Pursuing positionality in design

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In the context of a complex social matrix that we find ourselves in, described by the continuous flux of power relations and asymmetries; design as a practice, their practitioners and researchers carry the responsibility in the mindful shaping of the future. As mediators within the design system, designers carry the conversation between the design program, a hypothesis, the stakeholders, and the effects of the resulting conclusions. Within their practice and the reflexive process upon it, designers can question, critique, and dismantle oppressive systems of status quo perpetuation. A first approach to a critical dialogue in design suggests reviewing one's identity to discover possible privileges and biases. This is done through the revision of positionality as a conscious way of understanding who we are regarding an other; identity remains fundamental in the axiological description of our ethical values, preconceptions, and the essence of our being, modifying and steering our ways of knowing and doing. Defining positionality impacts the design process and research, affecting methodologies and findings. This manuscript searches to display the nuances of design and the relevance of achieving the situated conception of our identity, i.e. positionality, through reflexivity. Intersecting designerly research and critical social studies to analyse the role of the self enables reflexivity. Giving a comprehensive overview of how to achieve this by overlapping Decolonial theory and Pluriverse, Third-wave feminist theories such as Intersectionality, Standpoint theory, and Critical race theory; research methodologies such as Autoethnography and Participatory action research are presented under this theoretical framework.

Keywords: positionality; reflexivity; pluriverse; third-wave feminism

1   Introduction

The growing need for social justice, portrayed by countless crises witnessed by cultures and communities around the world, calls for responsible designers aware of their positioning and how it affects their processes and outcomes. Stating the given that design shapes the future, where design is defined "as the momentary coalescence of future possibilities materialised today" (Marenko & Brassett, 2015:6), the relationship between the way we carry out design as a discipline in the present, and the preferable futures we imagine, remain evident.

Approached on countless occasions, the description of design as a discipline and practice has a highly relevant social and cultural dimension. Also defined as a cultural system, design "affects environmental and cognitive contexts", transforming social reality (Zingale, 2022). Design as a human practice can be pivotal for cultural change, mediating between tangible products, social interactions, and the environment (Sheehan, 2011).

The power entailed in design consequently demands practitioners that are conscious of their processes, methodologies, and the effects their doings will bring to the world, its future, and cultural shaping. Introducing decolonial theory, we recognise the need to review how and what we debate about (in any discipline), seeking a radical epistemological shift (Mignolo, 2011). Designers and design researchers do not escape this calling; the task of reflecting on the way they practice the discipline by challenging what they know and how they know it is not a simple endeavour (Canlı & Prado de O. Martins, 2016).

This manuscript will search to display the layers and nuances of design research and practice and the relevance of achieving this through positioning and reflecting. The aim is to give a comprehensive overview of how to accomplish this through an overlapping of decolonial theory, design researching and practising, third-wave feminist theories, and research methodologies.

The methodology used to explore such topics and intersections is part of a PhD research, where understanding one's positioning to unmask possible biases makes a relevant case on how incorporating reflective methods helps in problematising our prejudices. An extensive literature review as part of an initial desk research phase included conceptions on Decolonial theory, Third-wave feminist theories such as Intersectionality and Standpoint theory, together with various methods that enable a reflective practice.

2   Identity in alterity

The concept of identity in design has been widely approached, including concepts regarding the design itself; artefacts, services, and communication. It is common to see the word identity being used to describe a brand's values, i.e. brand identities, a product's aesthetic value, or even communities' cultural and traditional elements. This description includes many layers of understanding of design, from aesthetic characteristics that entail a specific personality, to intangible qualities transmitted through perceptive and sensorial traits.

Likewise, understanding design as a system evidences the role of the designer and researcher in design as a mediator through which their personal traits and skills may be pointed. In this case, identity as a professional quality expresses the integration of "knowledge, action, and being" (Tracey & Hutchinson, 2016:1). The identity of the practitioner, the researcher, and the participants; if there are any, affects the research and its findings, taking the shape of an unavoidable bias (Bourke, 2014).

A further bearing of identities is that they "come into play via our perceptions", the perception the other has towards us and how we want the other to perceive us (Bourke, 2014:1). Conceiving how we define identity in terms of an other we introduce the concept of alterity, where although identity has intrinsic value, a parallel conversation regards identity considering its counterpart (Zingale, 2022). Identity then remains fundamental in our axiological and ontological descriptions, defining our values and the essence of our being, modifying our epistemology, our ways of knowing.

It is precisely design and its dialectical role that may assess the relationship between a plurality of peoples, their ways of being, knowing, and doing, recognising that it is legitimate to think that the design dimension can also undertake research paths that highlight the need to recognise the other. The theoretical dimension of alterity embraces contradiction; while identity and alterity should not be considered opposites, they still describe two dialectical polarities. The dialogical dimension instead introduces dialogue as the construction of relations, enabling an exchange between cognition and project. Both dimensions remain crucial when intersecting alterity in design, where the final meaning of designed things is measured with its effects and consequences. (Zingale, 2022)

When overlapping design, alterity and identity, an actionable element still questions, problematises, and challenges prevailing visions. A clear example is illustrated by Queer theory, where through gender studies, we may question the dominant narrative on natural gender definitions that presumes a hegemonical understanding, othering any other kind of sexual orientation and gender perception that is not heterosexual male or female (Butler, 1999; Misawa, 2010; Zingale, 2022).

3 Practising positionality

To understand who we are regarding an other, while avoiding the marginalisation of the constructed conceptions of identity, we may practice what is defined as positionality. "Within positionality theory, it is acknowledged that people have multiple overlapping identities. Thus, people make meaning from various aspects of their identity" (Kezar, 2002:96; Bourke, 2014); this allows the involvement of the dimension of alterity regarding identity, without losing the plural quality that defines identity.

Described by one's position in a given context, "defined by gender, race, class, and other socially significant dimensions" (Alcoff, 1988:433), the list of aspects determining our positionality is long and exhaustive. Besides describing our identity, it also gathers social, cultural, economic, and political aspects (Berger, 2015) that determine where one stands in relation to the other (Merriam et al., 2001; Bourke, 2014). Situating oneself is not static but relational and changing dynamically (Knight & Deng, 2016).

In fact, design research and practice methodologies consider positionality to reflect upon our own processes (Gray, 2004; Schön, 2016). Particularly regarding a researcher's and participant's positionality, other personal characteristics are added, such as "age, sexual orientation, immigration status, personal experiences, linguistic tradition, beliefs, biases, preferences, theoretical, political and ideological stances, and emotional responses" (Berger, 2015:220). In scholarly research, positionality enables a critical reflection "upon our position in regard to its impact on research/er" (Knight & Deng, 2016:108).

Positionality is relevant because it is "a state of being and a process of becoming, a journey of negotiations between social identities and shifting spaces of here and there." (Knight & Deng, 2016:106). These negotiations could be interpreted as the exchange between our practice and the context in which we operate, shaped by our situatedness and evidencing how it influences the way we research and carry out our practice, what sources of information we access and how we interpret it (Knight & Deng, 2016). The results will also speak on behalf of our positionality, holding ourselves accountable.

Researchers are called to "focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity; better understand the role of the self in creating knowledge; carefully self-monitor the impact of their biases, beliefs, and personal experiences on their research; and maintain the balance between the personal and the universal." (Berger, 2015: 220). Being aware of our positioning may not only make us more mindful of our biases, but it also creates a ground that helps the researcher (or practitioner) and the readers (or users) to understand the context and conditions of the results.

As design is a social practice and acknowledging the intrinsic existence of bias in the social construction of the world, Sheehan (2011) points out that bias is primarily present in all data given that all "research methodologies are cultural artefacts". The only imperfect solution devised so far when dealing with qualitative research has been to consciously recognise the effect this "bias has on data selection, analysis, interpretation, and the communication of findings" (Sheehan, 2011:78). Revising and acknowledging our bias and self-centeredness is part of the continuous and critical internal dialogue with ourselves (Berger, 2015).

The underlying concept to highlight regarding positionality is how it references social status and power positions given its situatedness. As a social formation of identity, it remains flexible and mutable, "all parts of our identities are shaped by socially constructed positions and memberships to which we belong. Such automatic categorisation is embedded in our society as a system" (Misawa, 2010:26). In this light, positionality has the power to be used to identify privileges, reflect upon our position, and act (Duarte, 2017) in response to the power dynamics present in the world.

4 A pluriversal approach

An initial attempt to achieve a critical conception of positionality that could further question their inherent privileges introduces pluriversality. Based on the decolonial concept of pluriverse and cultural and social studies, a pluriversal vision includes the coexistence of countless intersecting options of knowledge, being, and perception. Pluriversality critiques the idea of universal norms and searches to reinstate "the experiential nature of knowledge and the origin of any theory in the human life-world." (Tlostanova, 2017:4). Departing from Tlostanova's & Mignolo's (2009) pluritopic hermeneutics, based on the concept of diatomic hermeneutics by Panikkar, it is defined as the practice of understanding by means of interlacing traditions that don't share common models of understandability. Its main aim is to embrace ontological and epistemological differences, describing a world where many worlds fit (EZLN, 1996).

Strongly rooted in the concept of alterity, pluriversality describes the "practice of alterity that involves a deep concern for social justice, the radical equality of all beings, and non-hierarchy. It's about the difference that all marginalised and subaltern groups have to live with", which is invisible to privileged groups. (Escobar, 2018: xvi). From a further theoretical and philosophical perspective, the call to pluralise our conceptions of matter is a political project that combats the colonial tendency to presume that one framework can be marshalled to account for all the others. (Tuin and Nocek, 2019:820). While a pluriversal perspective on design uses ontological design to think about "the transition from the hegemony of modernity's one-world ontology to a pluriverse of socio natural configurations; in this context, designs for the pluriverse becomes a tool for reimagining and reconstructing local worlds." (Escobar, 2018:4).

As the Pluriverse is a result of decolonial thinking, it is also relevant to mention how decoloniality might also work as an overarching framing theory to achieve a mindful and reflective positioning that situates identity and alterity. The central claim related to decoloniality expresses the subjugation of non-Western epistemologies and traditions, opaquing local ways of doing and understanding, all this while generating an asymmetric relationship between a categorised other and a same that defines a universal norm, "enjoy[ing] epistemic and discursive privileges" (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009:3). Decolonisation calls upon action, seeking to challenge "modern/colonial institutions rather than fit comfortably within them." (Schultz et al., 2018b:83).

Setting the context, Decolonial theory was popularised in the 90s by a group of Latin American scholars (Mignolo, Quijano, Dussel, Lugones, Anzaldua, Escobar, Freire, Fals Borda, etc.), building upon the work of Frantz Fanon (1961) and touching topics such as dependency theory, critical race theory, colonialism, modernity, and gender. Decoloniality also describes itself in function of settler colonialism and its pursuit of an ideal of modernity (Dussel, 1993), referring to the repatriation and recognition of the land and the relationship with it (Tuck & Yang, 2021:7), searching the "liberation of a nation and the restoration of that nation to its people" (Fanon, 1961:36).

However, decoloniality has already found its overlapping with design, on a highly theoretical level and redefining design ontologically and epistemologically. More than 20 years after the Latin American decolonial collective, a group of transdisciplinary design scholars started the Decolonising Design Group, realising that the negation of the colonial gaze created spaces which allowed "non-hegemonic ontologies to emerge." (Prado de O. Martins & de Oliveira, 2016). When intersecting decoloniality and design, an ontological dimension needs to be redefined, acknowledging that when we design, we are prefiguring our actions, and "in turn we are designed by our designing and by that which we have designed." (Willis, 2006).

The decolonising design project opposes result-driven frameworks and searches to achieve a plural practice that includes marginalised ways of knowing and doing (Schultz et al., 2018). Going back to the importance of designers that can responsibly take accountability for their identities and how these influence their practice, decoloniality is an ongoing process that requires us to question the design discipline, ourselves, and our practice, revisiting our positionality and privilege. Once we start trying to understand how "plural cultures were drawn into the binary of centre and periphery" by including marginal perspectives in our "reflection on the history of modernity and of artifice", we may start designing plurally (Schultz et al., 2018:5).

The call to decolonise our roles as design researchers and practitioners entails the representation of marginalised populations. To avoid the prevailing epistemic practices in academia and design, we must "retrace and reformulate our own reasoning about whose voice is heard, whose knowledge is valid, and whose privileges cause others' oppressions." (Schultz et al., 2018). Applying a decolonial perspective that challenges hegemonical visions (Schultz et al., 2018) throughout the stages of the design process might ensure a more responsible practice, carrying to results that speak to the plurality of the world's reality and inspiring the participation of multiple perspectives.

5 The role of reflexivity

Regarding researchers, one way of achieving a critical review of our positionality is by means of reflexivity, described as the systematic addressing of the context of knowledge production and how it affects the researcher (Malterud, 2001). The action of reflexivity entails an initial assessment of the researcher's assumptions and preconceptions since these will affect how the research is conducted and framed, including the setting of hypotheses, methods, and tools. By doing this, the researcher's perspective remains exposed, giving the possibility to engage critically with these preceding personal beliefs and experiences, which shape not only the research process but also the core motivation behind it. (Sleeswijk, 2009; Malterud, 2001).

Understanding reflexivity as an iterative process of self-analysis (Callaway, 1992; Bourke, 2014) does not mean it is practised in isolation. The act of reflexivity is at least three-fold, implicating the researcher only, the researcher as an outsider of the researched community, and the researcher as insider of the researched community, as someone that belongs to it and is also carrying out an investigation. As necessary it is to keep an honest communication of the positionality within the research context with participants and the community (Bourke, 2014); reflexivity is essential when involving participants, individuals, or communities as part of the research objective. In this case, reflexivity involves "a self-conscious awareness of the relationship between the researcher and an "other""(Bourke, 2014: 2; Chiseri-Stater, 1996; Pillow, 2003).

Tuhiwai Smith (2021), a Māori scholar, emphasises how to tackle reflexivity as insider researcher when conducting decolonising practices. Intersecting decolonisation, research, and positionality, she points out that "[m]eaningful decolonising practices are not all about theory or all about action, but they are all about praxis and the reflexivity that is necessary for the integrity of research and of the researcher themselves." (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021: xiv). The continual self-reflexivity practised by insider researchers is tied to the fact that they must be critical "about their processes, their relationships, and the quality and richness of their data and analysis." (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021:157).

For the research on Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples, Tuhiwai Smith (2021) uses autoethnography since she is an insider to the community she is researching. This way, her "own Indigenous, personal and academic limitations were also up for interrogation", enabling the revision of how she relates with different community members and outsiders of the community. Autoethnography, as we will detail further, relies strongly on storytelling and writing, where self-reflexivity helps create a trusting bond between the parties involved through meaningful conversations rather than data gathering (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021). This is particularly relevant regarding insider methodology, not only "Indigenous research approaches problematise the insider model in different ways because there are multiple ways of being either an insider or an outsider in Indigenous contexts". Feminist and critical theories have also built upon this topic in qualitative research. (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021:157).

Moreover, when regarding practitioners, the concept of reflectivity is introduced instead. Although similar in scope, reflectivity represents the concept of thinking while doing about what one is doing. Here, thought and action intertwine, where knowing is implicit in action, and thinking is merged with doing, something that comes naturally in experienced practitioners. Here, practitioners define the

methods and the end results in a reciprocal way while framing the program of action or the situation to be addressed (I.e., design brief, problem, legal case, etc.) (Schön, 2016).

It is worth mentioning the contributions of reflection-in-action and reflection-in-practice outlined by Schön (2016:50). On the one hand, reflection-in-action reflects on the "understandings which have been implicit in his action", embodying them into new action. It is intrinsic in how practitioners face uncertainty, closely tied to the surprise factor in arising situations, the intuitive behaviour to meet them, or feeling stuck or dissatisfied with their performance. Reflection-in-action focuses then "on the outcomes of action, the action itself, and the intuitive knowing implicit in the action" (Schön, 2016:56). On the other hand, reflection-in-practice enables the critical inquiry of the routinely and repetitive experiences around the practice that arise from the specialisation, and leading to a lack of reviewing on what the practitioner is doing, flattening the experience. In this case, the practitioner may assess the behaviours tied to their practice and processes, reflecting "on the tacit norms and appreciations which underlie a judgement" on how the problem is framed, and their role. (Schön, 2016:62)

Reflectivity is very much present in the design practice, where the designer constantly and iteratively reviews the decisions that shape the project. These decisions are taken following specific understandings of the practice itself, determining the following actions and enabling a reflective conversation between the created situation and the designer, "In answer to the situation's back-talk, the designer reflects-in-action on the construction of the problem, the strategies of action, or the model of the phenomena, which have been implicit in his moves." (Schön, 2016:79). This conversation also entails the pivoting "between the unit and the total, between involvement and detachment", gaining perspective by distancing from the project (Schön, 2016:102).

6   Reflexivity through theories and methods

So far, we have pointed out how designers are already implicitly used to reflect upon their doings; this suggests that the same could be applied to positionality. Currently, design research and practice methodologies have evidenced the need to achieve a mindful revision of positionality. Placing the designer as mediator, human-centred design, user-centred design, systemic design, co-design, participatory design, and HCI (human-computer interaction), among other disciplines within design, have indirectly focused on the relationships between the designer, stakeholders, and the design system. These design practices differ in the designer's role and interaction with the stakeholders, users, community, or system.

Critically analysing one's positioning is not new to the social sciences but is yet to be explored in further detail in the design discipline, where approaches like first, second, and third-person perspectives explore the practitioner's view on a specific experience (Diez et al., 2020). Focusing on the first-person perspective, defined as "designing for oneself within the context involving one's own experiences … The designer is committed and includes informal autobiographical reflection in designing to bring inspiration to the design." (Smeenk et al., 2016:38). While running the risk of becoming self-centred and biased by only focusing on the designer's perspective, design practitioners and researchers mix all three perspectives according to the project or stage of the project.

Nevertheless, a growing base of theories adds reflexivity to design research and practice methodologies. Coming from other academic areas, mainly from the social sciences, where the

question of positionality and privilege has been historically approached, the application of these theories has seen an increase in popularity in hand of the increasing social movements that demand diversity, equality, and inclusivity. Decolonial theory, Critical theory, and theories stemming from Third-wave feminism nourish the discussion in the design discipline. These hold a valuable framework for the present research that explores how to adequately carry out a critical debate with ourselves to review and question our positionality.

Intersecting the values deriving from these theories is relevant because it seeks to achieve equity by dismantling systemic power asymmetries by acting, preventing the perpetuation of power imbalances and the status quo (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020). Situating our positioning may state existing situations of privilege and, consequently, power. A designer's ability to shape futures and behaviours entails a great responsibility in revising positionality as a tool to analyse and observe how power imbalances operate and, thus, eliminated.

Canlı and Prado de O. Martins (2016) state that "acknowledging the complexity of oppression and the multiple shapes it might assume is a helpful strategy in understanding its mechanisms" and how this greater matrix of power relations operates. For once, decolonial discourse sustains that to be freed from the "onto-epistemological subjugation of the Global North", we need to revise and challenge our positionalities and privileges constantly (Schultz et al.,2018:99). It is then crucial that design researchers and practitioners can determine an axiological level of the research, defining how positionality impacts the methodologies and findings, stating the designer's values, ethics and preconceptions.

Third-wave feminism and theories like Intersectionality, Standpoint theory, and Critical race theory overlap in how to situate oneself contextually and how they could be used as an approach to analyse and observe how power imbalances operate and could be eliminated (Crenshaw, 1989, Coaston, 2019, Pohlhaus, 2002). On a philosophical level, these theories rely on the conception of how reality is constructed, for which critical theory provides some insight.

Critical theory demands an integration of philosophy into social science's methods to "explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable, practical goals for social transformation." (Bohman, 2021). These lead towards the freeing of humans from oppression and domination situations (Horkheimer, 1993). Assuming that reality is socially constructed by symbols through language and practices that "privileges certain interests", the use of deconstruction as a methodology to detect hidden meanings in these symbols and the interests that such meanings privilege is very relevant. (Fuller & Loogma, 2009:74).

Intersectionality is a legal term that defines how individual characteristics such as race, gender, and class overlap with one another, conditioning our experiences and acting as elements of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). Identity and oppression are both multifaceted, just like privilege, "a privileged experience is one that does not require consideration of how one's race, or class, or ethnicity, or gender impacts one's work." (Onafuwa, 2018:13). Today's understanding of Intersectionality is that it "operates as both the observance and analysis of power imbalances, and the tool by which those power imbalances could be eliminated." (Coaston, 2019).

Using Intersectionality as an approach is crucial since nobody has a single, homogeneous identity but an overlapping and conflicting set of identities (Delgado & Stefencic, 2001). Intersectionality brings out the individual from everyone, closely tied to how identity shapes our experiences and perception, and vice versa. Applying an intersectional lens as a method in our research exposes how the overlapping crafts our positioning, which is the best way to start understanding it. Stemming from social movements instead of academia, Intersectionality produces from the margins, justifying the creation of knowledge coming from diverse epistemologies.

Similarly, Standpoint theory states that personal experience shapes our point of view and way of seeing the world (Pohlhaus, 2002). In feminist Standpoint theory, Harding (1991) makes an interesting point named "strong objectivity", describing that whoever is in an unprivileged social position will gain knowledge or generate perspectives of social reality that are less distorted, showing epistemic advantage (Rolin, 2009). This way, if social scientific research starts from unprivileged groups, it is most likely to obtain "more objective knowledge of social reality", revealing "hidden aspects of social relations between genders and the institutions that support these relations" (Harding, 1991; Rolin, 2009:220). Standpoint theory finds common ground between bias, privilege and positioning, sustaining that knowledge comes from social positions and how our positionality and situatedness in society shape our epistemologies. At this point, we might also notice that decolonial theory also demands the participation of marginalised voices for the sake of achieving plurality.

Furthermore, critical race theory (CRT) includes studying race and racism within society. Also belonging to the field of legal studies and popularised by Crenshaw (2011) and Harvard Professor Derrick Bell around the 80s, CRT highlighted how the legislative system served economically and socially to the hegemonical groups that belonged to certain racial groups, the white elite. Delgado and Stefencic (2001) point out that race is also a social construct that serves selected purposes, systemically set in society's institutions and structures (Bonilla-Silva, 2015).

Moving on from theory and stepping into more practical methods and tools, how to apply reflexivity and positionality remains a relatively unexplored ground. Nevertheless, academia from diverse disciplines has evolved in using the self as part of research strategies using qualitative methodologies such as reflexive ethnography and autoethnography (Berger, 2015). Methodologically, in the process of defining ourselves, we automatically fall into the narrative and storytelling aspects of personal descriptions of our identities.

On the one hand, autoethnography is one of the methodologies that allow the study of oneself regarding a particular cultural context (located between ethnography and autobiography), using tools and resources to analyse specific personal cultural experiences while considering how others may interpret similar ones (Ellis et al., 2011). Autoethnography uses various tools and methods that make it engaging for the audience and reader to follow. Borrowing aspects from storytelling and narration, it is usually considered somewhat artistic. This results in a methodology that is more accessible and has a broader reach; unlike traditional research, it makes "personal and social change possible for more people" (Ellis et al., 2011).

Similarly, reflexive ethnographies "document ways a researcher changes as a result of doing fieldwork", where the journey of the researcher's biography beside a specific cultural group is described and analysed (Ellis et al., 2011). If revisiting one's positionality is a reflective process, then

reflexive ethnographies could be a valuable methodology to analyse ones positioning within a particular cultural context, allowing us to "interrogate how our biases and cultural assumptions affect what we see, hear, know, and document" (Knight & Deng, 2016: 109). Reflexive ethnographies range from the researcher's biography, the studying of the researcher's "life alongside cultural member's lives, to ethnographic memoirs" where the research's backstage efforts become central (Ellis, 2004; Ellis et al., 2011)

Autoethnography does not come without some questioning and critique, mainly because of its personal narrative nature. It is often "dismissed for social scientific standards as being insufficiently rigorous, theoretical, and analytical, and too aesthetic, emotional, and therapeutic" (Ellis et al., 2011). Indeed, the threat of becoming a self-centred methodology based on biased data recalls what was stated previously on positionality and a first-person perspective approach, where not enough emphasis is made on having an exchange with different others and fail to comply with reliability and validity standards (Ellis et al., 2011), present in reflexive ethnography instead.

The richness that may result from a reflective practice of positioning carried out through autoethnography or reflexive ethnography, for instance, speaks not only of understanding our epistemological roots but, as mentioned earlier, the axiological ones that state our values. Being able to have this discussion in academia is already a privilege we must acknowledge, one that is needed in design research and practice to form responsible professionals that act consciously and remain accountable for their doings, pursuing an equitable practice.

Moreover, another methodology commonly used in design research that also has an essential reflexive factor is Participatory Action Research (PAR), enclosing "the reflexive capacities of human beings within the research methodology itself." (Kesby & Gwanzura-Ottemoller, 2007:72). Belonging to the overarching methodology of Action Research, it searches to involve researchers and participants collaboratively with a common objective. Mixing action and research and challenging the hierarchies of researcher and researched, PAR replaces the "'extractive', imperial model of social research with one in which the benefits of research accrue more directly to the communities involved" (Kindon et al., 2007:1; Wadsworth, 1998). This way, the empowerment of people from the communities enables a different academic model that is "flexible and socially owned" (Kindon et al., 2007:1).

Notably, the reflexive process in PAR has a central role in understanding how the power relations between researcher and researched influences the process and results; this is done by employing an inter-reflexive process from both sides involved (Pain et al., 2007). The relationships between the stakeholders involved in PAR coincide with the dynamic raised by Tuhiwai Smith (2021), analysing the role of insider and outsider researcher within a community.

7   Practical implications

The concrete implementation of these methods can be carried out by a wide range of tools and tactics, from more concrete actions, to less tangible definitions of the project. Through dialogue, negotiation and discussion, reflective writing and documenting the process are some of the techniques that will be further detailed in this section. Finally, some of the implications, effects, and upsides will be

intertwiningly be illustrated as well, regarding a transparent process for validation, a strong learning methodology, and the potential discovery of new needs and issues.

Particularly in PAR, "[p]articipants explore their experiences and beliefs, analyse data generated through research and come to their conclusions about necessary action in their communities" (Kesby & Gwanzura-Ottemoller, 2007:72). The outcome of this inter-reflexive negotiation with oneself also shapes the relationship between researcher and participants, where an inevitable result is the reviewing of positionality, personal transformation (Pain et al., 2007), and a solution to the specific problem or research hypothesis addressed. Theconstant reflexivity of the researcher enables the assessment and a shift in the power dynamics of the methods, empowering participants into different roles and taking "ownership of the sessions and the terms of debate" (Tolia-Kelly, 2007:134), and being critical upon the "assumptions, expectations and self-perceptions" (Tolia-Kelly, 2007:134), similar to Schön's statement on how reflecting-in-action allows the reviewing of how designers learn, leading to its reappreciation and reinventing (Schön, 2016).

A clear example on how design and social theory merge is the emergence of respectful design at Swinburne University, leveraging on indigenous knowledge, sustainability principles, feminist, and race theories to inform design practice. Tunstall (2011:133) defines respectful design as "the creation of preferred courses of action based on the intrinsic worth of all human, animal, mineral, fauna and flora and the treatment of them with dignity and regard". Respectful design, as a strategic and institutional aim, seeks to imbue students with an ethical foundation. Its educational curriculum emphasizes drawing as a philosophical skill to understand "one's contextual environment and place within it", the importance of material origin and local sourcing, and fostering dignity and worth through making. It promotes a collaborative learning environment and encourages self-critical reflection, fostering respect for diverse ways of being and processes of self-determination. (Tunstall, 2011)

On a practical level there are several methodologies to carry out a reflexive process. Sheehan (2011) posits that respectful design is anchored on negotiation, favoring dialogue and visual dialogue as prime forms for this process. It treats research as a relationship-building act, where the scientific method remains paramount. Practitioners of respectful design must first acknowledge and openly discuss their biases, employing methodologies to reveal and clarify bias (Sheehan, 2011). The reflective practice starts by the recognition of preconceptions and initial knowledge, shared in discussions and writings to ensure transparency in the process of knowledge production (Sleeswijk Visser, 2009). One way of doing this is through a reflective journal (Gray & Malins, 2004; Sleeswijk Visser, 2009), a crucial tool for design resesarch that acts as a record of thoughts, decisions, observations, and reflections throughout the project, thus facilitating critical evaluation at later stages. The reflective journal also enables the researcher to adapt assumptions and ideas over the course of the study, especially in Action Research methodologies (as introduced in this manuscript through PAR). This practice makes the unfolding events explicit and ties together the structure of all data collection types. (Sleeswijk Visser, 2009).

PAR also makes a point regarding the visualization of the research, in this case responding to the need for public accountability and validation of the design and its process, and self-evaluation. Documenting the research and making the process visible brings social responsibility upon the designer and researcher (Swann, 2002:56). The overall upside on the reflective stage of PAR,

"reflecting on the result of the evaluation and on the whole action and research process", may lead to the uncovering of new issues (Swann, 2002:56), and presents itself as a possibility for learning through reflection (Cole et al., 2005). The learning phase holds explicit implications for all stakeholders involved (researcher, designer, client, community, research community), enhancing theoretical knowledge, facilitating clearer outcomes, and driving meaningful change. Another methodology reviewed previously, 1st person design perspective is required to negotiate complex situations as it is concerned with designing within the societal context and system. This approach also includes stakeholder contribution and input, acknowledging the complexity of decision-making and the shared responsibility in the design process. (Tomico et al., 2012).

8 Conclusions

Design related research is still a relatively new study area, including research into, through, and for design (Frayling, 1993), even more when intersected with critical social studies and the analysis of how one's own identity modifies and affects the research and practice. Throughout this manuscript we reviewed different concepts, theories, and methods that enable us to pursue critical reflectivity and reflexivity aimed at reviewing our positionality. Although not definitory, different layers of analysis started from general terms and philosophies to more practical applications, understanding their points in common.

Complex and novel issues with unclearly defined edges require qualitative methods and processes that enable reflectivity and reflexivity upon and in parallel to the research and its findings; this continuous process helps in the reframing of the research and how to proceed. Reflectivity is crucial since it sparks a critical dialogue with oneself (Schön, 2016), allowing the researcher to revisit their positionality, privilege, and values, discovering axiological, epistemological, and ontological characteristics (Berger, 2015).

We have seen why applying a pluriversal perspective is crucial in efforts to dismantle power asymmetries so present in academia and research. Fuelled by the revision of the privileges entailed in this practice, and reviewing the researcher's positioning within the research, academic institutions, and communities involved, enable further understandings of how systemic inequalities operate. This is vital to achieving their dismantling; including perspectives from marginalised places helps attain a pluralised approach, creating knowledge from the margins, thus carrying epistemic advantages (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020:139). Understanding how our identity shapes the research aims at being critical in the pursuit of a more socially responsible practice, leading to a more equitable world.

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