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# The life and death of critical and speculative design:

## post-disciplinarity, post-truth, post-self and post-capital

Matt Ward

I am fully aware that the display of vulnerability is uneven; as a cis, white, able-bodied, man in a position of power, my display was easier than most.

# Preamble

‹I feel like giving you a hug.› (Jamie Allen, Critical by Design? conference, May 2018)

This chapter began life as a keynote at the Critical by Design? conference in Basel, Switzerland. Given the task to translate my lecture into written form, I find myself caught in a conundrum; how do I resist the critical distancing of academic language, method and style when writing for an academic publication? The motivation behind my lecture came from a frustration with a form of language that doesn't fully translate or transfer into the intuitive, emotional or «affective realm» of design practice and pedagogy. My aim was to speak in a different way, to try to articulate a different account of critical design. I hoped to introduce a «radical historical specificity» mixed with a form of situated knowledge in order to «to learn with our bodies» (Haraway 1988: 582).

The lecture pushed me emotionally and intellectually. It was, to some extent, cathartic and it seemed to resonate with attendees of the conference. After the talk, over coffee, sandwiches and later wine, I had many conversations about the emotional impacts of research, teaching and practice in the age of neoliberal education. Some of my peers connected with the vulnerability on display,[1] which induced a form of «solidarity» in how we manage, resist and survive the isolating forces of academic life in the 21st century.

But now, typing at my keyboard, I get pulled back into the language and form I wished to resist. How do I convey the intuitive moments that drive the maintenance and care needed to sustain a positive, creative learning environment? How do I articulate a new type of rigour within the frameworks of academic convention? Within Sociology, the work of Carolyn Ellis was particularly inspiring. In *Evocative Ethnography: Writing Emotionally about Our Lives,* Ellis looks to reframe the rational voice of the academic, utilizing the personal as a resource to investigate broader sociological conditions. Ellis' chapter uses multiple voices – both real and fictional – to create a dialogue with the sociological imagination. What captivated me about Ellis' account was how she repositioned notions of «truth» by moving from «representation to evocation» (Ellis 1997: 127). In Ellis' attempt to counter the «rational actor model of social performance that dominates social science» (Ellis 1997: 127) she reveals the affective realm of social discourse. As a designer, this resonates with the ways in which designers often navigate complex social dynamics through more intuitive, instinctual practices, for example in their examination and account of «users». By adopting Ellis' approach and ethos, I wish to

give an account of the evocative experience of living whilst teaching, of *being in the world* whilst trying to design it.

Annemarie Mol's seminal book, *The Body Multiple: Oncology in Medical Practice*, is an ethnography of the «day to day diagnosis and treatment of atherosclerosis» (Mol 2002). The mode of Mol's writing allows the reader to move between different «diseases», bringing a nuanced reading of the different social contexts in which the disease is given different meanings. This resistance to making singular truth claims, allowing the multiple to exist, is something I hope to achieve in this chapter. In my case, I want to recount moments within my life that shifted my understanding of design, critique and education, whilst also building a network of references that resonate with my aim: to make the personal, affective experience of teaching, loss and design multiple through the development of different theoretical and material trajectories.

The pedagogic cultures that produce new realities for design are often represented through the singular; design gods and canonical objects that travel most smoothly through our intellectual, institutional and media landscapes. The following text aims to disrupt the smoothness of the singular in favour of the multiple, messing up the narratives of design education to uncover some of the personal complexities in how we struggle to build educational culture and «communities of practice» (Lave/Wenger 1991); drawing together of voices of «limited location» (Haraway 1988: 583).

## Introduction

This chapter is a reflection on my practice as an educator, as well as a deeply personal articulation of four events that changed my life. This personal approach, an autotheoretical impulse, aims to distance me from current critiques of critical and speculative design, whilst exploring the personal impacts of death, disease and dementia on my understanding of design education. Through a subjective account of an educator's «trials and tribulations», I hope to reveal some of the hidden narratives that surround both critical and experimental design practices, whilst exposing the vulnerabilities involved in maintaining a culture of learning. Looking «under the bonnet» of an education, where knowledge is produced in dialogue with students and discourse evolves through pedagogic, material experimentation, I hope to uncover the ways in which new knowledge leaks into mainstream perceptions of design, influencing and creating new possibilities.

The four events, the deaths of my friend Nic Hughes, my father Tony Ward, my student Tom Wagstaff and my colleague Mark Fisher, have acted as ruptures in time, moments that altered my understanding

of the world. Evolving a position through moments of trauma allowed me to nurture a form of thinking that was close, raw, embodied and emotional. It pushed me to question how critique (and some critical design) often disguises epistemic rationality, hiding the politics and vulnerabilities of the self. In an age of post-truth, climate crisis and political chaos, clarity and transparency about the privilege and vulnerabilities of the academic is essential to counter the dark forces that are acting as barriers to global justice.

Each section of the chapter pivots around a certain *post*. As with death, the *post* demarcates a move away; the articulation of a different reality emerging from a tradition or body of thinking and making. The first section focuses on the idea of *post-disciplinarity*, where I unravel how design, as a field, is conceptualized through the intersection of teaching histories (pedagogic cultures), material practices (cultural and knowledge production) and epistemic categories (disciplinary specialisms). In doing this I hope to point towards an expanded notion of disciplinarity. The second section, *post-truth*, examines how fiction operates as a method to understand the world, simultaneously reflecting current positions and producing new realities. Through a case study, I expose different ways that *fiction becomes reality* and how designers employ narrative methods to understand, transform and reimagine the world. The third section, *post-self*, looks at how we move away from normative hero narratives within the discipline, to find new ways to educate, structure and mediate a new role for the designer. The final section, *post-capital*, is informed by the work of Mark Fisher and looks at how Mark's work has influenced and produced new ways to think about design beyond capitalism.

## Post-disciplinarity (NIC HUGHES 1968–2012)

I met Nic Hughes in 2005 when he joined the MA Design: Critical Practice at Goldsmiths. He arrived with years of experience as a graphic designer and his level of craftsmanship was incredible. He had that rare skill of being able to combine text and image in a way that just worked, a visual refinement that comes from years of practice. However, he was frustrated with his practice and with the lack of criticality in Graphic Design. He was steeped in the Swiss modernist tradition of visual communication but Nic was truly post-modern: he had mastered the rules, and then he set about breaking and rewriting them in the age of acid house and dance culture of the 1990s.

Most design education in the early 1990s was still based on the «Bauhaus ... model that advanced an apolitical universal aesthetic» (Boelen et al. 2018: 43). Undergraduate programmes focused on «core material skills» and «basic principles» that have not changed for

100 years. These modernist dogmas continue to restrict the evolution of the discipline. As the context, condition and understanding of the «materials» of design have changed, it has become widely acknowledged that the key task for design education is to reassess and redesign «the basics». In order to do this, we must ask: how do we define the basics in today's complex world, when the material, political and economic role of design has changed so dramatically?

Using the 2018 Istanbul Design Biennale «School of Schools» as a platform to discuss the future of design education, Jan Boelen categorized emerging pedagogic practices into three distinct areas: critical, speculative and relational. Boelen's articulation of design builds on an educational history (a renegade history) that has been evolving over the last 20 years, in places like Design Academy Eindhoven, the Royal College of Art, Goldsmiths, Parsons and Hyperwerk in Basel. A marginal approach to design education aimed to focus on the social, cultural, economic and environmental impacts of capitalism, highlighting the responsibility, role and agency of the designer.

Through the reconceptualization of the role of the designer, the old material specialisms appear incongruent to the changing pressures and possibilities for design practice. At the heart of this incongruence is the tension between what design *does* (the impacts it has on our material consumption and the chains of consequences it has on our ecology, politics, identity and economy) and *how* it does it (the materials, methods and tools employed to embody, produce and distribute change). Expanding our understanding of the «material» of design, to engage a broader, more complex and nuanced concept of «matter», is at the heart of what, in other fields, has been described as New Materialism (Coole / Frost 2010; Dolphijn / van der Tuin 2012) or the Material Turn (Hicks 2010).

This material turn played out in its own way in the early days of the BA Design at Goldsmiths. Initially, my colleagues and I struggled to question our own preconceptions of what constituted *material* and *matter*. We pushed our understanding of design beyond (or outside) the traditions, in what we described as «fucking the canon». By drawing influence from a more diverse range of visual and theoretical cultures, we invested our approach with a conceptual rigour, distancing ourselves from design's obsession with «things on plinths» or shiny objects of desire. We saw this as an expansion of the tools open to us as designers; stepping into a vulnerable space of the non-expert, making *us* the imposters.

When Nic arrived in 2005 we had moved into a different period of development – our early rejection of *material over concept* had evolved into a more sophisticated understanding of practice. It was Nic's continual dedication to his specialism, or more precisely his

material practice, that brings him into this chapter. His approach was not to reject material practices or the histories of a specialism, but to expand the notion of materiality. He was so convinced that graphic design could command the same *agency as things* that he even put some typography under an electron microscope (Fig. 16.1) to prove to me that letters are things too (Fig. 16.2). His approach was not to call into question the validity of the material practices, but to revitalize them through a renewed attention to how they connect and conjoin semiotic chains of meaning. How they move from the computer, through the press, into the hands, minds and desires of people; how they travel, transforming the bodies they connect. This is graphic design as «vital materialism», a rethinking of «thing power» (Bennett 2010: xvii).

Nic died in October 2012 of cancer of the gall bladder. To his last day, he approached his life with the same sensitivity and care as when he was discussing design and education. In our last conversation, the boundaries between bodies («me» and «we»), between life and death, between human and non-human fell away:



Fig. 16.1 Type under an electron microscope. Nic Hughes, 2011.

We all have a contract with finitude and share the same destiny. There are so many diversions and schemas that navigate this fact. Hard as it seems, we have to acknowledge that each of us at the table will eventually be part of the meal. We will eventually become echoes in the «field-of-beings». It is the paradox of the «me» and the «we», the journey made alone and together. (Hughes 2012)

Nic's ability to see forces as things, to see the invisible as matter, to see hope as material is what persists in my memory. He saw the critical possibility of design as part of a material-semiotic struggle to bring about change during perilous times. As Nic said at the time, «the world is fucked, we're not going to kern our way out of this one» (Fig. 16.3), but he understood that liberation from late capitalism had to begin with a form of radical subjectivity. Marcuse described this as the «great refusal», where art was the
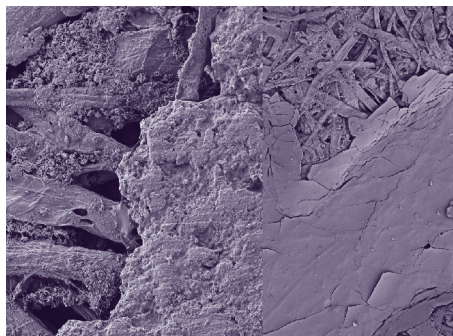


Fig 16.2 Letters Are Things. Nic Hughes, 2011.

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　Mark Fisher, in his last piece of writing, builds from Marcuse, moving beyond the «neutralising» and «absorbing» forces of capitalism to find a plasticity in the possible, to evolve an «unprecedented aestheticisation of everyday life» (Fisher / Ambrose 2018).



Fig 16.3 «We're not going to kern our way out of this one!» Nic Hughes, 2010.

«rational negation» (Marcuse [1964] 1991: 63) of the order of things.[2] With this, design needs to move away from understanding material as «mere matter» towards «an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable» (Coole / Frost 2010: 9) and subjectivities that are «constituted as open series of capacities or potencies that emerge hazardously and ambiguously within a multitude of organic and social processes» (Coole / Frost 2010: 10).

## Post-truth (TONY WARD 1937–2013)

The death of my father marked a moment where I began to question the idea of a subjective reality and the role of fiction in understanding and navigating a cruel world. During the last 15 months of his life, he made me reflect on how design and designers interpret, read, script and perform the possibility space of their «users»: constructing and fictionalizing desire and behaviour. The construction, whether fictional or not, of «the other», the mythical user, means that we constantly seek and invent empirical methods to grasp the reality of other people's lives. As we know, whether through the history of psychology, philosophy, anthropology or sociology, understanding the subjective reality, the internal world, of another person is a complex affair. As design educators, we aim to expose some of these complexities to our students, arming them with methods and techniques to uncover the motivations and behavioural norms of their users. Through the examination of *the other* we hope to build empathetic connections with those people for whom we design.

We are fully aware that the approximations we generate, through user profiles and personas, are limited fictions. Wilkie formulates a detailed analysis of how users are conceptualized within design and technology innovation. He develops the idea of the «user assemblage» as a means to uncover how «users act as devices of and devices for persuasion» (Wilkie 2010: 197). In the process of innovation and design we essentialize and operationalize people to achieve a shorthand for a «target market», translating the people we design for into data points on a sales graph. In the age of big data, where

3   Buolamwini (2017) and Noble (2018) are the beginnings of a wave of computer scientists interested in deconstructing industries' «algorithmic gaze».

companies like Google and Facebook can have ever more finely detailed understandings of our moods, motivations, desires and consumption patterns, our understanding of users is still based on crude algorithmic assumptions that mask difference. There is a growing field of research examining *algorithmic bias*, uncovering how automated systems carry with them the «priorities, preferences and prejudices» of those in power (Buolamwini 2017).[3]

My Dad suffered from vascular dementia. During the two cruel years that I witnessed his physical and mental decline, I had time to see the world differently. I described those years as watching death in slow motion. My Dad's dementia, a post-operative condition, shifted his understanding and interactions with the world, but his illness also gave me insight into how his damaged brain forced him to rethink the world around him through fiction. Neuroscience, as a discipline, is founded on case studies of damaged brains. In *Phantoms in the Brain*, Ramachandran and Blakeslee (2005) give an account of what they describe as «enigmatic disorders»: how non-normal neurological conditions can give us access to the inner working of the human mind. In design, I believe we can also learn from those who see the world very differently from ourselves. My father navigated a strange material world full of half-truths and semi-fictions. These fictions ranged from regular thefts of imagined possessions to the non-existent affair that my mother had with a major TV celebrity. His fictional view of the world had a direct and tangible reality, not just on him, but on those around him. His subjective reality demanded attention, care and engagement from others. Everyone struggled with how much of his fiction they should entertain. Whether they should *play along* to avoid upset and confusion.

To play along meant to *entertain* or *accept* the fiction that my father had conjured in his mind. Jon K. Shaw and Theo Reeves-Evison, in *Fiction as Method* (2017), outline how «entertaining belief» in a myth or fiction doesn't lessen the effect the fiction can have. Fictions move into the world, through different mediums, and are shared and collectively experienced. To fully understand the power of *fiction as method*, we need to focus on «the operative effect of something, irrespective of its objective existence» (Shaw / Reeves-Evison 2017: 17). Within Critical Design or Design Fiction this has been described as «suspending disbelief about change» (Sterling 2013), where «diegetic prototypes» (Kirby 2011) are utilized to explore possible futures.

Shaw and Reeves-Evison outline two strands that clearly link to the processes and practice of design:

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1. «those that reveal structures and gain agency in the construction of the everyday»;
2. «those that are deployed as holes to let in the ‹future› or ‹abstract-outside›» (Shaw / Reeves-Evison 2017: 8).

Over the last decade we have seen a growing body of practice that aims to «make visible» the underlying political and technological infrastructures of everyday life. The work of James Bridle, Trevor Paglen, Tactical Technology and Wes Goatley look to use artistic and creative techniques to uncover the inner workings, aesthetics and ethical complexities of our technological «black boxes» (Latour 1987). Designers often design ways to mask, mediate or translate the inner workings of technical systems to the external world. The level to which designers reveal or conceal system complexity ranges from the most practical decisions to an evolving body of work that aims to provoke, engage and stimulate the popular imagination. Arnall and Martinussen (2010; Arnall 2013) and Tharp and Tharp (2013, 2019) categorize such work as *discursive*, in that «discursive design engages with the popular cultural imagination, and is concerned with the socio-cultural representations and mediations of technology» (Arnall 2013: 150). Arnall, through Anne Balsamo, sees an opportunity for design, as a material and communicative practice, to shape and form «new narratives, new myths, new rituals, new modes of expression, and new knowledges» (Balsamo 2011: 7).

As designers, we have the power to blur the lines between the real and the fictional; I like to consider this as a process of *Hyperstition.* Hyperstition, a neologism from the words «hyper» and «superstition», was coined in the 1990s by academics who worked at the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU) at the University of Warwick. Hyperstition is a «fiction that makes itself real through time travelling feedback loops: it operates as a future vision thrown back to engineer its own history» (O'Sullivan 2017). CCRU saw reality «to be composed of fictions – consistent semiotic terrains that condition perceptual, affective and behavioural responses» (CCRU 2004). An example of hyperstition within the field of Critical Design is a cautionary tale I like to tell about Auger-Loizeau's Audio Tooth Implant – an upsetting account of how designing *fictions* and *speculations* operate in the «real», an unintentional hyperstition that had impacts on the mental health and life of a person I shall refer to as «M».

The Audio Tooth Implant, a seminal piece of Critical Design, was produced in 2001. Jimmy Loizeau is a colleague and good friend of mine, so I have been familiar with the background story and evolution of the project for nearly two decades. The project was developed when Loizeau was a researcher at the Helen Hamlyn Centre for

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Design and James Auger was in the second year of his Masters in Design Products at the RCA. The work was shown at the Science Museum and it took off. The idea was inserted into mainstream media and they loved it. What started as an idea, a speculation on a possible direction for mobile telephony, a fiction that questioned the role of micro-electronic miniaturization and the development of augmented biotechnology, became the invention of the year in *Time Magazine* in 2002.

Auger-Loizeau receive continual feedback about how this university project, this fiction, became real. They have even been told about it appearing in a pub quiz as a real invention. Loizeau has always been interested in the role of media and popular cultural forms as the site for discussing technological futures; in this case, «the debate» took place in the tabloid media. But as with all design, when inserted into the world, when left to roam free, unintended consequences will always arise. With this project, this happened in the form of a series of text messages Jimmy received 16 years after the project was completed from a person, «M».

Over a period of a month M sent numerous text messages to Jimmy, included threats of grievous bodily harm and visitations to his home. M demanded that Jimmy remove his fictional implant. It became clear that he believed that someone, possibly a government agency, had inserted the Audio Tooth Implant into his jaw. The device had been activated and had enabled someone to interfere and control his thoughts; whispering ideas of murder and violence into his ear, 24 hours a day.

A project that started in the safe space of a university was taken as real and built into the delusional thoughts of someone with severe mental health issues, someone with violent tendencies and a history of violence. This was indeed a speculation that Auger-Loizeau discussed back when they did the project, it was a possible future; one of the dark dystopian futures that they worried about. What they did not realize was that they could facilitate that future with a scale model using bits of an old TV.

Often when we discuss «the real» in design, we miss a more nuanced understanding of the term. It is commonly used to undermine or critique work that doesn't fully fit into our conservative notions of the future. The «real world» is wielded as a weapon to undermine the imagination. «For that's what ‹realism› amounts to: not a representation of the real, but a determination of what is politically possible» (Fisher 2005). However, forms of speculative design will always be real, as are all forms of fiction; they move into our collective imaginations, their affective agency ripples out into the world, changing our consciousness.

The Audio Tooth Implant has been accused of being a scam, a ruse, a con and almost 20 years later it is hard not to consider it as *fake news*. However, the relationship between news and fiction has always been a complex one. As forms of media they have co-evolved. Lennard Davis (1983) writes about the origins of the novel, tracing it back to the 18th century and the singing of the *Newes* to avoid slander. This publicly performed, single sheet *Newes* would commonly intertwine what we know as news with supernatural events and folk-lore. Catherine Gallager (2007) describes the evolution of the novel between the 18th and 20th centuries as evolving a «protective enclo-sure», a «free space in which to temporarily indulge imaginative play» (Gallager 2007: 347), allowing readers to invest in ideas with little risk to their daily lives.

In the context of dementia care, environments have been designed to support the fictions that patients experience, indulging them in the space of their imaginations. Hogeweyk Dementia Village in Weesp (NL), pioneered by Yvonne van Amerongen and Jannette Spiering, defined seven different «lifestyles» to accommodate demen-tia sufferers. These lifestyles were approximations of *lives once led*; semi-fictional environments aimed to reduce confusion. Each of these architectural fictions – cinematic sets designed to alleviate restless minds – were conceptualized after interviews held with families of dementia sufferers. The results and popularity of Hogeweyk seem to confirm a need to engage with dementia sufferers in a different way; to smooth the discord between their perception of the world and how it appears to «us». Hogeweyk's lifestyles are ordered and vary in category, for example; «*Indisch* for individuals from Indonesia and with an affinity with the Dutch East Indies … and *Huiselijk* for home-makers» (Verderber 2018). Once reality is stripped from the residents, they are connected only through social status, colonialism and capital-ist dreams. The «fragments of their material selves» (Ward 2013) are collected together and presented back to them without context or nuance; they are left with the weak signals of fictional lives they never lived. With a «care philosophy centred on reminiscent therapy» (Verderber 2018), Hogeweyk allows its residents to live in a «real-unreal world». A space (architecture), programme (service) and prac-tice (interaction) that frames reality through semi-fictions; a collective fiction that produces and formulates the reality of the individual; a *diegetic cue* that supports real-world interactions; a materialized and performed *suspension of disbelief*.

How we construct ourselves, our identity, is often through the stories we tell. In *The Self as a Centre of Narrative Gravity*, Daniel Dennet examines the role of fiction and narrative in the construction of the self. Dennet theorizes that our sense of self is determined by

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continuously updated and rewritten fictions of ourselves and the narratives we tell. He goes on to use «psychological disorders, or surgically created disunities» to examine the robustness of the «gravity centre» of the self:

> After all, when a human being's behavioral control system becomes seriously impaired, it can turn out that the best hermeneutical story we can tell about that individual says that there is more than one character «inhabiting» that body. (Dennet 1992: 114)

When my father's dementia worsened, his centre of narrative gravity was knocked off alignment. The shifted centre was compensated by those around him, his fictions became ours and we remade our reality according to his stories. We became characters inhabiting his ageing body and his fractured mind. There are times when reality and  truth become less settled, when they become «an array of possibilities – similar to the idea of parallel universes, but with all those parallel universes in one universe» (García 2017: 172). The last months with my father was like living in a parallel universe, an embodied experience of someone else's fictional self.

### Post-self (TOM WAGSTAFF 1995–2016)

Tom Wagstaff was my student until he died in May 2016. In the preparation for his final exam, he took his own life. Tom brought a wonderful energy to the studio; he had a strong network of friends, was loved by everyone and was a force for good in a tight-knit community. He was a talented designer and thinker, excelling at his work throughout his degree. His death brought shock and a collective mourning that I had never before experienced. Tom's death shook our community to the core. In the years since his death the department has struggled to «make sense» of the loss.

Over the last ten years, I have witnessed a changing role in how design education and culture values and assigns agency to the individual. Much of design culture still celebrates the auteur; the bold, creative genius. The individual who makes waves in the design world – getting headlines, demonstrating their unique creativity and talent. These forms of hero narrative are deeply engrained in both academia and design culture; however, times are changing. The celebrity designer (usually male, white, straight and cis-gendered), with their life goal to help society or single-handedly change the world (or at least save us from poor taste, ugly PCs and weakly sucking vacuum cleaners), is a fallacy. Design has always been a team sport; however, the teams have always been exclusive. As a practice, design sits at a relational intersection between many other forms of knowledge,

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transforming ideology into material form. However, it has failed to open its cultural practice to underrepresented, disenfranchised voices, so we must demand a process of decolonization and queering to find the true space of representational intersectionality. To do this we must foster caring, safe and welcoming communities, where ideas and values are collectively shared and individual identities are fostered through socio-political diversity. This has been our aim at Goldsmiths over the last two decades: a shared process, practice and philosophy of design, a «community of practice» (Lave/Wenger 1991) aimed at addressing complex socio-cultural problems.

Our[4] relationship with Tom and his relationship with his peers was constructed in and through «the studio». The studio is an essential place of learning for many designers, a «site of synthesis» (Michael/Wilkie 2016) where a «heterogeneous» set of ideas, skills, relationships, materials, knowledge, emotions and politics are combined in and through the bodies of our students. These sites of pedagogic transformation have been under-examined within the field of design education. Although *studio culture* has been described as the «hidden curriculum» (Dutton et al. 2002: 4), an informal set of practices, expectations and pressures that influence how students learn, design, behave and perform, little has been done to understand how design educators set up the right conditions for a creative and supportive environment.

Mike Michael, in the «Afterword» of *Studio Studies: Operations, Topologies and Displacements*, believes that members of a design studio «are likely to operate with ‹similar models of the social›» and asks «how are these ‹models› derived?» (Michael 2016: 214). Although Michael's proposition may be true within the professional realm, where the commercial practices of recruitment produce a more uniform set of world views (or prejudices), I believe that the educational design studio contains a more diverse set of «social models» and, more importantly, needs to maintain difference in order to produce a more open future for design.

In Situated Learning Theory, the concept of «communities of practice» highlights the importance of the context of learning, seeing learning as a relational activity situated in a place with a specific group of people. Different to cognitivist theories of learning, Lave and Wenger describe knowledge as «provisional, mediated and socially constructed» (Handley et al. 2006), where practices have a limited and ambiguous form – communities of shared interest aiming to achieve a mutual, recognized goal. However, Handley highlights some key problems with Lave and Wenger's initial conceptualization of communities of practice, including the lack of emphasis placed on identity construction and conflict.

It is at the intersection between the studio as a site of heterogeneous synthesis (Michael/Wilkie 2016) and as a learning «community of practice» that I feel work needs to be done. By looking at the layered complexity of how student designers navigate social and relational dynamics whilst also trying to understand themselves as individuals and professionals; how they learn to engage with users, materials and social contexts, whilst trying to locate themselves in the future roles of an industry that is ever moving and ethically complex to navigate. It is essential for educators to understand and embrace how the studio is a site of projection, proposal and possibility, whilst also being a site of vulnerability and fragility.

Tom's energy and presence in the studio still haunts me. As educators we strive to produce environments that are supportive and open, but with this form of care comes an investment and responsibility that is difficult to shoulder when we lose one of our own. I hope that the spirit of generosity that Tom brought to Goldsmiths will remain, pushing us all to make the environment pregnant with hope, laughter and possibility.

### Post-capital (MARK FISHER, 1968–2017)

I had been a fan of Mark's work for over a decade, through his writing on k-punk, when he made the move to the Visual Cultures department at Goldsmiths. I was a bit star-struck, but was lucky enough to get to know him. It was his care, a form of labour that aims to support creative communities, that brings Mark into this chapter. He was described by a mutual friend as having that unique energy so that he could *enthuse ideas into existence*. Mark took his own life in January 2017.

Mark brought a different quality to the culture of Goldsmiths, but also the culture of intellectual life around the globe. He was active, generative and engaging. He had the desire to produce something new in the face of the «slow cancellation of the future» (Berardi 2011: 18). In his memorial lecture, Kodwo Eshun described Mark as producing «[a]n interpretative community that gathers itself, that comes into existence, in and through the participation and the metabolisation of the possibility spaces opened by concepts, that are charged by beliefs» (Eshun 2018).

During the late 1990s it seemed that the internet would transform democratic engagement; however, it is now evident that it may be the mechanism of our downfall. In trying to think through alternatives (political and ecological), it often comes back to tangible changes in our material and social lives. Critical Design emerged at a particular time when it still felt like there was an alternative. Where the dominant

political and economic realities of technological culture were still open to different futures. By redesigning and rethinking our relationship to *matter*, whether through the reconfiguration of our domestic relationships or the redesign of our economic exchange system, we need to imagine through the visualization of material possibility.

Our current instantiation of speculative design came from a context of resisting the normative forces of design education (Ward 2013). In the early 2000s Critical and Speculative Design built up a head of steam; practitioners found new ways to communicate, disseminate and articulate the value of design beyond the inherent instrumental link to capitalism. But as with all resistances, as Marcuse highlights, eventually radical forms of expression become co-opted into the dominant system – in this case, a system of capitalist production where future speculation (visions of alternatives) become commodified, packaged, sold in the guise of entertainment, art or research. Conferences are run, books are written, PhDs are completed on the work that hope to find a different way of thinking about technology. Critical Design was the birth of many academic monsters, dozens of PhDs and peer-reviewed papers at conferences, where eager academics, climbing that slippery pole of academic promotion, state their claims, critiques and problems with this momentary, temporal resistance.

Critique, or more specifically the point of critical theory, is an attempt to resist the hegemonic forces of capitalism. In its purest form its goal is to liberate us; to find new alternatives to social and economic arrangements. The great refusal. Although many criticisms have been directed towards Critical Design, or more specifically that small group of practitioners coming from the RCA in the late 1990s and early 2000s, I think there was a deep desire to shift our culture away from normative futures.

In Mark's final writing, the introduction of his unfinished book «Acid Communism», he looks to expose capitalism's masking and blocking of «common wealth». In order to discover a new reality, one where the «red plenty» would run free (Fisher/Ambrose 2018). He returns to the psychedelic subcultures of the 1960s and 1970s. Although not interested in the use of psychedelic chemicals, but rather in «Acid» as an aesthetic approach, his final work looks for hope in finding alternative subjectivities, new realisms and an elevated collective consciousness. In Capitalist Realism he states:

> Emancipatory politics must always destroy the appearance of a «natural order», must reveal what is presented as necessary and inevitable to be a mere contingency, just as it must make what was previously deemed to be impossible seem attainable. (Fisher 2009: 17)

I feel that design has the tools and mechanisms to expose the fractures in our current social and economic systems; to show new desires and new possibilities. At the heart of this chapter was my desire to promote and produce new educational trajectories that support the creation of different futures – futures beyond the impossible barrier of capitalist realism.

## Conclusion

By placing myself and my experiences with loss and mourning at the visible centre of this work, I aimed to uncover the «meshworks» (Ingold 2010: 10) of affective experience that pointed to-wards a different future for design education. As I reach the end of the chapter, I realize a key idea runs through each section: the urgent need to find a balance between individual and collective narratives; how the co-authorship of our myths and fictions open up collective possible potential futures.

With the despair and sorrow that came with loss, a sense of hope and potential emerged – a different way for me to think about my practice. Nic Hughes spent much of his time thinking about how philosophical and theological narratives of creation can empower collective experience. His spirit of vital materialism and expanded notions of disciplinarity continue to inspire me to push the boundaries of what is desirable to be designable. My father, Tony Ward, used fiction as a way to understand, engage and play with those around him. He sometimes used stories as a way to impose power or force social cohesion, but he also helped me understand that the narratives that drive our identity construction are local, subjective and contingent. As designers, we need to develop a form of deep listening, giving space to the subjective realities of the people we do not understand. The tragic loss of Tom Wagstaff has made me rethink the narratives and structures of how we support young designers in the studio context, finding new tactics to support their emergent identities in our complex, sometimes brutal world. And finally, Mark Fisher enabled me to think about how the limits of our imagination are laid down by the structural imperatives of late capitalism, how the mechanisms of neoliberalism resist and restrict our collective imaginations. But above all, in order to resist and find new realities, we need hope and optimism to shift us away from the individualization of contemporary life, to where endless generosity enthuses new realities into existence.

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