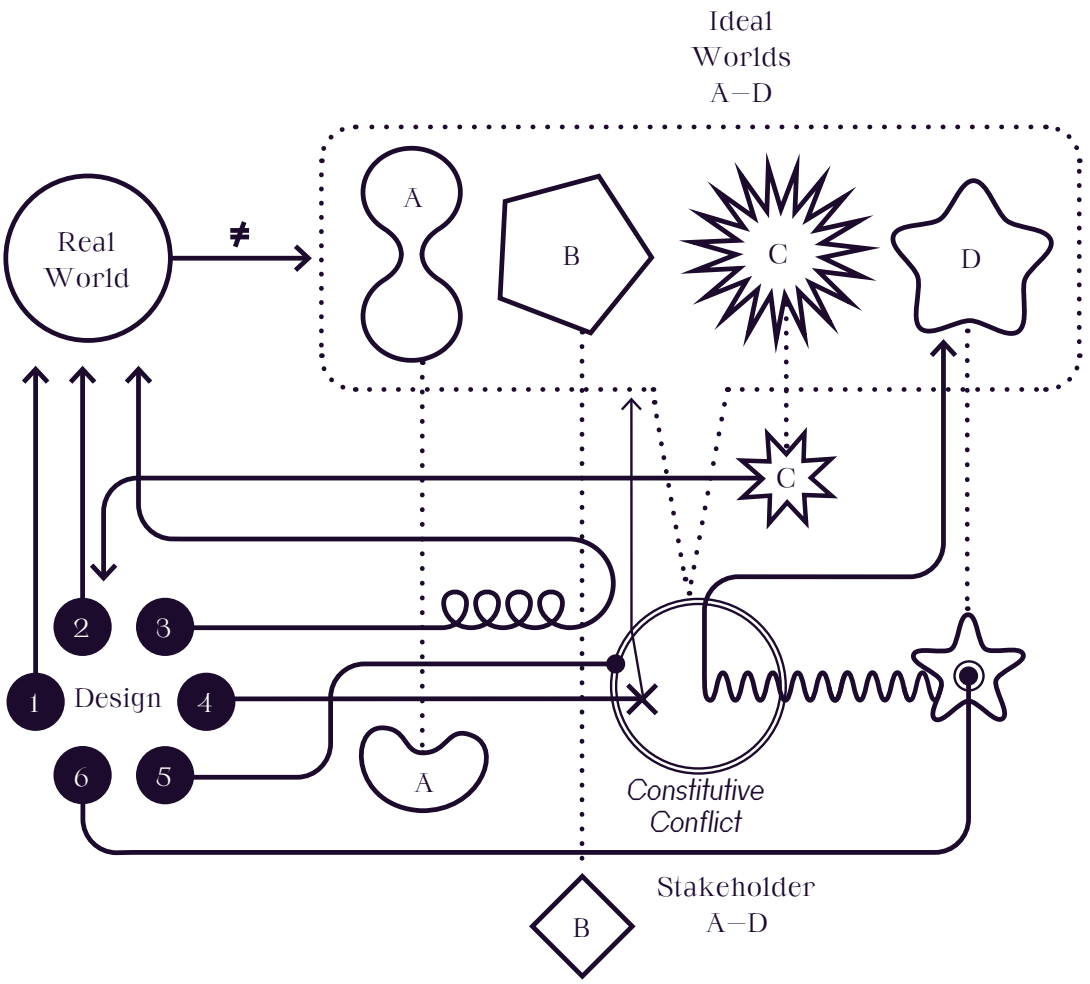
A different, bolder approach involves taking sides – beingbiased. For a soccer referee, biasedness is certainly not a good trait. For a reporter, it can be considered rude. For a coach, though, it is essential; and for fans, it is what adds spice to the game. For a lawyer, it is a professional obligation; for the defendant's relatives, it is only natural. For witnesses, it is not advisable; for a judge, it is grounds for a mis-trial. Thus, it is a question of role assignments in society. Does design want to preserve and observe a given framework? Does it want to assume that others are active players in the game or even committing crimes – in other words, negotiating the conditions of hegemony?

How does it work?

What practical action could be taken? The most obvious answer involves biasedness with respect to our own political position. This does not necessarily mean limiting ourselves to problems and actors in our own environment. Rather, as the starting point of a biased approach, we could examine the social questions that concern us personally, that we have an affinity for, that we subjectively regard as the most urgent. The first step involves getting a better idea of whose side we are on. As the dominant narrative in the history of Western design suggests, designers usually have a left-wing identity with roots in classical liberalism, or, to be more accurate, a humanist worldview. However, now and in the past, conservative positions have also been represented in design, as have libertarian stances and even right-wing nationalist worldviews. All of these are the legitimate points of departure for biased action. Often there is a clear contradiction between an individual's worldview and professional behavior. In many cases, the difficulties designers have in reconciling their professional and personal perspectives can cause a great deal of suffering. It is impossible to completely eliminate this burden, which has to do with lifestyle, professional identity, and the basic schizophrenia of the working world. It can thus make sense to recognize a clear boundary between work and life, because the growing confusion between friendship and working relationships, between competition and dependency, can conceal existing biases and make unresolvable social conflicts into individually burdensome

ones. This is also true of the confusing state of affairs in which leisure time is lent a work-related purpose and work is assigned a pleasurable character. Nevertheless, these entanglements can help us gain awareness of the existing biases of our own actions (for example, with respect to clients from the private sector, universities providing work, municipal or state institutions sending queries, and specific determinative sociocultural milieus). Additionally, they can prompt us to think about consciously choosing a bias. Yet how can we move beyond this self-survey about individual and professional social positions? The answer lies not in a denial of this dimension, but in an openness to other possibilities and in a non-identity-based form of engagement. The abovementioned lawyer, coach, consultant, and collaborator exemplify tried-and-true models. This does not mean that we should take the supposed problems of others, perceived as relevant, as the starting point for professional problem-solving approaches. Rather, it means making ourselves into the passionate partners of others. Here «others» are not defined in terms of difference and separateness, but rather as a multiple non-self. Nevertheless, traditional others do exist in design, the so-called clients, customers, and the people commissioning the work. For each of these groups, designers have developed various modes of communication and behavior. In relation to these others, designers take part in a delimiting, referential role-playing game that defines the horizon of requirements for design as a rehearsed culture of others. Focusing on others and considering those who are not usually the commissioners of a design (while possibly maintaining the same professional distance and empathy) could result in a shift in working relationships and subsequently lead to an alternative approach and an alternative design practice. But it means taking sides.

Biasedness sounds extremely one-sided and can in fact be unjust because it distorts competition and does not constitute an objective, neutral position. In design practice, though, it is (1) always the case (although often unacknowledged) and (2) necessary. It is necessary for what Mouffe describes as the democratic conflict. Now that the political nature of design has finally been acknowledged, design should take part in these conflicts by becoming biased. After all, just as design is inconceivable without the goal of transformation, and transformation is inconceivable beyond the political, so too is politics impossible without bias. The goal of biased design can no longer be limited to emonstrating a humanist worldview, projecting a designer's own ideas about a good life onto others, or honestly seeking ways to improve society. This harmonious picture must be replaced by one that is marked by unresolvable conflict. Together with the actors and issues involved in these conflicts, we could then enter the political dimension of the debate that is devoted to ideas and practices of coexistence as lived forms of conflict.



Design 1 Heroic design with a capital D, also called author design, knows what it wants to do.

Design 2 Affirmative wish fulfilment, or customer-friendly design, is content to be told what to do.

Design 3 Design seeks to understand reality through systematic market research, intuitive and sensitive observation, and research-based knowledge.

Design 4 Critical design, also called adversarial design, poses critical questions, encourages reflection, and disorients.

Design 5 A framework for negotiating conflicts is created by approaches such as participatory design and moderating forms of social design.

Design 6 Biased design (see text).

Fig. 14.1 A few design approaches.

Different social actors (Stakeholders A–D) represent different views of the direction in which the social circumstances of the present (Real World) should develop (Ideal Worlds A–D). There are connections between the social positioning of the different groups of actors (which

can overlap and contain each other) and their objectives for social change (which can be similar on certain levels or completely contradictory). Classical patriarchal design approach (Design 1) processes the real world in a way that enables transformation according to its own vision, without regard to any social groups and their agendas. Serviceable design (Design 2) works, often implicitly, on behalf of hegemonic social groups and makes their particular interest the basis for design intervention. This interest is thereby equated with a common good and eventually naturalized. Through empathy, research and analysis, investigative design (Design 3) strives to gain an understanding of existing needs and to integrate them into design considerations. Without getting too close to stakeholder groups, the goal is to capture a general empirical picture of needs and objectives. Instead of aiming at an ameliorative transformation of the real world, as Design 1–3 did, the critical-activist design approach (Design 4) aims directly at the social actors, whom it stimulates to critical reflection and action in relation to their values and ideals (Ideal World A–D). Similarly, participatory design (Design 5) operates in this social conflict situation as well, but strives to support negotiation processes about the goals and means of changing the world. Social actors are to be included through certain frameworks of consensus and compromise building. While Design 4 seeks to stimulate the dispute (*Constitutive Conflict*) and Design 5 seeks to frame it, Design 6 instead tries to work in it. The model of biased design (Design 6) presented in the text openly gets behind an interest group or certain actors and, through design, supports them in the sociopolitical debate and the implementation of their causes and concerns.

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