Artículo

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Univocal Design: An Ontotheology of Creation

Diseño unívoco: una ontoteología de la creación

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Abstract

This paper introduces the concept of univocal enmeshment as a novel ontological framework for understanding design as a metaphysical act of creation. Drawing from medieval theology - particularly Duns Scotus's doctrine of univocity - and extending through mystical, occult and modern philosophical traditions, we argue that design is not merely a technical or aesthetic practice but a manifestation of Being itself. By tracing the historical entanglement of design with Christian mysticism, occult science and speculative metaphysics, we reveal how artefacts emerge from a shared ontological field that includes both Life and technics. Engaging with key thinkers including Deleuze, Simondon, Heidegger and Thacker, we propose that design operates within a continuum of immanence, where creation is distributed, ambiguous and co-emergent. The resulting model of univocal enmeshment challenges hierarchical and hylomorphic views of design, offering instead a vision of design as a mystical, recursive and more-than-human process of becoming.

Resumen

El presente artículo se ubica en los marcos de la reflexión sobre la necesidad de una nueva geopolítica del diseño y dentro de una perspectiva decolonial del conocimiento. Se sostiene que si el diseño chileno es concebido como una forma de proyectar mundos, la responsabilidad ética, ambiental y social demanda una renovada erótica y formas de conocimiento que dejan escasos márgenes para la ambigüedad conceptual, los fines espurios y la individuación. Un reposicionamiento del campo a través de una ecología epistemológica implica cuestionarse lo que se ha generado conceptual y axiológicamente bajo el imperio del consumo y en condiciones de crisis social y ambiental, planteándose un nuevo horizonte de lo posible, desde procesos autónomos y de enlace temporal. Se argumenta que prospectivamente existen posibilidades de presentes y futuros diferentes frente a la hegemonía eurocéntrica que está en la base fundacional del diseño chileno. Para ello, dialogamos, a través de distintas entrevistas, con académicos y profesionales que han trabajado en diseño en los últimos cincuenta años de modo poner en tensión las formas de construcción del saber y de la profesión dentro del modelo neoliberal.

Introduction

Design is not merely a technical or aesthetic activity; it is an act of creation, embedded in cultural, material and spiritual realities (Cross, 2001; Walker, 2020). While much of the existing scholarship has examined design through methodological (Bremner & Rodgers, 2013) and cognitive (Hay *et al.*, 2017) perspectives, these approaches often overlook the fundamental questions of Being that underlie acts of creation.

This paper proposes a speculative perspective on design grounded in the theological and mystical traditions of Christianity, particularly the ontological position of *univocity*. We argue that design should be understood as part of a broader ontological continuum reverberating through the fabric of life itself. In this view, design is not a secular, rational or scientific process alone, but a metaphysical unfolding shaped by centuries of theological discourse and the fluid textures of life and society.

To explore these ideas, we take an unconventional route. Exploring medieval theology, mystical and occult thought, we trace how these traditions have influenced the foundations of science, art and design thinking, and continue to inspire designers and researchers today. Drawing on a diverse range of scholarship including Thacker's (2010) work on the ontologies of Life, Deleuze's (1994; 1997) 'plane of immanence' and Heidegger's (2010) work on Being, we develop a four-fold process of examination, exploration, development and creation, ultimately proposing an ontotheology of creation through design. We argue that design should be understood as a *univocal enmeshment* of technics and Life - an entangled process that reveals the intrinsic ambiguities and strange emergences at the heart of creation.

Methodology

This paper is structured into four interconnected sections, loosely informed by scholastic methods of comparison and analogy: examination, exploration, development and creation. These methods allow us to draw meaningful parallels between theological, occult, mystical[1] and design discourses, revealing underlying ontological continuities.

1. Examination of the key theological conceptions of creation, focusing on the univocal ontology of Duns Scotus. This is then discussed in relation to modern concepts from 20th-century design theory, providing an explicit comparative architecture.

2. Exploration and critical examination of how these ideas evolved through western mystical and occult traditions. We explore several instructive examples to show how mystical and occult concepts interacted with devel-

1 The theological, occult and the mystical are not equivalent but represent different and interwoven strands of a wider Christian culture. According to James (2002), a mystic seeks ineffability, *noesis* (intellect or intelligence), transiency and passivity, leading one into a state of consciousness in which there is a transference between this world and the world of the unknowable divine. As Villiers (2016, p. 5) notes, 'the mystic as lover of God is drawn irresistibly to totality, nothingness and infinity as a transforming power of the inner life. Despite fragmentation, there is unity'.

opments in the Scientific Revolution and evolved further within the frameworks of Modernist-era technology, science, art and design.

3. Development and presentation of univocal enmeshment model, a framework that illustrates how design emerges from a shared ontological field, where life and artefact, creator and creation, are deeply intertwined.

4. Creation of an ontotheology for design. We tentatively lay foundations for this ontotheology and utilise recent design theory and criticism to develop our position and link it back to the overarching themes of the work.

Examination: Understanding 'Creation'

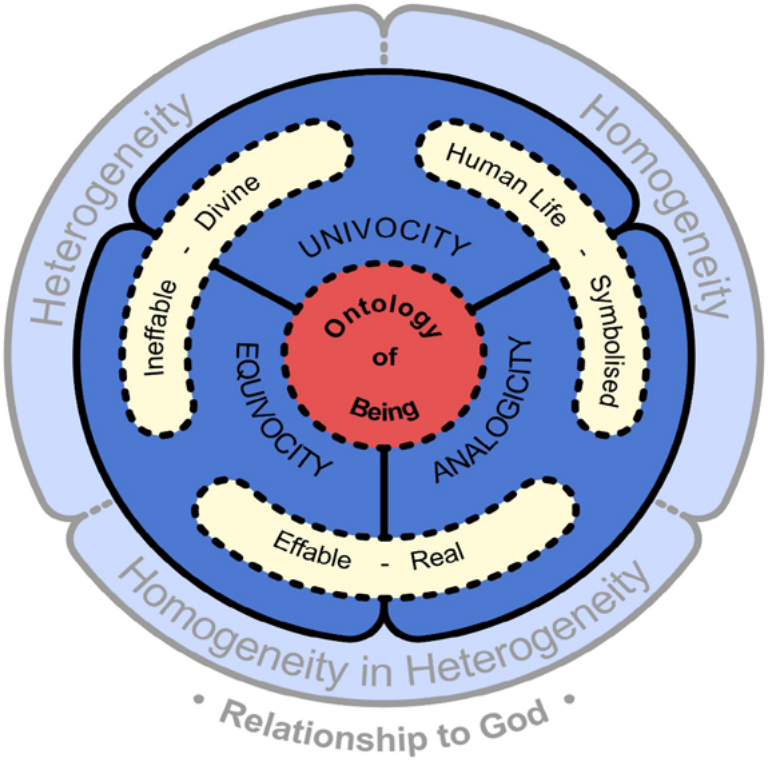
What is Creation; Who is Creator?

To penetrate the core problematic at the heart of design, we must first look to how *creation* itself is understood. Though rarely considered with design-research, scholastic philosophy and theology offer powerful tools for exploring this. At the heart of this discussion lies a triad of ontological concepts - univocity, equivocity and analogy - which emerged from theological discourse during the medieval period. These ideas, developed by early Christian thinkers such as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Thomas Aquinas, John Scotus Eriugena and Duns Scotus, and later revisited by philosophers like Gilles Deleuze, have profoundly shaped how creation and subsequently creativity are understood in Western discourse (Tonner, 2007).

For these thinkers, the nature of creation and Being was viewed in Neo-Platonist Christian terms. As such, there emerged two major strands of thought: cataphatic and apophatic theology. Apophatic theology emphasises the radical difference between humans and the divine, suggesting that God is unknowable. In contrast, cataphatic theology asserts a fundamental similarity between humans and the divine, making it possible to gain knowledge of God (Stenqvist, 2013). This divergence maps onto broader ontological positions. On one side are those who argue for a comprehensible similarity between human and divine Being - a *univocal* view. On the other are those who maintain that the divine is fundamentally ineffable and unknowable – *equivocity*. And a third, *analogicity*, in which the divine is understood through means of symbolic comparison through analogy (Figure 1). An important figure in this debate is the 13th-century Scholastic philosopher Duns Scotus. Scotus advanced a radical alternative to the dominant Aquinian position of analogicity (Hoschchild, 2019). He argued that both God and humankind share the same fundamental expression of Being. While their properties differ - what Scotus calls 'modes of Being' (e.g., God's infinite knowledge versus humanity's finite knowledge), they exist within a single, univocal *continuum of Being*.

What makes univocal thinking particularly striking is its radical departure from traditional theological frameworks. As Thacker (2010) notes, the dominant views of equivocity and

1 Figure 1 *Ontologies of Being and their relationships.*



analogy ultimately led to a philosophical impasse. These models framed creation solely through the lens of divine transcendence, placing it behind an epistemic barrier, something fundamentally unknowable to human minds. John Scotus Eriugena, an early theologian, synthesised this core problem by creating a four-fold schema of what creation is and what it is not:

1. **That which creates and is not created – the Source of all things, God.**
2. **That which is created and creates – primordial causes or Platonic ideas.**
3. **That which is created and does not create – self-perceived things, or phenomena.**
4. **That which neither is created nor creates – that to which all things return, also God. (Thacker, 2010)**

This final category is especially intriguing. As Thacker (2010) observes, it approaches the limits of ontology, a kind of ontological superposition where un-creation and creation converge. This paradox opened the door for Scotus' concept of *univocity*. Univocity proposes an ontological equivalence between divine and human acts of creation - an idea especially relevant when considering design as a creative practice. As such, Scotus defined univocity as a concept that maintains unity without collapsing difference: a heterogeneity unfolding within a homogeneity (Burrell, 1965). Scotus further advanced this idea through the notion of the 'infinite', suggesting that the divine must be understood as part of a oneness; a unity that is not countable or divisible. As Thacker (2010, p. 120) summarises: '[In univocity], the common nature that cuts across individual things is not itself determined by any one individual thing.' This formulation

marks a significant shift - blurring the boundaries between the divine and the human.

Within this conceptual opening, we begin to see the conditions for fresh understandings of design. Scotus argued that the concept of Being must be understood univocally across all entities to enable coherent metaphysical discourse (Thacker, 2010). This ontological stance is especially pertinent to design theory, where the need for systematic comparability and conceptual clarity is paramount. Univocity allows for the treatment of all entities - whether divine, human, synthetic or artificial - within a shared ontological framework, facilitating the analysis of designed product or systems and their components without recourse to metaphysical ambiguity. Furthermore, Scotus' emphasis on individuation and contingency aligns with principles in design thinking (Milton & Rodgers, 2013), which often foreground specificity, uniqueness and the potential for transformation. In this light, Scotus's ontology not only advances metaphysical precision but also provides a generative structure for exploring how designed artefacts and systems participate in Being, making it a valuable resource for exploring contemporary design ontology and the ever-evolving identity of design.

Designerly Ways of Creating

Since the rise of Modernism, design has often been conceptualised as a 'unity' of art and science (Pevsner, 1949). Seminal contributions by Archer (1978), Cross (1982) and Jones (1992) each position design within the rationalist traditions of post-Enlightenment thought. Archer, for instance, framed design as a specialised form of scientific inquiry – a view later critiqued for its reductive scope (see Boyd Davis & Gristwood, 2016). Cross, by contrast, emphasised the human-centred nature of design, highlighting 'appropriateness' as a core value in creative problem-solving. Jones extended this further, portraying design as a future-oriented activity: while science and art are often anchored in the present, design, he argued, must project beyond the immediate to imagine new possibilities.

Alongside these rationalist models, design theory has also engaged with more intangible dimensions. Approaches such as social design (Chen, 2016), interaction design (Stolerman, 2008) and design for emotion (Desmet *et al.*, 2021) attempt to translate the complexities of human experience into meaningful outcomes. Schön's (2017) theory of 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action' further underscores this experiential dimension. He proposed that design unfolds through a dialogue with the situation at hand - where the situation 'talks back' to the designer, shaping both the problem and its resolution. In this view, design becomes a performative act, akin to artistry, where invention, inference, and the negotiation of multiple perspectives are central. It is a process grounded in bodily engagement and reflective thought, emerging through dynamic interaction with the world.

Furthermore, David Pye (1968) explored the dynamic relationship between the maker's skill and the material being worked. He introduced the concepts of the 'workmanship

of risk' and the 'workmanship of certainty,' arguing that true innovation often emerges from the former - where unpredictability and skill converge. This emphasis on tacit knowledge is echoed in the work of Frayling (1993) and more recently by Sennett (2008), both of whom highlight the interplay between internalised, intuitive knowledge and externalised, formal knowledge, particularly within craft traditions. Provocatively, some such as Koestler (1964) have suggested that the creative process involve the suspension of rational thought, occurring in dream-like states.

While these theories have significantly advanced our understanding of design as a coherent activity, they often overlook the deeper intellectual and cultural lineages from which they emerge. Christian, mystical and occult traditions have long shaped theories of creation in the pre-industrial world and continue to exert influence in the post-industrial context. This is significant for two reasons: first, it reframes design as an activity historically intertwined with spiritual, religious and mystical practices; second, it offers a philosophical lens through which elemental thought in design methods can be ontologically re-examined.

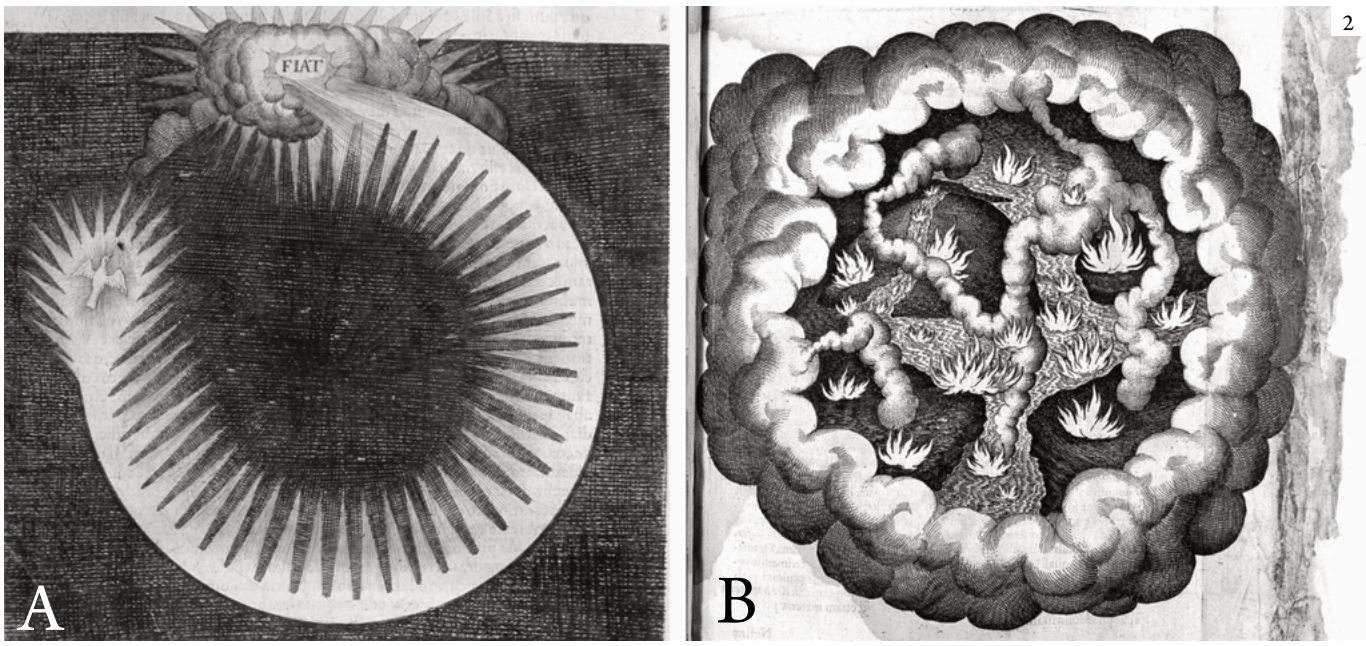
Exploration: Occult Science, Occult Designing

Visions of Creation

The word 'creation' long predates 'creativity'. In fact, the notion that individuals have powers of creativity would seem unintelligible to ancient peoples – creativity was an expression of God's will and art was a form of discovery. Creativity only becomes an established concept within the proto-scientific world of the European Renaissance (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999) and doesn't become widely explored until the 18th century (Tatarkiewicz, 1980) within the ambit of 'imagination'. Within this proto-scientific world, the magical and the spiritual were very still real (Koestler, 1959; Kuhn *et al.*, 2008).

In the early-modern period, a number of influential figures were engaged with esoteric, occult and mystical ideas about creation (see Gibbons, 2018). Galileo himself engaged in bizarre proto-scientific exercises. In his *On the Shape, Location and Size of Dante's Inferno* (1588) he provides a geometry and measurement to an unreachable (un)divine world (Dante's Hell). As the scientific enterprise of this time was so engaged with forms of ancient speculative cosmology (Aristotle's 'heavenly spheres'), theology, astrology, occult beliefs and magic, some such as Koestler (1959) have questioned the viability of the description 'scientific' revolution.

Notably, the English proto-cosmologist Robert Fludd (1574-1637), speculated on the possibility of a creation that emerges not from divine command but from a primordial nothingness. Fludd's theory of creation, influenced by the Swiss alchemist Paracelsus, was encapsulated in the phrase *fiat lux*, or 'let there be light'. In this vision, creation arises from a 'dark chaos', a void that paradoxically contains the potential for Being. Interestingly, Fludd had a series of



(a). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Utriusque_cosmi_majoris_scilicet_et_minoris_metaphysica_pg46_plate_01.tif
(b). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%22De_metaphysico_macrosmi...ortu%22,_Fludd,_1617_Wellcome_L0016159.jpg

Figure 2 (a). Fiat lux creation theory (Robert Fludd, 1617). Wikimedia Commons. Public domain.

(b). Primordial fires (Robert Fludd, 1617). Wikimedia Commons. CC BY 4.0.

correspondences with Johannes Kepler in which they debated the divine underpinnings of celestial mechanics (Pauli, 1955). Fludd's visual representations of this creation process are striking. In one image, a divine bird inscribes a circle of light into the surrounding darkness, symbolising the emergence of order from chaos. In another, primordial fires engulf a barren landscape, suggesting a world in the throes of transformation. These images, reproduced in Figure 2 (A & B), offer more than symbolic mysticism, they reflect a world view in which the divine is not separate from material but immanent within it. The void is not empty; it is pregnant with potentialities.

These occult conceptions of creation bear intriguing parallels with certain aspects of modern cosmology. Big Bang theory posits that the universe emerged from a high-energy singularity, seemingly out of a state of nothingness. While the contexts and epistemologies differ significantly, both frameworks suggest a form of emergence from an inscrutable or undefined substrate, rather than a creation imposed externally. However, such comparisons should be approached cautiously, as they risk oversimplifying or conflating fundamentally distinct metaphysical and scientific paradigms.

This partial continuity between mystical and scientific world views becomes even more apparent when we consider the material culture of the Scientific Revolution. Just as Fludd's images visualised the emergence of light and form from darkness, the instruments of early modern science, such as the telescope and microscope, were designed to reveal hidden dimensions of a divine reality (Wilson, 1995; Fauske, 2015). These tools did not merely extend human perception; they redefined the boundaries between the natural and the divine. By the 17th and 18th centuries, this shift was marking a pivotal transformation in the nature-culture relationship. Their design was deeply embedded in cultural narratives of order, divinity, truth and the

sublime, functioning simultaneously as technological artefacts and metaphysical instruments - echoing the same impulse to make the invisible visible, an enterprise that continues to this day at the sub-atomic level in places like CERN (Figure 3; Neresini, 2024; Jenkins & Schofield, 2015). This is also seen vividly in figures such as Isaac Newton, who methodically studied alchemy (the occult practice of material transformation). Newton's concept of 'action at a distance' - central to his theory of gravity - was shaped by alchemical ideas about invisible forces and attraction (Dobbs, 1982).

Mysticism in Technology, Design and Art

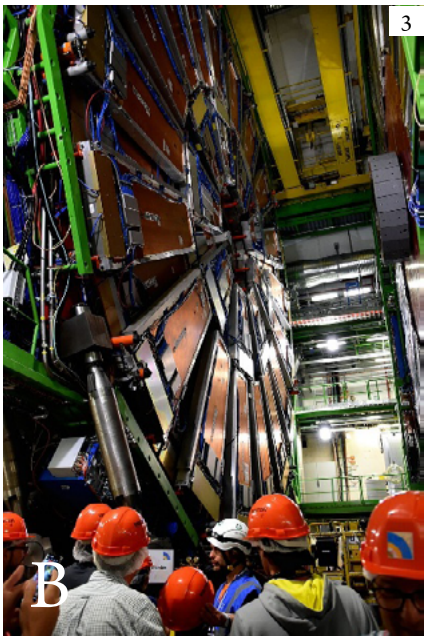
Often not appreciated, interest in the mystical, the occult and the spiritual has long been a property of modern design, technology and art. Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) – Austrian philosopher, occultist and architect - is an instructive example of the melding of these worlds (Adams, 1992). His architectural philosophy, as expressed in his lectures on designing the iconic 'Goetheanum' and the School of Spiritual Science, blends design theory with a form of mystical practice. Architecture is envisioned as a spiritual journey, where buildings are not merely functional or symbolic, but living expressions of cosmic truths. Drawing on curved forms like circles and lemniscates, Steiner believed these shapes could embody the dual nature of the human self and connect the soul to higher realms of reality (Steiner, 1999). As he put it: 'forms are living ... they are organs of speech flowing from the spiritual world' - guiding the soul from the earthly to the divine. Steiner is interesting due to his (underappreciated) impact on subsequent thought within design, notably influencing figures such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Frank Gehry (Gray, 2014).

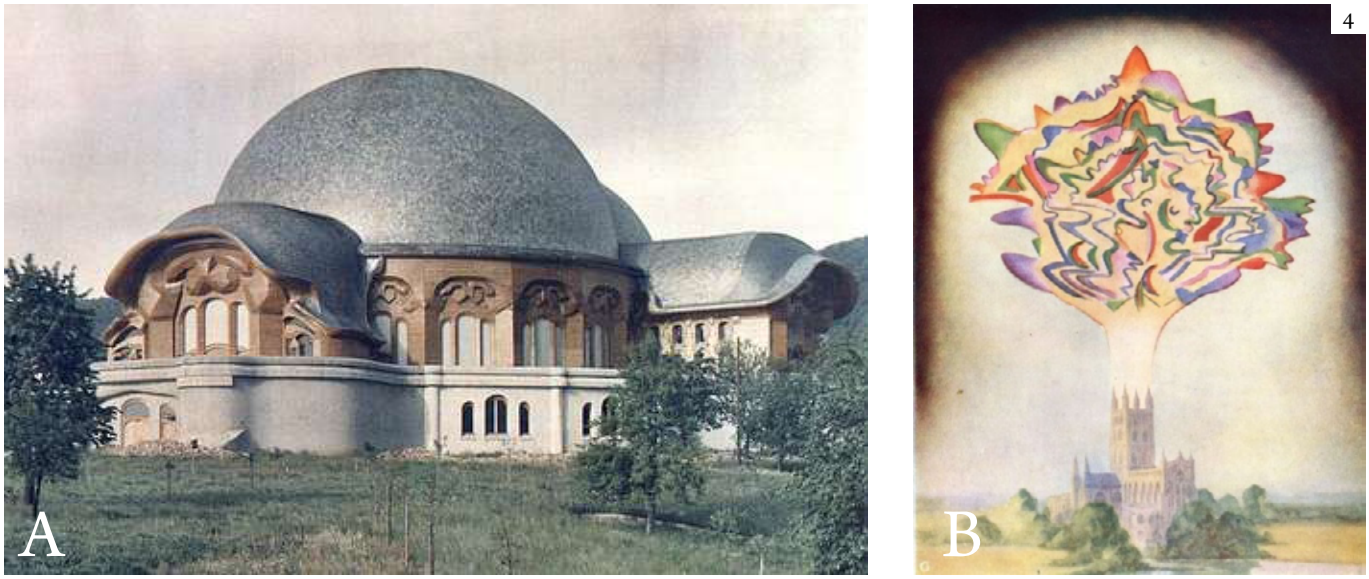
Stiener's thought runs contemporaneously with that of Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, Theosophists, who in 1905 described 'Thought Forms'. Thought Forms were reported to be observations of the 'substance

Figure 3 (a). A Philosopher Lecturing on the Orrery (Joseph Wright of Derby, 1766). Wikimedia Commons. Public domain.

(b). Tour of the Large Hadron Collider at CERN (2019). Wikimedia Commons. SimonWaldherr. CC BY-SA 4.0.

(a). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wright_of_Derby,_The_Orrery.jpg
(b). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CERN_LHC_CMS_06.jpg





(a). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:First_Goetheanum.jpg
(b). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Music_of_Gounod_-_Annie_Besant_Thought_Form_-_Project_Gutenberg_eText_16269.jpg

Figure 4 Examples of mystical and occult influence on proto-Modernist art and design.

(a). Rudolf Steiner's First Goetheanum in Switzerland (1914). Wikimedia Commons. Public domain.

(b). Thought-Form of the Music of Gounod (Annie Besant & C. W. Leadbeater, 1901). Wikimedia Commons. Public domain.

of thought' in which colours and shapes were said to denote meaning. This work, and the wider Theosophical movement, imparted substantial influence on art and design with key figures such as Kandinsky (who would go on to teach at the Bauhaus) and Italian Futurist Luigi Russolo, both using occult Theosophical beliefs as their guiding philosophies (Chessa, 2012).

Modernist philosophies essentially saw some kind of equivalence between science, technology and magic (Laqueur, 2006; Huxtable, 2024). This can be seen within *avant-garde* films from the early 20th century. Fritz Lang's 'Metropolis' (1927) is a vivid example. The film is fascinating for its explicit use of techno-gothic design and the merging of science with magic (Donahue, 2003). A still from the film below shows the occult pentagram behind the *Maschinenmensch* ('machine human'), who is transformed into a living being through a quasi-scientific, quasi-spiritual ritual. Here technology and a mystical unknown mesh continuously. Furthermore, influential figures within design pedagogy would actively engage in mystical and spiritual beliefs and practices. Johannes Itten and Annie Albers for instance, who both taught at the Bauhaus, had distinctive spiritual views. Itten's pedagogies of 'unlearning' echo 'forgetting' within mystical practice such as those seen within key texts like *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Moore, 2025; Anon., 2001). Similarly, Albers wrote in 1965 that forms of weaving design allow the maker to encounter other realities beyond the known, reviving the medieval mystical thought of Bigritta of Sweden (amongst others) who connected the practise of weaving to divine knowledge (McKay, 2024).

All of these examples call into question whether design can be viewed in strictly rational or scientific terms at all; should it in fact be viewed as a continuation of a theological enterprise? And does it need to be viewed in conjunction with the mysteries of Life itself? The development of scientific instruments, technological transformations and artistic movements detailed above thus played a dual role: they were both products of a cultural world

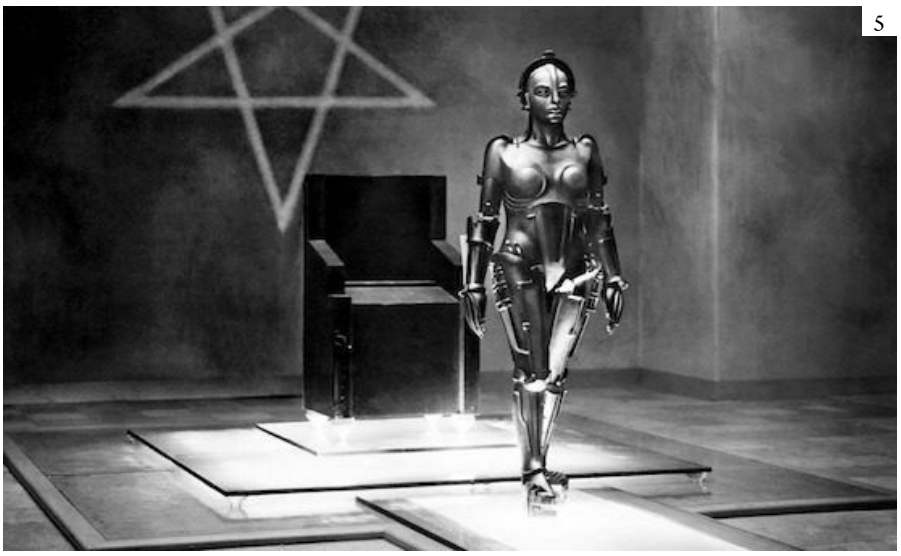


Figure 5 The Maschinenmensch from Metropolis (Fritz Lang, 1927). Note the occult pentagram on the wall behind.

Wikimedia Commons. Horst von Harbou. Public domain.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Horst_von_Harbou_-_Metropolis_set_photograph_05.jpg

view and agents of its transformation. This duality exemplifies the nature-culture entanglement that design uniquely embodies. Figure 6 illustrates this by highlighting how the interactions between culture (including theological, mystical and occult concepts) and discrete knowledge (scientific outputs) lead to the creation of objects (tools, products and systems) which then in turn enter the cultural matrices.

This positions the next phase of the discussion, where we will explore how a univocal understanding of creation can be connected to contemporary understandings of design. We will do this by considering the concept of 'Life' and discuss recent developments in philosophy that can help us understand design through a univocal lens.

Dasein, Design and Modernity

Design as a discipline is generally invested in the positive framings of creation: 'we need this, we will create that', or what Simon (1969) called moving from the 'existing' to the 'preferred'. This linearity and generosity of creation is at once very normal but also disarmingly strange – like Heidegger's concept of *Dasein,* or 'being-in-the-world', where the concept of Being is reconfigured within a materially embodied *lifeworld*. *Dasein*, as it relates to design, is a challenge to the ontic framing of the material versus the immaterial or the objective versus the subjective, which has not been lost on scholars of design. Dilnot (2017) for example has provocatively argued that design 'resists theorisation' but that any theory of design is 'as a capacity or a potentiality' (Dilnot, 2017, p. 150). Here we would like to point out a certain equivalence, between that of Life and that of design. As Heidegger (2010) clarifies, *Dasein* is 'having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something'. Life, we can safely assert, draws on a repertoire of 'componentry' that leads to creations, emergences and embodied interactions at micro and macro scale: cells, metabolisms, societies and so on. Similarly, design has an analogous essence in which componentry and assemblies lead to particular emergences of technics: nuts, bolts, software, plastic housings, entire buildings

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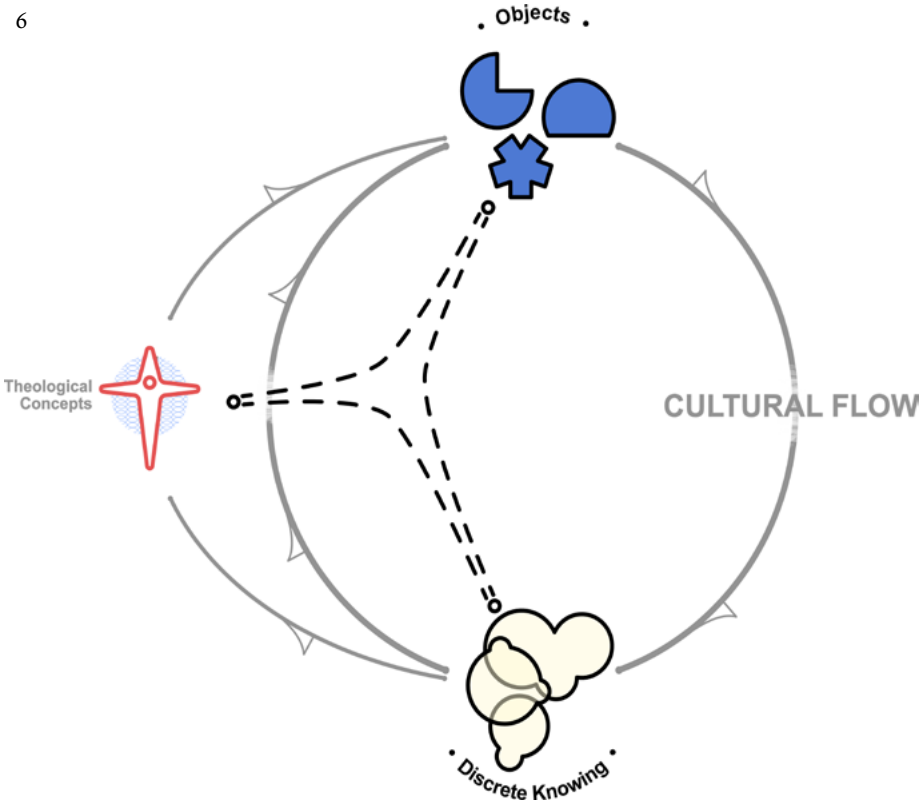

Figure 6 Interactions between cultural flow, theological concepts, discrete knowledge and knowing and the creation of objects.

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or large cities and systems. This 'interobjectivity', characteristic of Modernity (Morton, 2013), is a means in which we can consider 'emergence' and how emergence should be thought within the ambit of Being. Important theorists such as Giles Deleuze and Gilbert Simondon have addressed the central problem of emergence and the processes of individuation.

Simondon's (2009) dynamic concept of 'becoming' is linked to an ontology of immanence, i.e. creation emerging from within rather than being imposed from above. Form-emergence is accordingly distributed: not only do tools work against material during the processes of creation, but the material also works against the tool, described as a convergence of 'transformational half-chains' (p. 41); Simondon liked the example of brick-making whereby the brick's form is created from a dynamic field of forces and not simply a form-plus-matter operation. Being itself then is a form of potentiality which is never fully realised within a given individual thing based on these processes of exchange. By extension 'a Life' (an embodiment of, and experiences of a living creature) has a mysterious immanence, and design has a parallel and contemporaneous mysterious immanence. Both have a potentiality that defies definition as its absolute Being is lost in the processes of emergence itself – it has a kind of 'metastability' (Alloa & Michalet, 2017).

Deleuze (1994), drawing heavily on the work of Scotus, describes univocal Being as 'equal Being [that] is immediately present in everything, without mediation or intermediary, even though things reside unequally in this equal Being.' This formulation captures the essence of univocity: all entities share the same ontological ground, even if they differ in their expressions or intensities.

For Deleuze, univocity is the only ontological framework in which Being is truly collective, manifesting through the individuating differences within beings themselves through univocities of cause, attributes and modality (Smith, 2001). Design thus is not a linear imposition of form onto matter, but a co-emergent process shaped by both material conditions and cultural imaginaries (Simondon 2009; Ingold 2009). Deleuze (1997) further reconfigures the metaphysical landscape by replacing the classical real-possible distinction with a dynamic interplay between the actual and the virtual. The actual refers to material reality, while the virtual encompasses latent potentialities - perceptions, tendencies, and structures that have not yet been actualised. These two states are not opposites but co-constitutive.

Therefore, an event, in Deleuze's terms, is composed of 'a Life' - a pure immanence - unfolding on a plane of immanence. Events are seen as a synthesis of the past and future that can reshape reality, though they do not always cause direct change. Events include a transcendental field populated by singularities each expressing a unique configuration of Being. 'Singularity' refers to a point of intensity or a moment of becoming that disrupts established structures and systems – a creative becoming like water turning into ice. Perception plays a crucial role in this process: it mediates the transition between the virtual and the actual, shaping how 'a Life' navigates the transcendental field. As Deleuze (2001) explains, perception is virtual - it exists as a potential rather than a fixed actuality - while singularities are actual, concrete expressions of change or transformation. In this framework, the interaction field is also virtual, composed of latent forces and tendencies that shape experience. The transcendental field, which underlies both perception and interaction, is infinite and without origin or conclusion. Thus, creative potential emerges through a recursive process, where virtual possibilities are continually revisited, differentiated and actualised. In Deleuzian terms, this process constitutes an event: a moment where the virtual is folded into the actual, producing new configurations of meaning and experience (Figure 7).

Our perception of reality generates new ideas within the transcendental field, individuating singularities in the process. With some modification, this Deleuzian framework aligns with the mystical thinking of the medieval period, where individuation flows from within a dark chaos – an unknowable dark substrate from which immanent Being flows. In both cases, creation is not imposed from above but emerges from within, a shared ontological field of potential and becoming. Design, situated at the intersection of multiple object relations, exemplifies an activity that reveals

Figure 7 Deleuzian 'Event' reimagined through the lens of mystical concepts

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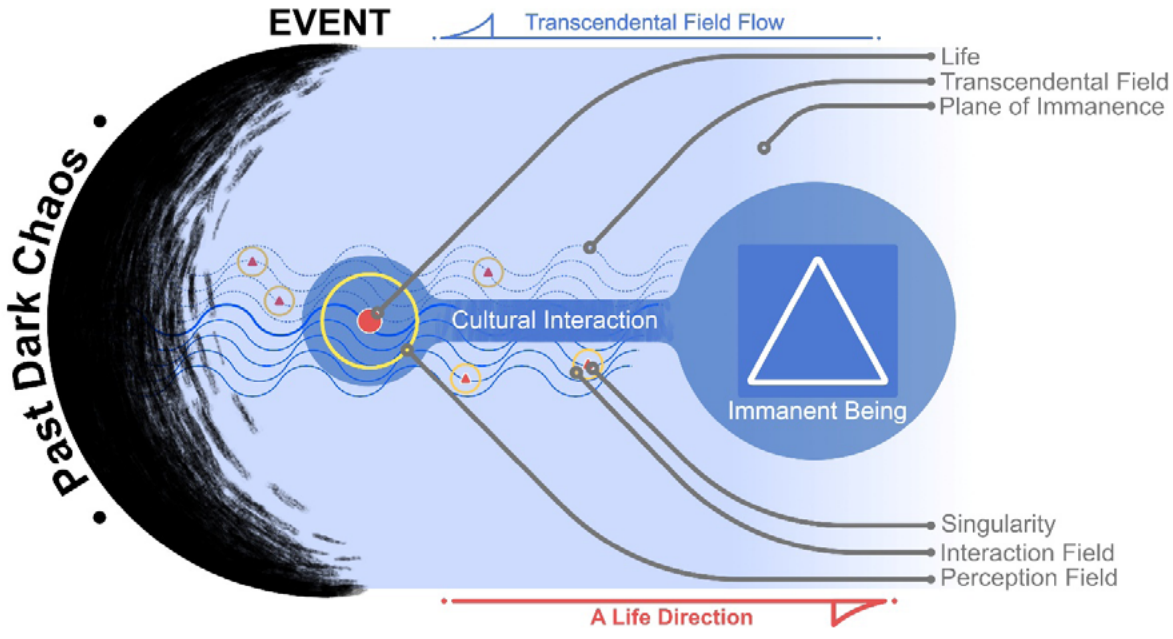

the inherent strangeness of reality. It does so by reconfiguring matter - such as in the creation of an artefact - into new forms. According to metaphysical developments in Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) (Harman, 2002), the aesthetics of design highlight how objects are 'displaced' from their intrinsic essence (Kant's 'thing in itself'; 2008) and reoriented around a different set of (sometimes non-human) purposes (Morton, 2013).

Development: Univocal Enmeshment

Given this starting point of the Deleuzian 'event', we now face the challenge of developing an ontology of creation in design without relying on top-down, transcendent frameworks. Developing such an ontology proves to be complex, particularly when we adopt a flat or univocal perspective on Being. As previously discussed, a univocal understanding implies an ontological equivalence between Life and design. In this context, Deleuze's notion of univocity becomes especially relevant: he proposed a framework in which Being is expressed equally across a multiplicity of entities, where, 'in every single space and time, every Being contains and in fact implies a multiplicity of different Beings.'

But this univocal Being creates a problem, a problem of differentiation that leads to what we will refer to as 'ambiguities of creation'. We have also seen how more modern treatments of the problem, have provided frameworks in which to explore ontologies of emergence from different perspectives, that of interactions between objects (interobjectivity in OOO) and meshworks (flows between energy and material). Latour, in a 2008 lecture, developed a theory of design that explored the concept of *enveloping*. Latour here argues that we are always enveloped within the conditions of the world as we find it and as such, design itself reflects the intrinsic Being of this precondition. To quote Latour (2008), 'we are enveloped, entangled, surrounded; we are never outside without having recreated another more artificial, more fragile, more engineered envelope. We move from envelopes to envelopes, from folds to folds, never from one private sphere to the Great Outside'.

Nature and culture, once seen as distinct, are now understood as co-constitutive. Design operates precisely in this entangled zone - where the artificial is naturalised and the natural is technologised. This is evident in bio-design, AI aesthetics and speculative design fictions that blur the line between organism and artefact. As Manna (2024, p. 132) has argued, '[w]hile nature communicates with itself instantaneously and non-locally, humans communicate with nature through their actions in space-time. The design action becomes part of the informational process through which humans participate in the semiotic design of the world'.

Mysticism Within Design Epistemologyt

As Bruno Latour argues, *we have never been modern* - we have always existed as hybrids, entangled in networks of nature, culture and technology. Design, therefore, is not merely a response to this hybridity; it is its most powerful expression. This idea resonates with Vilém Flusser's (1999) concept of the recursive nature of creation: de-

sign begets more design. There is no final or perfect design, each solution generates new needs and new designs. This forms a kind of mystical, infinite loop, a continuous folding of creation upon itself, echoing the Deleuzian event and plane of immanence detailed above. Tony Fry (2009) describes design as both a *futuring* and *unfuturing* activity. It exists in a state of temporal superposition, shaping the future even as it potentially undermines it. What we design today conditions the possibilities of tomorrow.

Ranulph Glanville (1999) adds another layer by framing design as a cybernetic process, a conversation with an unknown self in an unknown language, unfolding and being deciphered in real time.[2] As Barad (2012) writes, 'ontological indeterminacy, a radical openness, an infinity of possibilities, is at the core of mattering.' In this view, design envelops the designer, shaping them as much as they shape it. Furthermore, Ingold's (2009) concept of *enmeshment* helps reframe this enveloping. Design is not separate from life but deeply entangled within it. This enmeshment is *univocal* - a shared, distributed Being that manifests in diverse forms. The diagram (Figure 8) visualises this ontology of design. At its core, the model rejects hierarchical metaphysics, depicting creation as an immanent process distributed across entities. The central zone illustrates univocal enmeshment, where Life and Design co-constitute each other within a shared ontological field. This field emerges from a primordial substrate, a 'dark chaos', and extends toward a future dark chaos, signifying recursive cycles of creation and dissolution.

Directional flows indicate two reciprocal dynamics: Life–Design interaction, where biological and cultural systems shape design processes, and Design–Life interaction, where artefacts and systems reconfigure lifeworlds. From this interplay arise new creations. These formations lack fixed origins, embodying distributed agency and interobjective relations. The ontic barrier marks the threshold of the known, a liminal zone where virtual potentialities fold into actuality. This visualisation underscores design as a mystical, more-than-human practice, an unfolding of Being rather than a linear imposition of form.

1. Univocal Enmeshment (central blue zone)

Encircling dashed lines and overlapping forms signify a shared ontological field where Life and Design interpenetrate. The blue gradient conveys immanence, flowing from past dark chaos (left black arc) towards future dark chaos (right black arc), suggesting recursive cycles of creation.

2. Life–Design Interaction (red and blue directional arrows)

The red arrow labelled *Life Direction* runs horizontally, showing Life's trajectory through design processes. Blue lines indicate transcendental field flow, linking Being to emergent objects.

3. Design–Life Interaction (interwoven shapes)

2 Interestingly, German mystic and polymath Hildegard von Bingen created an 'unknown language' that was used in her mystical practices.

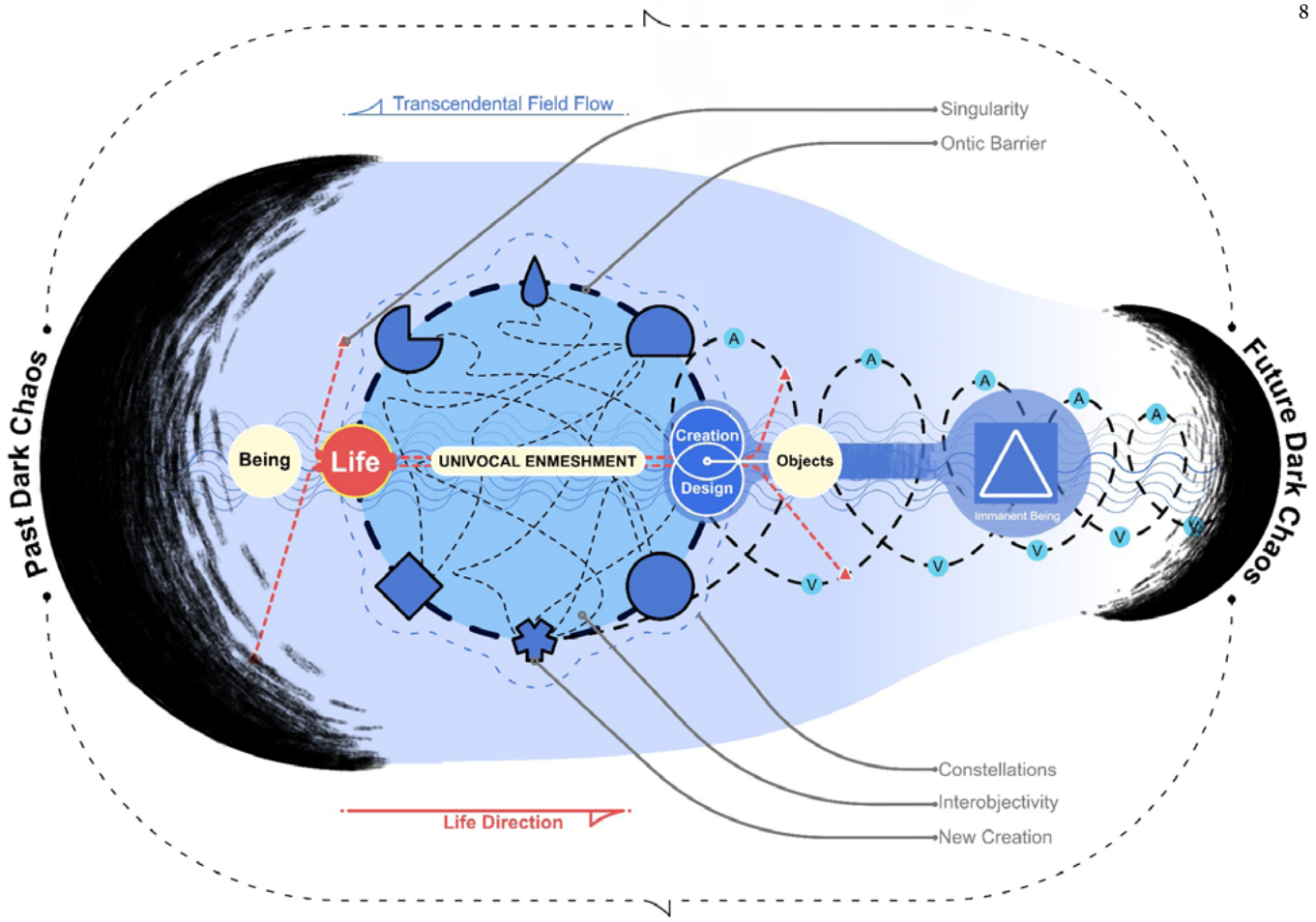

Figure 8 Univocal Enmeshment Model illustrating design as an immanent, distributed process within a shared ontological field. Life and Design co-emerge from a primordial chaos, generating new creations beyond the ontic barrier through recursive flows of Being.

Circular and polygonal forms within the enmeshment zone represent design elements entangled with living systems, emphasising distributed agency.

4. New Creations (constellations beyond the ontic barrier)

On the right, clusters of small blue diamonds and dotted loops depict constellations of artefacts and systems, emerging without singular origins. These formations echo Deleuzian singularities - points of intensity within a continuum.

5. Ontic Barrier (dashed oval boundary)

The black dashed perimeter marks the threshold of knowability, beyond which creations enter an ambiguous, virtual domain. This porous barrier mediates the interplay between actual and virtual states.

Life, as the superstructure through which an immanent Being is expressed, offers a framework for understanding design. Design, in this sense, is another manifestation of Being. Sloterdijk (2011) argues that the boundary between the 'natural' and the 'artificial' is blurred, and this blending reveals a form of Being - a *Dasein* not limited to humans but extending to quasi-human forms. Design, then, shapes our Being, just as we shape design and the evolution of technics within an immanent unfolding. Through our enmeshment in the world, Life presents itself as a designed envelope, manifest in artefacts and social structures like homes, laptops, energy

systems or political movements. This reciprocal shaping between design and Life reveals a *Dasein* within design - a Being that folds through life, through design, and back again.

Creation: Design's Ontotheology

Lorusso (2023), building on Flusser (1999), notes that problems are inherently tied to things, and thus to human existence. Yet in design discourse, problems are often treated as isolated, solvable entities, reinforcing a mode of 'solutionism' that overlooks deeper ontological and cultural entanglements. This risks reducing design to a linear, rationalist process. To counter this, Lorusso introduces the designerly unconscious - a space where myths, ideologies, and symbolic structures emerge from socio-historical matrices (Lorusso, 2025). Design, he argues, operates as a 'paranode' (Mejias, 2010): a liminal zone where meaning forms but resists full comprehension. In this view, design becomes a mystical practice. Not esoteric, but attuned to complexity and ambiguity.

Dominant design models, however, remain tied to hierarchical ontologies, where designers impose form onto passive matter. This is evident in design cognition research (Ball & Christensen, 2019; Hay et al., 2017; Arnott, 2006; Oxman, 2002; Gero & Milovanovic, 2020), which often frames design as linear problem-solving, neglecting the entangled relations between designer, material, and context.

This blind spot is amplified in our interactions with networked technologies, which exhibit interobjective otherness - a 'spooky', ambient connectivity (Milutis, 2006; Byrne & Lockton, 2021). Such systems defy traditional notions of form and agency, suggesting that design might be better approached apophatically, through negation and mystery (Dilnot, 2022; Hara, 2017). This invites a praxis that dwells within the unknown rather than mastering it.

Towards a Univocal Ontotheology of Design

To reframe design ontotheologically, we return to Eriugena's fourfold schema of creation, proposing a metaphysical model that mirrors the structure of immanent Being itself:

1. Uncreated Creator

Design emerges from an ontological substrate - the plane of immanence (Deleuze, 1994) - a mystical, uncreated force beyond human agency. Echoing the apophatic tradition (Turner, 1995), design is not intentional but a revelation of Being through artefacts and systems.

2. Created Creator

The designerly unconscious (Lorusso, 2023): culture, ideologies, and symbolic patterns that shape and are shaped by design. It is a mythopoetic process; design as both a product and producer of cultural meaning (Lorusso, 2025).

3. Created Non-creator

Artefacts are the phenomenal outputs and singularities

of design - objects embedded in networks of meaning and use (Morton, 2013). Though inert, they mediate transformation and reflect design's metaphysical unfolding.

4. Uncreated Non-creator

Design dissolves back into Being - the cloud of unknowing (Anon, 2001; Dilnot, 2022; Hara, 2017), an ambient ether (Milutis, 2006). This is the recursive loop of creation and uncreation, where design becomes a fleeting gesture of becoming.

More than Human Design

Heidegger (1977) wrote that 'technology is a way of revealing'. In this sense, technology is both defined by us and defining 'for-us' in that is reveals aspects of the nature of the human animal. Design's articulation with technics thus reveals our reflective habits and our enmeshment within a mysterious lifeworld. Design scholarship and criticism is now critically engaging with this unknowability. Marenko, Formia and Celi (2024) write 'unknowability of un-scripted futures can become a way of stemming and counteracting some aspects of design, namely the lingering Modernist mindset of 'design for a better world'. This insight echoes what Thacker (2011) has termed the 'unthinkable world' and the 'world-without-us' i.e. a projected future in which a human-centred positionality is dissolved.

Recent scholarship has considered a 'more-than-human-centred' design approach, which we would position as the closest to a univocal reading of design. Wakkary (2021) has powerfully argued, humans are entangled with the non-human and the synthetic and hence must approach design accordingly. Coulton and Lindley (2019) have built on this and developed the poetical metaphor of 'constellations' to describe the transcendental nature of contemporary design (artefacts, data, systems, etc.). The constellation is the object-oriented positionality of an object: just as a constellation of stars changes with respect to the point of reference, different objects or 'creations' have both a unique and a multiplicity of expressions – especially in a world dominated by unseen and ethereal forces, such as 'social networks', data flows and algorithms (not all working in our interest).

Conclusions

This paper has advanced the concept of univocal enmeshment as a metaphysical framework for understanding design not merely as a technical or aesthetic activity, but as a distributed act of creation embedded within the ontological fabric of Life. Drawing from theological traditions, mystical thought and contemporary philosophy, we have argued that design operates within a shared continuum of Being; where artefacts, systems, and living entities co-emerge through recursive, immanent processes.

By revisiting Duns Scotus's doctrine of univocity and tracing its resonance through Deleuze, Simondon, Heidegger and mystical traditions, we have shown that creation in design is not imposed from above but arises from within - a dynamic interplay of individuation, resistance and transformation. This challenges dominant hylomorphic and solutionist

paradigms, reframing design as a mystical and ontotheological practice that engages with the unknown, the ambiguous, and the more-than-human.

The model of univocal enmeshment visualises this entanglement, illustrating how design and Life are co-constitutive, each shaping and being shaped by the other. Design becomes a site of ontological participation, not mastery - a recursive unfolding of Being that reveals the strangeness, depth and ethical stakes of creation. In this light, artefacts are not merely outcomes but expressions of a deeper metaphysical process, echoing the mystical loop of creation and uncreation.

Ultimately, this paper calls for a reorientation of design theory: one that embraces ontological humility, apophatic engagement and speculative openness. In a mystical description of God, medieval theologican Alaine de Lile wrote 'God is an intelligible sphere, whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.' Design can perhaps be thought of in similar terms, forcing us to ask: where does Life end and design begin?

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