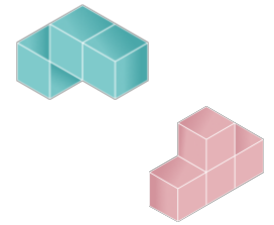# TRANSITIONAL DESIGN HISTORIES: PRESENT-ING HISTORY IN DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

In design, the big questions are typically not where we come from, but where we are heading. History, thus, rarely has a prominent place in the understandings of how, or why, design is done in certain ways. Yet, the methods, processes and ways of thinking that shape contemporary design practices have come about over time, and are thus historically constructed. This paper argues that making visible – present-ing – the historicity of designing is crucial to making visible mechanisms that work on a conceptual level of design, and that need to be addressed in the re-framing and development of emerging design approaches and practices. Taking Scandinavian user-centered (industrial) design as an example, I suggest a shift in scale and perspective for making design histories that contribute to present-ing historically formed concepts and ideas in designing. This shift of scale can provide a provisional and propositional scaffolding to activate an awareness of how – and why – designing has been formed over time. Making histories of designing that start on the scale of concepts, can highlight contexts, practices and approaches that expand contemporary understandings of what design might become.

INTRODUCTION

Industrial design is oriented towards the future, envisioning and proposing things and actions aiming to bring about changes perceived to be 'better than' or 'preferable to' existing situations. In this kind of projection, the outlook of design is placed in present-day contexts. But the present is not only the starting point for taking off towards what is to come. It is equally a condition and a context shaped historically over years, decades, centuries, and millennia (Hendon & Massey, 2019).

The scale of time frames the outlooks of what we humans can envision of what is to come; the near or far future. Where we find ourselves, how we understand the world, the material structures that support our everyday lives: All of this has been shaped over time. The scales of time in industrial design, however, do not often stretch towards the direction of the past and the long trajectories of historical time. That perspective, instead, pertains to the field of design history.

While industrial design has its outlook honed towards the future and design history gazes towards the past, they both share a common ground in that their respective queries spring from challenges in the present.
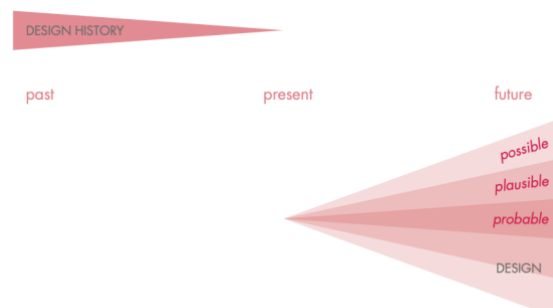

Figure 1 (adapted from Hancock & Bezold 1994): The cones of the past and of possible futures from the non-aligned outlooks of design history and design.

The above illustration of the disconnect between design and design history, is based on how the 'futures cone' is often used to describe the relationship between present situations and the futures possible to envision. From design's point of view, the line of vision opens up towards a range of futures, more or less probable, that could be made to come about through proposals and interventions made through acts of designing; through practice. Design history's outlook tends to sit in relation to design understood as a product or result of designing. This in no way means that design history only engages with 'objects' – its scope is much wider than so. Contemporary design history critically questions both present and past understandings of design, and it does so with regard to investigating what has been regarded as practices of designing, how ideas of design have been mediated, and how consumption and everyday practices have formed understandings and meaning-making in the field of design.

These diagrams build on taxonomies established in futurology, taking on the form of a cone that expands and broadens from a point in the present towards futures that range between probable, possible, potential and preferable (Henchey 1978; Hancock & Bezold 1994). Depending on choices made and actions taken in the present, the idea is that the line of vision opens up towards a range of possibilities, among which what is 'preferable' can be called into question in different ways. These cones of potential futures have become fairly frequently used to visualize and critically discuss how to handle complex issues of possibility and preferability in relation to futuring (Dunne & Raby 2013) and de-futuring (Redström 2017) in design. In these projections, however, the past is all but invisible.

My proposal is that history would need to be made more present in designing, and that this opens up spaces for thinking otherwise about futures in terms of possibility and preferability (Abdullah 2017). This present-ing of history can speak to to temporality, extending explorations of designing in time to considering time in experiences and impacts of design in scales of everything from seconds to centuries (Hendon & Massey, 2019). Another way to make history present would be to go about the making of design histories with the aim of drawing forth the historicity of design itself: of the ways of thinking and working that are so fundamental to ideas of what design 'is', that they are more or less taken for granted. These design histories do not aim to describe what design is or has been, but instead aim to probe what design could become if we could think or approach it otherwise.

Present-ing history in design through investigations of core concepts that frame and ground much of contemporary design practice and design inquiry, two things follow: One is that other events, situations, things and contexts will be highlighted as relevant to understanding design in the present. The other is that such design histories are transitional (Göransdotter 2020), in that they scaffold other outlooks on contemporary issues in design through re-framing the outlook of design history from a conceptual level.

HISTORIES OF WHAT?

When industrial design once was called into being, much attention was focused on questioning what things should look and be like, and what the relationship between designing and production should be. With time, a wide range of methods, tools and processes for designing have been developed to allow industrial design to take on challenges that changes in materials, technologies, and societal structures have brought to design and to the situations in which designing takes place. Throughout these transformations, designing has always been about making things as much as about developing ways of designing that support handling changes in the present and proposing alternatives and futures that could be both possible and somehow also preferable to strive towards. (Sanders & Stappers 2014).

Questions of what designing can be have thus increasingly moved towards issues of process and practice. In developing theories and practices within designing, this has shifted the emphasis to *how* design should be done – in which constellations, with which methods – to support transformations, rather than beginning with questions of *what* design results or design objects should be like. How, for example, do situations of designing relate to situations of use, and how would open-ended processes of designing work, where there might be no definitive beginnings or endings of design projects or no clear boundaries between 'designers' and 'users'? (Giaccardi & Redström 2020; Le Dantec & DiSalvo 2013; Björgvinsson 2008).

The purpose of making design histories from the viewpoints of contemporary core concepts in designing is therefore not a matter of tracing the geneaology of the design profession, of certain methods, or of specific ways of working in designing. It is more of an archeology of ideas and approaches that have shaped the methods, tools and processes introduced into designing – investigating the contexts and situations that have called for establishing certain ways of doing design. Framing design histories in light of the historicity of how contemporary design concepts have emerged and become established provides a scaffolding for seeing other potential futures (Hunt 2020). Following Hunt's proposal of a scalar framing that opens up new perspectives and possibilities of addressing a problem or situation, when changing the scales design historical studies, the questions posed will change, as will the conceptual spaces that become visible. From a perspective of investigating how core concepts and

foundational practices have entered and formed designing, the inquiry becomes redirected from what it is that design makes, to questioning what it is that makes design.

HISTORIES FROM WHERE?

As industrial design has shifted and expanded its field of interest towards inquiring into processes of designing, the orientation towards design understood as products is still quite prominent in design history. This does not mean that design history is only interested in objects or things. Indeed, critical approaches in design history open up for understanding design things and design practices in relation to contexts of the past as well as in light of present-day issues with regard to production, consumption and mediation, and to processes of the creation of meaning and value. (Julier et al. 2019; Margolin 2015; Maffei 2009).

Handling complexities in various ways in order to find a space from where to aim for a preferable future, is at the core of design. Thus, inherent to design are fluid and changing approaches to its own practice as well as to the definitions of what 'design' can be. Johan Redström (2017) has proposed approaching definitions of 'design' as a fluid and continuous spectrum spanning between what 'a design' could be to what 'designing' is understood to be. In this spectrum, or scale, ideas and definitions of what design 'is' work simultaneously and interconnectedly on different levels: from particulars, such as products, to the scale of paradigms formed and forming certain ideas and world views of design that are more or less expressly articulated as 'universal' or 'general'—not in the sense of being universally valid, but in the sense of having a strong impact on and central position in understandings of what designing is about.

Figure 2 (adapted from Redström 2017, p 39): Design understood fluidly, as a spectrum ranging between the particular and the general.

My point here, is not that design history would deal only with objects – but rather that design history often looks towards the past from an object-oriented *position*. The questions design history grapples with critically engage with matters of design in terms of meanings and concepts, practice and profession. It does so from positions of questioning, amongst other, what design things might be, and what kinds of understandings of design could be sparked from considering things differently – or different things – in making design

histories (e.g. Attfield 2000; Fallan 2019; Huppatz 2020)

In much of current design research and contemporary design practice, the outlook from which questions are raised and probed is predominantly one that is *positioned* in designing as practice: By means of what kinds of methods could design address complex contemporary and emerging challenges? What would design processes look like, to allow working from a non-anthropocentric standpoint?

As design situations change, the ways designing is done also need to change. With design moving into other fields than those from which it once sprang, questions arise that at once radically and gradually will affect the core concepts in design. What is it to work with 'form-giving' – one of the very foundations from which designing has sprung – when 'form' becomes intangible, experiential and temporally fleeting rather than material, physical and lasting? Or, in a design approach such as user-centered design: how should the designer's intent weigh against users' influence on design decisions? How should design situations be set up to open up for broad participation in designing and use by not only 'users', but for broader understandings of stakeholders and situations before, during and after designing taking place?

In design's transformation, there has over time been a continuous development of methods, processes and concepts in designing that are anything but stable over time. In making histories that speak to this changing character of design and designing, there a stable definition of design would not be the starting point. Instead, the outlook of design history shifts to a position that takes on view-points of concepts and ideas that shape the ways designing currently is done.

This way of thinking of 'design' is "not to be read as a shift from design as a thing on one end to design as activity on the other, but rather as the span between a distinct outcome and the overall effort that produces such outcomes." (Redström 2017, p. 39). Instead of contributing to accounting for past practices that could affirm or dispute definitions of design and designing, the scope here is to make histories that contribute to expanding the conceptual spaces of thinking and doing design.

By shifting the outlook of design history from product to process – from things to thinking – foundational concepts and central methods in design become key to explore. This shift of position, in which design histories can provide a sort of provisional and propositional scaffolding (Hunt 2020) that activates an awareness of how – and why – the ways we design have been formed over time. Transitional design histories aim to engage in a continued re-positioning of perspectives on what is

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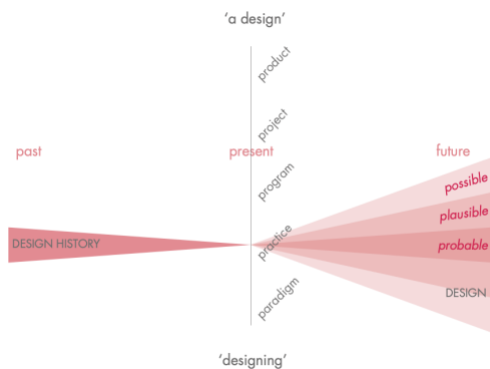perceived as relevant, and difficult, in present design situations.

Figure 3 Bringing toether the outlooks of design history and design.

When transitional design histories are made from other perspectives, from designing, what seems relevant for us to pay attention to in the past will change as will the methods applied to probe new aspects of making histories. The 'transition' intended is thus not meant to be a passage from one clearly defined state or practice to another, or from a 'now' to a 'then,' but something more akin to a quality or a logic in how this sort of history proposes to work.

The above illustrations of the cone of potential futures and its relation to the histories of design are built around the idea of gazing in a certain direction, from a particular point that gives a specific perspective allowing some things and not others to come into view. Taking a perspective on something has to do with several things: Where we place ourselves in order to look at something, what we use to help us look. A perspective, historically, was a sort of telescope – something to look through that made it possible to see distant things up close. What a perspective enables us to see and how we then represent and handle that which was previously hidden from sight, varies depending on what types of lenses we apply.

What is possible or not to see depends on how wide or narrow the frame of vision becomes when applying a perspective, and where the focus point of the perspective as lens lies. As the intention of transitional design histories is to contribute to critically exploring what design could become through activating an awareness of design's historicity, the shift in perspective here consists of applying historical lenses from a position in contemporary designing, shifting both frame

of vision and focus in regard to what sorts of histories to go looking for.

From a position in present-day designing, looking to the past through the lenses of core concepts and methods in current design, this will bring into view ideas, practices and contexts within cultural and societal agendas that not only have allowed but perhaps also pushed for certain types of design practices to take form (Göransdotter & Redström 2018). But we might also see what that means for the limits these ways of doing design carry with them in the situations they are expected to address, and in terms of the norms and values that shaped them and that now might be perpetuated through design.

PRODUCTS AND PRACTICES: AN EXAMPLE FROM SWEDISH USER-CENTERED DESIGN

What would change, then, if one were to shift the outlook of design histories towards practices rather than products, working with illuminating core concepts in contemporary designing? To give a very brief example, let us consider the user-centered design approaches that have held a strong presence in the Scandinavian industrial design context that I am a part of, and how histories of these have so far been narrated.

Considering that user-centered design has had a quite substantial impact in Sweden – and in the kinds of designing that have continued to build on approaches of 'Scandinavian user-centered and participatory design' – it might be somewhat surprising to note that Swedish design histories do not to any prominent extent include narratives of user-centered design. While collaborative and user-centered designing brought about the exploration and invention of new methods and different processes in design, the considerations of what that meant for developments in designing are relatively invisible in a Swedish design historical context.

Even in cases where the "common knowledge" is that the period between 1960 and 1980 was one when designers increasingly begin to develop new methods for understanding and working with users, the processual, conceptual and methodological perspectives on design as design*ing* are rarely present. While ergonomic or design-for-all-aspects are indeed included in some in Swedish design histories, the focus is rather on the formgiving of products that came out of these processes, and not on methods development of collaborative designing or what that meant for changes in design practices.

At design consultancies such as Stockholm-based Ergonomi Design Gruppen, explorations of new methods for designing together with people emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The work carried out,

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for example, together with 'disabled' people in the development of different aids and tools, led to the introduction of user-centered methods in designing tools also for professional use. In the mid-1970s, a series of screwdrivers was redesigned with a starting point in ergonomic user studies and interviews with people working professionally with these tools. Using video filming, different work situations were studied and analysed, and iterative prototyping then took place together with users in regard to grips, torques, and handle sizes.

This way of working with users at Ergonomi Design Gruppen is described by Swedish design historian Lasse Brunnström as a "tangible work method with consumers as co-creators in the design process [that] shall be seen as a further development of the 1940s Swedish tradition of consumer research." (Brunnström 1997, 302) While noting this longer historical trajectory of the emergence of new design methods, the shift in design practice brought about in working with users is not further highlighted in this Swedish design history publication, besides stating that it has "given exceptionally good results, but at the price of both time-consuming work and high costs." Risks with the process are noted, such as designers possibly nudging "test persons" in desired design directions, or that the methods might entail the designer abdicating from "design responsibility and simply give people what they want". (Brunnström 1997, 321)

Similarly, design historian Kerstin Wickman also does bring attention to the rise of ergonomics in Swedish industrial design in her history over the design consultancy A&E (Wickman 2018). Against a background of the crafts-based and traditional Swedish design education of the 1950s and 1960s, she highlights the dissatisfaction and critique among young designers that surfaced as critiques of the roles of designers in relation to social responsibility. While the publication does pay a good deal of attention to design processes from the perspective of form work, and different stages of iterative prototyping of products in relation to ergonomics, materials and production techniques, there is hardly any mention of what the new user-centered methods for designing entailed.

Overviews of Swedish industrial design point to the 1970s turn towards 'design for the disabled' or 'design for all' as important for establishing ergonomics and inclusion as central aspects of Swedish design. Examples presented are mainly everyday utensils such as knives and forks designed for disabled persons, and screwdrivers or other ergonomic hand tools for professionals. Products tend to be described as things in which the aspects of "function" and "aesthetics" came together, for example in "handicap adapted products", which would make these suited to "everyone". With the focus on design as products rather than as process, in

the turn towards 'design for all' these are presented as designers' reactions to broader societal issues and discussions on equality, democracy and critiques of consumption. Simultaneously, and perhaps sometimes more explicitly, the formal qualities of these designed object are emphasised from a perspective of their having been "awarded design prizes and are exhibited in design museums around the world, not least because they, besides being ergonomically functional, have had a beautiful form." (Brunnström 1997, 321)

In the focus on design as materiality, as actions of continuity and disruption in form, design's history is largely approached from a form-giving point of view. In these Swedish design histories, the changes in process and perspective in designing brought about when developing methods for user-centered design is, at best, touched upon in relation to ergonomic design and design for all. Overall, what comes across in this historical account is a strong emphasis on the role that work-life ergonomics, safety and security perspectives and design for disabilities have had on Swedish design. This is of course a valid account in many ways. The innovative design and engineering work carried out in this context are undisputable – but in telling the story in this way, a blind eye is turned to what contexts and design situations have brought in terms of opening up new spaces for design, and new methods and practices through formulating ideas of 'design' and 'use' through practice. How ideas of 'use' and 'users' have entered into design practices, adapting methods, tools and processes brought in from other fields into the realm of designing, will not very easily be visible in histories of design that have the main emphasis on design as result or product.

As research and approaches in user-centered and participatory design have continued to evolve, one of its core concepts seems to have become increasingly difficult to handle: that of the 'user'.(Ahmed 2019; Ebbesen 2019; Redström 2008). In participatory user-centered design, conceptual difficulties also emerge when collaboration in designing take on formats that blur the boundaries between 'designers' and 'users' – not only in terms of roles, power, expertise and accountability but also in terms of non-human agency in designing (Forlano 2017).

Despite, or perhaps because of, its centrality to many methods and orientations in design, who or what a 'user' is in regard to roles and agency in designing is not at all very straightforward. As design moves into situations that are not clearly defined as to when designing starts and ends, the 'use' designed for is neither easily attributed to a single context, a stable technology, nor to a readily defined type of profession or group of people. Who the 'user' might be, what 'use'

will entail, and how it might change over time is, therefore, becoming increasingly hard to say.

At the same time, many of the methods and tools adopted within user-centered designing continue to form central components in emerging practices that aim to challenge generalizing, instrumentalist and anthropocentrinc ideas in 'user'-centered designing. Design histories that could support shedding new light on the historicity of conceptual components embedded in ways of thinking and doing design, therefore, would need to engage with design*ing* in order to probe what this means for shaping or limiting emerging practices.

Shifting the outlook towards histories of user-centered Swedish design from a perspective of practice, I have previously explored what might become visible in applying the concept of "use" (Göransdotter 2020, 135-201). In a study of 1940s Sweden and the programme of designing a new type of welfare state – materially as well as ideally – I investigated how the concept of 'use' emerged in so-called dwelling-habit investigations.
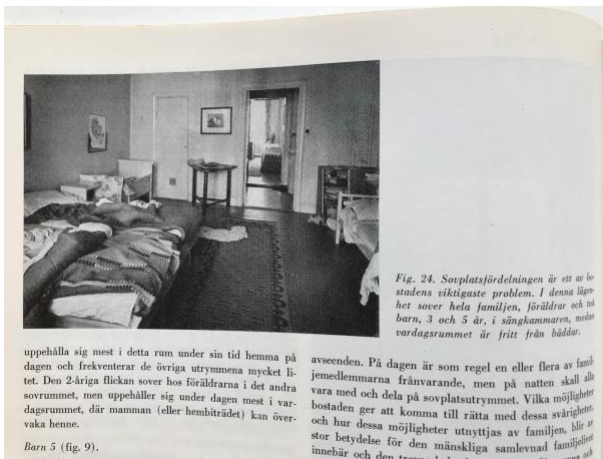

Figure 4. A 'voluntary overcrowding' illustrating a mismatch between intended and actual use, from a dwelling survey conducted in the early 1940s and published as *Bostadsvanor och bostadsnormer* (1964). A family of 4 all sleep in one room, while the parlor remains un-used on a daily basis.

These were studies of ordinary people's everyday life conducted with the aims of improving the design of dwellings as well as the design of furniture and household objects. In surveys, interviews and observations the interiors of Swedish families' homes were documented in writing as well as in images and plan drawings, and the main question of the surveys revolved around 'use': How and where did people sleep, eat, do homework, listen to the radio, carry out chores or just spend time together? What kinds of things did they have in their homes, and how were they used on a daily basis?

The concept of use, as approached in the context of dwelling surveys and home reform, was formed in a historical situation where the explicit intention was to enable certain ways of using the home, while disabling others, through design. Simultaneously, active efforts were made to shape the ways people lived on an everyday basis by initiating broad educational programs that targeted the consumption of certain things and specific ways to use them. This goes both for the instrumental or rational use tied to enabling or fostering a particular individual behaviour in relation to specific things or environments, and for a more collective and systemic design program aiming to bring about new norms, practices and socio-material (infra)structures that would support new ways of life.

The case study of applying the concept of 'use' in making a transitional design history of 1940s home and furniture design provided a backdrop for the understanding certain mechanisms that shaped the latter emergence of Scandinavian user-centered and participatory design. Articulations of ideas of 'use' and 'users' in design came forth in activities aiming to address housing issues and reforms of everyday practices. In this process, the tensions between design intent and real use came to be explicitly considered and addressed, in ways that might also provide entry points to reflecting on how to negotiate the inherent tensions between ideal and real, potentiality and actuality, embedded in concepts and methods associated with contemporary user-centered designing.

Applying the concept of 'use' in design not only requires attention to the process and future proposed situations of design in regard to the expectations or limitations envisioned in future use. Going back to the historical contexts in which ideas of 'use' became important to address in the process of designing, one can argue that the concepts of 'use' and 'user' will most likely always come with embedded understandings and mechanisms of intentionality and limitation in regard to what 'use' can be. Rather than trying to find ways to upheave or dismantle perceived problems associated with dichotomies such as designer-user, or intended use-actual use, we might approach these inherent conflicts historically embedded within the concept of 'use' as that which might make it possible to create openings for thinking and doing things differently.

PROTOTYPING HISTORIES

One way of scaffolding an awareness of design's historicity, is through approaching design histories as suggestions for a way of seeing design rather than as accounts of what design actually is or has been. This means that design histories, as sketched in the very brief above example, can be made and handled as prototypes in a way similar to how prototyping is applied in iterative and explorative manners in design and design research. Following this, histories made as prototypes must be open, possible to adjust and change after trying them out, but still solid enough to be able to provide a

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certain functionality or experience that allows for specific aspects of an idea or a proposal to be investigated.

Prototypes can be made in different degrees of fidelity and finish, choosing materials and assemblies to make them look or work similarly or the same as a finished version would. The prototypes made in this study were made to look and work as histories, as historical representations. That these prototypes have worked as histories seems reasonable enough, but the question is if they work as transitional design histories? For that to be the case, these histories would have activated an awareness of design's historicity in designing, provided openings towards thinking and doing design differently, and also themselves be open to shifting and changing as designing changes.

Taking historical perspectives on concepts and methods at the core of designing today, it becomes clear that design's foundations are not all that stable as they sometimes might seem to be. (Redström 2017) What also comes across, is that ideas and practices have come into design at certain points in time that have contributed to forming embedded concepts and methods that design still uses, but without there being an awareness of what this historical layering implies for designing.

The proposal that design histories should be made as prototypes that are open and changing largely springs out of an attention to the conceptual foundations of designing and their inherent instabilities. Since design is directed towards change, and based in conceptual foundations that themselves are fluid and unstable, design histories that aim to support such change must also themselves be unstable and open to change. This means that transitional design histories will need to change in relation to designing, in response to what the conceptual foundations seem to be and how activating an awareness of design's historicity could open up for seeing certain situations and practices differently.

INSTABILITIES AND POSSIBILITIES

Turning a historical attention towards designing, and using concepts as lenses for the analysis, central concepts in design can come actively into view as not only 'being there,' but actually 'having become' what they are at certain points in time, and over time. With time, however, they change form and shift meaning, as ideas proposing new understandings or practices play into defining the concept. Activating the historicity of designing thus also activates the instabilities that design necessarily has to work with, if the ambition is to not only replicate the existing but to make possible understanding how designing could be something different.

Approaching design histories as transitional aims to highlight what it could mean for design that several of its core concepts – use, participation, and even the concept of 'design' itself – are anything but stable, temporally as well as situationally. As design moves in different directions, the outlooks from designing towards relevant histories also changes. In working with instability rather than solidity, questions rather than definitions can support in finding historical instances that shed light on why certain aspects of designing are difficult to handle given the concepts and methods we have at hand.

Through histories that address the historicity of designing, values and world views embedded in design's foundations can be drawn forth in terms of their capacity to respond to issues at hand. In order to work towards doing design in ways that make other futures possible than ones that are visible from our current perspective of practice, design's conceptual foundations will necessarily need to change. In tackling issues of living together, sharing resources and making decisions in ways different from those that have been guided by the logics of progress, industrialism and consumerism, design needs to change (Escobar 2018; Fry 2019). For this, the frameworks and world views governing how design is understood and practiced also need to change. (Willis 2006). An awareness of design's historicity can open up other understandings of what is made possible in design – in terms of proposing changes of how design could be done differently.

In contemporary and emerging design practices that emphasise the need for design-driven change towards more sustainable futures (eg. participatory design, transition design, design for social innovation), a foundational idea is that power needs to be redistributed and renegotiated on global as well as local scales of designing. Transition design, for example, aims to change postures and mindsets, activating participatory design practices in new ways of designing that can support behavioural change on individual levels as well as systemic and values-based changes in order to create conditions for a sustainable and resilient society. (Kossoff et al. 2015; Tonkinwise 2019; Irwin 2019) The perspectives applied in transition design bring together multiple disciplines and practices, emphasising that transitions towards sustainment are complex processes that take time – and that fundamentally need to actively work with changing ways of thinking. These are by no means easy things to address. Bringing the historicity of design concepts to the fore will not in any way resolve these difficulties. But what it can contribute with is an awareness of how such negotiations between prescribing and making possible, limiting and opening up designing, have been formed historically and how the historicity of these concepts is at work in contemporary and emerging design practices.

Different complex design decisions and programmatic ambitions will necessarily bring about conflicting agendas on both practical and project levels when we try to design differently. Over time, as other design practices emerge, the design histories that resonate with these will also need to change if they are to be meaningful for design. From what we see and where we stand, then, practices of designing will probably call for yet other histories. In some parts, they will build on previous design histories: in other aspects, the histories we make will need to be completely different in order to contribute something for design – and also to the histories of what becomes design. Activating historicity in design through the making of transitional design histories aims towards opening up conceptual spaces for thinking and doing design differently.
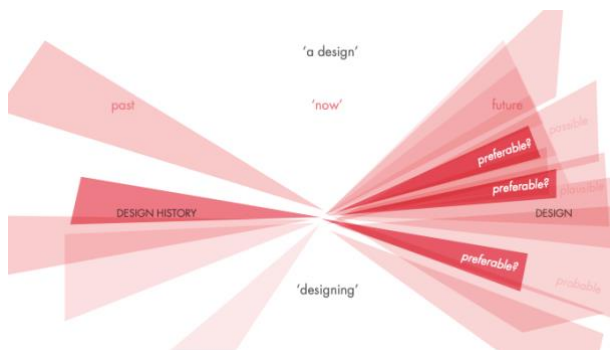

Figure 5. Different perspectives in the present, connecting to various trajectories of possible pasts, make many potential futures visible and can highlight questions of what is preferable for whom, for what, and for what scale of future vision.

These other outlooks can in turn make it possible to think and see in directions that open up for other potential futures. In this, transitional design histories that work as prototypes help us to understand how our present once might have been an unthinkable future. Activating the scales of temporality, where the past and the future are enmeshed in the present makes a difference for how possibilities in design are envisioned. What might have seemed unreasonable or less-than-plausible routes to take towards the future, can be re-considered in the light of historical time, from conceptual perspectives.

PASTS, PRESENTS, FUTURES

History is made by people. We make it through the way we choose to remember the past, and how we choose to tell stories of it – which is often that which we think of as 'history'. But we make history in many more ways than that. Everything we make and put in the world becomes history that shapes our ideas of the past as well as our understandings of the present. How we think, how we behave, how we relate to each other – in short,

how we live our everyday lives and how we make sense of the world – is thoroughly conditioned by the historical materiality of what we have around us.

As Clive Dilnot (2015) has pointed out, we now find ourselves in a situation where human activity has brought about a state where it is the artificial that conditions existence – human as well as non-human. But design is not only – or even primarily – about making things that take on material presence in our lives. Even more, design is about proposing that things could be otherwise. It is about proposing that we could do things differently: there could be other things that support us living our lives, but above all, there could be different ways to think about what it means to live life.. The ways of living that we can envision are dependent on where we stand, and what we can see from that point of view. If we are to make it possible to see other things, think other thoughts, propose other futures, we need to move to other places that allow for other lines of sight. Purposely re-forming design on the scale of its categories and concepts, could open up new conceptual spaces for actually making different futures both visible and possible.

With this, then, the proposals for what to take action on in the present, given different trajectories possible to discern from the past to our 'now', will also be different. This view continues to change as design's contexts, outlooks, practices and histories change in relation to each other. Different pasts lead to different presents, from which the perspectives on potential futures can be turned in several different directions, depending on where we are able to find footing stable enough to provide a different outlook.

In activating design history in the drawing up of trajectories towards possible futures for design, comes responsibilities of ensuring that the outlooks towards pasts as well as towards futures encompass as many aspects as possible. Even if we cannot unmake what has once been made, we can at least do our best to avoid repeating or reinforcing structures and attitudes that further ways of being we actually wish to leave behind. To not end up following trajectories that lead towards defuturing, increased unsustainment, or continued inequity and inequality, the past trajectories that point in those directions need to be challenged through finding other possible histories that re-direct the paths visible to take from here. The futures possible to discern from situated understandings of the present, of the 'now', depend on where that 'now' comes from. The more present positions from where to see different pasts, the broader and more divergent the outlooks towards the future can be. Activating different histories will expand and make a bigger 'now', needed to propose plural potential ways of moving towards other design practices.

The ways designing is done – and by/with whom – will necessarily change, as will the outlooks towards what could be relevant histories for making preferable futures (Lindström & Ståhl 2016). And as design always takes place in the present, in a 'now', the future previously envisioned will eventually become a new 'now'. From there, what becomes visible – in the past, in the present, and as potential futures – will lead to yet other probings into the conceptual foundations of designing.

Even if certain of the foundational concepts in design might seem stable and constant, and even sometimes a-historical, they do change over time – and they *can* be changed. Through present-ing assumptions and ideas that form these conceptual spaces for designing, it is also possible to address aspects of historicity of the very ways of thinking that guide the choices of what to do, and how to do it, in design.

What it is that we take for granted and what we challenge in design differs depending on the scale and scope of what we make visible in the process. If the conceptual foundations on which design methods and processes are built begin to increasingly be in conflict with emerging understandings governing situations in which design takes place, it is precisely this that calls for a need to explore this in terms of historicity and to call new practices of design into being. (Boehnert 2014)

Unpacking the ideological contents and historical contexts embedded in current designing supports conscious and critical approaches in rethinking and developing existing and emerging design practices. It is crucial that an awareness of design's historicity can support unlearning and unmaking some of the methods, concepts and processes that designing historically was built around (Jones 1980) .This will unavoidably bring about other relationships, other priorities, and thus other dilemmas into designing.

Though history seemingly is about the past, it always has to do with what is relevant and meaningful in the present. The stories we make in the present – the enacted narratives about who 'we' are, what 'we' expect in life, and what futures 'we' aim for – are all shaped by the stories told about the past. Changing the stories we tell about what 'the present' is and where it comes from supports changing how and on what we choose to take action in negotiating what design could actually be making possible *now*. Making things possible, however, is not the same as making things become a reality. The actions and choices that are made based on what could be are always anchored in particular ways of thinking and understanding the world – in certain concepts that guide our interpretations, that form our actions, and that make certain paths more likely to be taken than others.

Making transitional design histories is one way of shifting perspectives not only on, but in, the present.

Making many, and other, potential futures come into sight requires creating spaces for a more multi-faceted and diverse 'now.' Many potential pasts speak to many potential understandings of what 'now' could be. This making of a bigger 'now' does not mean including as many perspectives as possible. Going to the etymology of the word, to 'include' originally means 'shutting in' or 'imprisoning'. Rather than shutting in diverse perspectives in a position where their outlooks converge into one, the ambition with prototyping multiple pasts is the drawing forth of many possible trajectories, through multiple presents, towards divergent potential futures.
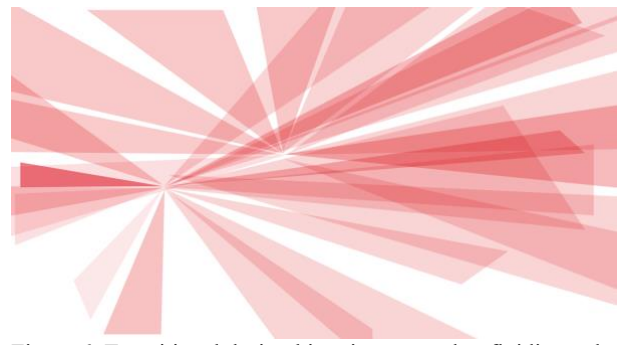

Figure 6. Transitional design histories respond to fluidity and change, scaffolding conceptual spaces for thinking and doing design differently.

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