

## Call for Chapters

### ***The Politics of Design: Privilege and Prejudice in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Canada and South Africa***

**Edited by Federico Freschi, Farieda Nazier and Jane Venis, Otago Polytechnic Press, 2021**

*‘Although design totally infuses the material fabric of the world around us, it is almost always rendered invisible by the very thing(s) it brings into being.’ – Tony Fry, 2011*

In *Design as Politics*, Tony Fry argues that in “giv[ing] material form and directionality to the ideological embodiment of a particular politics”, design must be understood as “profoundly political”. He argues further that all aspects of design that shape social and cultural experience – built environment, transport systems, information systems, infrastructure, etc. – are by their nature ideologically loaded and “predicated on how human beings should be viewed and treated”.<sup>1</sup> The longer arc of Fry’s argument is concerned with the urgent need to harness the political power of design to effect positive environmental change, a political transformation that he terms “Sustainment”. Nonetheless, his notion that “design expresses power materially and in ways that shape how people interact and ontologically prefigure their material culture”<sup>2</sup> raises provocative questions about how design has historically served to distribute and exercise power.

In seeking to understand the causes and ongoing effects of global inequality, the relationship between design and politics deserves particular scrutiny in the postcolonial context. Despite being the product of deliberate political and social intentions, successful design appears ‘natural’, its ideological biases effectively hidden in plain sight. In former settler-colonial societies, this ‘invisibility’ begs the questions of the historical complicity of design in imposing and maintaining racialised hierarchies of privilege, access, identity, and notions of ‘belonging’. While the former dominions of the British Empire, namely Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Canada and South Africa followed different paths to sovereignty, they are united by several common factors. Not least, as Annie E. Coombes argues, the ways in which white settlers dealt with indigenous peoples “is the historical factor which has ultimately shaped the cultural and political character of the new nations, mediating in highly significant ways their shared roots/routes”.<sup>3</sup>

In South Africa, the route was highly visible. Apartheid, as a deliberate system of institutionalised racism and segregation, permeated every aspect of South African political and cultural life, and its pernicious effects continue to inform the present – politically, socio-economically, and culturally. The environments and daily experiences of South Africans continue to be mediated by the long-reaching and persistent consequences of design policies implemented by apartheid urban planners, industrial designers, technocrats, architects, and ideologists. While apartheid did not exist as a political system in New

---

<sup>1</sup> Tony Fry, *Design as Politics* [E-book]. Oxford & New York: Berg, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Annie E. Coombes (ed.), *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2006, p. 2.

Zealand, Australia and Canada, all aspects of society (and by extension design) were geared to privileging European settler societies over the rights and needs of indigenous populations. This privileging of the values of the settler-colonialist is evident across the spectrum of social activity, from architecture and urban planning, to transport networks, land policies, education, health, justice, and arts and culture. Over this was laid a thin veneer of 'assimilation'; at best, a well-meaning nod to the notion of a new nationhood, but in effect a negation of the importance of indigenous cultural identity. The net result of this was a loss of land and resources that eroded the health and wellbeing of indigenous people.

In South Africa, the effects of apartheid were highly calculated, all-encompassing, and systematically designed. Examples abound: from the large-scale transformation of the demographic and geopolitical landscape through the creation of Bantustans, the Population Registration Act, the Pass Laws, and the Group Areas Act, to the valorisation of western culture at the expense of African cultural forms, to the divisive use of print media and later television to disseminate propaganda (through channels segregated according to racially specific content). This design ideology governed and disciplined everyday life. It is evident through mechanisms such as the euphemistically named 'Reference Book' (Passbook). It is in the ubiquitous 'matchbox' house of the townships; the all-male and all-female hostels of the migrant labour system; and the production of the infamous Casspir and Ratel police and military vehicles, which were designed to intimidate, surveil and frighten the civilian opposition.

Although in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and Canada design engineered for cultural separation was not part of a visible agenda as it was in South Africa, social inequalities were and are facilitated by the Western design aesthetic of the European colonial communities. In these settler-colonial contexts, design became the business of the 'civilised' settler who poured money into 'creating a home away from home.' This was supported by the annexation of Māori land in Aotearoa New Zealand through legislation passed after the Treaty of Waitangi, and in Australia and Canada by successive indigenous and first-people policies. Consequently, architecture, product and graphic design, as well as arts and culture more generally, had an overwhelmingly Eurocentric bias and were privileged over 'native crafts'. The 'native' sensibility was, in turn, exploited to betoken 'authentic' national identity when it was expedient to do so, or degraded as cheap tourist souvenirs. It is also important to note that power was not only exercised in all these contexts by privileging the colonial aesthetic, but also by defacing or removing works made by indigenous peoples.

In varying degrees, the inescapable and systemic inheritance of what was essentially racialised design continues to inform the present across these geographical locations, evading critique and hampering efforts at decolonisation. While there is a growing body of literature on the shared histories and legacies of settler colonialism in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Canada and South Africa, there is no comparative study that focuses specifically on the role of design in creating and perpetuating racial hierarchies. This book aims to redress this by raising long-overdue questions about the history and implications of design in these contexts, and its problematic legacy and effects. How were buildings, objects, visual culture and material culture implicated, and how do they continue to be implicated in the normalising racial logics of former colonial-settler societies? How were designed forms, structures, spaces and artefacts that sustained the development of these

societies entangled within – but also foundational to – the politics of obtaining and deploying power? How do these structural inequalities continue to inform design in the present and how are people experiencing the historical remnants of design?

In different ways, the essays in this volume grapple with these questions. They challenge us to think comparatively across disparate but conceptually similar geographical and cultural contexts, and enable a better understanding of the politics of design and its role in sustaining the prejudices and privileges of whiteness. In rendering visible complexities and contradictions that have long been hidden in plain sight they lay the foundation for a new kind of restorative knowledge.

==

### **Editors' biographies and contact details**

**Federico Freschi** is Professor and Head of College at Te Maru Pūmanawa | College of Creative Practice and Enterprise at Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, New Zealand . He was formerly the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Johannesburg, where he continues to have a visiting appointment as a Senior Research Associate in the NRF SARCHI Chair in South African Art and Visual Culture. Previously, he held academic positions at the Universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch, and the Witwatersrand. His primary research interest is into the political iconography of South African public buildings, with a secondary line of research into the construction of the canon of modern South African art. He has published widely on these and other subjects, most recently as co-editor (with Brenda Schmahmann and Lize van Robbroeck) of *Troubling Images: Visual Culture and the Politics of Afrikaner Nationalism* (Wits University Press, 2020). In 2016 he was the South African curator of 'Henri Matisse: Rhythm and Meaning' at the Standard Bank Gallery in Johannesburg, the first exhibition of Matisse's work on the African continent.

ORCID Id <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9515-3303>

Email: [federico.freschi@op.ac.nz](mailto:federico.freschi@op.ac.nz)

Tel: +64 (0)21 735 967

**Farieda Nazier** is a Senior Lecturer and Head of Department of Jewellery Design and Manufacture at the University of Johannesburg. As a researcher and creative practitioner, her work explores the psychological and perceptible consequences of historical legacy, memory and traces. She employs provocative sculptural and video assemblages in the form of installation art to engage in discursive opportunities within her practice. Nazier has successfully curated and participated in many art exhibitions, both locally and abroad. Most recently, she curated and produced the 'Post Present Future' intervention hosted by the Apartheid Museum, April to October 2019. In terms of choreographic practice, Nazier has performed in a range of contexts including the 56th Venice Biennale and at the FNB Art Fair (Johannesburg) in 2015. She has presented her work at Goldsmith's University (London, UK), Principia College (Elsah, USA), MCLA (Williamstown, USA) and Williams College (Williamstown, USA). Her research and writing appear in publications that range from academic peer-reviewed journals to educational books.

ORCID Id <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2779-7799>

Email :[fnazier@uj.ac.za](mailto:fnazier@uj.ac.za)

Tel: +27 (0)11 559 1130

**Jane Venis** is a multi-media artist, musician and writer. She is a Professor and Academic Leader at Te Maru Pūmanawa | College of Creative Practice and Enterprise at Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, New Zealand. She is also a Tauwiwi Facilitator in Te Tiriti O Waitangi workshops facilitated by the institution. Her practice focuses on the politics and absurdities of contemporary popular culture expressed through the making of objects, video, sound and performance works. Recent solo installations have taken place in public galleries and museums in Aotearoa New Zealand and as part of juried group exhibitions in the USA, China, South Korea and the UK. She also works collaboratively in writing and performance with contemporary drawing practitioner Hannah Joynt. They have most recently exhibited as part of the solo show series in CICA Museum, South Korea in April 2020 and will be published in the CICA book *Art Now 2020*. Her current writing – published in international peer-reviewed art and design journals and publications – is linked to her studio practice and explores the fertile ground between art and design. Jane is the co-editor of *Art and Design: History, Theory, Practice* (2017) and the current editor of *Scope: Contemporary Research Topics, Art and Design*.

Email: [jane.venis@op.ac.nz](mailto:jane.venis@op.ac.nz)

Tel: +64 (0)21 735 187

Recent Research: <https://www.op.ac.nz/industry-and-research/research/expertise/search/researcher/Venis,%20Jane>

==

**Please submit the following:**

- A title and abstract of between 500 and 750 words in length for a finished chapter of 6,000 words; due 7<sup>th</sup> September 2020
- A title for your chapter
- A short biography, including your current institutional affiliation (about 200 words)
- Your Contact details
- A written commitment to:
  1. Observing deadlines if accepted
  2. Sourcing your own images (maximum 6 per chapter) and permissions

**Acceptances and key dates:**

- **Abstract:** Due by September 7<sup>th</sup> 2020
- **Acceptance:** Confirmations will be sent by 18<sup>th</sup> September 2020
- **First Draft of Chapter:** Due by 20<sup>th</sup> December 2020
- **Peer review process:** completed by 15<sup>th</sup> February 2021
- **Envisioned publication:** July 2021