

Residues, remnants, and vestiges in Design and Art

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“Our relationship with nature is broken. But relationships can change. When we protect nature - we are nature protecting itself.” (@GretaThunberg, May 22, 2021).

“So we have to be careful what we humans design, because we are literally designing the future, and that future isn’t in our idea of the thing, how we think it will be used and so on—that’s just our access mode. The future emerges directly from the objects we design”.

Timothy Morton

“In essence: technics is memory-support. And this means technics is the condition of the constitution of the relation to the past.”

Bernard Stiegler

Hiperproductivity seems to be a feature of our contemporary lives. Not only in the sense of the production of objects, necessary gadgets, or useless junk, but also in terms of virtual and digital matters.

Vast surfaces are colonized by the effects of these matters, vestiges of a civilization in progress, in process, in development, crisis and decay. We are witnessing the complexity of the sense of residue when an accumulative sedimentation takes place globally. The phenomenon of the “plastic soup” is just an example of it.

Many countries, companies, industries, and individuals have understood and increased their investments worldwide in reducing carbon-emissions. It is evident the intention in some developed countries, at least, on mitigating in part their carbon footprints. Lately we have been witnessing the complex debate on regulating biomass burnings. Energy, use of soil, water, and climate are more than ever the main aspects for thinking design in the middle of a deep changing environment.

Residues, remnants, and vestiges are all over the place, they inhabit the space, the void, the territories, surfaces, and undergrounds, but they also inhabit the virtual, the digital, communications, expressions, memories, emotions, and imaginaries.

Australian philosopher Patrick Stokes, in his article “The decay of digital personhood. Towards

new norms of disposal and preservation”, published in the edited book *Residues of Death: Disposal Refigured* (Eds. Kohn, Gibbs, Nansen, van Ryn, 2019) writes about the “moral implications of the persistence of digital residues”. He argues that we are living in a world where the remains of someone else can continue living digitally in a “network of relationships and association.” He writes that “such digital residues should be considered as “digital remains” analogous to bodily remains.”

What kind of implications that sort of statement has towards design, both industrial and experimental? How should we understand the scope of an issue that seems to be invisible to the daily activities in industrialized societies when it is also creating a massive complex environmental transformation? What are the potential tools that design, art and other aesthetic and cultural practices, and in that sense designers, artists, activists, cultural agents, should develop, both conceptually and materially, to think this challenging residual matter?

Design, as a multidisciplinary field, faces an increasing challenge when confronting its role in the production of leftovers, residues, remnants, and vestiges. Both industrialization and manufacturing in design industry implies a hyper productivity that collides with the limitations of our world. How design is, or should be, engaging with these matters, from its different surfaces of practice and research? In what way design researchers are developing, or should develop, critical approaches to a sensible, social, political, and economic agency that is touching different aspects of our in-development societies? How design as a practice and research through practice should compose the spaces for allowing a conscious response to a multiple and sometimes confusing and complex socio-political, and business environment? What sort of tools are research designers exploring and developing both conceptually and materially to confront and participate in these broader discussions? How can we start thinking about and pushing forward post-sustainable design practices?

This issue of *Immaterial* aims to gather scholarly articles from a broad perspective highlighting the material and immaterial agency of the phenomena of the residual. With an interest in gathering research from different places around the world, effectively exposing the different approaches to similar problems, and allowing the scientific review to be the space of encounter for diverse researchers.

We would like to invite designers, thinkers, theoreticians, philosophers, artists, activists, social engineers, mediators, educators, to share their ideas, approximations, practices, and methodologies to contribute an intense and multilayered aspect of our present.

We will thank perspectives addressing these issues such as (but not limited to):

1. designing traces to digital memories
2. readdressing the memory of the remnants
3. creation through the discarded
4. pollution as a space for future worlds to design
5. impact of the residues in the processes of thinking-designing
6. aesthetics of the residual.

The submission deadline is April 15th, 2022.

Originals should be sent to: info.inmaterialdesign@bau.cat

Inmaterial, diseño, arte y sociedad

<https://www.inmaterialdesign.com/INM>

Inmaterial is a scientific publication dedicated to examining design and design research issues and question the effects of design practice critically and scientifically. It welcomes original texts, high-quality papers that address conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and practical aspects of design, and papers that will enhance the body of design knowledge that unites the different disciplines. The purpose of this journal is to overcome the traditional disciplinary boundaries, so as to make its reflections available for as broad a public as possible. Challenging the traditional interpretation of design as a mere technical, problem-solving activity, we call for a vision of designers as both intellectual and material operators, conscious of the wide range of cultural, social, economic, and political implications of their actions, and therefore capable of asking themselves adequate questions before putting forward possible answers. In a moment in which the very notion of design, its principles and specific objectives are subject to an evident reformulation, this journal also seeks to include the innovations – in epistemological, methodological, terminological terms, and the like – that might concern the discipline. Starting from this theoretical framework, INMATERIAL wants to set up a space – rigorous but also agile and dynamic – for reflection and debate on issues related to design and its intrinsic capacity of social transformation.

Reference:

CFP: Residues, remnants, and vestiges in Design and Art. In: ArtHist.net, Jan 30, 2022 (accessed Apr 5, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/35793>>.