

P / REFERENCES OF DESIGN

THE FUTURE OF WELL-BEING: IN A WORLD THAT AGES.

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Cura sui – this phrase pops up today as a recurring name for beauty salons, aesthetic clinics, diet counseling, and the like. Two thousand years ago, however, it was used as a philosophical watchword: ‘Take care of yourself’ that is take care that your existence, taken in both physical and spiritual sense, is aligned with the cosmos as a whole, with its all-pervading order (since the Greek term of *kósmos* means precisely order), or meet some higher level of (divine) design (Hadot 1995). And it also involved that you ought to take the steps needed to achieve that harmony. Your well-being cannot be conceived as an individual state, only as a partaking in something bigger, an engaging in good in itself.

Well, that is the past of how well-being as an existential state can be apprehended, at least how its understanding went on in the most radical part of its history, in which it has been connected to a philosophical approach and art of living. This attitude has been transmitted through modified forms in the Middle Ages, especially in monastic life: well-being was meant of being close to God. Today, by turn, we are at an interstellar distance from this ancient heritage of the *cura sui*, and much closer to the way of life that Foucault (1986) characterized by the term, “aesthetics of existence”. Instead of *cura sui* we have had new and different watchwords for long that have a common feature of each being formulated in a possessive grammatical structure: our Earth, the blue planet; our age, the times of modern life; our design, which is aligned to the human scale.

Our planet – our age – our design: such wonderfully obsolete terms, although still in heavy use! This planet got wounded and is ageing. We, as a society and as individuals, are ageing as well, and disintegrating in many different ways. Our design practices, Papanek warned as early as the 1970s, have proven to be harmful

and dangerous, or ignorant as for planetary and natural conditions (including our very ageing). From this perspective, the last thing we need is even more design. Rather we need care and carefulness. But can we give and take good care in an all-spontaneous way? Might one conceive carefulness without the implication of prudence, circumspect, foresight, and coordination? Since more often than not there arises a great and multiplied need for care, simultaneously for multiple, both human and other living or nonliving entities, and this leads in itself toward the necessity to assess, organize, and institutionalize what is at stake, the act of design per se, be it product development or policy making, seems inevitable even against their apparent overdriving.

The contributors to this section are testifying their deep understanding and experience of the above tensions. Some of them responded to our call by focusing on specific, intersectional, and institutionally underrated or blindspotted issues: like the situation of the gynecological inspection (V. Juretko), or complex problems of period poverty (Z. de Meillon), HPV detection devices seen from the point of view of the user experience (M. Maldonado et alii). Others approached more directly institutional malfunctions: that of hospitalized children healthcare (C. Akoglu and K. Dankl), burial protocols (M. Kuronen), and urban revitalization (S. Qin et alii). Still others provided examples of careful design in multiple fields highlighting how mindsets are the most important aspects as opposed to technologies (I. Caruso and V. Cristallo; L. Christiansen).

A full panel came together from thought-provoking submissions about how to deal designerly with emerging issues in an ageing society. This was by far the most recurring theme among all the 70+ initial submissions we got on our call, and those that made it until this publication phase are not coincidentally those that put an emphasis on service and technology aspects (A. Giambattista et alii; P. Veske-Lepp et alii; A. Pollini et alii). Their underlying issues are the same as the ones we inherited from the modern design tradition: how can we avoid that our 'solutions' lead to ever-increasing alienation?

References

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