

# Editorial: Design by Doing

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Iris van der Tuin

The popular literature about design, quite widely available on the World Wide Web, features a useful distinction between ‘doing by design’ and ‘design by doing’. The first slogan points at practices of following step-by-step manuals or taking tick-box approaches, the second at working toward solutions in more messy ways. Whereas linear manuals or top-down approaches can be adjusted to local situations, the local situation itself is often a ‘meshwork’ in which conservative and innovative forces inter- and intra-act. Philosopher and artist Manuel DeLanda, who works in the field of architecture and design, differentiates between ‘self-organized *meshworks* of diverse elements’ and ‘*hierarchies* of uniform elements’ which ‘not only coexist and intermingle, [but also] constantly give rise to one another’ (DeLanda 1997: 32; emphasis in original). The slogan ‘design by doing’, read through DeLanda, incorporates both, the necessity to be critical of top-down linearity, and the celebration of the potential playfulness of bottom-up and lateral movements in the design process. Top-down linearity refers to technologies and techniques that exclude and oppress bodies that do not fit hegemonic forms and molds. DIY cultures of design, and forms of ‘critical making’, respond to such exclusion and oppression while also, and at the same time, remaining open to new opportunities and unexpected solutions.

This guest edited issue of *Somatechnics: Journal of Bodies – Technologies – Power*, titled ‘The Somatechnics of Critical Design’, reflects on, and contributes to, the critical and creative study of design. In my reading, the issue, edited by theorist Stacey Moran, associate director of the Center for Philosophical Technologies and co-director of the programme ‘Design + Society in the Netherlands’, both at Arizona State University, contributes to the tradition of academic engagement

with ‘design by doing’ for non-normative bodies and minoritised communities in particular. The issue includes feminist, queer, and trans; critical-disability; and critical-race and decolonial perspectives on the designed environment on the scales of land, city, neighborhood, and body. In addition to that, the issue adds to the hands-on mentality and creative methods of critical makers by, not only reflecting on, but also participating in, for instance, zine making and photography. As such, the guest edited issue expands the scope of interdisciplinary, interprofessional, and community-based somatechnics research and theorizing.

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There are two announcements that we would like to make as the *Somatechnics* editorial collective. First, this issue was delayed by the impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic on the higher education sector. For this delay, we would like to apologise. Second, we would like to announce that, as an editorial collective, we have published an article in the journal *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, reflecting on the conceptual, institutional, and intersubjective intersection of somatechnics and transgender scholarship. We write:

Somatechnics and trans-gender studies are about the dialoguing across human-human, human-nonhuman, natural-cultural divides that are internal or external to us, and that may be enabling or oppressive, in various milieus and environments. Such dialogue seeks to radically upset the long-treasured dichotomies of organic and technological, then and now, us and them, by occupying a space of imbrication, entanglement, and mutuality. (Janzen et al. 2020: 380)

This issue of *Somatechnics* on design, as well as our recent and forthcoming issues on data and gender (9.2), education and pedagogies (10.1), and sports (11.2–3) are part of an exercise to broaden the scope of the journal, reaching out into new themes and providing a platform for the integration of somatechnics research and theorizing into a variety of academic, professional, and activist communities, while keeping in close contact with those communities that have already found their ways to the journal (see our issues on trans film studies [9.1], HIV scholarship [10.2], and medical masculinities [11.1]). We hope that *Somatechnics* as a journal continues to benefit from, and contribute to, the generative exchanges between somatechnics and trans\* scholarship. We also hope to offer, what we called, ‘trans-substantial dialogues’ in various other fields of research, engaging in forms of “pushing [existing] arguments beyond their original problematics (both in context and communities)

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and insisting on an even deeper intersectional analysis that is responsive to anticolonial, antiracist, and critical dis/ability movements” (Janzen et al. 2020: 376).

### **References**

- DeLanda, Manuel (1997), *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, New York: Zone Books.
- Janzen, Caitlin, Holly Randell-Moon, Iris van der Tuin and Melisse Vroegindeweyj (2020), ‘On the Intersection of Somatechnics and Transgender Studies’, *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 7:3, pp. 374–382.