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Editorial: Design philosophy: Amplifying the unheard

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Abstract: At a time of intersecting planetary, social, and epistemic crises, design philosophy must confront a central question: whose investigative ideas and knowledge count? This theme track, *Amplifying the unheard*, challenges the consolidation of design philosophy into predominantly North Atlantic and Anglophone frameworks. Rather than stabilising the field, it seeks to reconfigure it as a plural, contested, and situated space shaped by diverse cosmologies, practices, and epistemologies. The contributions gathered here move beyond inclusion toward transformation, foregrounding Indigenous, decolonial, posthuman, and practice-based approaches that reconfigure design's conceptual and ethical conditions. Together, they demonstrate that amplifying unheard voices is not merely additive, but constitutive of new ways of thinking, teaching, and practising design philosophy.

Keywords: design philosophy; decoloniality; epistemic justice; plurality.

1. Whose knowledge counts?

At a moment when design is increasingly called upon to respond to planetary, social, and epistemic crises, the question of whose knowledge counts has become imperative. The theme track 'Design philosophy: amplifying the unheard' emerges from this urgency, not as an attempt to stabilise or define the field, but to unsettle it productively. Rather than reinforcing an already consolidating canon, this track insists on design philosophy as an open, plural, and contested space, one shaped as much by its absences as by its dominant narratives.

For decades, the relationship between design and philosophy has been stimulating, albeit somewhat intermittent, unstructured, and exploratory. Recently, however, a rapprochement has gained momentum as professional philosophers increasingly turned to design as a central object of inquiry, while design researchers have become more attuned to philosophical debates, engaging in interdisciplinary collaborations that have influenced both fields. This convergence has been visible in academic publications, such as Bloomsbury's book series *Designing in Dark Times* and *Beyond the Modern*, among other venues. The



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Design Research Society (DRS) conference, one of the foremost platforms in design research, has also consistently supported philosophically oriented work, not least through the society's associated journals – currently *Designing*, published in partnership with Sage.

Yet as this convergence intensifies, so too can the conceptual horizons of design philosophy narrow. Much of the dialogue has relied on a relatively limited set of philosophical frameworks, often rooted in North Atlantic and Anglophone traditions. While these contributions have been invaluable, they could also inadvertently lead to a premature calcification of the field, in which certain questions, methods, and references harden into dominance, while others remain peripheral or unheard. This theme track responds to this tendency by seeking to soften rigidities and foster expansion towards a more plural and responsive field.

2. Beyond canon: pluralising design philosophy

Design philosophy ought to be considered a contested field, as it has always had a more diverse and expansive lineage than is often acknowledged. Across different regions, languages, and intellectual traditions, design has been intertwined with distinct cosmologies, ethical systems, and ways of knowing. These traditions have not merely supplemented design; they have fundamentally shaped its practices and meanings. This is evident throughout the history of design, for instance, in the work of Italian Radicals such as Ugo La Pietra and his engagement with Guy Debord's Situationist work. It is also reflected in Flávio de Carvalho's dress reform proposals, attuned to the Brazilian climate and culture and informed by the anthropophagic ideas of Oswald de Andrade.

To 'amplify the unheard' is therefore not simply to add new voices to an existing conversation, but to question the terms of the conversation itself. It involves recognising that what counts as philosophy, what counts as design, and how the two relate are historically contingent and culturally situated. It also requires confronting the structural conditions that have limited participation in these debates: linguistic barriers, institutional inequalities, uneven access to resources, and the enduring legacies of colonialism.

In this sense, the track aligns with broader critical movements within design that challenge Eurocentric modernism, anthropocentrism, and patriarchal assumptions in their entanglements. At the same time, it seeks to move beyond mere critique toward constructive pluralism – toward a field in which multiple genealogies can coexist, intertwine, and transform one another.

3. An emblem of multiplicity and displacement

As an emblem for this call, we chose the *Tupinambá* feather cloak (Figure 1). This extraordinary artefact was created by one of the Indigenous peoples of what is now Brazil, but it had been housed in Denmark since at least 1689 until recently. It stands not only as a testament to sophisticated material and symbolic practices but also as a witness to histories of violence, displacement, and resilience.

Repatriated to the Brazilian government a few years ago, the cloak embodies both return and unresolved tension. While its physical relocation marks a significant gesture of

reparation, Indigenous communities continue to contest its institutional framing and advocate for forms of reappropriation that exceed museum display. The cloak thus exists in a state of ongoing negotiation between visibility and erasure, recognition and appropriation.

The visual motif used in our call for papers – the cloak shown from multiple perspectives – stages these ambiguities. It invites us to consider how objects, like ideas, reveal different aspects depending on how they are approached. What withdraws from one angle may disclose itself from another; what has been overlooked may emerge through a shift in perspective. At the same time, the turning cloak evokes histories of silencing and alienation that have shaped the production and reception of knowledge.

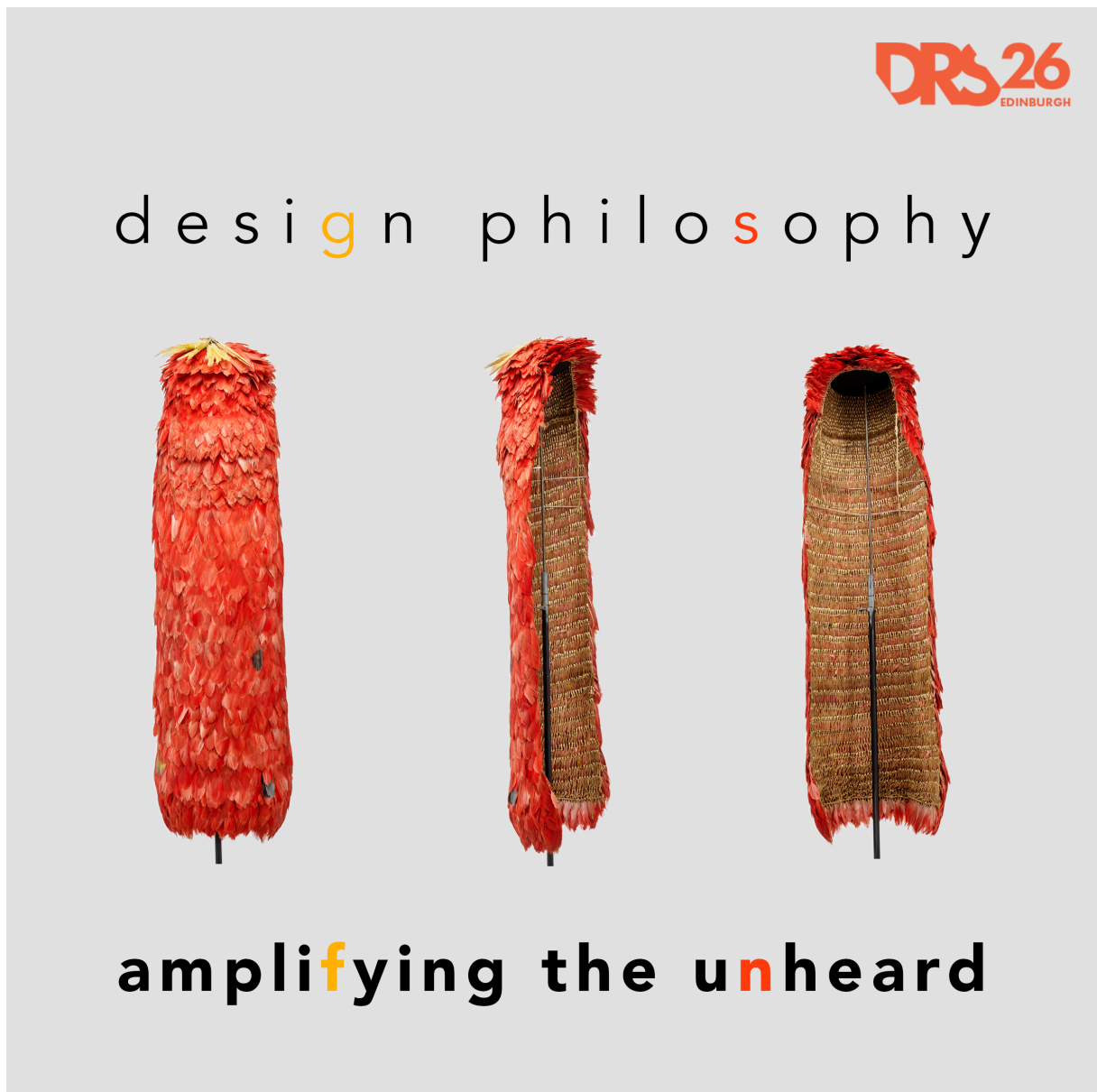


Figure 1 Tupinambá feather cloak (16th–17th century). Repatriated through donation by the National Museum of Denmark to the National Museum of Brazil, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). Photography by Roberto Fortuna / National Museum of Denmark, CC BY-SA.

In this sense, the cloak is not merely illustrative, but methodological: a materialised form of philosophical inquiry that asks us to displace perspectives, to re-examine institutions, and to listen carefully to emerging and ongoing manifestations.

4. Amplifying voices, reconfiguring conditions

The contributions gathered in this track reflect a deliberate effort to create space for voices that are often underrepresented in academic discourse. This includes not only scholars working in or on regions outside the Global North, but also those in less resource-intensive research environments, as well as early-career researchers whose perspectives may not yet be fully recognised.

Amplification, however, is not a neutral act. It requires critical attention to the conditions under which voices are heard, interpreted, and valued. It also demands reflexivity from those who curate and mediate these spaces. Therefore, we understand here the act of amplifying as a political act, conscious of its own structural limitations and of the politics of translation it involves. As organisers, our role has been to facilitate conditions for this process, not to define its outcomes or presume to 'give voice' to others. In this effort, we are extremely grateful not only to the authors who submitted their work but also to the generous contributions of peer reviewers, whose collegial, constructive, and incisive feedback has significantly strengthened the submissions. Their efforts exemplify the collaborative ethos that this track seeks to foster.

In this sense, we do not seek here to propose a modern taxonomy of un(der)heard voices; rather, we envision a constellation of contributions emerging through fragmentary, non-homogenous lineages of correspondences and connections. This approach allows this non-uniformity of voices, or heteroglossia, to be activated across and beyond the order of the proposed sessions, enabling new meanings to form through interaction across the contributions that follow.

4.1 Session 1

- Yaw Ofosu-Asare's *Reading against the grain* reconfigures first-year design education by embedding African philosophies – Ubuntu, Sankofa, and rhythm – not as content but as infrastructural principles. Through a studio-based study, the paper demonstrates how relationality, temporal recursion, and collective memory can transform learning environments, shifting them from competitive individualism toward collaborative and iterative practices.
- Andjela Bisevac's *Beyond the menace of the gaze* explores Alexander McQueen's fashion philosophy and challenges Western notions of the gaze as alienating. Drawing on Japanese philosophical concepts of emptiness, the paper interprets McQueen's work as a material discourse that moves from confrontation to relationality, offering a nuanced account of visibility, identity, and embodiment.
- Nicolas Marechal's *Rethinking our relationship with technology through the translation of a film prop* engages with Science and Technology Studies through an unexpected lens: a film prop from *Full Metal Jacket*. By treating training as a

mediating force between user and technology, the paper proposes a reconfiguration of smart technologies that transcends conventional material or moral frameworks.

- Carlos Henrique Araujo de Aguiar's *Opening portals to the posthuman* introduces a pedagogical framework based on Speculative and Critical Design, conceptualised as 'portal-making'. Through this approach, students engage with complex philosophical themes – posthumanism, biopolitics, and ontology – by materialising abstract ideas, positioning design education as a space for critical philosophical inquiry.
- Yihui Yang and Li Zhang's *Desiring production* critiques the dominance of 'need' as the ethical foundation of design. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, the paper reframes desire as a productive and relational force, proposing an alternative ethical pathway that aligns with plural and emergent forms of subjectivity.
- Guilherme Meyer, Seher Mirza, and Raees Calafato's *Crafting savage futures* introduces translanguaging as both a linguistic and material practice. Through participatory craft projects in the Global South, the paper highlights how peripheral making can serve as a site for multilingual storytelling, identity negotiation, and speculative world-building.

4.2 Session 2

- Laura Santamaria's *Code ecologies* reclaims design as a practice of meaning-making within living systems. Drawing on biosemiotics and neuroscience, the paper argues that meaning is intrinsic to life itself, positioning design as an agent within interconnected ecologies of codes.
- Sergio Nava's *From interface to intuition* addresses the ontological shifts brought about by ambient intelligence. As interfaces dissolve, design becomes a practice of attunement, mediating relationships between human and non-human agencies in increasingly distributed systems.
- Polyana Andrade Tavares, Rodrigo Freese Gonzatto, and Frederick M.C. van Amstel's *Collective handiness in prospective design* revisits the concept of handiness through a collective lens. By incorporating the work of Brazilian philosopher Vieira Pinto, they foreground the social and infrastructural labour that underpins technological readiness, advancing a philosophy of prospective design.
- Vanessa Monna, Abhigyan Singh, and Natalia Romero Herrera's *Towards positional citizenship* proposes the concept of 'positional citizenship' to rethink political agency beyond the human. Drawing on posthuman and indigenous perspectives, the paper envisions design as a practice that makes visible and actionable the distributed agencies shaping collective life.
- Ziyang Wang's *The lustre of hands* offers a poetic yet rigorous critique of the visual bias in contemporary design. By valuing the traces of touch and time, the

paper foregrounds care, continuity, and the tactile as essential dimensions of design, with implications for sustainability and inclusion.

4 Toward plural futures

Taken together, these contributions do not converge on a single definition of design philosophy. Instead, they open multiple pathways – pedagogical, material, ecological, and political – through which the field can be reimagined. They suggest that amplifying the unheard is not simply a matter of inclusion, but of transformation; always partial, situated, and unfinished.

As we present these sessions, we hope they will not only expand the field of design philosophy but also challenge participants to continue seeking new perspectives, questioning established canons, and remaining attentive to voices not yet adequately heard, and reconsidering the very terms through which design philosophy is named and practised.

In amplifying the unheard, we do not complete a task. We embark on an ongoing process of listening, translation, and reconfiguration.

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About the Authors:

Fernando Secomandi researches the intersection of design and philosophy, with a focus on philosophy of technology, recognition theory, and intersubjective freedom mediated by technology.

Daniel Portugal is a researcher in design philosophy, exploring plural, processual, and entangled ontologies of design.

Virginia Tassinari's research investigates how philosophy can concretely support design researchers to design beyond modern, anthropocentric, colonial and patriarchal constraints.

Philippe d'Anjou is a scholar of design philosophy and ethics whose work examines the ethical nature of design, with implications for theory, education, and practice. He is the author of three books, most recently *The Adaptive Nature of Design Ethics Discourse* (2025).