

# Everyday Acts of Design

## Learning in a Time of Emergency

Zoy Anastassakis  
and Marcos Martins

B L O O M S B U R Y

# **Everyday Acts of Design: Learning in a Time of Emergency**

## DESIGNING IN DARK TIMES

Responding to the current and wide-ranging systemic, social, economic, political, and environmental challenges we face, the aim of this series is to bring together short, polemical texts that address these crises and their inherent possibilities.

Understanding that the old division between the theoretical focus of the social sciences and the practical stance integral to designing, making, and shaping the world is dissolving, *Designing in Dark Times* explores new ways of acting and knowing concerning the artificial. Identified by the refusal of resignation to what-is and by the equal necessity and urgency of developing new models of the possible, the series presents both modes of thought (models, concepts, arguments) and courses of action (scenarios, strategies, proposals, works) at all levels from the local and the micro (the situation) to the global and the macro.

The aim is to push the boundaries of both design and thought, to make each more capable of opening genuine possibilities for thinking and acting otherwise, and thus of better facing, and facing down, the myriad failures of the present.

As the world descends into crisis, these books seek to offer, in small ways, a counter view. Against the instrumental they use the fact that design is *also* a means of articulating hitherto unforeseen possibilities—for subjects as much as for the world—to show how at base it offers irreplaceable capabilities for thinking and acting well in the artificial. In so doing, they point us towards ways of reversing some of the negative and destructive tendencies threatening to engulf the world.

### DESIGNING IN DARK TIMES

*Politics of the Everyday*

Ezio Manzini

*Designing in Dark Times: An Arendtian Lexicon*

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*Making Trouble: Design and Material Activism*

Otto von Busch

*Designing for Interdependence: A Poetics of Relating*

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*Design and the Social Imagination*

Matthew DelSesto

*Everyday Acts of Design: Learning in a Time of Emergency*

Zoy Anastassakis and Marcos Martins

Clive Dilnot

Eduardo Staszowski

“Zoy Anastassakis and Marcos Martins take us on a personal journey through the challenges of leadership, management, and teaching in a design school during times of uncertainty, precariousness, and government neglect in Brazil. Weaving together stories of everyday experiences demonstrating alternative ways of thinking, design acts, the resilience of educators and students, and the bonds that are developed when a situation and a state is on the brink of collapse, this book is an urgent read for all design students and educators.”

DANA ABDULLAH, *University of the Arts, London*

“In this account of a present intensively lived, Anastassakis and Martins reveal the individual struggles and collective actions of ESDI’s prodigious community of precarious lives. Reimagining the first and foremost design education institution in Brazil, Latin America, and the Portuguese language demanded shuffling functions, challenging privileges, and questioning conventions. But also claiming resistance, vulnerability, care, interdependence, coexistence, and solidarity as essential terms of a design lexicon they generously share with us in this momentous book.”

FREDERICO DUARTE, *Faculty of Fine Arts,  
University of Lisbon*

“Hope is perhaps the element to be harnessed in a time that insists on oppressing and in which different ways of doing things are designed to circumvent the investments of domination. In these margins, scribbling is the act of imprinting life, whether it be to inscribe battles and continuity, or to strike through the logics that paint a world obsessed with a single, exclusive method. Education, when it becomes an inventive and radical stroke of life, affirms itself as an ordinary task, as everyday acts that give other contours to the margins.”

LUIZ RUFINO, *Faculdade de Educação da Baixada  
Fluminense, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro*



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Zoy Anastassakis and  
Marcos Martins

*Translated from Portuguese  
by André Jobim Martins*

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## FOREWORD

Have you ever had the impression, on reading a work of scholarship, that the authors' hearts are just not in it? It is an unwritten rule in academic writing that it should reveal no trace of the feeling that went into the composition of a text. One should remain objective and dispassionate, distanced from matters of one's concern, lest their truth be contaminated by too close an involvement. Every shade of feeling, from joyful exuberance to deep despair, is banished from an account whose truthfulness is measured by factual objectivity, to be judged in the cold light of reason. Yet a truth bereft of feeling is but a shadow of the world. Is there no more to guilt, for example, than the facts of the case, which prove beyond doubt that a crime has been committed? What of the pangs of conscience, the pain of relationships traduced, the agony of knowing that what's done is done—that the slate can never be wiped clean? These afflictions are of course the stuff of literature and drama. Yet so convinced are we that truth finally comes to rest at the facts, that we can countenance such themes only by consigning them to fiction.

This division between fact and fiction is the curse of our age. For even as it reduces reality to a shadow of itself, it admits to imagination only as fantasy. Life itself drains away between the two, like water under a bridge. Must we be resigned, then, to an endless shuttle back and forth across the bridge, between ideas in the head and facts on the ground, or can we open up to the pure possibility of a life that ever overflows its measured representations, into realms of conscience and feeling? Can we muster the courage to jump from the bridge and regain the current? This is a challenge for design, as it is for any endeavor dedicated to securing a pathway into the future. If you believe that design holds the key to renewal—that far from setting targets it can clear the ground for life to carry on—then read this book! For Zoy Anastassakis and Marcos Martins, design is not a game of futures, played out through strategic plans and smart solutions. Design actions, they insist, are rather experiments in living and

working together, sharing in the joys and sorrows they bring, and restoring life to a world racked by oppression.

In the following pages, the authors offer powerful testimony to what this means in practice. They show that the road to keeping life going lies not in innovation, prediction, and control, not in planning for the future, but in the plethora of little acts of everyday care by which we look after the people and things around us, or simply get by, and which are far too often belittled or ignored. In this, the work of cleaners, caretakers, and secretaries holds just as much value as that of managers and professors. Everyone has a part to play in the collective task of fashioning a habitable world for generations to come. This, first and foremost, is the task of education. That's why design is, above all, an educational endeavor; not so much a subject to be taught as a way of teaching. Nor can what students learn be dissociated from the ways—including the activities, the conditions, the spaces, the collectivities—in which they learn it. The politics of managing a school, the challenges of creating a curriculum, and the struggles to maintain an estate—these, and more, are design issues in themselves. All bear directly on pedagogic practice, and on the lived experience of teachers and students alike.

This book tells movingly of actual events, some shocking, some exhilarating, as they unfolded from amidst the thick of it. It pulls no punches. Its pages are populated by real people, having to cope with the practical immediacies of life in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Unlike so many scholars who have made their names with their prognostications on the contemporary crisis—written from the relative security and affluence of North American or European academia, and who can afford to indulge in tournaments of philosophical erudition and verbal gymnastics—the authors speak from their own, visceral experience of violence and precarity through a time of intense political turmoil. They are not ashamed to speak from the heart as much as from the head. For them, design is not about projecting futures, imagining solutions; it is about sheer, day-to-day survival. But in survival lies not just desperation but also hope—the hope that we can

live another day, and that generations to come can begin afresh. This is to commit not to progress but to sustainability, to the ongoingness of life. But if the designers of tomorrow are to have loose ends to pick up and follow, then today's stories need to be told. For that, read on!

TIM INGOLD, *Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology,  
University of Aberdeen*

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## NOTES ON TRANSLATION OF SOME KEY TERMS

The use in this book of some terms referring to the field of design, or to socio-political aspects, requires preliminary clarification. Some words were kept in Portuguese, especially when it came to names of institutions or places. In the first occurrence of these names, however, we provide their literal translation in parentheses.

Concerning the name of the Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial (ESDI), we must clarify that its literal translation into English is “Superior School of Industrial Design”. It is important to note that “superior” indicates that it is a higher education institution (Instituição de Ensino Superior, IES). As for “industrial design,” this was the first term adopted in Brazil for the set of professional activities that would later come to be widely known through the English term “design.”<sup>1</sup> Throughout the book, we will use the acronym ESDI to refer to the school, since this is the term by which it is known in Brazil.

We employ the term “project,” when connected to the field of design, in a different and broader way in relation to its common use in the anglophone world. In Brazil, the English word “design” is used to designate the professional area in which “designers” work. However, the making of design is identified by the word “projeto” (project). As we adopt the English word “project” and its cognates, we also want the reader to mind the meaning of the word in Brazil.

As for the terms relating to affirmative action policies in Brazilian universities and, more broadly, with regard to ethnic-racial issues, some considerations are necessary. We have adopted the term “cotista,” commonly used in universities, because we believe it carries a meaning that a literal English translation, quota students, does not comprise. A set of federal and state laws regulate the system for reserving places in Brazilian public universities. At UERJ, the system is called the Affirmative Action Program, or Quota System. In 2000, the Legislative Assembly of

<sup>1</sup> For a review of this semantic trajectory, see Milene Soares Cara, *Do desenho industrial ao design: uma bibliografia crítica para a disciplina*. São Paulo, Editora Edgard Blücher, 2010.

Rio de Janeiro approved the first law for reserving places for candidates from public schools, and in 2001 quotas were expanded to include self-declared Black (*negro*) and Brown (*pardo*) candidates. In 2003, these laws were modified, encompassing all categories of quota reservation into the broader category of “needy” (*carentes*) students. According to the text of this law, “a needy student is defined as such by the state public university, which must take into consideration the applicant’s socio-economic level and determine how this condition will be proven, using for this purpose the socio-economic indicators used by official public agencies.” Since 2018, among the needy, the law guarantees the reservation of 20 percent of seats for Blacks, Indigenous people, and candidates from *quilombola* communities, 20 percent for candidates from public high schools, and 5 percent for candidates with disabilities and children of civil servants in risk professions, such as firefighters, military personnel, and prison guards killed or injured in combat.<sup>2</sup> Note that Rio de Janeiro State legislation uses different terms from the Brazilian Census Bureau (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, IBGE) and, consequently, from the Federal Quota Law (Lei 12.990) and other nation-wide affirmative action legislation. In IBGE documents and federal race-related legislation, the population is divided into the following ethnic groups: *pardos* (Browns, or lighter-skinned Blacks), *brancos* (whites), *pretos* (Blacks), *amarelos* (yellow, i.e. East Asian), *indígenas* (indigenous), and *negros* standing for the aggregate of *pretos* and *pardos*. Conveying the distinction between *negro* and *preto* in English is difficult for several reasons, not least because the meaning the terms carry in administrative parlance is different from their current use in everyday language, which also varies according to context. When referring to colors in nature, the Portuguese words *preto* and *negro* have the same meaning (the color black), the latter being slightly archaic, but, when referring to people of African descent,

<sup>2</sup> See “Quota System,” UERJ – State University of Rio de Janeiro, accessed May 27, 2019, “Sistema de cotas,” UERJ – Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, accessed June 22, 2021, <https://www.uerj.br/inclusao-e-permanencia/sistema-de-cotas/>.

*negro* is more widely used, at least in the mainstream news media (usually meaning Afro-Brazilians in general). A person of mixed European, Levantine, Indigenous, and/or African descent may identify as *pardo*, but not consider themselves to be either *negro* or *preto* (however, note that, for census purposes, they will be counted as part of the *negro* population). These distinctions are also a matter of debate within Black and anti-racist political activism in Brazil.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### **ca. 1500**

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the territory of the city of Rio de Janeiro was mostly occupied by the Tupinambás, also known, in this region, as Tamoios.

### **1500**

Beginning of Portuguese colonization in Brazil.

### **1822**

Brazil declares independence from Portugal.

### **1850**

Eusébio de Queirós Law prohibits the entrance of enslaved Africans in Brazil.

### **1888**

Lei Áurea (“Golden Law”): slavery is outlawed in Brazil.

### **1889**

Proclamation of the Republic.

### **1919–1933**

Period of operation of the Bauhaus, Germany.

### **1948**

Establishment of the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM, Rio de Janeiro Museum of Modern Art).

### **1950**

Opening of the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ, State University of Rio de Janeiro).

### **1953–1968**

Period of operation of the Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm, Germany.

**1953**

Max Bill visits the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro.

**ca. 1953–1959**

Plans are made for a Escola Técnica de Criação (ETC, School of Technical Creation) at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro.

**ca. 1960**

Establishment of the first design companies in Brazil.

**1962**

Establishment of the Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial (ESDI, Superior School of Industrial Design), offering courses in the areas of product design and *programação visual* (graphic design).

**1964–1985**

Military dictatorship in Brazil.

**1968**

Ato institucional no. 5 is promulgated, suspending constitutional guarantees in Brazil, and opening the way for widespread incarceration and torture of political dissidents.

**1975**

Incorporation of ESDI into UERJ.

**1985**

End of the military dictatorship in Brazil.

**1988**

Promulgation of the current Brazilian Constitution.

**2002**

Implementation of the quota policy at UERJ.

**2003**

Election of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, from the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT, Workers' Party), for the Presidency of Brazil.

**2004**

Creation of the Bolsa Família federal program guaranteeing, by direct transfer, a minimum income to families in poverty or extreme poverty in Brazil.

**2014**

Brazil hosts the FIFA Soccer World Cup.

**2015**

New ESDI curriculum is implemented, with a new and expanded set of areas of expertise: communication, product, interaction, and services.

**2016**

Rio de Janeiro hosts the Summer Olympic Games.

Dilma Rousseff is ousted as President of Brazil through a parliamentary coup.

An Architecture and Urbanism undergraduate course is opened at ESDI/UERJ.

**March 2016–December 2018**

Zoy Anastassakis and Marcos Martins are directors at ESDI.

**2016–2017**

Budgetary crisis at UERJ. Payments are systematically delayed, academic activities are suspended, basic maintenance funding is curtailed.

**February 12, 2017**

ESDI Aberta (Open ESDI) event is held in the context of the #UERJResiste (#UERJResists) movement.

**March–April 2017**

Students occupy ESDI, dwelling on the campus and promoting activities of the ESDI Aberta movement.

**August 2017**

Regular academic activities resume at ESDI and UERJ.

**March 14, 2018**

Assassination of Rio de Janeiro Councilwoman Marielle Franco.

**April 29, 2018**

Assassination of UERJ student Matheusa Passareli.

**October 28, 2018**

Jair Bolsonaro is elected President of Brazil.

**March 2020 to the present**

COVID-19 pandemic.

## MAP AND ESDI GROUND PLAN

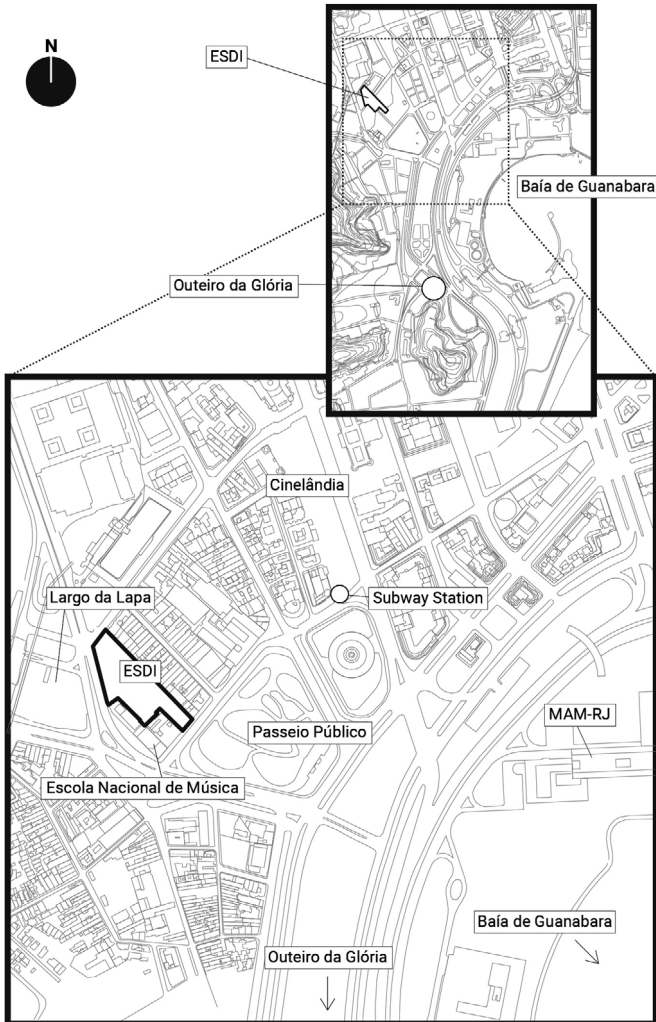


FIGURE 0.1 Part of downtown Rio de Janeiro.



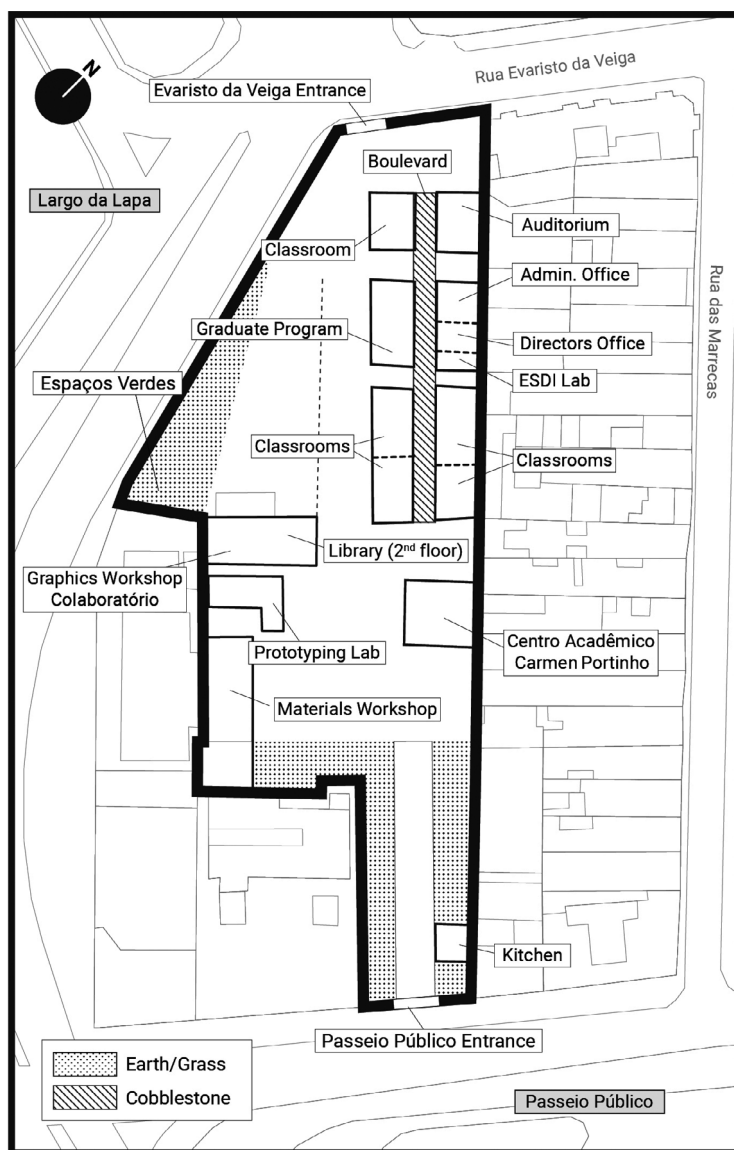


FIGURE 0.2 ESDI's grounds.

# Introduction

Marcos Martins and  
Zoy Anastassakis

## THE SETTING

The place where the stories in this book unfold is the Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial (ESDI),<sup>1</sup> the first design school in Brazil to offer bachelor's degree courses in the areas of product design and *programação visual* (graphic design). The initial plans for its implementation date back to the country's industrialization between the 1950s and 1960s, a time of progressive ideas shared both by enthusiastic intellectuals and the government. At that moment, the idea of progress was adopted as a motto by the federal government, which invested intensively in industrialization as a vector for national development. In this context, it would be necessary to form a body of professionals capable of designing for the national industry. These were the first steps towards creating industrial design courses in the country.

<sup>1</sup> The literal translation of the school's name into English is Superior School of Industrial Design (see Notes on translation of some key terms).

ESDI came into being with the support of a group of designers linked to the Bauhaus and the HfG Ulm, such as the Swiss Max Bill, and the Argentinean Tomás Maldonado. As far back as the late 1950s, the Museu de Arte Moderna (MAM), Rio de Janeiro, hosted several educational activities related to a proposal launched by Max Bill, later revised by Tomás Maldonado, to create the Escola Técnica de Criação (ETC), within the museum premises. The project (which ultimately fell through in its initial MAM-based version) was embraced by designers, artists, architects, and scholars from Brazil, Argentina, Germany, and Switzerland, culminating in the establishment of ESDI in 1962. During its early years, the school became a model for the teaching of design in Brazil, and, in 1968, the Brazilian Ministry of Education adopted its curriculum as a model for the creation of other design courses in Brazil.

Initially, ESDI was to be housed at MAM, which, in 1958, was transferred to a building designed by Affonso Eduardo Reidy facing the Baía da Guanabara, in downtown Rio de Janeiro. The plans for linking ESDI to MAM did not go any further, so the school came into being through an initiative of the state government, and was provisionally placed in a group of buildings in the historic central district of Rio, where it still is today. When it was established, the school was not part of a university, being directly linked to the structure of the Secretaria de Educação e Cultura (Department of Education and Culture), until, in 1975, it was incorporated into the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (State University of Rio de Janeiro) (UERJ), of which it is, to this day, an academic unit.

For more than fifty years since its founding, the school's curriculum had been structured around two main areas: visual programming<sup>2</sup> and product design. This structure also determined the creation of departments, two corresponding to these two fields, and a third, dedicated to historical and theoretical disciplines, the Department of Cultural Integration. In 2016, a substantial curriculum reform was approved, increasing the

<sup>2</sup> *Programação visual* (visual programming) was one of the first terms widely used in Brazil to designate what can also be called graphic design, or visual communication.

number of core axes to four: communication, product, interaction, and services.

The same year, ESDI started offering a course in architecture and urbanism, in the city of Petrópolis, in the mountainous range of the state of Rio de Janeiro. ESDI launched its postgraduate program in 2005 with a master's course in design, also offering, from 2012, a doctoral course in design. The school's graduate program is currently divided into two lines of research: Technology, Product, and Innovation; and Theory, Information, Society, and History, and admits around twenty students annually.

In its undergraduate design course, until a few years ago, ESDI would open thirty seats for new students every year. More recently, this number rose to forty. Since ESDI's establishment, around 2,000 designers have graduated from the school. Because of this history, ESDI has established itself as one of the main references for design education in Brazil. However, more than that, it has remained an institution capable of rejuvenating itself and resisting the recurring attacks on public education in the country because of its tendency to constant transformations.

### STORYTELLING, EDUCATING, DESIGNING

This book tells stories that were lived by both of us between 2016 and 2018, when we were directors of ESDI. It was a time marked by a severe financial and institutional crisis that affected the entire university. Different paths led both of us to the moment we took office as directors in March 2016. Zoy graduated from ESDI in 1999. In 2012, after completing her PhD in anthropology, she returned to school, approved for the vacancy of associate professor in the area of Design, Society and History. Marcos graduated in design at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro in 1984. Between 1999 and 2004, he taught some courses in graphic production at ESDI, as a temporary lecturer, until, in 2010, he was admitted by public tender as a professor of design for the area of Design, Interaction, and Communications. Both, today, are tenured professors at the school.