

Inhabiting the tension between self-centeredness and otherness

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Abstract

Around the world, people and entire communities are seeking just and sustainable futures by rejecting binary oppositions that separate the human from nature, men from women, white from black, and by pushing back against paired logics that consider some ways of being, thinking, knowing, and doing as superior to others. Given the many interrelated contemporary challenges, it is obvious that human self-centeredness has reached its limits. The challenges we are facing hint at the importance for contemporary design practice to move beyond a primary focus on the human – a focus that has dominated Western thought since at least the Enlightenment (Forlano, 2017) – towards embracing a plurality of life-centered perspectives, where the needs of diverse actors and species and the functioning of wider natural ecosystems are considered (e.g. Escobar, 2016; Forlano, 2017; Roudavski, 2020). The word ‘embracing’ is here used to signal a sense of interconnectedness, a way of inhabiting our world that posits an affirmative connection between the self and others. Yet, even if we embrace otherness, our habitual cognitive tendencies keep us grounded in our self-centeredness.

In my PhD, I explore ways to enable ourselves to embrace and inhabit the tensions between self-centeredness and otherness. I experiment with various approaches, including art-based, spiritual, and multi-species approaches. My work is closely connected to the broad theme of ServDes.2023, which explores how aspects such as otherness, justice, spirituality, vulnerability, and more-than-human approaches are redefining design practice. In particular, my research aligns with the conference track on ‘Services and relationships: humans, beyond and below.’ Many services are focused on human relationships, but increasingly they are being reframed by more-than-human, posthuman, and dehumanizing perspectives. I believe that designers and innovators need to navigate and get entangled in these human encounters to create more meaningful and sustainable services.

I would be thrilled to participate in the Student's Forum, to be able to discuss and work on these and related topics together with my peers, to advance our shared knowledge and understanding, and to enjoy the energy, inspiration, and sense of connection that comes from gatherings like these.

Keywords: design, otherness, self-centeredness, tension

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