FROM THE GUEST EDITORS: "DESIGN, POPULISM AND POLITICS"

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Today, 'design' has become a concept that is frequently used in every field, in an awkward and populist manner. Hair design, nail design, feng shui design, wellness design, and city design are some of these conceptions that reduce the value of design, manipulate its meaning, as well as empty its content. For professional designers and design scholars, this situation has become more critical, as they start losing their intellectual voice and professional legitimacy among all those who use and consume the concept of design, regardless of its context. On the other hand, when we consider it from a global perspective, we see that design is one of the most dominant concepts in the strategic planning and development policies of developed and/or developing countries. In a way, it has also become a powerful tool of politics, re-conceptualized in populist discourses and practices of authorities and decision-makers.

Design, in all its forms, is a testament to human ingenuity, an embodiment of our innate creativity. It has the unique power to both shape and mirror human values. Design, from the smallest details of our everyday lives to the grand architectural marvels that define our cities, carries the potential to convey meaning, evoke emotions, and inspire action. The natural value of design lies in its capacity to enhance functionality, enrich aesthetics, and communicate ideas. Design is the bridge that connects the abstract with the tangible, the intangible with the perceptible. Whether it's any beautifully designed technological tool that seamlessly integrates technology into our lives or a thoughtfully crafted piece of furniture that enhances our living spaces, design reflects the very core of human experience. The significance of design goes beyond the visual; it is an essential and indispensable part of the human experience that should be cherished, promoted, and constantly seeks leverage for the betterment of the community. Design is also the dynamic force that influences our lives, communicates our identities, and reflects our cultures. It's a vital part of our experience that should be cherished, nurtured, and continually strived for a better global community.

In the current era, no one can deny the strong interconnections among design, populism and politics. However, the engagement of design with populism and politics is rather a complicated phenomenon, both enhancing and devaluing this very nature of design. Design navigates the currents of popular trends, and it engages with the political forces that shape our world. In a world driven by consumerism and the never-

ending desire for the next big trend, we often find ourselves grappling with the notion of populism in design. Design populism captures the essence of our current age, where trends, passion, and the appeal of the masses dominate. It's about understanding what captures the public's imagination, what resonates with the people, and what becomes popular. From the positive side, the rapid pace of design populism can democratize good design, making it accessible to a wider audience, however it also can create a throwaway culture, where products are disposed of as quickly as they are embraced, leading to environmental concerns and the erosion of true design value. The colors, typography, and imagery can evoke emotions, inspire loyalty, and convey a sense of trust or credibility. Design isn't just about aesthetics; it's about the strategic use of creativity to influence the course of theory and history. It is the power of design to trigger public sentiment, shape the course of life, and contribute to the success or failure of political movements.

Neoliberal political discourses, which began to affect the world in the late 20th century, have moved to a more global scale in the 21st century with the possibilities and necessities of the communication age. At this point, like many other concepts, the concept of design has become a tool of daily life and consumer culture, being abstracted from its historical, theoretical and professional meanings and norms, often emptied of its essence. In fact, this situation began to blossom with the postmodern design approaches and discourses that emerged in the late 20th century as a reaction to the elitist, rigid and homogenizing 20th century modernism that was isolated from the realities of society and daily life.

In consumer societies, objects, concepts and value judgments are constantly manipulated, separated from their original meanings and values, and a 'brand and packaging value' is attributed to these objects. As a result, everything becomes buyable and sellable. It is for sure that every design object, from an architectural structure to a teapot, has and will have a material equivalent. What is problematic here is that the functionality, durability, affordability and aesthetics expected from a quality design product are left in the background or even ignored in the face of this attributed packaging value. For example, the best-selling products of the Swedish company, which has gained a massive place in the furniture industry in Türkiye in the last 20 years, are the flimsiest ones. However, all of them bear the signature of a Swedish designer. This is an illusion of mass consumption.

Throughout history, there have been critical and reactionary approaches to the design approach based on consumption and capitalism. One of the most prominent of these is the Arts and Crafts Movement, introduced by William Morris as a reaction to the industrial revolution. Morris emphasized the aesthetic values of design with a stance against the concept of design being a tool of capital. However, at some point, designs that were consumption objects, even if they were not industrial, became even more valuable and expensive capital-based objects than industrial ones. According to some historical commentators, William Morris was the most unsuccessful socialist in history and was defeated by capital. Therefore, it is not possible to consider design separately from capital. On the other hand, especially in the late 20th century and the 21st century, other important roles of design have come to the fore with a new awareness. Chief among these are factors such as social responsibility, sustainability, ecology, welfare and security, and these new approaches save design, though partially, from the instrumentalization of capitalism.

Design disciplines, due to their historical development and essence, are at the intersection of human, social, artistic and applied sciences. In fact, this often causes ambiguity in the academic environment. In fact, this is a wealth and advantage in terms of knowledge production and application. As in life itself, design is an endeavor that touches both people and society, technology, philosophy and emotions. Its real value is hidden in this multi-layered structure. Therefore, we had better try to understand what exists rather than attributing new values to design. There is still no established field of Design Sciences that we can define clearly and precisely like Natural and Social Sciences. In fact, design is essentially a human instinctive action, and every human being is inherently equipped with designing skills, some more, some less. In this context, the designer is a professional who performs the act of design in a formal way, consciously and trained. We can think of it like sports, everyone can do sports (some are better, some are worse, the same goes for design) but not everyone is an athlete. In addition, since design touches every part of life, it benefits from every field and is fed by the theories, skills and know-hows of every field.

Based on these historically constructed conceptions of design shaped by populist and ideological discourses and practices both in Türkiye and over the globe, the 15th 4T Design and Design History Symposium, held between 12-14 October 2023 in Şile Campus of FMV Işık University with the theme of 'Design, Populism and Politics' aimed to re-question what design means both in academia, in society and in practice. As specified in the symposium call, this fundamental question proliferated into the following questions which were addressed in various sessions that examined and discussed the effects of design policies in different fields and disciplines:

- How does the term design operate in various political and socio-cultural contexts?
- How do various power structures attribute meaning and value to design?
- How does design embody value?
- How have academies and long-established design disciplines responded to such proliferation of meaning?
- How is design instrumentalized by or mobilized against consumer capitalism?

This special issue is composed of selected papers from the symposium, which presents and discusses the reflections and expansions of the theme in the fields of interior design, housing and design activism. Deniz Hasırcı, for instance, focuses on the modern Turkish interior and considers it as a medium through which socio-political, socio-behavioral, and socio-spatial changes in Türkiye could be read and comprehended. The shaping of the modern Turkish interior by means of populist discourses and policies is further examined by papers based on extensive historical research. The study by Cemre Eryılmaz and Deniz Hasırcı questions the role of Sümerbank home textiles in the modernization process of Republican Türkiye. They investigate how the aesthetic preferences and popular trends of the society have affected the design of modern Turkish interiors shaped by Sümerbank patterns.The historical research by Hande Tulum Okur and Efsun Ekenyazıcı Güney reveals the ideological codes embedded in educational interiors in the Republican Türkiye. They represent how the gender norms idealized and initiated by the political regime have been spatialized at the interiors of Refia Övüç Maturation Institute since its establishment in the mid-1940s. Through a historical review of architecture periodicals, Güliz Öktem Taşdemir examines the economy politics of modern interiors in Türkiye. She questions how popular design tendencies regarding material choice in modern interiors have not only influenced market dynamics but also shaped social norms and values by means of design.

Initiated by the private sector, there has been a reciprocal relationship between housing policies and populist public demands and trends in Türkiye since the 1950s. Selim Sertel Öztürk, for instance, focuses on the case of TİMLO (Turkey Construction and Material Partnership) established by Emlakbank, in order to understand the socio-political factors and actors that have shaped housing design both in the building and settlement scale, as part of Post-war International Modernism in Türkiye. He closely examines how Emlakbank Housing Projects in the cities of İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir were realized within a network of actors in terms of design, implementation, and user relations, and how they contributed to the housing practices of the period. The paper by Çiçek Tezer and İpek Akpınar is a similar study but focusing on the Housing Architecture of Global Modernism in the 2000s. They provide a critical discourse analysis of populist discourses and political concerns regarding the new residential projects in Umurbey District of İzmir, a former industrial and port neighborhood. They reveal conflicts and contradictions produced by these discourses to foresee the urban spatial character of the district in the near future.

Design Activism is relatively a new field that utilizes design to address natural and ecological problems, promote social change, challenge injustices, and create a more equitable and sustainable world. While design activists are critical to populist solutions of mainstream policies, they also meet local public demands in a bottom-to-top approach. The short-term rescuing practices immediately after the 2023 Kahramanmaraş Earthquake in Türkiye showed once again the lack of a holistic design approach considering pre- and post-disaster stages as well. In such cases, design activism may at least create alternative solutions benefiting from populist tools. Following a comprehensive approach on the basis of actor-network theory, the research by Hande Yıldız Çekindir and Can Güvenir tends to explore the interaction between design activism and emergency services to understand how socio-technical systems may have a positive social impact in times of emergency, particularly focusing on volunteer designers and civil society organizations in İzmir that cooperate to help survivors of the earthquake.

While investigating the complexities of design, populism, and politics, one should remember that design is a powerful force, a dynamic entity that could enrich human's lives, connect their world, and define the shared destiny. It is noteworthy that political and populist discourses and practices do not only devalue and/or revalue design, but also enable us to re-conceptualize 'good design' that prioritizes public benefit and shared values. The papers in this issue, we believe, unveil these complexities and bring forward new questions and perspectives for further research on design.