PRIVILEGED PARTICIPATION: DESIGN, ALLYSHIP AND DECOLONIALITY

CONTROVERSIES

DIMEJI ONAFUWA

SCHOOL OF DESIGN, CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY, USA

DIMEJI@ CMU.EDU

DYNAMICS

JOSHUA D BLOOM

SCHOOL OF DESIGN, CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY, USA

JABE @ CMU.EDU

ABSTRACT

This intensive three-hour workshop will engage participants in exploring **the role of the design community in platforming allyship** at the intersections of coloniality, race, and culture in contemporary society, and in light of our current sociopolitical climate.

INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in our current sociopolitical climate have led to entrenched factions around racial and cultural hegemony. We see evidence of this polarity in the design discourse. While some scholars and practitioners are convinced by the imperative to decolonize the discipline, a vigorous opposition remains to the notion of West-centric design as an imperial force. These positions are debated across the discipline – from design practitioners to researchers and scholars alike – occasionally to a contentious or even vitriolic level.

This shifting landscape is resulting in the need to revisit what it means to accommodate diverse voices, especially those outside what Walter Mignolo calls the "colonial matrix of power," since design as it is currently practiced is a discipline that produces modernity and enables new forms of cultural hegemony. Paraphrasing Anibal Quijano, Mignolo refers to "coloniality as the 'invisible, constitutive side of modernity,' and not merely derivative of modernity" (Mignolo 2007). This suggests that a purely modernist (or heavily West-centric) perspective of design, one excluding pluriversality (Escobar 2015), should no longer be the predominant narrative – other voices are out there and they may have been made invisible by the dominant one. As design continues to become more of a transdisciplinary practice, designers should continue to explore this idea of pluriversality. We believe that allyship is a vital component of such an exploration; one that creates spaces for other perspectives to be heard.

The goal of this workshop is to engage designers in this discourse on decoloniality by providing platforms for identifying and addressing what may be perceived as forms of oppression. The workshop seeks to give participants an opportunity to reflect on and respond to scenarios drawn from experiences around gender, sexism, racism, and xenophobia. Participants will engage in groups and explore three frames: activism, advocacy, and allyship. Insights gained from reflection, discussion and mapping are immediately applied to future visions. This structure will allow the workshop organizers to learn from the participants' experiences and actively guide them to discovering new insights on these issues.

WORKSHOP THEMES

The workshop will explore the themes of design, allyship and power dynamics. The workshop structure is influenced by the Ally Skills Workshop created to support women facing discrimination in open technology culture, as well as from many co-design, participatory design and prototyping methods. The workshop is divided into two parts:

WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES AND FORMAT

PART 1: CONVERSATION

The first part of the workshop is a conversation on the power implications of intersectional perspectives on decoloniality in design. Facilitators will engage the audience in conversation around influences of neoliberalism and cultural capital on race, class and gender politics. Facilitators will share an overview of the concept of and challenges with allyship.

PART 2: PROMPTS, SITUATIONS AND OUTCOMES

Participants will be presented with individual scenarios representing intersectional issues relating to sexism, racism, xenophobia. Participants will also be encouraged to present cases (5 minutes each) within any of the above themes. The goal is to use these "action situations" as prompts for problem framing. Problems will be framed in groups within the following categories:

- Speech/Advocacy
- Actions/Activism
- Practice/Allyship

Through a co-design effort, participant groups will map out forms of conscious and unconscious oppression at different scales of intervention. With specific regard to platforming through design, participants will discuss how design might help make invisible components of cultural hegemony more visible.
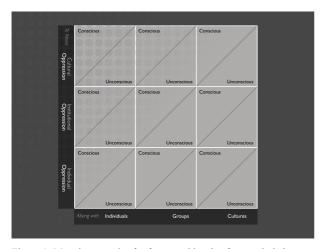

Figure 1: Mapping exercise for forms and levels of power imbalances. It is derived from the Winterhouse Symposium Social Pathways format.
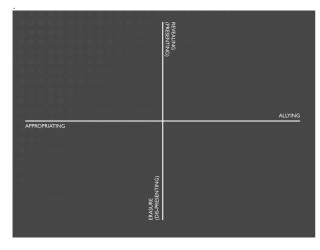

Figure 2: Two-by-two matrix for mapping the distinction between appropriation and allyship strategies in platform building.

CORE QUESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

We intend for the workshop to explore the following questions:

How might those pursuing decolonial efforts engage (or refuse) allies?

How might alliances to decolonize design and other discourses work between individuals and groups?

Who benefits from allyship, how is agency managed and negotiated in these political relationships?

What is the designer's individual responsibility (regarding Advocacy, Activism, Allyship)?

How might designers work to platform allyship?

How might neoliberal strategies perpetuate uneven power dynamics?

How might we better design our biophysical world to respond better to a conflict situation relating to this scenario?

How might future communities reflect more acceptable models of co-habitation?

Design and *Symbolic violence* (Bourdieu 2004): How might we "un-naturalize" symbolic violence in design? How can we collectively derive design principles for allyship while we remain aware of our privilege and cultural capital?

How might designers in the Global North work with victims of oppression to represent the complexity of these social problems from their privileged positions?

CONFERENCE TOPIC AND SUB THEMES

We believe that the workshop is directly relevant to the *Design and Power* conference theme. It specifically falls in the *Controversies*, and *Dynamics* thematic categories.

REFERENCES

Amatullo, M. (2014) Codifying Practices in an Emergent Space: Insights from the Leap Symposium on the New Professional Frontier in Design For Social Innovation. *Design Principles and Practices Journal Annual Review*, *7*, pp.55-67.

Gardiner, M., Aurora V., Ally Skills Workshop, (Online), Available: https://adainitiative.org/continue-our-work/workshops-and-training/ (2017).

Boehnert, J., Elzenbaumer, B. and Onafuwa, D. (2016) Design as Symbolic Violence. Design for Social Justice.

Bourdieu, P. (2004) *Gender and symbolic violence*. na.

Escobar, A. (2015) Transiciones: a Space for Research and Design for Transitions to the Pluriverse. *Design Philosophy Papers*, *13*(1), pp.13-23.

Mignolo, Walter D. (2007) "DELINKING: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality 1." *Cultural studies* 21.2-3 : 449-514.