Design (In)actions

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ABSTRACT

Sometimes the best decision may be to not design. But you can "not design" in different ways. There are emerging discussions of using design's destructive potential to hinder, eliminate, "undesign" unwanted technologies and practices. In this paper we argue that informed and carefully crafted not-doings should also be considered valid and generative design acts. Through discussing a series of inaction-related design projects we propose the concept of design (in)actions. An (in)action is the informed, articulated and designerly decision to not act. Through the concept of "designer killjoy" we frame risks and stakes of such moves. We discuss how design inactivism – design (in)actions mobilised for activist ends – inform and develop current conceptualisations of design activism. Finally, we propose design (in)actions as a useful tactic for "gracious design": more-than-human design moves characterised by forsaking human privilege through leaving be.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → Interaction design; Interaction design theory, concepts and paradigms.

KEYWORDS

Design theory, inaction, undesign, design activism

1 INTRODUCTION

Decisions to not design go largely undocumented within HCI. With the exception of a limited few [5, 15], publications normally document the design, testing and the effects of new technologies or the use of new contexts for existing technologies. Our goal with this paper is to develop and expand the field of Human-Computer Interaction's (HCI) vocabulary around designers' use of inaction as a design decision. We find that these events might include leaving things as they are because they cannot be improved upon through

design work, or abstaining from designing due to ethical or political concerns. In these cases, it might appear that designers are merely refusing to act – in a negative and passive sense. We argue that in these cases, inaction can be a generative and affirmative act. In this paper we develop the concept of (in)actions. Our use of parentheses refers to the fact that we, in fact, see some inactions *as* actions.

In doing this, we attempt to validate the fact that designers can make the decision to not design. Labelling (in)actions as valid design acts troubles the boundaries of what we consider to be "designerly". Typically, designers' achievements are measured in terms of production; what technologies they have created and the qualities of these resulting artefacts. We propose that there is value in attending to designerly inaction and the seemingly empty spaces left behind, as well as trying to understand what led to the decision to not produce typical design work.

We firstly use three existing examples from the wider design community where designers have chosen (in)action. We do this in order to illustrate how different types of not-doing exist in design. These examples sit on the spectrum from: designers not producing a design because they deem what already exists to be adequate, to designers not producing a design because of their ethical and political beliefs. We also present different forms of reactions to these projects from a range of audiences. We do not claim that all not-doings qualify as acts of design, and propose criteria for (in)actions drawn from our examples. We argue that *inactions that are informed, articulated, designerly decisions should be considered valid design acts.*

Marc Rettig's statement "interaction design is about designing the right thing and designing the thing right" [27] is often quoted within interaction design educational programs. In our paper we attempt to understand what might be the implications, limitations and benefits of designers being able to decide that the best move would be to not design the thing at all. We end our paper with a discussion of how (in)action can be a form of (in)activism. We also use reactions to the examples we present as a way to show the consequences of deciding to (in)act in a design context; where the designer might be labelled as a killjoy. We end with a proposal for what kinds of politics and tactics are enabled or especially well supported by design (in)actions through presenting "gracious design" as an example: more-than-human design moves characterised by forsaking human privilege through leaving be.

2 (IN)ACTIONS WITHIN HCI

As mentioned, it is uncommon to find researchers within HCI discussing the decision to not design. However, in developing (in)action as a design move, we draw on the following sources in particular.

The concept of (in)action develops certain aspects of undesign. Pierce offers the theoretical framework of undesign in order to address "substantive concerns with the limitations and negative effects of technology" [26]. Undesign is a theoretical contribution that highlights how "design both creates and destroys, enables and constrains, persuades and dissuades, inhibits and invites, and amplifies and reduces" [26]. Pierce states that there is an "apparent rift between researchers and others that describe, explain, and argue the limitations and problems with technology, on the one hand, and those whose primary concern is designing technology affirmatively" [26]. As a way to counter this, Pierce proposes a spectrum of intentional negations of technology: one such tactic, *inhibition* refers to design intended to hinder individual users' interactions in a certain context, *displacement* refers to design preventing more routine examples of interactions with technologies, and *erasure* refers to designs that strive to completely eliminate a technology. Pierce touches upon but does not elaborate on *foreclosure*, which is similar to erasure but aims to prevent not-yet-existing technologies from coming into being. We find similarities with Pierce, in both our motivation for finding ways of validating designerly acts that aim to negate the negative effects of technologies, as well as in the approach of foreclosure.

In their paper "When the Implication Is Not to Design (Technology)" [5] Baumer and Silberman state that "the community should similarly and simultaneously work to develop a reflective awareness for situations in which computational technologies may be inappropriate or potentially harmful" [5]. Building upon previous work [4], they propose three questions to articulate when designing technologies might be inappropriate: *Is there an equally viable low-tech or no-tech approach to the situation? Might deploying the technology result in more harm than the situation the technology is meant to address? Does the technology solve a computationally tractable problem rather than address an actual situation?* Baumer and Silberman end their paper with arguments for publishing "failed" projects with the intention of sharing the knowledge of what makes a technology appropriate or not. Though we reject the use of the term "failed", we echo this sentiment, and use examples of "failed" projects, and reactions to these projects in order to develop the argument for the sharing of design processes that ended in (in)action. This is supported by Gaver et al., who propose how documenting how research projects have "failed instructively" can "provide a set of sensitivities or orientations that may complement traditional task-based approaches to evaluation" [12]. Rather than accounting for design projects which did not live up to expectations, inaction, in line with Pierce, can be seen as an act that forecloses an undesirable future from coming into being. With this paper we hope to develop the concept of (in)action as both as an example of foreclosure, and as a tactic of undesign where (in)action is used to resist existing practices and systems.

3   A REPERTOIRE OF DESIGN (IN)ACTIONS

Our research began with hosting a workshop at a Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm in January 2020. The 15 participants were MA students in Design, Visual Communication, Craft, Fine Art, and Teacher Education. The event was attended voluntarily by students across the institution and was advertised as a seminar where "we will discuss the risks, ethics and creativity involved in not designing".

Workshop participants were instructed to bring one example "of a design project, artwork or other creative/everyday act that is characterised by deliberate inaction, refusal, withdrawal or undoing. It could be a decision not to proceed with a project, a gesture of keeping quiet, an act of retreat to make space for others, a destroying of a certain way of being or relating..."

We started the workshop by introducing concepts that we thought could be useful in mapping, discussing, and critiquing the example projects, such as "refusal" [33], "dematerialisation" [29], "elimination design" or "undesign" [10, 31, 32], and "grace" [21, 30]. These concepts came from literature across many different fields including posthumanism, critical animal studies, feminism and design. The purpose of this aspect of the seminar was to propose vocabulary, borrowed from other fields, that we could perhaps use to unpack, describe, and analyse acts of not designing. The participants then introduced the examples they had brought, and each project was printed or drawn on a card and pinned to a shared whiteboard, together with the project cards from our introductory lecture (see Figure 1). Together we discussed, critiqued and mapped the projects adding new labels, concepts, and annotations when deemed necessary.

The ensuing discussion was vivid and confounding: What's the difference between failure, cancellation and a decision not to design? What counts as an "act of design"? Is it meaningful to distinguish between conceptual productivity and material productivity? Afterwards the students told us that these are questions and situations that they had been thinking about or had personal experience with, but that they had never been asked to articulate their thoughts on the topic. For example, one participant had designed a "non-existing gun" (an empty gun-shaped space covered by a black cloth) for a prototyping exercise (see Figure 2) and was advised not to proceed with his project by his classmates as it was "too risky" and that he might fail the course. The workshop participants described how they lacked a vocabulary to express the nuances of inaction-related projects.

We will now use three examples of inactions presented in the workshop to conceptualise not-doing in HCI and design: the design of the Place Léon Aucoc by architects Lacaton & Vassal, the event No Fashion on a Dead Planet by fashion design student Laura Krarup Frandsen, and the paper "Inaction as a Design Decision: Not Designing Self-tracking Tools for Menopause" by interaction design researcher Sarah Homewood. We choose these examples because of the rich conversation they provoked in the workshop, and because these examples are from different design disciplines (architecture, fashion design, interaction design), carried out by creators in different organisational contexts (professional practice, graduate studies, design research), and where the decision to (in)act entailed different risks and stakes. In the three chosen examples the inactions were also fueled by different aesthetic and ethical agendas. These differences allow for more precision in articulating (in)action as a useful concept, as well as broaden the fields to which our contributions are relevant for.

Figure 1: Board of projects at the Design Inactivism workshop

3.1 Place Léon Aucoc

In 1996 architects Lacaton & Vassal were commissioned to redesign Place Léon Aucoc, a small square in Bordeaux, France. The architects spent lots of time on location, talking to the pétanque players and observing the movements and interactions of the strollers and bench-sitters. Then they presented their proposal: do nothing. "Quality, charm, life [already] exist", they claimed. "The square is already beautiful" [20]. Nothing but a few minor changes, such as cleaning the square more often and replacing the gravel, was needed.

Their decision was explicitly not intended as a denial of architecture or design. "The work of an architect is not only to build", Lacaton explains in an interview. "The first [thing] to do is to think, and only after that are you able to say whether you should build or not." [16] The architects took responsibility beyond expectations of "embellishment" [20] in the given brief. Transgressing the brief led to a conflict and to extended negotiations with their client, the City of Bordeaux. Lacaton recounts "At first they said, 'ok, we'll find someone else if you don't want to do it.' [O]ur response was, 'We do want to do the project, and our project is

to do nothing.' After three months of discussion, they were convinced that we had done a good project. They said 'okay, you're right.'" [6].

The design act here is an informed decision based on architectural expertise in judging what the "best" outcome of the project would be. Rather than focusing on how they would use their typical methods as architects to change the physical landscape, Lacaton and Vassal questioned if their typical methods were even appropriate.

On the website of Lacaton & Vassal the project is assigned the status of "built/realisé" [20]. For the architects, this was not an aborted or incomplete design process. The proposal, the creative outcome, was "do nothing" – a design act of leaving be, of leaving room for the life that already existed at the place. Their decision was not inaction motivated by refusal, inability, complacency or apathy; it was a carefully considered and articulated design proposal.

3.2 No Fashion on a Dead Planet

Laura Krarup Frandsen, a fashion student at the Royal College of Art, UK, refused to produce a collection of garments as part of her final Masters degree project. At the final degree show of the MA

Figure 2: The non-existing gun is under the black veil to the right. Image credit Anton Asberg

Figure 3: Die-in performance at the Royal College of Art. Image credit Daniel Sims.

Fashion Womenswear 2019 course she instead staged a "die-in" (see Figure 3) – a performance where members of Extinction Rebellion, a climate change activist group, entered and lay on the floor in corpse-like positions.

Spurred into climate activism by the then recently released report from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which described the huge emissions from the garment industry, Frandsen came to the conclusion that producing any garments at all would be inappropriate. For Frandsen, even clothes developed through sustainable methods did not go far enough in addressing and rectifying society's attachment to producing and purchasing far more clothes than we require; thus aggravating the climate emergency.

When the project was presented on a popular design blog [14] most of the comments were critical. Frandsen was called out as a "lazy student", who "didn't do her homework" and "avoided her finals" using "little effort". Others focused on the work having "no substance", claiming "she hasn't actually done anything yet", questioning whether she should be allowed to get her grade. "How can you judge a work", a commenter asked, "when there is no competency demonstrated"? This was however not an issue since the Masters program Frandsen attended valued critical thinking and theoretical contributions as much as tangible material design work. Another line of criticism was that the designer was a naysaying "cop-out" by being too negative, as "[c]ontesting is much easier than suggesting [new directions]". Others claimed that "design schools are about design, not political protest". A few sympathetic comments retorted that Frandsen truly had understood the fashion system, that she was "brave" and that it "takes a lot of courage in taking a stand like this, especially when the course of your career is at stake". Another comment proposed that there was "definitive action taken here", that she made a "statement" about culture and consumption.

In terms of creating and exhibiting a collection of garments, the project "No Fashion on a Dead Planet" definitely exemplifies a lack of action. Whilst her peers sat at their work tables cutting and stitching garments, Frandsen sat inactive in one sense, but very active in another. The project was designed to communicate a message, and this was highlighted through the design of the "die-in" performance. If we consider that the project was intended as activism, then it very much succeeded. Frandsen received a large amount of press and attention for her work, and continues to work with Extinction Rebellion on changing sustainability cultures within the fashion industry to this day.

3.3   Not Designing Self-tracking Tools for Menopause

In the paper "Inaction as a Design Decision: Reflections on not Designing Self-Tracking Tools for Menopause" [15] Sarah Homewood reports on her experience of going against what is typically expected of a PhD candidate in interaction design.

After reviewing existing apps and mapping out the design space around menopause, Homewood came to the conclusion she could not continue with the design work without compromising her "research approaches and beliefs". These approaches included "a

commitment to feminist and phenomenological approaches to designing for the body" [15]. As a way to unpack her decision to not design Homewood uses Baumer and Silberman's three questions: 1. "Could the technology be replaced by an equally viable low-tech or non-technological approach to the situation?", 2. "Does a technological intervention result in more trouble or harm than the situation it's meant to address?", and 3. "Does a technology solve a computationally tractable transformation of a problem rather than the problem itself?" [5]. These questions helped her articulate the fact that she found any type of self-tracking device to be both ineffectual and redundant in tracking the menopause, as well as the fact that these devices might risk promoting troubling perspectives on the menopausal body.

In her paper, Homewood reflects on how it felt to come to the conclusion to not design whilst conducting a PhD in interaction design. Homewood states how Baumer and Silberman's questions helped her articulate some factors that she had had a "gut feeling" about throughout the process. Deciding to not design allowed her to understand more about her commitments to theories such as feminism and phenomenological perspectives on the body and allowed her to understand the limits of the appropriateness of introducing self-tracking methods. She recommends that more designers document where they have used inaction as a design decision "Were all designers to unpack their abandoned projects and the reasons behind the abandonment, what rich knowledge we would produce about the limits of the application of technologies. We might also save some wheels from being re-invented" [15].

In reviews of the publication before its acceptance to the Alt-CHI track at the CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, reactions included "Overall, the author's reasons for inaction in design of self-tracking wearable stands weak as it does not focus on how the problems consumers face with these apps can be solved". This review communicates a more narrow role of design; to improve on the technology that already exists, rather than question whether that technology should exist at all.

Reflecting on inaction allowed Homewood to recognize her assumption that design processes will always end in a physical or digital result; she describes feeling like a "failure" when she had no prototype to show. Just as Pierce and Baumer and Silberman proposed, this example highlights how inactions can lead to the production of knowledge. Through reflecting on her decision to not design, Homewood discovered what she found to be the limits of the appropriateness of self-tracking technologies. Baumer and Silberman's questions helped her articulate the ethical and practical concerns that her decision was informed by. Although self-tracking apps for menopause already exist, Homewood felt she could not knowingly add to this collection of technologies that she did not support on neither ethical nor practical grounds. This could be described as a designer's individual act of protest and even activism.

4   DESIGN (IN)ACTIONS

We propose the concept of design (in)actions as a useful contribution to HCI and design research. It can be put to use to frame the above (and similar) examples as valid design acts. Our aim is to shift the discussion from whether a design (in)action is a valid design

project to a more generative and substantial design critique. When we are done discussing whether Lacaton & Vassal *really* redesigned Place Leon Aucoc by "do[ing] nothing", we can start tending to the details of their proposal and their design rationale. For example, by stating that "there is already life" on the square, what lives (humans, nonhuman animals, plants) are included in their definition of "life"?

Not all inactions are design (in)actions. Based upon the examples above, we propose that design (in)actions have to live up to three criteria. Design (in)actions have to be *informed, articulated and designerly decisions.* Below we unpack these criteria.

4.1 Informed

Design (in)actions are thoughtful and carried out with attention and care. Dedicated work has been put into the projects, work that leads to informed design decisions. A design (in)action is more than just a no. It takes skill, creativity and practice to give shape to the (in)action.

Lacaton & Vassal was asked by their client if they didn't want the job. It would have been possible to opt out there and then. But they did want the job. In fact, the job was already done, according to them. It was important for the architects to complete their assignment, to implement what they had worked out to be the most preferable act: do nothing. Sarah Homewood's decision to not design self-tracking tools for menopause was informed by a critique of existing technologies, research into the peri-menopausal transition, and previous design work on self-tracking technologies. Laura Krarup Frandsen's decision to stage a "die-in" rather than produce a range of clothes was a response informed by the UN report on the levels and effects of climate change. The above examples are not abandoned, aborted or cancelled due to lack of interest from the designer. They are reshaped as design (in)actions through careful engagement with the situation at hand.

4.2 Articulated

Design (in)actions are willful, intentional propositions. They are made explicit as valid design acts. The story has to be told and the design rationale explicated due to the fact that there is no artefact to tell the story on its own behalf. By breaking with design conventions, designers who stay with their design (in)actions are forced to articulate and argue their case.

Lacaton & Vassal published their project as "realised" on their website, Frandsen generated substantial media attention through her fashion refusals, and Homewood produced a conference paper to communicate her learnings. As Baumer and Silberman and Homewood state; this knowledge can be applied practically by other designers once it is articulated, for example by warning other designers away from a particular approach or design space, or communicating knowledge produced through the process of deciding not to design [5, 15].

4.3 A Designerly Decision

A design (in)action has to be situated within a design process, within a particular design discipline and has to be carried out by a designer. You need designer credentials in order to be able to point to your design (in)action and label it as design.

Design (in)actions are characterised by a tension between what is expected of *a* designer and what decision is made by *the* designer. In the three examples discussed above none of the designers chose to opt-out, to resign, as designers. Lacaton & Vassal insistently stood by their decision to put forth "do nothing" as the best and most responsible design deliverable. Designers can use the attention generated by the friction between the (in)action and the norms of design – only as long as they stay within the system. It is not remarkable when a nurse does not design a technological device, but it is remarkable when Sarah Homewood, as a design-researcher, does not. Frandsen considered dropping out of design school to pursue her activist agenda, but decided that her actions would have more impact as a design project. Designers are experts in using their trained judgement to bring the right things into being. We propose the need for supporting and validating using these expertise also to judge what should *not* be brought into being.

5 DISCUSSION

In this concluding section we put the concept of design (in)actions to use. We articulate novel questions and point to promising areas for further elaboration. We found that the causes for design (in)actions sat on a spectrum from leaving things as they are because they cannot be improved upon through design work, to abstaining from designing due to ethical or political concerns. Through the concept of *designer killjoys* we discuss the risks and stakes of not adhering to the expected script of design optimism. Under the heading of *design inactivisms* we argue that design (in)actions can be a form of design activism. We then suggest that design (in)actions lend themselves particularly well to activist tactics of *grace* and speculate on the potentials of such tactics as a critical complement to emerging discourses of entanglement HCI and more-than-human design.

5.1 Design Inactivisms

At the core of the concept of design (in)action is a tension between withdrawal and productivity. (In)action troubles the discipline it is situated within. The friction generated between the conventions of the discipline can be put to activist use. How can *design inactivism* – design (in)actions mobilised for activist ends – inform and develop current conceptualisations of design activism? Can design (in)actions be helpful in enacting limits to design and design research?

According to Markussen [23] design activism shares many characteristics with political activism, but design activism has certain specific traits. For Markussen the "design act is not a boycott, strike, protest, demonstration, or some other political act; instead it lends its power of resistance by being precisely a *designerly* way of intervening in people's lives" [23]. Markussen never defines what he means by "designerly", but he argues that design activism is an aesthetic practice and "not just a socio-political one" [23].

However, pitting affirmative "aesthetic" design acts against "political", negative acts such as strikes or boycotts may blind us to acknowledging the political and activist potential of design (in)activism. If aesthetics, taken in a broad Kantian sense, pertains to forms of our everyday experiences, design (in)actions – even while embracing the form of a strike or boycott – are aesthetic practices. For example, Frandsens die-in was designed to support the

#BoycottFashion campaign [37] where consumers can sign a pledge not to buy any new clothes for a year. Homewood's decision to discontinue the process of designing self-tracking apps for menopause could be considered a micro-political feminist strike. Her action can be placed in a genealogy of creative, feminist inactivist proposals: from Lysistrata's sex-strike to end the Peloponnesian war [3], to Shulamit Firestone's "dream action" for the women's liberation movement: a "smile boycott, at which declaration, all women would instantly abandon their 'pleasing' smiles, henceforth only smiling when something pleased *them*" [7]. Through an aesthetics of (in)action these proposals certainly qualify as design activism as a composition of "micro-political and aesthetic aspects" [23].

Design (in)actions may also be useful for manifesting the limits of design (research), especially in the context of ethnographically-informed design of marginalised communities. Tuck and Wang theorise *refusal* and stances of refusal in research as "attempts to place limits on conquest and the colonization of knowledge by marking what is off limits, what is not up for grabs or discussion, what is sacred and what can't be known" [33]. Affirming such limits is catalysed by realising that some stories are not to be passed on, that there may be forms of knowledge that the academy doesn't deserve, and that – in a specific situation – design (research) may not be the intervention that is needed. Further research could elucidate the role of design (in)actions for enacting limits to design (research) as a kind of silent design activism.

5.2 Designer Killjoys

Design (in)actions can be provoking – to clients, PhD supervisors, designer peers, and others who encounter the designs. Frandsen was repeatedly called out as "lazy". Homewood's paper was reviewed as "weak" as it didn't focus enough on how the problems of using her apps could be "solved". The first reply to our call to a design research oriented email list for "examples of designerly projects that are characterised by a decision *not* to design" was a curt and dismissive suggestion to "do nothing". Design (in)actions cause a particular kind of trouble. Not just for the individual designer – who will have to defend and argue for her (in)actions as valid design acts at the client meeting, the crit, or in a review process – but a social trouble. "To be willing to go against a social order, which is protected as a moral order, a happiness order, is to be willing to cause unhappiness, even if unhappiness is not your cause." [1] The (in)activist designer is the cause of a bad atmosphere for fellow designers. She becomes an "affect alien" [1] in the room: a *designer killjoy*.

In *The Promise of Happiness* Sarah Ahmed describes the figure of the feminist killjoy. A killjoy gets in the way of other people's happiness. The history of feminism is a history of causing trouble, of refusing to follow "someone else's goods" [2]. A killjoy threatens the happiness of others "simply by not finding the objects that promise happiness to be quite so promising" [2]. The killjoy figure has travelled beyond feminism. Other affect aliens, who struggle against dominant affective orders, have put Ahmed's killjoy to use. Vegan killjoys refuse to take part in the normative scripts of meat and dairy eating, at the dinner table [34]. The very presence of a vegan can be enough to trouble the prevailing happiness order in the room.

For Ahmed, normative happiness is achieved by aligning with a convention [2]. To deviate from the happiness path, then, is to challenge convention. Convention comes from the verb convene, to gather, to assemble, to meet up. What are the design conventions that are troubled by design (in)actions?

There are a plethora of joys being killed through applying design (in)actions, and these joys will be dependent on the norms of the design discipline that the (in)action is situated within. For the client of Lacaton & Vassal the convention of an architectural project was to have it end with a visibly different site. The architects' (in)action caused friction and led to extended negotiations with the client. As an interaction design researcher Homewood was expected to produce physical and digital prototypes that would lead her research process and she was criticised in reviews for not trying hard enough to solve the problems of a solution she believed should not exist. Fashion student Frandsen's peers expected a collection of womenswear garments to be produced and the online design community (more than her teachers) was provoked by the lack thereof, questioning the validity and, perhaps, loyalty as a designer, calling for her excommunication from the design community.

Being a killjoy also takes a toll on the individual themselves. Frandsen was considering dropping out of her fashion education, and took a break for a year, as she couldn't see herself as a fashion designer within the current, unsustainable fashion industry [19]. Homewood described how "as a research-through-design practitioner, not producing an artefact to communicate knowledge and act as the vehicle for further research has felt disappointing, and often like a failure. At the early stages I blamed myself for having been naive about the appropriateness of menopause as a design case" [15].

An obvious argument against (in)action being a valuable tool for design is that only the privileged would be able to use it. Designers work within complex structures, and the fact that design is a vocation means that economic factors are more than often at play. As discussed by Lacaton & Vassal, to be a designer hired by a firm to "do a job", and to refuse might be to lose income or reputation. There is a story about designer Massimo Vignelli from the 1960s when his company Vignelli Associates were asked by Ford Motor Company to redesign the Ford Logo [17]. After a couple of months of work, they gave a big presentation at Ford explaining why the logo needed no big redesign as it was known to the general public for decades, and a change would rather harm the brand's identity. Ford were sceptical as they had expected some dramatic changes, and eventually raised the argument that they might not pay Vignelli as they felt he and his team had "not designed anything". To which he replied: "If you visit a doctor and he tells you that you are perfectly fine, you will nevertheless have to pay him, right?".

This story, and our proposal to validate design in(actions), lead to the question; Are expert-designers, endowed with the agency to decide whether or not to design, necessary for realising design (in)actions? In the three examples discussed in this paper the designers have been able to – have had the privilege to – choose the path of design (in)action relatively independently. What about larger projects where there are many cogs (designers) in the machine? Could one of these cogs stop the whole project from going ahead? Future research into collaborative design (in)actions could add texture to our understanding of not-designing also in situations with

more complex stakeholder constellations and distributed designer agency. Design (in)actions may be less contested in design research within academic settings, since knowledge production is the real goal in these contexts. Perhaps if we in design research stood behind and valued the position of the designer killjoy, it could become a stance more easily taken up in both academic and commercial design settings. If the best design is to not design at all, then wouldn't everyone benefit from designers having this tool in their toolbox?

5.3 Next Steps: Towards Gracious Design through Design (In)actions

We propose that (in)action is a tool that enables and supports certain types of politics and ethics. We will use the concept of *grace* as an example to show how (in)action can be a tool for a less anthropocentric (where humans are placed in the centre, at the cost of other species and the environment) design. Besides the climate activism of Frandsen and the feminist commitments of Homewood, we suggest that design (in)action is especially useful, as a concept and a tactic, for activism that works through forsaking human privilege.

By showing ways in which human existence is bound together with other lives, contemporary cultural theorists have tried to challenge the anthropocentric ontology and human exceptionalist ethics that underpin destructive human relations to the environment and to other animals. Such discourses of *entanglement* [8, 9, 18] and *more-than-human design* [11, 28, 36] are gaining traction in design and HCI as well. We argue for the importance of gracious design approaches, as implemented through design (in)actions, to complement these vital theoretical developments. It has been said that entanglement discourses are useful for acknowledging and *rethinking* human-nonhuman interdependence but may be less helpful for *remaking* or *undoing* unjust relations [13, 22, 24, 35]. Not all relations should be sustained. In order to "create alternative ways of being, it is necessary to make decisions not only about which relations to prefigure and enact but about which to exclude" [13]. An ethics and activism of exclusion [13] is needed to complement an ethics of entanglement.

A design (in)action, then, is a design move characterised by *grace*, in the sense of *leaving be* as proposed by Michel Serres [30] and developed by Patricia MacCormack [21]: "Grace is nothing, it is nothing but stepping aside. Not to touch the ground with one's force, not to leave any trace of one's weight, to leave no mark, to leave nothing, to yield, to step aside." [30]. Grace always entails a forsaking of entitlement. The abolitionist vegan refrains from "exerting human privilege through the little word NOT [...] Not buying them, not breeding them, not consuming them, not wearing them. Not forcing them, not causing them suffering, not imposing ourselves, and our humanity, upon them, but rather take a step aside to create a possibility for them to prosper on their own conditions" [25]. Lacaton & Vassal refrained from exerting their designer privilege and did *not* leave a mark on Place Léon Aucoc, in order to let the life that was already there flourish. Grace is the "ability to choose to be unable to do what we are able to do" [21]. Gracious ethics embrace the tension of doing/not doing and "of passivity [as] a certain kind as activism, silence as allowing the other to be heard" [21].

Design is typically cast in positive terms: innovation, production, and things. Recent calls for undesign and elimination design embrace negative aspects of design: destruction, foreclosure, and inaction; crafting artefacts and systems for limiting, displacing, or erasing certain interactions. In upcoming design explorations, through speculations and hands-on experiments, we will probe what might happen if we turn this "negative" designerly gaze away from the artefacts we (un)design towards ourselves, as designers and human beings. What could such a gracious design practice be like?

6 CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to trace opportunities for the trajectory of "not" in an HCI and design context. In this paper we argued that informed and carefully crafted not-doings should also be considered valid and generative design acts. Through discussing three inaction-related design projects from fashion design, architecture and interaction design, we propose the concept of design (in)actions. A design (in)action is *the informed, articulated and designerly decision* to not act. These criteria came from our understanding of the three different examples, particularly the motivation for the designer to choose inaction, and the consequences of this decision. We then developed this discussion through the concept of the "designer killjoy" where we outline the risks of design (in)actions, both in terms of how others will react to the decision, as well as the cost for the designer themselves. Rather than being a negative character, we discuss how the concept of "designer killjoy" is related to troubling less-than-desirable norms. This leads to how design (in)actions represent a design activism related to acts such as strike and boycotting. We end with a proposal for *grace* as a quality of the kind of politics and tactics that are enabled or especially well supported by design (in)actions. We see promise in exploring further how design (in)actions and entanglement HCI can work together in practice to enable sustainable human-nonhuman relations.

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