DISEÑA 21
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INTRODUCTION

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DESIGN, OPPRESSION, AND LIBERATION

Design, Oppression, and Liberation

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Oppression relations are characterized by prejudice against, cultural hierarchization, objective exclusion, physical violence, social silencing, and subjective domination of specific social groups that have gone through historical processes of negative differentiation and consequent dehumanizing (Fanon, 2007; Freire, 1996; hooks, 2014).

These processes generate stable albeit less visible social structures, which include everyday objects that have been designed by the oppressors to be used (or not used) by the oppressed — in a way that heightens negative differences. The role of design in structuring oppression has gone largely unacknowledged by design research and design history (similar to other fields); however, we can see a recent move, pushed by social movements, to recognize design's complicity with racism (Souza, 2020), heteronormativity (Santos, 2018), ableism (Liao & Huebner, 2021), colonialism (Angelon & van Amstel, 2021; Schultz et al., 2018), userism (Gonzatto & van Amstel, 2022), and other forms of structural oppression.

Acknowledging oppressive design opens up the possibility of occupying, reclaiming, repairing, and restoring what oppressors have done with it. Pluriversal design (Noel, 2020), feminist designs (Bardzell, 2010), design justice (Costanza-Chock, 2018), multispecies design (Westerlaken, 2020), designing for liberation (Jack & Tuli, 2021), southern perspectives over design (Gutiérrez Borrero, 2015; Reynolds-Cuéllar et al., 2022), and anthropophagic studio (van Amstel & Gonzatto, 2020) are just some approaches that shift design research from denouncing to announcing new realities. This shift is a dialectical result of social movements reaching design practice while, at the same time, design practice reaching social movements (van Amstel et al., 2021).

DENOUNCING AND ANNOUNCING REALITIES

In his analysis of oppression in Latin America, Paulo Freire (1996, 2000) came to the conclusion that it was not enough to denounce oppression to change reality; it was necessary to announce liberation so as to foster hope among the oppressed

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that such reality could be transformed. Without doing so, fatalism could prevail, even if critical of the current reality. In the case of design, this means putting equal effort on analyzing oppressive designs and on developing liberating designs. In tune with this implication, this special issue highlights research that contributes to both sharpening the understanding of oppression in design, and increasing the solidarity between the different struggles for liberation that cut across design.

After closing our call for papers, we were overwhelmed by its response, both in quantity and quality, so we had to extend our plans to secure a second issue: *Diseña 22*. Among the 32 submissions received, we selected eight to go through the peer-review process for this issue and eight for the next one. We gathered them to display, in both issues, the variety of positions, understandings, and approaches for denouncing oppression in and through design.

Finding at least three reviewers for each paper was quite challenging, as most researchers working on this topic do not have stable academic positions yet, possibly for being part of oppressed social groups that suffer from epistemic imperialism, citational injustice, deregulated job market, and underdevelopment. We are very thankful for those who made the peer review process work in such unfavorable conditions. Having said that, we denounce this situation and announce the need for more stable positions in design research institutions.

THE ROLE OF DESIGN IN LIBERATING FROM OPPRESSION

After going through the review process, seven papers were accepted for this issue. These papers address different kinds of oppression: racism (Moses), ableism (Luck), sexism (Bravo, Rufs, and Moyano), banking education (Souza and Cunha Filho), colonization (Marques Corrêa and Cardoso; Albarrán González and Campbell), and systemic oppression (Sosa). What they all have in common is a heavier emphasis on announcing the liberation of the oppressed, suggesting a possible role for design research in the transdisciplinary field of oppression studies.

The authors, educators, researchers, and practicing designers explored the design possibilities offered by several liberating approaches. Beginning with Marques Corrêa and Cardoso's paper, three approaches are introduced: delinking from the Western modernity, disobeying the powerful, and decolonizing design. In a similar vein, Albarrán González and Campbell discuss decolonizing design, yet they add a connected approach that emphasizes dialogue: Buen Vivir-Centric design. In a completely different setting, Luck describes how people with disabilities organized to engage with planning authorities in Milton Keynes, United Kingdom, to keep ableism away from urban design.

Organizing is also at the heart of four other papers. Sosa uses computer models to show how the oppressed need to smartly bond together to reach a revolution; while Souza and Cunha Filho tell the story of design students

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organizing an event that looked like a strike to protest against banking education and other issues in their school. Design tools seem to be useful to organize against oppression, as Bravo, Rufs, and Moyano suggest with their feminist data visualization approach. Moses comes to a similar conclusion, even if dealing with a different oppression: she describes a typography design project that works as a metaphorical uniform for Black voices, inviting them to dress themselves as a collective design body in their fight for liberation.

KEEPING UP WITH THE TRADITION OF LIBERATION FIGHTS

The authors included in this issue have diverse origins: Chile, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, United Kingdom, and United States. As expected, most of them paid attention to the journal's geographic location, and productively engaged with Latin American and Caribbean oppression studies laid by authors such as Fanon, Vieira Pinto, Freire, Rivera Cusicanqui, Mignolo, Escobar, Walsh, and others. This region of the world is characterized by dynamic (and sometimes unstable) democratic regimes that offer the concrete possibility of big turnarounds in oppression relations. In the spirit of keeping up with the liberation *praxis,* we would like to point out the less-cited theorists from the Caribbean recommended by Grosfoguel (2020) for future studies, for having a better recognition in oppression studies: Walter Rodney, Silvia Wynter, Claudia Jones, Aimé Césaire, Clive Thomas, Paget Henry, Jamaica Kincaid, George Padmore, C.L.R. James, Edouard Glissant, Norman Girvan, and Stuart Hall.

The collection of papers herein shows some paths that design can take to contribute to liberation fights in Latin America, the Caribbean, and other parts of the world. Oppression and liberation in and through design need to be further explored, and there are several issues and concepts that remain untapped for design research. We might experience great advances in oppression studies if we keep asking the following questions, inspired by Paulo Freire's and Vieira Pintos' (Freire, 1984; Passos, 2010; Vieira Pinto, 1993) writings on education: design for who? In whose service? Against who? Why design here and now? We invite the reader to join our collective questioning and enjoy reading the papers abridged here.

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