

# **Non-design at Scale**

*Dasein* Design and the *Dao* of Performance

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**Abstract:** Amidst the traumas of global eco-anxiety, exercises of *dasein* design and non-design offer teams ways of collaborating with non-profits, NGOs, and schools on projects involving death penalty cases, rural healthcare, and public infrastructure. Guattari's diagrammatic metamodelization and three ecologies of self, society, and world enable StudioLab to design shared experiences of care that detour the positionality of platform performativity. How do progressive lawyers story-tell with conservative voters to stop a death sentence? How do off-grid villagers connect with vaccines and maternal and infant care? How do rural schools build infrastructure during pandemics? Across time zones, our collective existential, historical, ontological, and cosmological experience base exceeds reductive modelling and requires recursive abduction of shared worlds for the immanent co-design of sympoetic encounters. As Guattari's metamodel enfolds Heidegger's fourfold interface of world and thing, we overlay the Daoist fourfold and its empty *wu* to rehearse new efficacies, the *Dao* of performance.

**Keywords:** non-design, experience design, performance design, policy design, Guattari, Heidegger, Daoism, positionality, storytelling, cosmography



Figure 1. Zine workshop. March, 2024. 14BC Gallery, NYC.

## 1. Introduction

The experimental pedagogy StudioLab began in the late 1990s connecting performance studios and media labs at New York University and at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. After directing StudioLab at the University of Wisconsin-Madison from 2008-2016, I rebooted StudioLab at Cornell University to continue research of Cold War R&D, first announced in *Perform or Else* (2001). It rehearses a general theory of performance in which modern disciplinarity encounters postmodern performativity: grand narratives meet input/output matrices, surveillance meets dataveillance, literacy meets digitality. It also entertains Derrida's *performativity* as the iter-ability or other-ability of any performance.

Partners bring projects, and we work with extraordinary individuals and organizations. Over the past 5 years, 200 designers and 15 community partners have shared innumerable positions, arguments, and stories on issues including the death penalty, healthcare, education, and social and environmental rights. Many projects have been joyful, a few tragic, and all have unfolded in disruptive times. From co-designing has emerged *dasein* design.

StudioLab practices performance design as *performance*, minding the liminal norms of platform performativity, its satisficing of cultural efficacy, technological effectiveness, and organization efficiency, and the chances of performative drift. As described in *Transmedia Knowledge for Higher Education and Community Engagement* (2019), our mix of theory-practice introduces

transmedia knowledge to explore performance design *as collective thought-action figuration*, reinscribing Platonic ideation within media cascades crafted through design exercises. We co-design across studio, lab, seminar, field, and zoom spaces using different methods and genres: manifestos, experiential architectures, narrative sparklines, cosmograms, etc.

This paper reflects on StudioLab's metamodelization method inspired by Deleuze and Guattari, whose desiring-machines motor our design teams' engagement with sociotechnical platforms. Metamodelization counters analytically reductive practice with the synthetic ontogenesis of multiple worlds. By collaboratively overlaying different conceptual, affective, and cosmological processes, a plane of flow or consistency may emerge via abduction. StudioLab metamodels planes of consistency, plateaus of becoming.

We follow the potentialities of recursive abduction and Daoist non-design to explore performance as a minor design praxis guided by Kafka's nomadic k-function, an anarchic principle driven across different genres, platforms, and worlds by random encounters of alterity. Abduction, according to Pierce, is discovery, the inferential process of forming new insights through manipulation of cognitive, embodied, or systemic processes that Magnani extends into the environment. *Dasein* is abductive, its thought-action ecological. Recursive abduction feeds surprising, novel outputs back in as inputs, over and over, effecting behavioral, systemic, environmental, historic, ontological, and/or cosmic transformation. Such strange loops lurk in Hegel's *Aufhebung*, Marx's revolution, Nietzsche's eternal return, Heidegger's Event, Ronell's telephony, and, indeed, *any system marked by rupture and renewal, i.e. any and all systems*.

Via recursive abduction of non-design, we encounter an empty place, the *Dao* of performance, found during reflective moments of the design process. Mindfulness and attunement feedback with recursive abduction in the emergence of care.

## **2. *Dasein* Design and Thought-Action Figuration**

Thomas Wendt's *Design for Dasein: Understanding the Design of Experiences* defines design as alethic, as disclosive of being beyond utility. Via design as *dasein*, we disclose the world, others, and ourselves in ways that displace Platonic ideation of forms and all-too-human use values. StudioLab pursues *dasein* design via media cascades of thought-action figures, post-Platonic ideas refreshed with all the affective forces and multiplicities that logocentrism banishes with its idealizing, ontologizing question, "what is?" To generate figures, StudioLab combines Critical Art Ensemble's tactical media with Critical Design Thinking's media cascades, and its transmedia knowledge flows through desiring-machines and sociotechnical systems alike.

Freed from binaries of knower/known, mind/body, and quests for the One, for utility and the arborescent ordering of concepts, *dasein* design as thought-action figuration entertains the speculative question "what could be?" We respond not with top-down decisiveness but with the transversal, bottom-up approach of IDEO's human-centered design model. In the central Create phase, which StudioLab metamodels with the liminal phase of rites of passage,

established social positions, symbols, and processes enter anti-structural play. Such liminal playing of materials is key to StudioLab's design process and the becoming of *dasein* designers.

It is within these exercises and accompanying transmedia cascades that post-ideational thought-action figures — *designs and designers* — emerge and flow, appear and withdraw. A child's doll, a motorcycle taxi, a comic book hero — such figures function as transmedial mediums of communication, healing, and transformation.

Like Kafka's K character, thought-action figures guide both the design of artifacts *and* the fashioning of ourselves as *dasein* designers, as designers with existential skin in the game. Teams craft personal cosmograms that map values and figures instilled by family, education, history, popular culture, religion, and/or the street. This feedback of designer and design, system and environment, thing and world, *da* and *sein* prompts us to define *dasein* design as *figuring the thrownness or chance of being by any medium necessary*. Projects become collaborative quests, nested complexes, and sometimes collective ordeals. As Deleuze and Guattari note, desiring-production occurs alongside, in the margins of work, and *dasein* designers may bracket elements within the larger processual event while pursuing their k function elsewhere and when. Such recursively abductive eddies are conducive to transformative processes in clinical, critical, and creative contexts.

While Wendt approaches *dasein* design's disclosure of being through Heidegger's broken hammer analysis in *Being and Time* (1928), we follow Reiner Schurmann and "read Heidegger backward." Starting with the fourfold figure of the 1950s and 60s, back through "The Turn" and "Question Concerning Technology" of the dark 1930s and 40s, and then to *Being and Time's* destruction of Cartesian subjective certainty, *dasein's* thrownness into finitude with its fundamental mood of *Sorge*, its decisive *s/care* package of authentic Angst-Care. One reframes enframing via fourfolding.

Psychologists have begun describing "eco-anxiety," anxiety that cascades from the climate crisis through social institutions into individual bodies, a circulating cascade whose plunging currents include local and global pandemics, political violence and economic disruption, as well as the widespread erosion of social institutions and cultural identities. Following Bettina Bergo, StudioLab approaches anxiety as a fundamental *stoff*e of global experience design. Others might call this stuff "platform nihilism." Let us not forget Heidegger's breakdown and the *Daseinanalysis* of Boss, Binswanger and Foucault.

Reading Heidegger backwards shifts one's orientation from *dasein's* heroic decision to the fourfold, sympoetic play of relationality of earth, sky, mortals, and immortals. The fourfold is what Aristotle's four causes (material, formal, efficient, and telic) become in Heidegger's heterochronic Event of being. Questioning technology's challenging-forth of the world to perform as subjects and objects positioned by the standing reserve of modernity, Heidegger follows Holderlin: where the danger lies, grows the saving power. The turn toward the essence of *techne* lies in *poesis*, truth as *aletheia* or the unconcealing of thing and world. In the sympoetic fourfold interface of thinging and worlding, heroic decision-making designers are released into the flow of *Besinnung*, a meditative place of *mindfulness*.

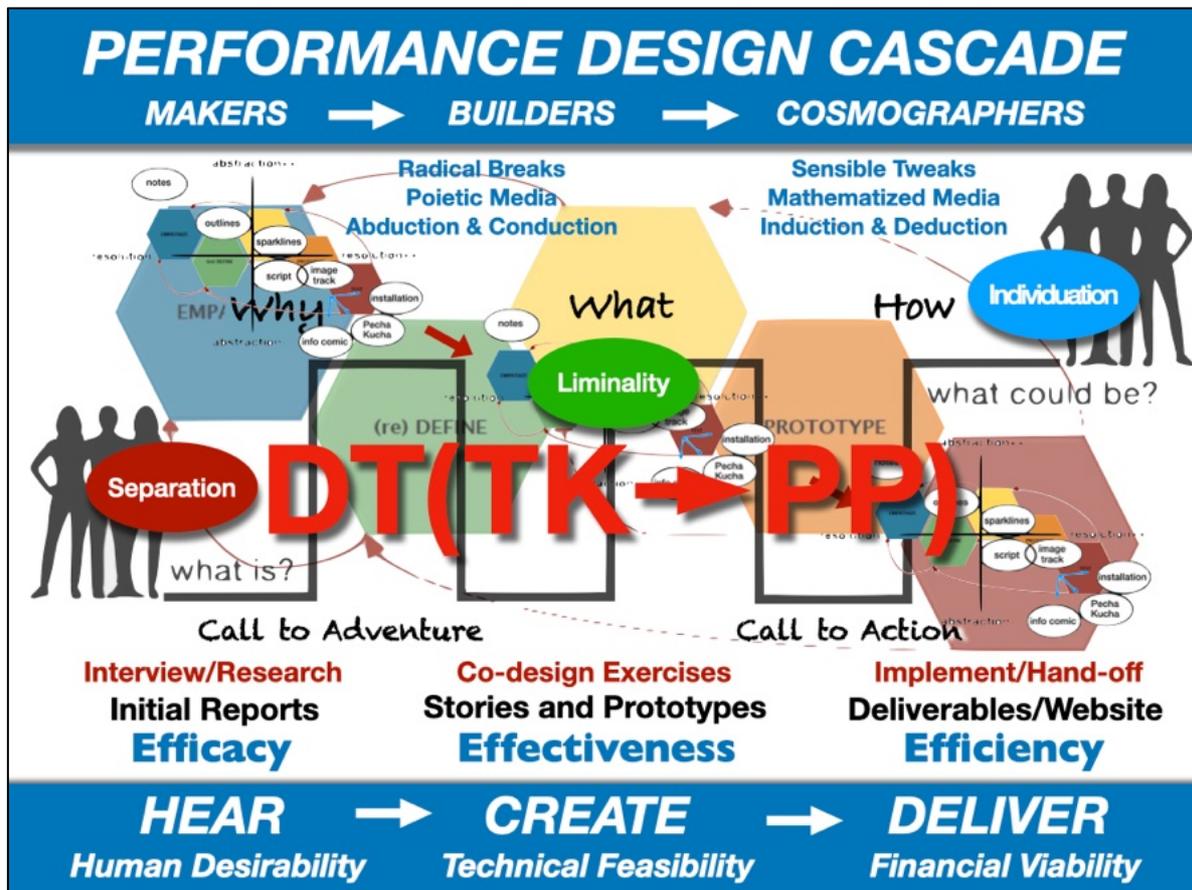


Figure 2. Design metamodelization.

### 3. Design Diagramming and Her Whole Truth

Reading Heidegger backwards releases *dasein* (and Aristotelian *psyche*, poetics, tragedy, rhetoric, etc.) into mindfulness or care of world. And just as Heidegger desubstantiates Aristotle’s four causes, Guattari ‘metamodels’ or iteratively diagrams Heidegger’s fourfold worlding into his own machinic ecosophy or worlding wisdom. *Dasein* becomes desiring-machine in Guattari’s diagrammatics. Likewise, StudioLab diagrams Guattari’s metamodel and its three ecologies of self, society, and world in order to conduct posthuman design thinking at scale.

In StudioLab, collective thought-action figuration occurs within three sets of co-design exercises assembled as three becomings: becoming-maker of transmedia knowledge, becoming-builder of collaborative platforms, and becoming-cosmographer of shared worlds. Through co-design, teams create and share artifacts rehearsing future encounters. Each term, an emergent rhythm of performance takes shape via co-design, a collective wave of flows that generate eddies of creativity, tension, stasis, ecstasis, etc. within the wider flows of social and global eco-anxiety.

StudioLab's design diagram overlays several practical and theoretical models to chart our process over three months, including the general theory, IDEO's five-phase human-centered design process, Nancy Duarte's narrative sparkline, media cascades inspired by Bruno Latour,

and StudioLab’s three becomings. The hexagons come from IDEO's design thinking process, while the figures moving from “what is” to “what could be” do so along the narrative sparkline. Atop them both are three graphs of media cascades.

Over a semester, teams perform three iterations to help our partners tune in and engage different groups. The desired transformations are multiple, shared, and recursive, for they echo between our community partners, their stakeholders, and several design teams, as StudioLab usually co-designs with 4-5 different partners and teams during a single semester. Taken together, we have a huge ensemble of performances cascading together over a short time period—I’ve come to think of the experience as a giant wave function composed of many small performances that unfold across different systems at different scales.

The most transformative co-design project has been Her Whole Truth, run by the Cornell Center on the Death Penalty Worldwide to provide holistic legal storytelling for women on death row. In two cases, StudioLab designers created media campaigns with progressive human rights lawyers storytelling with mainstream conservative, religious voters to share the women’s whole life stories, life stories carved down to abject figures by prosecutors, public defenders, and the press. On shared platforms, two worlds met. One case ended with execution, the other a live-saving deferral. Both devastated the collaborating coalition — and me — and *dasein* design is one way to live on.

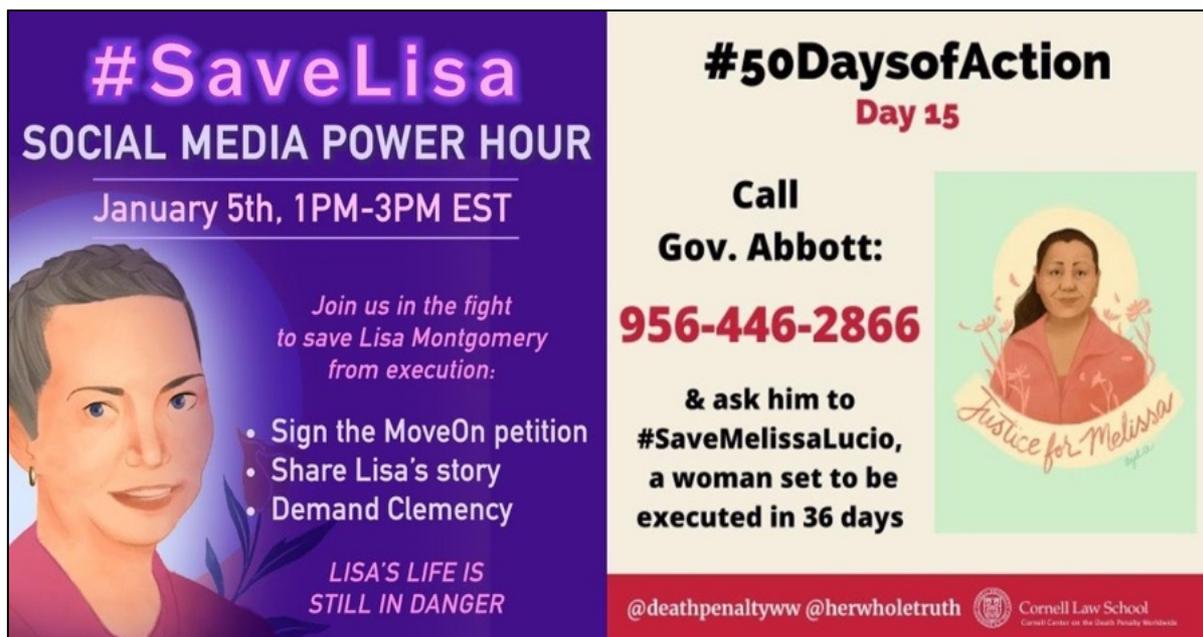


Figure 3. Instagram social media posts for Lisa Montgomery and Melissa Lucio. Her Whole Truth, Cornell Center on the Death Penalty Worldwide. <[www.instagram.com/herwholetruth/](http://www.instagram.com/herwholetruth/)>.

#### 4. Non-design and the Efficacies of Platform Performativity

Let us return to the design diagram. Across the bottom, we have the values of cultural efficacy, technological effectiveness, and organizational efficiency. Performative power works by optimizing these different values, while performance displaces them. Significantly, these values correspond with IDEO’s three spaces of innovation: human desirability, technical feasibility, and financial viability. As IDEO’s design thinking prioritizes human desirability, it aligns with StudioLab’s long-term mission to inject values of cultural efficacy into the systems dominated by effectiveness and efficiency.

Yet the past eight years have seen an extraordinary polarization and weaponization of cultural differences via communication networks and social media. Social media platforms operated by a wide variety of state, corporate, criminal, and political agents have divided and conquered different generations, identity groups, and social movements, as their algorithms capture and manipulate our sensibilities, conceptual models, and judgment systems, perversely enabling us/them judgments to take action at scale in the blink of an eye. Cultural efficacy has taken center stage, rivaling hegemonies based on efficiency, effectiveness, and/or their combination. More challenging: Heidegger’s *Gestell* can be translated by enframing, apparatus, and positionality as cybernetic circulation. Following Marcuse, I study it as performativity. How to take a stand on the standing reserve?

Amidst calls for more *vita activa*, we witness something like the *vita hyperactiva*, toggling between the efficacies of tragic hero and systems designers, between poignant soliloquy and online communitas, incessantly sucked in and doomed scrolled through our handheld black holes. In our desire to be efficacious, to do the right thing, we have been abducted by recursive abductions of our own making, reverse-engineered to come back and haunt us.

What if the “or else” of *perform or else* was itself given to something else? Namely, another efficacy, an efficacy of non-action, the usefulness of uselessness, place of non-place, the mastery of non-mastery, which we can explore as *non-design*.

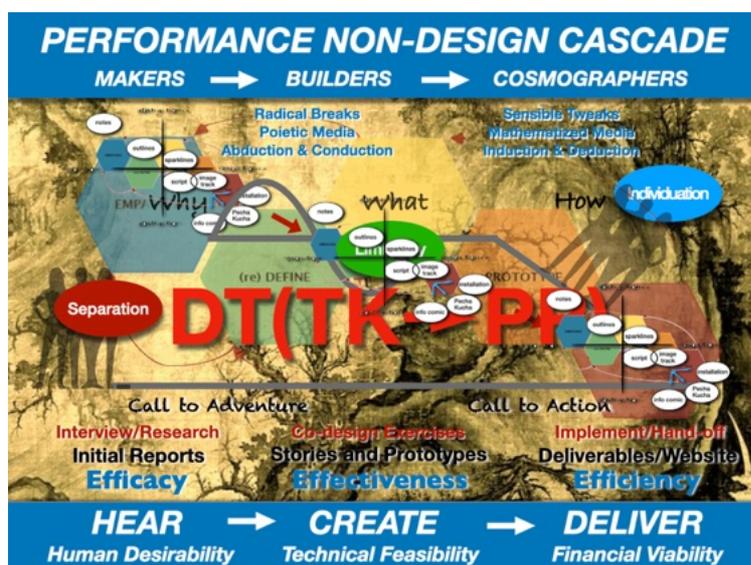


Figure 4. Performance non-design cascade with Li’s garden-landscape.

## 5. Recursive Non-design

Architectural historian Shiqiao Li has theorized Chinese practices of non-design. The place taking place here via non-design is not a stage or website nor even a building but instead a garden-landscape. Li writes that

“crafting garden-landscapes in Chinese thought-language begins with ‘non-design’: what the site gives (best fit, *yi*) and what the surroundings provide (borrow, *jie*). Non-design approximates the Daoist non-action; here, the call is not for the absence of action but for action with efficacy. Efficacy, unlike the impact of the plan-action-result framework, derives from a strategic use of forces contained in a specific situation; this is captured by the concept of propensity (*shi*), a widely used principle in the preparation of action.” (Li 2023, p. 73)

Li draws on François Jullien, whose *Treatise on Efficacy* shuttles between Western and Chinese thinking to offer a subtle, radical rethinking of a core value of Performance Studies, namely, that of efficacy, human action with moral force. Yet beyond theory and practice, cause and effect, subject and predicate, lies the efficacy of *dao* as the *propensity of things*.

The *Dao* of performance flows through Li’s garden-landscape. What is an efficacy based not in action or karma or drama or work? Jullien defines non-action as action *upstream* in a processual flow. It’s not only a matter of *how* to release and go with the flow, how to non-act, but also of *when* and *where*. Rather than plan and execute, instead assess the propensity of forces and environs and do nothing. *Wuwei*, non-action, guided by *feng shui*, wind-water or sensing the lay of the land. Rather than make a bold, dramatic gesture, merge discreetly with the site’s flow of continuous variations, its silent running transformations, making slight adjustments at key moments. Problem-solving and positionality becomes part of the problem. Declare success, and let it happen. Only the place takes place.

Let’s try to figure this positionless efficacy via the design diagram, reading it now as a great image with no form, to use a phrase from the *Dao de jing*. Contrasting Western and Eastern painting traditions, Jullien contends that the West has been obsessed with the nude, with the subject/object distinction, the clarity of ideas, and direct moral action. Classical Chinese painting focuses on the garden-landscape and the merger of emotion and landscape through atmosphere, vagueness, and incompleteness. Rather than an external perspectival view with vanishing points within, classical Chinese painting offers an experience of soaring, flowing over and through the landscape. Alongside positions, occupations, and marches, the *Dao* offers open, continuous variation, swirls, swarms, and withdrawals of non-action.

Within the design diagram, small ovals trace media cascades that descend left to right, moving from highly abstract, low-resolution sketches and notes to increasingly concrete and higher resolution media forms, such as sparklines, outlines and finishing with deliverables, such as websites, design, specs, and strategic plans. The small arrows depict feedback, moving upstream in the process, even going back to the drawing board. At term’s end when partners co-present with teams, a shared sense of completion and incompleteness unfolds of closure and openness, ending and next steps. Sparklines are recursive and multiple, transposable and

disposable. Our diagram performs as both a plan of action and a safety net for letting things be. Sparklines are lifelines, pathos paths.

In this wave of performance design, making cures consist of media cascades and *collaborative not-doing*. In the very flows of project-based eco-anxiety sweeping through us, performance design elicits counter-cascades, eddies and whirlpools of pharmacological making cures, twirling at different scales.

Thus opens the *Dao* of performance: design degree zero, non-design or not, beyond the imperative. At stake is an efficacy neither post-dramatic nor anti-theatrical but non-dramatic, non-event, abductively recursive — spikes in a nest in a tree in a garden in a photo in a book in a subway.

Recalling the stakes of cosmography and recurrent cascades of eco-anxiety, it may be hard to exaggerate the dimensions of our reflections here, for Indo-European morality, religion, epistemology, politics, and aesthetics are all modeled on epics, on grand noble acts, on karma, the drama of finding truth, doing good, creating beauty. Indeed, the labyrinths of Greek and Latin cosmologies are haunted by primal scenes of an *arche techne*, a first creator, a doer whom we channel through epic, drama, advertising, discipline, and psychotherapy, purging our pathos and working out with the happiness daimon (*eudaimonia*).

Drama and agency are built into our modern grammars and hammers, into happy performatives with their subject and predicate actions, as well as into our rituals, procedures, and architectures. When these acts carry ethical charge across diverse worlds, they support karmic and moral systems with complex rewards and debts, ecstatic souls and pounds of flesh measured, bought, sold, and stolen. Thus roaming our labyrinths, we may turn and recognize the Minotaur as designer, Brahman, shaman, guide, activist, lover, self....

What to do — and less precisely, *not-do*? What are the efficacies of *not-doing* or *non-design* across different worlds at different scales and tempos? Might there be (or not-be) something like collective pluriversal non-design? How to make sense of such questions?

We can distinguish — and connect — the post-Daoist non-design of Li and Jullien with other non-design concepts and practices, beginning with those in the field of policy design. With Health Access Connect, data visualization and storytelling help Ugandan health officials research, define, and employ key performance indicators/KPIs that shape public health policies regarding maternal and infant care, HIV treatment, vaccinations, etc. In “Policy Design and Non-Design: Towards a Spectrum of Policy Formulation Types,” Howlett and Mukherjee distinguish both good and bad policy design (i.e., instrumental problem-solving that succeeds or fails due to process, information, etc.) from *policy non-design*, situations marked by highly contingent forces, lack of constraints, and multiple stakeholders with situational knowledges so diffuse, suspect, and/or contradictory that they challenge or defy understanding. The authors lay out a spectrum of policy formulation with varying degrees of customization, from off-the-shelf design through design patches to policy non-design involving irrational behaviors, including opportunism and corruption.



“wicked problems,” a concept originating in public management. Hartley and Howlett contend there “is scant analytical purchase in metaphorizing non-design only as a hopeless and random mess or failed architectural endeavor” (2021, 456). Indeed, they offer another architectural form as a model of policy non-design: the bird nest.

“The evolutionary character of many policy assemblages in politically contested settings embodies contradictions, inconsistencies, and inefficiencies. As such, applicable descriptors or metaphors must also offer corresponding analytical depth, and the naturalistic metaphor of the bird nest is one such option. Decision-makers must work with the materials at-hand in crafting policies, and often incoherent or less rational political factors and ideologies constitute the adhesive agent (“mud”) that binds together policy elements (“twigs” and “sticks”). Although apparently rudimentary and lacking aesthetic quality, the resulting policy assemblage can be unexpectedly durable.” (Howlett & Hartley, 2021, p. 451)

The naturalness of bird nests and any metaphor is open to debate, and we approach this figure as a nested and recursive metamodel. From a transmedia perspective, the bird nest figure cascades across species as well as human linguistic and disciplinary fields, holding and folding different wicked solutions to different wicked problems, many of them staying with our traumaturgical trouble. As a generative matrix, the nest nests wickedly as metamodel of fourfolding *dasein* design.

## 6. Cosmography as Ecological Non-design

Let’s follow this recursively abductive figure further as a collective thought-action figure and compose an uncanny plane of consistency, a flight of nests.

Donna Haraway’s string figure repertoire includes the bird nest, and pop psychology likewise “holds” its patients in therapeutic nests, while policy theorists Hartley and Howlett use the figure to convert a “naturalistic metaphor” into a heuristic model of policy non-design by drawing in turn on mechanical engineering research of randomly packed yet ordered filaments. For them, such filaments are policy briefs, proposals, programs, etc., and yet the nest figure, holding nothing, holds much more.

In an adjacent field, mechanical engineers Weiner, et al. turn to centuries of bird nest research, which currently posits millions of years of avian nest evolution, in order to theorize the bird nest as a structural “meta-material” between objects and fibers (i.e., common packing materials). Here one gets a non-designed sense of sustainable intergenerational non-design across innumerable platforms, an ecosophical plateau of planetary becoming. Who or what holds worlding?

“Several needs drive bird nest design across the diversity of nests, but structural integrity under mechanical loads and disturbances, over its lifetime, is clearly a dominant factor. Large platform nests of eagles and hawks appear to derive stability from gravitational load of heavy sticks. Hummingbirds are known to use spiderwebs as sticky lashing, and weavers learn to tie formal knots. Many birds, though, seem to rely on a fundamentally different strategy, rooted in the emergence of desirable properties of the random packing.” (Weiner, N., Bhosale, Y., Gazzola, M. & King, H., 2020, p. 2)

Recursive abduction diagrams the random emergence of insights and alethic flashes across disparate spacetimes to compose a meta-cosmography. The engineers' attention focuses on this emergence of desirable properties of the random packing of elements, in particular the emergent stable behaviors of different cohesive granular structures composed of flimsy elastic filaments within the context of packing and shipping. We are unpacking this nested figure to figure out alternative efficacies of non-design.

Cosmography allows us to connect the non-design worlds of packing materials, sticks, policy elements, and intimate lifelines. Nested structures are recursive, producing *mise en abyme* and *deja vu* effects via the pluriversal stacking of models. We are tracking neo-Daoist non-design eddies within the design wave of large media design collaborations, drawing on policy design analysts' use of non-design models taken from mechanical engineering research of packaging materials modeled on avian nest design. In this recursive abduction, it's nests all the way down.

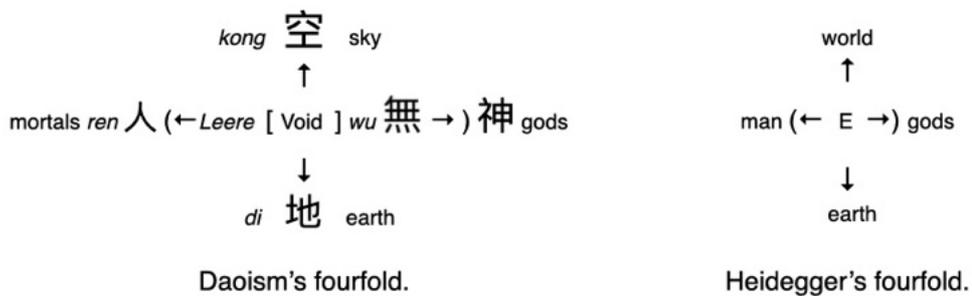


Figure 6. Ideogrammatic and alphabetic nestings.

Non-design eddies and bird nests share a similar round structure, one that resounds with the *wu* (void) of the *Dao de jing*, as well as the empty space of Heidegger's jug in "The Thing." Here we can overlay the Daoist fourfold and Heidegger's fourfold, noting the shared and empty non-design place of the *Dao* (道) and Heidegger's Open (*Lichtung*). Similarly, the size and shape of a bird nest hollow is determined by the body of the individual bird, who packs found materials around itself within environmental contingencies of location, time, and other factors and thereby shapes the void.

Ecological changes past and present have altered bird nest locations and materials worldwide over millennia, as has the recent invention of anti-bird devices designed specifically to deter roosting and nesting. In response, biologist Hiemstra reports, individual crows and magpies in Scotland, Belgium, and the Netherlands have begun building nests with flexible anti-bird spikes. The birds abduct their constraints

Adjacent to policy non-design, we thus have intimations of critical interspecies non-design, shared nothingness in response to global eco-anxiety. Stepping back, the birds follow the *dao* of anti-bird devices.



Figure 7. Critical interspecies non-design.

## **7. Non-design without Architects**

Non-design subtly shifts the ground beneath StudioLab’s different design paths/sparklines/lifelines — the paths of plan, fall, wander, sit, and play — even as non-design’s affinity with Li’s garden-landscape stands out in this wider non-built environment. Yet another approach to non-design comes from vernacular architecture and its study by artists, archaeologists, historians, and urban planners.

The study of vernacular design was jump-started by the 1964 MOMA exhibition *Architecture Without Architects*, designed by architect Bernard Rudofsky. Contributing to the Sixties counter-cultural era, *Architecture Without Architects* brought attention to non-Western and historical design practices far removed from Bauhaus, pop culture, Pop Art, and the Space Age. With an eye for striking forms and patterns, Rudofsky narrates the ways overlooked architectural forms reveal design practices that emerge globally not from specialized design experts — “pedigreed architects” — but rather from local knowledges of builders and craft persons working using site specific materials and traditional processes handed down over generations. In the exhibition’s black and white high-contrast photographs, the buildings and spaces — villages, enclaves, market spaces, amphitheatres, granaries, terraced fields, caves — often mime the surrounding landscape, echoing hills and hollows and horizon lines, their forms built and carved of materials taken from the environment — rock, wood, grass, soil.

Sensitive to the disciplinary fields feeding the burgeoning profession of modern architecture at the time, Rudofsky and MOMA focused on local, indigenous, and premodern architectural

forms. Rudofsky's term "non-pedigreed architecture" stressed non-academic design, and soon other labels emerged to specify the practices in positive terms: *vernacular architecture*, *folk architecture*, *contextual architecture*, *primitive architecture*, *regional architecture*, and *Indigenous architecture*.

Vernacular non-design may seem distant from modern policy design and non-design, such as effects of urban planning and commercial zoning. However, modern cities produce their own vernacular architectures, as Robert Venturi championed in his 1971 book *Learning from Las Vegas*. Venturi opened designers' eyes to "Ugly and Ordinary Architecture, or the Decorated Shed," not as objects of derision but evidence and inspiration for understanding and practicing contemporary architecture. With partner Denise Scott Brown, Venturi published "Less is a Bore" critiques of High Modernist architects, embracing instead complexity, ornament, historical references, and humor to counter the academy's minimalist formalism and sober seriousness.

We are still learning from Las Vegas. Today, 95% of the built environment is considered vernacular design, ugly and ordinary architecture, in short, *non-design* from the traditional perspectives of academic architecture and urban planning. While the drafting tables for that tiny remaining 5% of the built environment may depict pristine buildings on immaculate sites, the world throws up a monstrous nest of building types, architectural styles, and legacy infrastructures, as well as political, economic, and ecological scenes whose composition appears, if anything, more demonic than eudemonic, the stuff of wicked problems, muddles, messes, and amidst all this, actual bird nests backed with millions of years of avian R&D.

We sense a figure/ground shift: non-design is not marginal, auxiliary, or incidental to design but rather functions as design's social background if not its infrastructural palette, its sociotechnical platform. In her 1976 essay "Design vs. Non-Design," republished in 1991, architect and theorist Diana Agrest makes precisely this argument, theorizing non-design as wider forms of cultural production that create the built environment as a general process outside institutions.

"I wish to explore here these 'external' or cultural relations of architecture — that is, between architecture and its social context — by means of a theoretical model that posits two distinct forms of cultural, or symbolic, production. The first, which I shall call *design*, is that mode by which architecture relates to cultural systems outside itself; it is a normative process and embraces not only architectural but also urban design. The second, which is more properly called *non-design*, describes the way in which different cultural systems interrelate and give form to the built world; it is not a direct product of any institutionalized design practice but rather the result of a general process of culture." (Agrest 1991, p. 32)

Rather than design waves harboring eddies of non-design, design unfolds as eddies within other interrelated non-design systems within a general process of cultural production. Non-design happens at different scales and tempos, making its non-operations non-linear, multiple, and recursive. For Agrest, both design and non-design are productive, and she approaches design with a semiotic model enabling her to move from architecture and urban planning to theater, film, dance, and everyday life and into ideological critique.

Focusing on architecture's ideological dimension, Agrest distinguishes design and non-design as the production of the individual and social subject, respectively. "If design is the production of an historically determined individual subject, which marks the work, non-design is the product of a social subject, the same subject which produces ideology. It manifests itself in the delirious, the carnivalesque, the oneiric, which are by and large excluded or repressed in design" (50). Much like the pharmakon, non-design's ontological ambiguity both enables and disables the ideological construction of individuals and institutions alike. "Non-design may also be seen as an explosive transformation of design. This kind of explosion implies in some way the dissolution of the limits of architecture, of the ideological limits which enclose different architectural practices" (52).

Non-design thus opens a "free space" through which may pass what Agrest calls a "*mise en sequence*" of alternating codes, chains of signifiers and shifters between chains, a non-game, non-language space that she demonstrates in the original French version of the text through a sequence of images, "an infinite and spatialized text in which those levels of reading, organized along various codes, such as theater, film, fashion, politics, gesture, are combined and articulated" (55). *Mise en sequencing*, recursive caring *vis dasein* design, the garden-landscape nests.

A half century ago, Agrest practiced performance (non)design *avant la lettre* as *mise en sequencing*, juxtaposing images and textual fragments to demonstrate how different signifying chains and codes encounter symbolic shifters between one chain and the next. Design forges ideological chains, non-design shifters challenge them. "For non-design is a non-language, and by comparison with a language, it is madness since it is outside language, and thus outside society. This non-language, this non-sense constitutes an explosion of the established language in relation to a sense already established (by conventions and repressive rules)." Architecture without architects, theater without actors, design without designers, the *Dao* of performance emerges at scale in recursive abduction as cosmic care, attunement to worlds within worlds and without.

## 8. Epilogue

And if *The Castle* were k's nest.... Richard Fontenot arrives to argue that non-design aligns with post-War neoliberal urbanism. Get Jane Jacobs on the line.

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