Jun 23rd, 9:00 AM - Jun 28th, 5:00 PM

Counterism and Trust; From Critical to Tactical Design

Fernando Galdon
Royal College of Art, United Kingdom

Counterism & trust: From critical to tactical design

Fernando Galdon

Royal College of Art, United Kingfom

*Corresponding e-mail: fernando.galdon@rca.ac.uk

Abstract: In this paper we explore the emerging qualities of Counteristic Design practises as they depart from Discursive models. In this process, Counterism is underpinned as an emerging field of study that seeks to design trust. Counterism offers a way of resistance by creating systems of autonomy, accountability and reparation that values difference and creativity. The two projects analysed vary in approach, with some developing new methods by incorporating new technologies, while others reimagine existing methods. These approaches can offer interesting ways towards a new future for citizens at the intersection of social justice, and technology. Counteristic practises operate within the system with the aim to shape its directionality in a particular direction in which social justice is paramount. In this process the critical becomes tactical in which the main aim is to restore trust rather than build engagement.

Keywords: Counterism; Discursive design; Critical design; Tactical design

1. Introduction

Critical design was introduced by Anthony Dunne in his seminal work *Hertzian Tales* in 1999. Matt Malpass (2017) explains how Critical Design moves away from traditional approaches limiting design's role to the production of profitable objects, to focus instead, on a practice that is interrogative, discursive, and experimental. In recent years Critical Design has been expanding in what Tharp defines as Discursive Practises (Tharp, 2019) via Speculative design (2012), Co-speculative design (2018), or Xenodesign (2021), becoming in the process a highly influential discipline affecting policy and practice in a range of fields aiming for reflective engagement as its main output.

However, in reviewing the evolution of the function of the critical in design practises over the last ten years, we can differentiate two main eras/approaches; one where the critical operates as an end (e.g., Dunne's critical, Auger's speculative, Lohman's co-speculative, or Schmeer's Xeno), and a more recent approach were the critical operates as a mean (Forensic Architecture, 2010 or Prospective Design, 2019). The former has been characterised as Discursive,

where the latest is characterise here as Counteristic. It can be argued, as several papers suggest, that critical and speculative design practices have fallen short due to their lack of processes to move beyond debates (Tonkinwise, 2014), elitism (Forlano and Matthew, 2014), and lack of representation (Oliveira & Prado, 2014: Prado & Oliveira, 2014).

Counteristic design practises, then, align with notions of post-critique as conceptualised by Polanyi, Ranciere, or Ricœur in the context of literature (Felski, 2015). Polanyi advocated for a post-critical philosophy in which the critical perspective becomes available through personal presence, participation, empathy, caring, and thoughtful hospitality (1958). This could be translated in the context of design as an attempt to find new forms of designing that go beyond the methods of critique, critical theory, and ideological criticism were the critical operates as a mean, rather than as an end. A practise of design in which "the intellectual or political payoff of interrogating, demystifying, and defamiliarizing is no longer quite so self-evident" (Anker & Felski, 2017, pp. 1). This model will align with more contemporary notions such as de-eventualizing (Žižek, 2014). As described by the Slovenian author, De-eventualization is to explain an event as an occurrence that fits the coordinates of our normal reality. In his approach framing, reframing, and enframing became the fundamental stages. In Žižek's analysis, "framing" refers to the process by which certain aspects of reality are highlighted, emphasized, or presented in a particular way, while other aspects are suppressed or obscured. Žižek often points out that what is excluded from the frame is just as significant as what is included, as it shapes our perception and understanding of the world. Žižek introduces the concept of "reframing" as a way to disrupt or challenge dominant ideological narratives and modes of perception. Reframing involves shifting the focus or perspective to reveal what has been marginalized or repressed within the existing frame. It entails questioning the established ways of seeing and interpreting reality and bringing to light alternative viewpoints or interpretations that have been marginalized or suppressed. Finally, Enframing (inspired by Heidegger's concept of Gestell) is the notion that technology designates an attitude towards reality which we assume when we are engaged in such activities. By critically examining and disrupting these processes, Žižek aims to unveil the underlying contradictions and tensions within ideological systems and open up new possibilities for thought and action.

Counteristic design practises, then, via Framing, Reframing and Enframing, mainly align with notions of post-critique emphasizing emotion, affect and care to describe various phenomenological or aesthetic dimensions of the experience. However, at other times, it might focus on issues of reception, seeking to resolve a "sense of confusion" (Moi, 2017).

Crucially, post-critique does not reject critique; rather, it endeavours to enhance and expand it by introducing novel methodologies. This postcritical condition, that is not anti-critical, recognizes the significance of critique in specific contexts while acknowledging its limitations in others. Postcritical approaches to Design, then, should be experimental, and concerned with discovering new methods, postures, and stances of designing, as well as, testing out new possibilities and intellectual alternatives to the standard operations of transforming the world were the critical operates as a mean. Is within this context in which the idea of Counterism emerges to address a postcritique condition in the context of design practise.

1.1 Counterism

The term "counterism" is derived from the word "counter," which means "opposite" or "against." (Merriam-Webster, 2023). Counterism as practise, then, might be understood as a perspective that opposes or challenges mainstream ideas and/or institutions; a response to hegemonic narratives that shape our understanding of the world that is grounded in critical analysis, evidences, and tactical action. In this context, a selection of reference works in this area have been reviewed to preliminary frame its fundamental qualities.

From the work of Bell Hooks in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), we can infer that Counterism seeks to create space for marginalized voices and perspectives. It encourages the exploration of alternative viewpoints and the celebration of difference. In doing so, Counterism challenges the dominant culture of homogeneity and fosters a more inclusive society. A key feature of Counterism, then, is its emphasis on diversity and inclusivity. Consequently, Counterism recognizes that dominant narratives are often exclusionary and perpetuate inequality. From the work of Angela Davis in *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle* (2016), we can infer that Counterism recognizes that established paradigms can limit our ability to see the world in new ways. It encourages us to break free from these constraints and to explore new possibilities. Counterism, then, embraces the power of design and other forms of creative expression to challenge dominant narratives and create new ones. It recognizes that creativity and imagination can be a powerful force for social change. From the work of Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1990), we can infer that Counterism recognizes that our perspectives and beliefs are shaped by our social and cultural contexts. Counterism, then, encourages us to examine our own assumptions and biases and to question the dominant narratives that shape our thinking. It is a mode of inquiry that values openness and self-reflection, and encourages critical thinking and reflexivity. From the work of Giroux et al., in *Dangerous Thinking in the Age of the New Authoritarianism* (2017), we can argue that counterism challenges established norms and institutions, and this can make some people uncomfortable. There is a risk that Counterism can be dismissed as "radical" or "extreme." However, Counterism is not about destroying established institutions, but as we have seen in these examples, it is rather about reimagining them in more inclusive and equitable ways. Counterism, then, is not about tearing down what exists, but re-building it. It aims for reform rather than revolution.

In conclusion, Counterism is an emerging field of study that seeks to challenge dominant narratives and ideologies. From the accounts reviewed, we can argue that Counterism offers a way to foster a more inclusive and equitable society, challenging dominant narratives that perpetuate inequality and encourage the exploration of alternative perspectives. Counterism has significant implications for contemporary society and academia. As such, counterism is a powerful tool for social change and a way of imagining an creating a better future.

1.2 Trust

In this relational context of power structures and citizens, trust emerges as a fundamental quality to enable a balanced, responsible, accountable, and fair relationship between them.

Seppanen et al. (2007) compiled more than 70 definitions of the concept of trust. The most cited definition of trust is Mayer et al.: "The willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 712). In addressing the complexity of the definition of trust, Kaplan et al. presented an integrative review in which in all instances of trust there are three fundamental elements: "1) a trustor, who is doing the trusting and who is vulnerable to harm from another individual; 2) the trustee, who is the one being trusted, and who is the individual capable of harming the trustor; and 3) a context within which the trustee's actions are capable of causing harm or benefit to the trustor" (Kaplan et al., 2020, p.1150).

In this context, three elements emerge as fundamental; levels of autonomy (between the trustor and trustee); levels of accountability (to address the trustee when causing harm); and levels of reparation (to restore trust within the system/context) (Galdon, 2019a: 2019b: 2019c). The erosion of trust, then, implies the removal of autonomy, which is supported by the suppression of accountability and the lack of reparation. Therefore, the implementation of Counteristic design interventions to restore trust will always focus on designing accountability systems to provide, protect, or restore levels of autonomy between the trustee and the trustor.

1.3 Counterism and design
In terms of design history, design practises that can be associated to preliminary embodiments of Counterism can be traced back to preservationism with the work of William Morris, radical design with the work of Italian design collective Memphis, conceptual design with the work of Dutch collective Droog, or critical and speculative design with the seminal work of Dunne and Raby (Fig 1). However, since 2010 we have witnessed a new breed of design practises such as Forensic Architecture (2010), Adversarial Design (DiSalvo, 2012), Design for Social Impact, Prospective Design (2019), or Design Justice (Costanza-Chock, 2020), in which the critical has evolved from an end to a mean, and design has become a tool to enable social change. However, there are significant differences between the practise of Forensic Architecture (FA) or Prospective Design (PrD), which are identified here as Counteristics, and Adversarial Design (AD), Design for Social Impact (DfSI), or Design Justice (DJ).
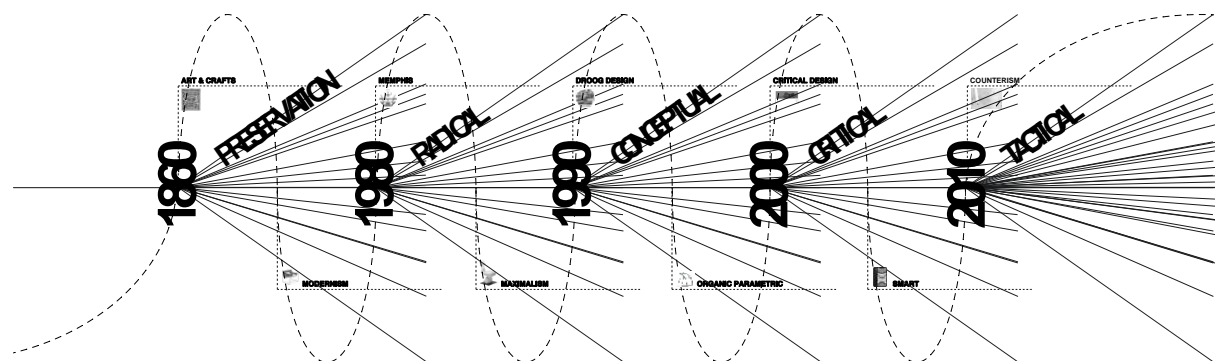

Figure 1   Timeline of Counteristic practices in design. Fernando Galdon, 2023

1.4 Counterism versus agonism

DiSalvo's Adversarial Design (2012) is fundamentally ingrained in Agonism Mouffe, 1999). The agonistic tradition to democracy is often referred to as agonistic pluralism. Beyond the realm of the political, agonistic frameworks have similarly been utilized in broader cultural critiques of hegemony and domination, as well as in literature, science fiction, and design (Kraft, 2020). As Political theorist Samuel A. Chambers explains;

> Agonism implies a deep respect and concern for the other; indeed, the Greek *agon* re-fers most directly to an athletic contest oriented not merely toward victory or defeat, but emphasizing the importance of the struggle itself—a struggle that cannot exist without the opponent. (Chambers, 2001).

Agonism is perfect for a situation in which both sides respect each other, and consider the other side as opponents …. But what happens when one side does not respect the other side, and, furthermore, consider them as enemies? (e.g., Trump, Bolsonaro, or Netanyahu). Is in this context were Counterism emerges as an alternative (design) practice to Adversarial Design, and, an alternative (design) practice for reform.

1.5 Counterism versus justice and social impact

Two fundamental elements differentiate Counterism from Design justice and Design for Social Impact. The first is the role of the designer. As described in point 5 of the foundational manifesto of Design justice, "[designers are] facilitator rather than an expert". For Counteristic practises the use of participatory processes are more focused on evidence gathering. They are not facilitators, but experts with a duty, namely, designing on behalf of citizens to restore trust. The second is this element of trust as the fundamental element to design. This element is absent in the case of DJ, DfSI**,** or even in AD. In this context Counterism emerges as an alternative (design) practice for delivering accountability, autonomy, and reparation.

1.6 Counteristic design

In this context, Forensic Architecture (2010), and Prospective Design (2019), are fully embracing Counterism and developing a new set of techniques and methods placing design as a tactical tool for change. By tactical I mean practises operating within a specific system/context with the aim to shape its directionality in a direction to address the erosion of trust by challenging dominant narratives in which the critical operates as a mean rather than an end – it is more aligned to notions of Tactical media (Raley, 2009) than Strategic design. It proposes an alternative design practice aiming for delivering accountability, autonomy, and reparation. Recent embodiments in this paradigm are for instance Prendeville, Syperek, and Santamaria's Counter-framing (2022). In their approach, dominant or 'institutionalised' positions embodied by the most powerful are challenged by 'counter-frames' - values, beliefs and practices that emerge as societies evolve - constructed to gain power and influence to affect change. This element of affecting change, also prominent in Forensic or Prospective, depart from previous Discursive practices revolving around ideas of engagement.

2. Methodology

In this study we will use two case studies to frame the emergent properties of Counteristic practices. Then, a comparative study will be implemented between the two cases to underpin key similarities and differences. Cases studies enable the exploration and investigation of a real issue within a defined context by using a variety of data sources (Baxter et al., 2008). This methodology allows design researchers to develop and to enhance "the capacity of comprehension and analysis of real problems, the capacity to propose and evaluate alternatives for the improvement of the problem considered, to work collaboratively, [and facilitates] their capacity of information management and synthesis of problems" (Herrera et al, 2016). Comparative studies, on the other hand, analyses and compares two or more objects or ideas to examine, compare and contrast them to show how two or more subjects are similar or different Bukhari (2011). The resulting emerging framework will become a future evaluation tool to expand Counteristic studies.

3. Cases

3.1 Forensic architecture

'Forensic architecture' is the name of an academic field developed at Goldsmiths (2010-ongoing). According to their website "It refers to the production and presentation of architectural evidence—relating to buildings, urban environments—within legal and political processes" (Forensic Architecture, 2023). Counter-forensics, as defined by the ICA, is "a civil practice that seeks to invert the institutionalized forensic gaze, with individuals and organizations taking over the means of evidence production, and turning the state's means against the violence it commits" (ICA, 2023).

The project was developed as a response to the urbanization of warfare, the erosion of trust in evidence in relation to state crimes and human rights violations, the emergence and proliferation of open-source media, the increased use of smartphone footage in documenting human rights violations in urban conflict, and the need for civil society to have its own means of evidence production for application in law, politics and advocacy.

It combines analogue and digital techniques – mappings, timelines and alternative ways of reading space. A case would involve grounding evidences via a set of innovative methods (see below), presenting the evidence in court, then in the media, and then as an exhibition for reflecting upon their techniques. This act presents an opportunity for them to create new audiences, but also as a way to think through technologies. In this process they have developed the concept of Hyper-aesthetics as a multimodal non-hierarchical sensorial assemblage of the inherent interconnectedness in aesthetics to address consequential civic justice.

Method: Spatial research
Forensic Architecture begins each case by conducting research from a range of sources, including: site visits, lidar scanning, photogrammetry and ground-penetrating radar, as well as, the use of digital models to locate and synchronize source materials in space and time.

Method: Situated testimony

Situated Testimony represents a methodological approach developed by Forensic Architecture over a series of projects. The technique employs 3D models of pertinent scenes and environments where traumatic events have transpired, with the primary objective of facilitating the process of interviewing and eliciting testimonies from witnesses who have experienced such events. Given the inherent challenges posed by the often elusive and distorted nature of memories pertaining to traumatic or violent incidents, the integration of digital architectural models has demonstrated significant utility in enhancing a witness's recollection.

Through a collaborative endeavor involving an architectural researcher and the witness, the process unfolds as follows: the witness is recorded while engaging in the act of reconstructing the scene where the event unfolded, thereby providing an opportunity for the individual to delve into and access their recollections of the particular episode in a controlled and secure manner. By employing this method, FA aims to enhance the reliability and richness of the testimony obtained, offering valuable insights into the events in question while mitigating the potential uncertainties arising from the complexities of memory recall.

The Situated Testimony technique represents an innovative and productive advancement in the domain of interview methodologies, harnessing the potential of 3D architectural modelling to facilitate a more profound and accurate understanding of traumatic events through the lens of witness testimonies. This approach exemplifies the commitment of Forensic Architecture to pioneering investigative techniques that hold significant promise in augmenting the pursuit of truth and justice within challenging and complex contexts.

Method: Re-enactment

Re-enactment takes a number of forms to test real-world phenomena in which some confusion may pervade to find the truth. It is based on in situ recreation by different means. This is a process they refer to as 'ground truthing'.

For example, the movement of a car down a hill-against results derived from digital simulation. Re-enactment was a central tool for forensic examination to understand if what really happened aligns with official narratives. It may use simulations or leaked documents (2022). The results may be embodied via a detailed and synchronized timeline using all available data, and precise situational moments.

Hyper-aesthetics

The concept of Hyper-aesthetics represents an expanded and intricate framework within the domain of aesthetics, characterized by an intensified focus on both sensory perception and sense-making processes. This theoretical construct manifests itself through three distinct avenues of augmenting sensory experiences;

- Detection; hyper-aesthetics enhances the perceptual acuity of entities in detecting their surrounding environment. This amplification is realized through both conceptual and material means, facilitating a heightened attunement to sensory

stimuli. The process of hyper-aestheticization entails the augmentation of bodies, technologies, or other material states to enable superior sensing capabilities, and in some cases, the recording of the perceived stimuli, thus fostering a more enriched sense-making experience.

- Multiplication; hyper-aesthetics involves the proliferation and diversification of the modalities by which entities function as sensors. This proliferation may encompass translations across vertical chains of sensation, such as digital sensors interpreting data from physical sensors, thereby broadening the scope and depth of sensory perception.

- Synthesis; hyper-aesthetics integrates multiple sensory inputs on a horizontal plane. While all forms of matter possess the potential to serve as sensors, the reconfiguration of relationships between organic and inorganic sensory matter, as well as, the dynamic interplay between humans and computers, can lead to the emergence of non-hierarchical sensorial assemblages. Furthermore, this process may entail the exploration of harvesting or 'rescuing' obscured traces of sensory information that lie beneath layers of protection.

In essence, hyper-aesthetics represents a sophisticated multimodal non-hierarchical sensorial assemblage of the inherent interconnectedness in aesthetics, reaching a threshold beyond accumulative evolution that becomes reflexive and consequential (Fig. 2-3)

Figure 2   'Forensic Architecture: Hacia Una Estética Investigativa'. This digital model described the nature of the blast made physical. Forensic Architecture, 2016
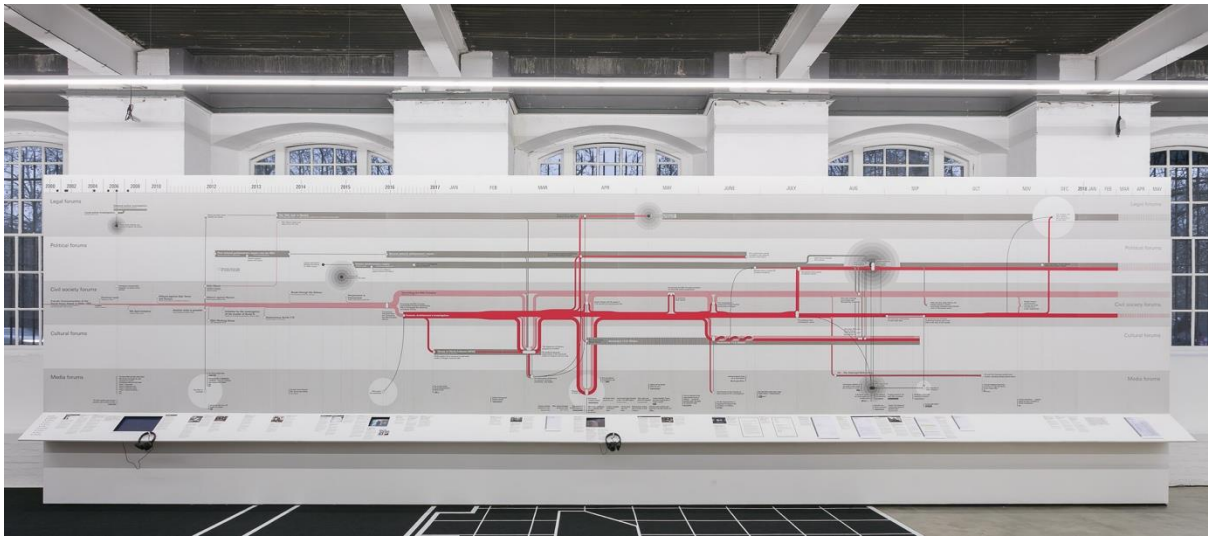
Figure 3   Counter Investigations exhibition at ICA 2018. Photograph by Mark Blower

3.2 Prospective Design

'Prospective Design' is the name of an academic field developed at the RCA (2016-ongoing). Its practice concerns itself with implementing processes that are geared towards the examination and reversion of power asymmetries within systems to create ethical and emancipatory projects in the short and long term (Galdon et al., 2019: Galdon, F, 2021). It focuses on designing trust by inserting autonomy, reparation and accountability elements into its processes and outputs. This approach extends the temporal frame of design towards the future, shifting the focus of knowledge from the "known" to the "partially known," from the "factual" to the "potential," and from the "intended" to the "unintended." In this context, design research assumes the role of an orthogonal node for grounded transformational directionality and emancipatory-led practices, creating in the process a space for effecting change.

This approach was developed as a response to several converging phenomena, such as the development of advance AI, the lack of accountability and reparation within big tech corporations and their products, the erosion of trust in relation to social networks and democratic processes, the emergence of ethical paradoxes and dilemmas, and the need for designers to have their own means of evidence production beyond speculative propositions.

It combines analogue and digital techniques, including mappings, timelines and alternative ways of designing interactions. Projects evolve by grounding evidences via a set of innovative methods (see below), and implementing a combined top-down & bottom-up approach based on publications and design interventions. Publications are presented as evidence to government bodies to affect its policy via reports, papers or new human rights (Galdon, F. & Hall, A., 2020a), whereas design interventions are presented to industry and potentially showcased in exhibitions. In this process the concept of Exo-aesthetics is been developed as a contemplation and appreciation of the boundless possibilities of aesthetics beyond the familiar, expand-

ing the horizons of artistic expression and aesthetic inquiry to encompass the vast and un-known territories that exist both within and beyond our physical reality. In focusing in synthetic interactions, this neoteric theoretical construct incorporates three distinct elements; post-human, symmetrical/asymmetrical assemblages, and consequential interconnectedness.

Trajectories

The incorporation of trajectories in design research proved to be a proactive approach in the implementation of high-order systems analysis through relational and comparative perspectives. This method enabled the identification of potential cases through literature reviews, and background research. These processes, enabled through longitudinal studies and embodied in timelines, illuminated prospective development. Through these actions, the process unveils objects of inquiry, allowing for the identification of its characteristics, qualities, and the need for a different type of design methods to address its nature.

Probabilistic extrapolations

The use of probabilistic extrapolations was of paramount importance in addressing prospectivity within future-led design research studies. This method provided a factual perspective for design researchers to access the future and triangulate potential developments of a specific technology by forensically investigating patents, prototypes, and demos. As a result, this approach inserted rigor and robustness into the research process by grounding speculations with evidences.

Asymmetries

The identification and reversal of asymmetries is one of the most effective methodological contributions made in this research, as it introduces an ethical directionality to product/system development. This process involves uncovering potential areas of conflict, exploitation, and injustice. By identifying asymmetries within the system, the resulting design, which is always a projection of the analysis, can be transformational and beneficial for society.

Unintended consequences

Unintended consequences proved to be an important method as it provided a systematic model for addressing asymmetries. It identified the three fundamental levels; consequences (intended and unintended), contexts (highly sensitive areas), and unintended actions (unhappy actions, inaccurate predictions, the loss of something, and violence). This triangulation has the flexibility to address a multiplicity of contexts, cultures, and behaviors.

Counter-fictions

The addition of counter-fictions challenged established orthodoxies on design futures, which were often framed as a positivist pro-consumer option versus a critical pro-citizen option. This method allowed for the integration of both options into an emancipatory projection revolving

around applied ethics. This perspective enables the designer to develop real-world interventions with an ethical and social component at their core. Additionally, it challenges the notion that design futures need to be either 'bright' and utopic, or 'noir' and uncanny.

Exo-aesthetics

Exo-aesthetics refers to an experimental aesthetic framework or concept that extends beyond the traditional boundaries of human perception and comprehension. It involves exploring and appreciating aesthetic experiences beyond the familiar and conventional, reaching into realms that lie outside human sensory capabilities or conceptual understanding. Exo-aesthetics delves into the aesthetic dimensions of phenomena, entities, or aspects that are typically inaccessible or even unimaginable to human perception.

Exo-aesthetics may involve the creation of interventions that evoke and explore the aesthetics of synthetic systems, theoretical dimensions, post-human realms, or abstract entities. It may also encompass the investigation of unconventional sensory modalities, such as those experienced by non-human organisms or artificial intelligences (e.g., moral computations). This construct incorporates three distinct elements; post-human interactions, symmetrical and/or asymmetrical assemblages, and consequential interconnectedness (Fig. 4).
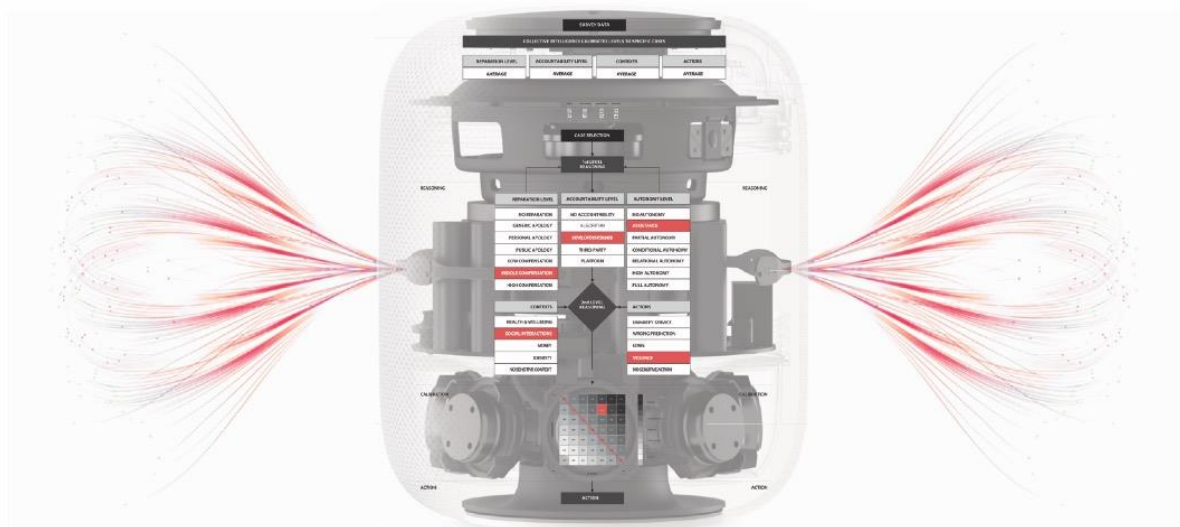

Figure 4   Moral calculation experiment; Synthetic consequential reasoning. F. Galdon, 2016-23
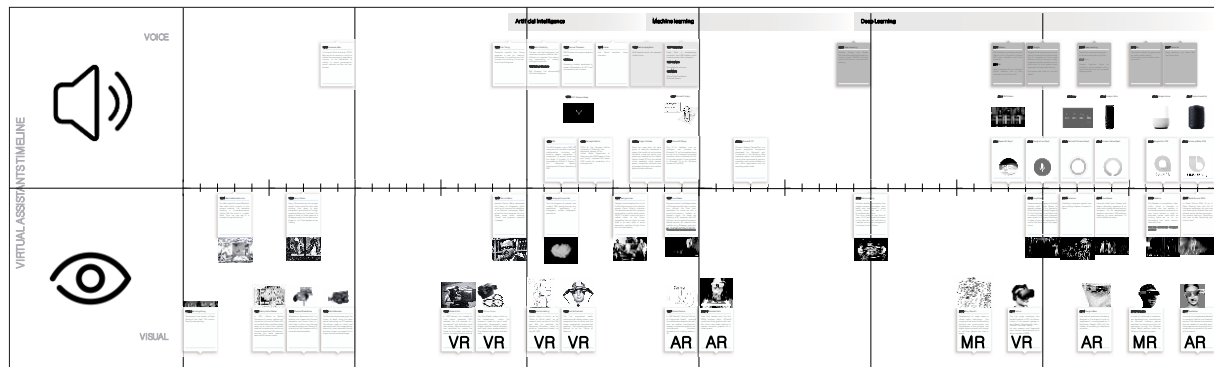
Figure 5   Chronologies of support; A longitudinal study on the evolution of virtual assistants, its embodiments, and their relation to the evolution of AI. F. Galdon, 2016-21

3.3 Comparative study

Table 1   The variables of Counteristic design. Finding similarities and differences. F. Galdon, 2023

	Forensic architecture	**Prospective design**
Problem	Erosion of trust	Erosion of trust
Aim	Accountability and reparation	Accountability and reparation
	deconstruct or test official narratives by governments	*deconstruct or test official narratives by tech companies*
Subject	architecture can become a medium for supporting testimony	design can become a medium for supporting ethical principles
Areas of interest	state and corporate violence, human rights violations and environmental destruction	Technological oppression, human rights and lately design environmental impact
Approach	On behalf of … *Citizens* *Planet*	On behalf of … *Citizens* *Planet*
Focus	Event-based	Issue-based
Temporality	Past-led	Future-led
Evidences	Factual	Probabilistic
Desk research	leaked documents	Patents, prototypes, and demos
Insider research	Direct Whistle-blowers	Indirect Whistle-blowers *Media interviews* *Media investigations*
Contextual studies	On the ground Past-led *Footage, testimonies, and traces* Situated testimony *Memories of trauma*	Participatory online Future-led *Surveys* Asymmetries *Areas of conflict, and exploitation*
Longitudinal studies	Timelines	Timelines

	Events	*Trajectories*
Relational studies	Mapping *Cartography* *Events interactions*	Mapping *System infrastructure* *Systems interactions*
Spatial studies	Architectural models 1:1 3D models	Hyperobjects
Enactment	Simulacra; in situ recreation	Simulation; a posteriori events
Method	Re-enactment: a reverse architectural process to explore the conditions and context of a site	Unintended Consequences: a reverse design process to explore the conditions and context of an interaction
Outputs	Films Exhibitions Trials	Mechanisms Tools New rights
Aesthetics	Ethico-Aesthetics paradigm *beauty is irrelevant while aesthetics is productive* Hyper-aesthetics *non-hierarchical sensorial assemblages of consequential interconnectedness*	Ethico-Aesthetics paradigm *beauty is irrelevant while aesthetics is productive* Exo-aesthetics *Post-human, symmetrical assemblages of consequential interconnectedness*

From this analysis, a comparative mapping study between Prospective Design and Forensic Architecture provides valuable insights into the development, execution, and evaluation of design and architectural projects. In order to facilitate its analysis, I will use the Sanders & Stappers model (2008). This is a framework to categorise design research methods between; expert and participatory mindsets and between design-led and research-led processes. It is commonly used in design research methodology and can be applied to both Prospective Design and Forensic Architecture to assess their respective strengths and weaknesses.

The methods used by these practices (PD & FA) are clustered in four areas; participatory methods and strategies (in yellow), tactical design methods and outputs (in red), contextual or systematic analysis methods and techniques (in green), and simulated practical approaches and strategies (in blue).
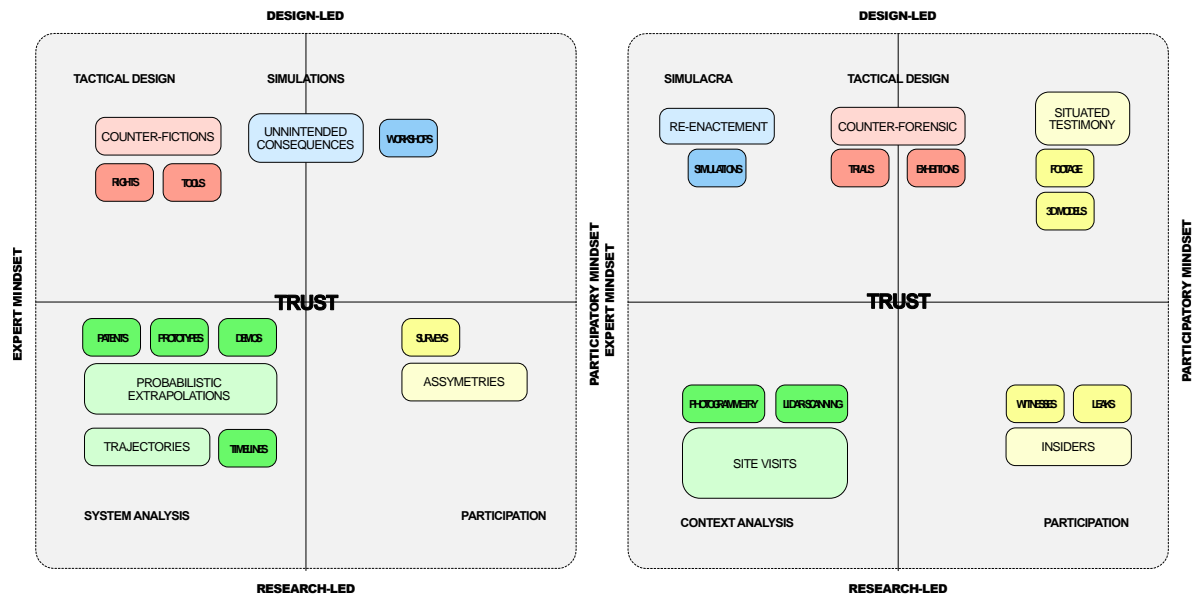
Figure 6   A comparative mapping between Prospective Design and Forensic Architecture methods and techniques. Based on Sanders (2008) categorisation model. F. Galdon, 2023

4.0 Discussion

Countering: From critical to tactical design

Countering involves notions of investigation, justice, and critical thinking, but it fundamentally aims to be deployed in a specific context in which the erosion of trust is prevalent. This element marks a transition from previous frameworks such as Discursive Design in which engagement was its main focus.

The critical paradigm operates with practitioners observing the system from outside to obtain a wider perspective of the problems within the system to design interventions to generate a debate. On the other hand, Counteristic practises operate within the system with the aim to shape its directionality in a particular direction in which autonomy, accountability, and reparation are paramount to address the erosion of trust. It does so by challenging dominant narratives in which the critical operates as a mean rather than an end – more aligned to notions of Tactical media (Raley, 2009) than Strategic design. This tactical condition is enabled by a mixed-method approach combining four areas; participatory methods and strategies (Situated practises, asymmetric relationships, and intel), Tactical design methods and outputs (counter-forensic, or counter-fictions), contextual or systematic analysis methods and techniques (contextual and systems analysis via extrapolations, trajectories, and site visits), and simulated practical approaches and strategies (re-enactment or unintended consequences).

Tactical design, then, refers to an approach that emphasizes interventions within existing systems or contexts to challenge official narratives with specific social or political aims. Unlike critical design practises focusing on engagement or traditional design methodologies focused on problem-solving, tactical design adopts a more adaptive and responsive stance. It involves employing creative strategies to address complex issues such as social injustice, sustainability,

or cultural hegemony. Central to tactical design is its agility and ability to operate within constraints, leveraging available resources and opportunities to enact meaningful transformations to restore trust. This approach uses collaboration, participation, and empowerment, engaging diverse stakeholders in the consolidation of evidences. Tactical design interventions can take various forms, including forensic approaches, prospective practises, or evidential activism. By challenging established norms and power structures, tactical design seeks to address the erosion of trust, restore autonomy and accountability, and catalyze positive social change. It embodies a dynamic and iterative process that evolves in response to evolving contexts and emerging challenges, emphasizing experimentation, adaptability, and reparation.

Practises such as Forensic Architecture or Prospective design are fully embracing this approach, however, we can observe some new projects aligned with these premises in the context of design such as Cooking Sections' CLIMAVORE project, a project challenging how food systems operate, Formafantasma's Cambio, a project challenging the governance of the timber industry, or shady.club, a protest-led start-up developing a plug-in to challenge greenwashing in fashion conglomerates. All these projects are operating tactically within their system/context with the aim to shape its directionality in a direction to address the erosion of trust and accountability in their corresponding areas by challenging dominant narratives.

Countering: From the fictional to the factual
Counterfactual is a method widely used in Discursive Design (Mainly Critical and Speculative Design). The fundamental function of this method is to connect the past with the present to generate alternative realities. The key example presented in *Speculative Everything* (2015) is: what if the Nazis had won the Second World War? What would the present be like? This method allows practitioners to transform the present into a fiction to propose alternative realities, in the same way, they use Speculative Design to connect the future to the present and transform the present into a fiction to propose alternative realities.

On the other hand, Prospective design or Forensic architecture use counter-fictions or counter-forensics to connect the future or the past into the present. What they are countering here is not reality to generate a fiction in order to operationalise a fictional alternative; rather, they are countering the fiction (embodied in 'official narratives' of events or technological utopias), to generate a reality to operationalise a real alternative. In counter-fictions or counter-forensics, they aim to transform the fiction via a real-world intervention effecting change. In these models, fictions become objects of inquiry rather than end products. They aim to restore trust rather than produce engagement.

Countering: From engagement to trust
Matt Malpass presents a multitude of design practices on the emancipatory design-social science spectrum, such as Associative Design, Co-design, Transition Design, Speculative Design, Critical Design, Design Fiction, Design Activism, Socially Responsible Design, Participatory Design, Meta-Design, Transformation Design, Conceptual Design, Post-industrial Design, Social Design, Open Design, Design as Politics, or Sustainable Design (Malpass, 2017, p. 9). We can

include more contemporary notions such as Design Justice, or Adversarial Design, however, none of these practices discusses designing trust as its fundamental element; Instead, they focus on engagement. As Julia Lohmann acknowledges in her thesis *The Department of Seaweed: co-speculative design in a museum residency*, " [in these approaches] Designers […] create discourse, dialogue, activism and engagement with future scenarios" (Lohmann, 2017, p.21). Or Dunne and Raby themselves state that "This approach requires viewers to creatively engage with the props and make them their own" (Lohmann, 2017, p. 28).

Although trust and engagement belong to relational practices, trust is significantly different from engagement. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, engagement is defined as "being involved with somebody/something in an attempt to understand them/ it". However, trust is defined as "the belief that somebody/something is good, sincere, honest, etc. and will not try to harm or trick you". Therefore, the intentionality of the other part and the implications of this relationship which can be detrimental are positioned as fundamental.

A comparative analysis between the "United Micro Kingdoms" exhibition by Dunne & Raby and "Counter Investigations" by Forensic Architecture may help to understand the differences.

Despite both exhibitions employing innovative techniques and engaging with socio-political themes critiquing societal norms, technological advancements, and political landscapes, they diverge significantly in their focus, methods, and intended outcomes.

Dunne and Raby's exhibition, The United Micro Kingdoms, is a speculative design project that envisions alternative futures through the lens of fictional micro-nations. Rather than presenting straightforward critiques of existing systems, Dunne and Raby explore speculative scenarios to provoke critical thinking about contemporary societal structures and technological developments. The exhibition features a series of intricate models, speculative artifacts, and narratives that challenge viewers to reconsider their assumptions about governance, technology, and human behavior. Central to Dunne and Raby's approach is the use of speculative design as a tool for envisioning alternative futures. By creating fictional micro-nations with distinct ideologies and technologies, they encourage viewers to question the status quo and imagine new possibilities. The exhibition invites active participation, prompting viewers to engage with the speculative artifacts and consider how different socio-political systems might shape everyday life.

In contrast to Dunne and Raby's speculative approach, Forensic Architecture's Counter Investigations exhibition adopts a forensic methodology to investigate human rights abuses and state violence. Through a combination of architectural analysis, digital reconstruction, and testimonial evidence, the exhibition exposes hidden truths and challenges official narratives. Rather than speculating about the future, Forensic Architecture focuses on uncovering past and present injustices, seeking accountability and justice for affected communities. By analyzing architectural structures, satellite imagery, and audiovisual recordings, they reconstruct events with meticulous detail, providing evidence that can be used for legal advocacy and

accountability. The exhibition creates immersive experiences that immerse viewers in the investigative process, inviting them to understand the erosion of trust critically with evidences to question dominant narratives.

While both exhibitions engage with socio-political themes and employ innovative methodologies, they differ significantly in their approaches and objectives. Dunne and Raby's The UMK utilizes speculative design to imagine alternative futures and provoke critical reflection, whereas Forensic Architecture's Counter Investigations adopts a forensic methodology to uncover past and present injustices and seek accountability, reparation, and trust. In conclusion, The United Micro Kingdoms and Counter Investigations demonstrate the differences between Critical and Tactical design, or Discursive and Counteristic practises, in which contemporary design can engage with socio-political issues to challenge dominant narratives.

Counteristic practises approach the design process from a real consequential perspective to insert an applied ethical directionality. In terms of participation, Conteristic practises repositions the focus from Dunne's (1999) 'directing the user', Irwin's (2015) 'connecting the user', or Costanza-Chock (2020) 'designing with the user', to outputs focused on designing 'on behalf of the citizen'. In this process, Counterism aims to design trust, rather than engagement. It does so by structuring methods around autonomy, accountability, and reparation.

In this context, the use of Counteristic methods emerges for these practises as a strategy to address power dynamics and abuse, but also as an experimental method to ground interventions. Its primary function is to reverse asymmetries of power and dominance in social, political, and environmental contexts through design. Outputs are expected to range from the ethical to the legal. Embodiments may range from evidence processes, to tools, to rights, to trials, to exhibitions, to frameworks.

For instance, Forensic architecture presented their investigations in international courtrooms, parliamentary inquiries, United Nations (UN) assemblies, as well as in citizens' tribunals and truth commissions (Forensic Architecture, 2023). In the case of Prospective design, four papers were submitted to the National Data Strategy board in the UK to affect the development of AI (Galdon, 2019a) (Galdon, 2019b) (Galdon, 2019c) (Galdon, 2019d). All submissions were accepted by the board and included in an evidence bank. Furthermore, it also proposed a new digital right, the right to reparation (Galdon & Hall, 2020), which has been submitted to the EU Commission for their consideration.

Countering: From the sublime to the Ethico-Aesthetic
Counteristic practises generate a new political identity with the creation of new feelings and new ways of feeling the world, in which the main focus is placed on addressing the erosion of trust. An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm, as Theodore Reeves-Evison (2015) suggests, in which design interventions moved beyond 20th Century main notion of the sublime to represent a fundamental point of access for seeing how this relationship forms and changes. In this context, Hyper-aesthetics and Exo-aesthetics emerge as aesthetic representations at the intersection of design and social justice, challenging in the process discursive orthodoxies.

The concept of Hyper-aesthetics represents an expanded and intricate framework within the domain of aesthetics. It is characterized by an intensified focus on both sensory perception and sense-making processes. This theoretical construct manifest itself through distinct avenues of augmenting experiences. On the other hand, the concept of Exo-aesthetics aims to extend an expand our understanding of 'otherness'. We may characterize it by its emerge at the (a)symmetric intersection of multiple intelligences in a-more-than-human context.

Countering: From indeterminate speculations to Chrono-realities
Time and reality are fundamental elements in Counteristic practises. Whereas Forensic architecture places its effort towards understanding what was in there in order to construct a progressive future. Prospective design places its main emphasis on the progressed future while researching and analysing evolutive traces from the past. Same practise, but different temporal weights.

Time also emerges in these practises as a temporal span to organise information for analysis and understanding. These informative elements are a record of places, dates, embodiments and strategies by which to extract knowledge. The chronological structures operate as a type of index system that is normally operationalised by articulating several graphic organisational frameworks to enable data to be cross-referenced and compared. By using chronological studies to frame the issue at hand, Counteristic practises uncover grounded or missing traces.

Finally, these practises understand that Time and Reality are fundamental elements for justice. Without time, you cannot frame accountability (actions from the past), nor responsibility (actions for the future). And without reality, you cannot frame traces and evidences, therefore the possibility of justice becomes ungrounded. These variables support a Counteristic condition in which a materialistic tactical perspective is enacted.

4.1 Results
in this paper we explore the emerging qualities of Counteristic Design practises as they depart from Discursive models. In this process, Counterism is underpinned as an emerging field of study that focuses on design trust by challenging dominant narratives. It is a mode of resistance that encourages critical thinking, creativity, and inclusivity. Counterism has significant implications for contemporary society and academia. As such, Counterism is a powerful tool for social change and a way of imagining a better future.

The two projects showcased vary in approach, with some developing completely new methods by incorporating new technologies, while others reimagine existing methods. The projects presented demonstrate that Counteristic paradigms can be an opportunity for design, and that different approaches can offer interesting ways towards a new future for citizens at the intersection of social justice, and technological advances.

In these processes, designers are experts with a duty, namely, designing on behalf of citizens to restore trust. They embrace participatory strategies as a course of action to source evidences and develop design implementations collaboratively with others. This notion, together with the integration of autonomy, accountability and reparation represents a new *modus operandi* to challenge and revert asymmetric power dynamics.

From the comparative study conducted between the two cases, FA and PrD, we can state that, Counteristic practises operate within the system with the aim to shape its directionality in a particular direction in which trust is paramount. In this process **the critical becomes tactical**. Furthermore, Counteristic practises are **countering fictions** (embodied in 'official narratives' of events or technologies), in order to generate a reality to operationalise a real alternative. In counter-fictions or counter-forensics, fictions become objects of inquiry rather than end products.

The result of mixed-methodologies emerges as a paradigm to combine design-led with research-led strategies while including experts and citizens into the equation. This wider multi-dimensional perspective has been traditionally absent on design pratises which tend to focus on one or two of the paradigms. In this process, they have developed novel aesthetic paradigms as they intersect with ethics. This element marks a distinctive evolution from stylistic traditions and approaches in design based on artistic practises. An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm, as Theodore Reeves-Evison (2015) would suggest, in which design interventions represent a fundamental point of access for seeing how this relationship forms and changes. In this context, Hyper-aesthetics and Exo-aesthetics emerge as aesthetic embodiments at this intersection, challenging in the process existing orthodoxies revolving around ideas of the sublime.

Finally, time and reality emerge as fundamental variables to support a Counteristic condition in which a materialistic tactical perspective is grounded. They do so via the creation of new feelings and new ways of feeling the world based on design interventions addressing accountability, autonomy, and reparation.

5. Conclusions

In this paper I have formalised the emerging qualities of Counteristic Design practises as they depart from Discursive models. In this process, Counterism is underpinned as an emerging new modus operandi in design complementing other initiative in the postcritique landscape such as Design justice, Adversarial Design, or Design for Social Impact. Counterism, in contratst from the aforementioned practises, offers a new way of resistance by focusing on trust as the main element to design via the design of systems of autonomy, accountability, and reparation. This formalisation aligns Counterism with a long tradition of design as they intersect with the social sciences, yet places it in its own singular space.

Building from this Counteristic paradigm, this paper formalizes a tactical condition by framing a mixed-method approach combining four areas; Participatory methods and strategies (Situated practises, asymmetric relationships, and intel); Tactical design methods and outputs

(counter-forensic, or counter-fictions); Contextual or systematic analysis methods and techniques (contextual and systems analysis via extrapolations, trajectories, and site visits); and Simulated practical approaches and strategies (re-enactment or unintended consequences).

In this process, this research places trust as the main element to design. This is achieved via the creation of new feelings and new ways of feeling the world based on design interventions addressing accountability, autonomy, and reparation.

Finally, this work provides a guiding framework to analyse potential design practises operating within this context. The framework operates in three distinctive levels; First, a set of categories (Trust (autonomy, accountability, and reparation), Tactical, Factual, Chrono-realities, and Ethico-Aesthetic) will inform us whether a particular practise belong to the Counteristic paradigm or not. Second, a comparative study provides us with a set of variables by which to understand similarities and differences between existing and potential Conteristic design practises. Third, the comparative mapping based on Sanders (2008) provides insights into the development, execution, and evaluation of design and architectural projects, as well as, an understanding of the level of integrated multidimensionality.

Future work will focus on expanding this analysis via the implementation of the emerging analytical framework into other Counteristic practises such as 'counter-frames', Cooking Sections, Formafantasma, and other potential candidates operating within this context of trust design via the design of systems of autonomy, accountability, and reparation.

6. References

Anker, E. S., Felski, R. (2017). "Introduction". In Anker & Felski (ed.). *Critique and Postcritique*. Durham: Duke University Press. p. 1. ISBN 978-0-8223-7304-9.

Auger, J**. (**2012). *Why Robot? Speculative design, the domestication of technology and the considered future* PhD thesis, Royal College of Art.

Baxter, P., Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. The Qualitative Report, 13, 544–559.

Bingham, C. (2019). More is More: Memphis, Maximalism, and New Wave Design. Ed. teNeues Publishing UK Ltd. ISBN: 9783961712038.

Bukhari, S. A. H. (2011). *What is Comparative Study*. SSRN. Retrieved February 21, 2020, from http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1962328

Chambers, S.A. (2001). "View of Language and Politics: Agonistic Discourse in The West Wing. *Ctheory*: 11/12/2001. Retrieved 30/07/2023. Available from; https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ctheory/article/view/14591/5443

Davis, A. (2016). Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement. Haymarket Books.

Dunne A. (1999). *Hertzian tales : electronic products aesthetic experience and critical design*. RCA CRD Research Publications.

Dunne, A., Raby, F. (2013). *Speculative Everything*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Felski, R. (2015). *The Limits of Critique*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p. 150. ISBN 978-0226294032.

Freire, P. (1990). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Continuum.

Forensic Architecture (2023). Forensic architecture; About. Retrieved March 22, 2023. Available from; https://forensic-architecture.org/about/agency

Forlano, L., & Matthew, A. (2014). From design fiction to design friction: Speculative and participatory design of values-embedded urban technology. Journal of Urban Technology, 21(4), 7–24. doi:10.1080/ 10630732.2014.971525

Galdon, F., Hall, A., & Wang, S. J. (2019). *Prospective design: A future-led mixed-methodology to mitigate unintended consequences*. In J. Hoo Na (Ed.), *Design Revolutions*. https://iasdr2019.org/research-papers?keywords=prospective+design&category=

Galdon, F., & Wang, S. J. (2019a). Designing trust in highly automated virtual assistants: A taxonomy of levels of autonomy. Artificial Intelligence. In: Industry 4.0: A collection of innovative research case-studies. International Conference on Industry 4.0 and Artificial Intelligence Technologies IAIT. Cambridge, UK.

Galdon, F., & Wang, S. J. (2019b). From apology to compensation; A multi-level taxonomy of trust reparation for highly automated virtual assistants. In: Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Human Interaction and Emerging Technologies (IHIET 2019) conference August 22- 24, 2019, Nice, France.

Galdon, F., & Wang, S. J. (2019c). Addressing accountability in highly autonomous virtual assistants. In: Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Human Interaction and Emerging Technologies (IHIET 2019) August 22-24, 2019, Nice, France.

Galdon, F., Hall, A. (2020a). The right to reparations: a new digital right for repairing trust in the emerging era of highly autonomous systems. In: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Human Interaction and Emerging Technologies: Future Applications (IHIET-AI 2020) Lausanne, Switzerland.

Galdon, F, (2021). Designing trust: Evolving models and frameworks towards prospective design futures in highly automated systems. PhD thesis, Royal College of Art. https://researchonline.rca.ac.uk/4960/

Giroux, H. A. (2017). Dangerous Thinking in the Age of the New Authoritarianism. Routledge.

Herrera, S., Cruz, C., Ramírez, Y., & Cisternas, L. (2016). Conceptual process design for Boric Acid: A case study for engineering education. 26th European Symposium on Computer Aided Process Engineering, 1437–1442. doi:10.1016/b978-0-444-63428-3.50244-7

Hooks, B. (1994). Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom. Routledge.

ICA, (2023). Counter-forensics. Short Course in Forensic Architecture. Retrieved August 10, 2023. Available from; https://www.ica.art/counter-forensics#:~:text=COUNTER%20FORENSICS%20is%20a%20civil,against%20the%20violence%20it%20commits.

Irwin, T., Kossoff, G., Tonkinwise, C., & Scupelli, P. (2015). Transition Design 2015: A new area of design research, practice and study that propose design-led societal transition toward more sustainable futures. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University. https://design.cmu.edu/sites/default/files/Transition_Design_Monograph_final.pdf

Kaplan, A. D., Kessler, T. T., & Hancock, P. A. (2020). How Trust is Defined and its use in Human-Human and Human-Machine Interaction. Proceedings of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Annual Meeting, 64(1), 1150–1154. https://doi.org/10.1177/1071181320641275

Kraff, H. (2020). A Critical Exploration of Agonistic Participatory Design, The Design Journal, 23:1, 31-48, DOI: 10.1080/14606925.2019.1684730

Lohmann, J.C. (2017). The Department of Seaweed; co-speculative design in a museum residency (Doctoral dissertation, Royal College of Art, London, UK). Retrieved from https://researchonline.rca.ac.uk/id/eprint/3704

Malpass, M. (2017): Critical Design in Context. London, New York: Bloomsbury.

Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An integrative model of organizational trust. Academy of Management Review, 20(3), 709–734

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Counter. In Merriam-Webster.com. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/counter

Moi, T. (2017). *Revolution of the Ordinary*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p. 180. ISBN 9780226464442.

Mouffe, C. (1999). Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism? *Social Research*, *66*(3), 745–758. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40971349

Oliveira, P., & Prado, L. (2014). Cheat sheet for a non- (or less-) colonialist speculative design. Medium [online]. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://medium.com/a-parede/cheatsheet-for-a-non-or-less-colonialist-speculative-design-9a6b4ae3c465#.ezn3dpooa

Oxford Dictionary (n.d.). Trust. In oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com dictionary. Retrieved September 21, 2023. Available from; https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/trust_1?q=trust

Oxford Dictionary (n.d.). Engagement. In oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com dictionary. Retrieved September 21, 2023. available from; https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/involved?q=involved

Polanyi, M. (1958). Personal knowledge: Towards a post-critical philosophy. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Prado, L., & Oliveira, P. (2014). Questioning the 'critical' in speculative and critical design. Medium [online]. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://medium.com/a-parede/questioningthe-critical-in-speculative-critical-design-5a355cac2ca4#.s3i439807

Prendeville, S., Syperek, P., & Santamaria, L. (2022). On the politics of design framing practices (Version 1). Loughborough University. https://hdl.handle.net/2134/19043348.v1

Raley, R. (2009). *Tactical Media* (NED-New edition, Vol. 28). University of Minnesota Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttsbc0

Ramakers, R. (2002). Less + More; Droog Design in Context. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers.

Reeves-Evison, T. (2015). *After Transgression: Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigms of Contemporary Art*. Doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London [Thesis]. https://research.gold.ac.uk/view/goldsmiths/Reeves-Evison=3ATheodore=3A=3A.html

Sanders, L. (2008). An Evolving Map of Design Practice and Design Research. Retrieved August 5, 2023. Available from;

https://www.dubberly.com/articles/an-evolving-map-of-design-practice-and-design-research.html

Schmeer, J. (2019). Xenodesignerly Ways of Knowing. *Journal of Design and Science*. Retrieved from https://jods.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/6qb7ohpt

Seppanen, R., K. Blomqvist and S. Sundqvist (2007) Measuring inter- organisational trust: a critical review of the empirical research in 1990–2003. Industrial Marketing Management, 36 (2), 249–65.

Tharp, B.M., & Tharp, S.M. (2019). Discursive Design. The MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/11192.001.0001

Tonkinwise, C. (2014) How We Intend to Future: Review of Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming, Design Philosophy Papers, 12:2, 169-187

Yount, A. (2005). William Morris and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Historic Preservation in Europe. Dissertations. 1079. https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/1079

Žižek, S. (2014). Event: Philosophy in Transit, London: Penguin Books.

About the Author:

Dr. Fernando Galdon; is a Tutor (Research) at the Royal College of Art. His interdisciplinary background ranges from Product Design, Computer Science, Neuroscience, Philosophy, and Sociology. His work investigates the social, technological, and political implications of Trust Design.