Design Ethics beyond Duty and Virtue

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By

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To my wonderful parents, Simone Proteau and Roger d'Anjou; they are the embodiment of wisdom in its most achieved existential practice.

"Freedom is nothing but a chance to be better."
—Albert Camus

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PREFACE

This book is a "collage" of several writings I have produced in the past few years. Put in the form of chapters, they are snapshots of philosophical inquiries that use a "bricolage" approach. In Derrida's terms, "if one calls 'bricolage' the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is 'bricoleur.'"[1] The chapters as such are carried out as analytical and critical bricolages of existentialist ideas, notions, and concepts that aim at reconfiguring specific aspects of design and design ethics in regard to their existential reality. Their collage forms a cohesive whole while allowing each chapter to be autonomous. In that sense the book can be compared to fractals or a cubist painting where the subject depicted is exploded in its different facets shown simultaneously on the canvas. Each facet can be appreciated for its own sake and yet it participates to the overall meaning and image of the whole. A cubist painting is a collage of the facets of a subject revealing both the subject as a whole and each constitutive facet also as a whole. The whole and the parts are constitutive of each other without any absolute priority.

Existentialist analyses, mostly from Sartre's philosophy, are borrowed and used to construct and actualize philosophical and critical tools for apprehending the ethical character of design in regard to the designer's existential condition of freedom in the conduct of design practice.

I decided to group the chapters in three themes: designer, project, and ethics. They seem to cover essential existential domains of design ethics.

My concern about design ethics has been the issue of freedom and responsibility. It seemed clear that this was not addressed squarely and something had to be done. Sartre's ideas naturally appeared to offer the most suited frame to radically address this issue.

In a way design is the practice of bricolage, which describes well the mode of practicing an existentialist design ethics.

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[1] J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans A. Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 285.

FOREWORD

Much has been written about design and ethics, but most of this material is directed at professional codes of practice and is not philosophically well grounded or rigorous. Philippe d'Anjou's text is the obverse of this approach. What d'Anjou does is to situate his concern with a developed existential understanding of ethics within contemporary contexts: first as an essential ground of design education; next as foundational to understanding the nature of the agency of design as a determinant of our being and world(s); and finally as a key factor in our species' ability to survive. So positioned, the mode of ethics as outlined and contextually framed is brought to more specific engagements with design as project, practice and a reworked epistemology.

What *Design Ethics Beyond Duty and Virtue* makes clear is the inescapable fact that for architects and designers to be able to act responsibly in a world made unsustainable (in part by design) they have to confront the need for a developed understanding of ethics, acquire it, and thereafter bring this ethical sensibility to underscore how they perceive the worlds of human difference, the ways design acts upon such worlds, including their own mode of being-in-the-world. This is a book of the moment.

Tony Fry

INTRODUCTION

Science sees the world as an object to be observed, understood, and known whereas design sees the world as a project to be transformed, invented, and brought into existence. Science seeks what *is* out there and design creates what *ought to be* here. Science pretends to objectivity, design accepts subjectivity. Design, as a mode of human inquiry and practice, is concerned with bringing into existence, through projecting, making, and transforming, an artificial world in terms of both material and immaterial domains. In a broad sense, design refers to those disciplines involved in changing existing states of affairs into preferred ones. It concerns not only disciplines like architecture, urban design, interior design, graphic design, and industrial design, to name a few, commonly associated to design but also others like medicine, engineering, law, etc., that are equally engaged with the purpose of making a difference in and changing the state of the world. In this book design refers to the disciplines that are concerned with bringing into being the artifactual world, with some reference to architecture as an illustrative case. Design as such implies intentional actions that are driven by projects. These are intentional pre-figurations of realities meant to come into material existence, which ensue from the perception of their intended lack. The ethical question carries from this ontology of design. Indeed, transforming the world and bringing into being artifactual realities through intentional choices, actions, and projects entails transforming and shaping, or designing, human existence and life; in other words, design brings into being the being of humans and the being of design. The issue of the conduct of design practice in terms of choices, actions, and projects in regard to what ought to be brought into being, and how and why it ought to be brought into being, is intrinsic to the being of design.

This ethical aspect of design has mostly been addressed from the perspectives of two major ethical traditions, Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian duty ethics.[1] A glance into design ethics and professional ethics

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[1] The theoretical foundations of these two ethical traditions can be found in the works of Aristotle and Kant. See Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. D. Ross (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); I. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. M. Gregor (New York: Cambridge University

literature and professional codes of ethics illustrates this clearly. They all belong to normative and prescriptive ethical approaches.

There is a whole dimension of design ethics that has been neglected but is essential to fully comprehend the more fundamental ethical stakes of design and its practice: it is the freedom of the designer and its ethical existential implications. Indeed, designers have freedom of choice in the course of given design practice situations. Design freedom refers to the existential dimension of the designer, namely one's chosen being in the world defined through freedom of design choices, actions, and projects. Hence an existential exploration of design ethics in terms of freedom leads to inquire into Sartrean existentialism, the very unique philosophy that has analyzed freedom in a radical manner with its ethical implications:. It is by means of Sartre's philosophy that it is possible to analyze and propose an understanding of and a workable existential design ethics that fully acknowledges and accepts freedom as a condition of design practice. This can only help to complete and further our apprehension of design as a "world-making" practice and, more importantly, as a "being-making" practice.

Sartre's work is among the most important and significant philosophical endeavors of the twentieth century. His philosophy has informed and influenced many aspects of artistic, political, social, and cultural fields. However, it has rarely been contemplated in design and more specifically in design ethics. This book aims at filling this void by offering an exploration of what Sartre's philosophy and ethics, and de Beauvoir's work to some extent, can bring to considerations of the designer and design in general.

Sartre proposes a radical conceptualization of human reality with regard to consciousness and freedom, which sheds a unique light on the meaning of choice, action, values, and ethics in design. Thus, his philosophy of existence can help to examine the reality of designers that continuously engage the world, the others, and the self as free beings in unique design practice situations. Because designers are "condemned to be free," one is what one makes of oneself through design choices, actions, and projects; designers are free and responsible for these and their consequences upon themselves and the others. Because designers continuously choose and act in concrete and singular design practice situations, Sartre's ideas, concepts and analyses offer a rich, unique, and purposeful philosophical configuration that allows us to reposition the

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Press, 1997); and I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M. Gregor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

designer's reality, place in the world, and ethical responsibility beyond the instrumental *modus operandi* of design.

Exploring the reality of the designer and design with unique Sartrean concepts such as freedom, choice, action, engagement, responsibility, project, and authenticity, which are intrinsic to the nature of design practice, provides designers with an essential critical perspective on the existential meaning of being a designer and practicing design.

The book is organized in three parts. Part I shows that design carries a much deeper concrete meaning when it is comprehended rather from its existential reality than its professional and instrumental rationale. Being intentional implies that design is more than an agency of artifact production; it is an agency that brings into being being. To practice design is to affirm and invent values, it is to posit ways to exist in the world.

When analyzed according to these philosophical considerations, the ongoing and critical issue of sustainability in design finds a new interpretation. It leads to address how designers can become the being of sustainability and sustainability the being of the designer. This is explored through the Sartrean concept of "existential project." Important links are made between the design project and the existential project of the designer. The issue of sustainability thus reframed is at the intersection of these two articulations of the project, the instrumental (artifact) and the existential (self). But sustainability has to be freely chosen in order to be, according to Sartre, ethical or "authentic," and a potential for a radical reconfiguration of the designer's life project.

Part II explores design ethics in relation to the concept of project. The design project takes a different meaning when analyzed as "place" and "moment" of encounter between the designer and the other. The design project thus becomes an opportunity for human communion to occur if the primacy of the design actor valued as a "human person" is acknowledged in design ethics.

For this ethical sensitivity to consciously take place, an existential conversion needs to happen in design thinking and practice process. Engaging a design project is engaging the project of human condition, which concerns designers, users, and humanity as a whole. This is the pivotal stake of design because design is an agency that literally recreates the world that we all inhabit materially and existentially. Any design project then is a *nexus* where the designer encounters oneself and the others; beyond the artifactual project is the human project. This shifts the way to contemplate the design project in design. It has to be engaged as

intrinsically ethical instead of instrumental.

Viewing the human person as an existential project and the design project as a place of encounter of human projects represents a solid paradigm for disclosing ethics in design thinking and practice.

The idea of project in design seems to be obvious and without mystery at first glance. It points to the designer's mental conceptualization or prefiguration of something to be realized. The design process and action is the way to carry out a design project, which usually results in a material artifact. This way to understand the project in design is limited to its instrumental and practical reason and misses its most important facet. A deeper reality of the "designer-project" phenomenon is revealed when the notion of project in design is addressed from its existential reason. It reveals that designers are committed beyond the instrumental and practical rationale of design projects. Designers are committed to the project of human essence; at stake is the existential project, which is the project of the "human person," actualized through the project of the artifact or the instrumental project. Designers, users, communities, and humanity are therefore the ultimate project being realized and, being so, design projects are means through which existential projects are disclosed. It then appears clear that to practice design is to choose and create what the world and the self-other relationship ought to be by means of the way we inhabit among people and things. This meta-project is intrinsic to design and the issue is to raise awareness of it. It ensues from this that the designer is engaged in and responsible for four embedded projects: the artifactual world; the human-world relationship; the being of the other; and one's own being.

The set of ideals and principles guiding design choices, actions, and projects may sometimes miss the most crucial element of any well intentioned design practice. According to what has been said before, what design lack is to contemplate the fact that design actors are beings in the *be*-coming, individually and collectively. The discussion of globalism, regionalism and localism rarely addresses individuals in that sense and rather focuses on the environment: natural, built and historic. Brought into the discussion is the speculation on the relationship between the making of the artifact and the making of the existential through the concept of project. This is explored through the concrete case of New Urbanism.

New Urbanism attempts to achieve the existential project (New Urbanist goal) through the artifactual project; contrarily people of shantytowns make the artifactual project (goal of shantytown residents) through the existential project. In the process and intention of design, building, and inhabiting, the traditional American suburban developments or the informal building principles of 21st century shantytowns appear to

be more successful and ethical than the ethically motivated New Urbanist realizations in supporting and disclosing the existential projects of all individuals and communities.

In Part III a specific existential design ethics using Sartre's philosophy configuration, which centers on the conscious individual and freedom, is defined. It shows how it applies to critical issues of design practice such as professional engagement and design decision-making. It offers designers a solid frame to engage ethical dilemmas in their design practice.

This ethical frame is developed in relation to the specific issue of the designer's ethical character. It discloses radical and unique ways to apprehend the question of this ethical character. Because freedom is the designer's reality, "authenticity" in the conduct of design practice is the attitude to judge ethical character.

Authenticity is what characterizes the ethical value of design ethics. The existentialist concept of authenticity is examined by looking specifically at the client-designer relationship. While this concept is valuable for design ethics it entails important issues for an authentic relationship and ethical deliberation in design practice. Three models of interaction are used to analyze existentialist authenticity and its implications in design practice for the client-designer relationship and the ethical decision-making process. A revised and more suitable conceptualization of design authenticity is proposed, in which client and designer are able to interact on the grounds of reciprocal recognition and valuation of individual subjectivity. Considering design ethics through this revised conceptualization of authenticity can contribute to improve mutual ethical deliberation and involvement between client and designer in design practice.

Finally, an existential design ethics decision-making model for design practice is developed and proposed. It brings the analyses exposed in the previous parts into the empirical realm of practical decision-making. The proposed model takes the form of a reflective process. It aims at encouraging acceptance of complete subjectivity and a clearer awareness of individual design freedom and responsibility, leading to "authentic" design practice conduct. In this lies the value and significance of the model for design practice with regard to ethical design dilemmas.

PART I

DESIGN DESIGNER

CHAPTER ONE

DESIGN DESIGNER-BEING

The designer is a conscious being capable of choosing, acting, and projecting upon the world; designers have a projective character. In *Being and Nothingness*,[1] Sartre explains that humans make themselves a lack of being so there can be being; he says:

> Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of Existentialism. It is also what is called subjectivity.[2]

According to the two types of being that Sartre posits, the being with no consciousness like things that he calls "being-in-itself," and the being with consciousness specific to humans that he calls "being-for-itself,"[3] designers find themselves in the situation where they constantly have to face the tension between what is and what might be, and subsequently between what one wants to be and what one ought to be through choices, actions, and projects in one's design practice. Designers can be aware of themselves and of the world. By their symbolic capabilities, they can foresee states of affairs that do not exist in the present. This is what they do at the moment of setting a design problem and envisioning a design project.

The gap between what is wants and what actually may be achieved requires some action. But designers cannot enact their power freely due to the resistance of both the world and other wants that they and others happen to have. Thus, when designers engage in design practice based on their wants they encounter resistance from given design project situations such as site conditions, codes, clients, users, budget, politics, etc.[4] Even without the benefit of existentialism, the designer's capability to envision

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[1] J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H. E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992).
[2] Ibid., 18.
[3] Ibid., 24-30.
[4] Sartre calls the givens "facticity" (*facticité* in French).

non-existing realities inevitably might allow two fundamental concepts to consciously arise: the awareness of freedom and the awareness of value.

The fact that states of affairs could be different, which is setting a design problem, does not imply that they have to be in a specific way. This may well trigger a hope or desire to make a given reality different. There is at least the freedom to think that it might be different. This is an internal freedom that remains even when all possibilities to translate desire into action are eliminated. When designers think of design freedom, however, they usually mean more than freedom of thought or freedom to accept what they cannot change. They want freedom to act and freedom from restraint. Because there is a gap between internal and external freedom, it is common to accept that designers have limited freedom. However, according to Sartre, the designer's complete freedom cannot be disregarded.

Common obstacles to design freedom are to be dismissed because every obstacle originates from one's own creation.[5] Once designers become aware of design possibilities and of their own commitment to some of them, then in every aspect of design practice they can be free by choosing how to engage a given design situation.

At each moment of choice and action in design, designers make themselves the kind of persons they will be at the next moment. As Sartre puts it:

> Man is nothing else than his plan; he exists only to the extent that he fulfills himself; he is therefore nothing else than the ensemble of his acts, nothing else than his life.[6]

Consequently, freedom and sense of responsibility in design are key ideas to existentially comprehend the reality of the designer; to be a designer is to exercise freedom of choice in design practice. When choices are difficult to make the designer becomes aware of the tension that constitutes the ambiguity of selfhood.

As soon as the designer can deal with possibilities that are representations of states of affairs, or design projects, that do not exist, and as soon as it is clear that there are obstacles between desire and fulfillment, then the design reality becomes structured with values. Considerations in design become biased in relation to the designer's desires, purposes, interests, etc.

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[5] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 562.
[6] Ibid., 132; J.-P. Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. B. Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 38.

But design engenders a series of consequences that designers may not be able to foresee. A given state of affairs may fulfill one's desire while frustrating somebody else's. There inevitably arises the question of which value or values should prevail in design. Is there any design principle or guide that enables designers to choose a specific value that ought to be sacrificed when there is a conflict among several values? According to Sartre, there is no external guide or principle whatsoever designers could rely on.

In order to deal with this problem, designers tend to resort to guiding principles such as being reasonable, having good intentions, aiming at the greatest good, respecting codes, etc. These principles derive from prescriptive and normative ethical theories and assume that reason is good enough to make choices self-consistent and to foresee a reasonable amount of consequences. Relying on good will operating rationally still leaves designers without knowing what to do even though it does tell them how to go about making any choice in design. Reasons like client's interests, humanitarian causes, career achievement, tradition, respect, sustainability, etc., suffer from the same particularity and relativism that created the need of a criterion in the first place. For instance, design as a means for the good of the community doesn't help at all until we know what is good for the community. Designers always choose according to some principle of ethics but no principle can theoretically justify itself in any particular design case, and this is true for any professional code of ethics.

Designers are what they choose and they cannot avoid to choose. All design choices become part of the world in which other individuals have to live and choose. The value choices of the designer limit and influence others and they also make the world valuable. In that sense, designers are literally creating reality and value as they practice design.

> To choose to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what
> we choose [...] and nothing can be good for us without being good for all.[7]

In a fundamental way, designers are universal legislators, but they legislate without any authority and without any sanction to which they can appeal.[8] In such unavoidable presumptuousness, it is no wonder that designers are, as Heidegger insisted, "forlorn" and in perpetual "anguish."

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[7] Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 20.
[8] The professional codes of ethics can be seen as being such a justification, but to rely on such codes would be a way to flee from absolute responsibility; from a Sartrean point of view, it would be considered as an attitude of "self-deception" or "bad faith."

In Sartre's words, the designer is "condemned to be free." What remains for the designer is to assume this difficult responsibility with no guarantee of success and no appeal in case of failure. If this is the essence of design practice, then it is possible to understand why freedom is the only meaningful solution to it; for the absolute value is freedom.[9] Indeed, when the designer is aware that in "his forlornness he imposes value, he can no longer want but one thing, and that is freedom, as the basis *of* all value."[10] Also, "one may choose anything (only) if it is on the grounds of free involvement."[11]

This leads to three significant questions in design: is there a specific program of design practice in the name of freedom? How does the designer escape from freedom? And, what is the relation of the designer's freedom to the freedom of others?

Designers could conclude that design is useless and practicing design in one way rather than another is meaningless. But "there is no reality except action,"[12] and "man is nothing else than a series of undertakings. … that he is the sum, the organization, the ensemble of the relationships which make up these undertakings."[13]

Since designers cannot excuse themselves on any grounds and for any reasons, they cannot excuse their inaction. Also, the designer's practice makes a difference because it either comes out of freedom and for freedom or does not. Sartre defines action in the following way:

> to act is to modify the shape of the world; it is to arrange means in view of an end; it is to produce an organized instrumental complex such that by a series of concatenations and connections the modification effected on one of the links causes modifications throughout the whole series and finally produces an anticipated result.[14]

This describes design in a very compelling way. The underlying meaning is in tune with Herbert Simon's definition of design when he says that to design is to devise "courses of action aimed at changing existing

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[9] An analysis and explanation of this assertion by Sartre can be found in the work of David Detmer, *Freedom as a Value* (LaSalle: Open Court, 1988).
[10] Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 54.
[11] Ibid., 57.
[12] Ibid., 37.
[13] Ibid., 39.
[14] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 559.

situations into preferred ones."[15] In both statements the intentionality of action is implied in design,[16] which, according to Sartre cannot be causally explained and justified. Design intention is to see something lacking, and design as intentional action requires that something be recognized as needed or wanted, which is considered to be an objective lack.[17] The objective lack is what design is meant to address. The designer acts in view of a desirable reality, usually in the configuration of the so-called design project, not yet realized. Intentions are not constituted of the simple consideration of the existing reality.[18] The fact that something is needed or wanted does not indicate any specific decision or action. Considering that something has to be designed is to claim that something is lacking. When a given reality interpreted as lacking is compared to the possibility of something desirable, then it provides the reason for the designer's intention to change the "existing situations into preferred ones."[19] Design presupposes the conception of a reality that does not exist but can exist and ought to exist. But facts alone cannot trigger specific courses of design actions, which are the projection of designers' consciousness toward what does not exist.[20] Nothing that exists in the present can point to something that does not exist in the present, for "man is the being through whom nothingness comes to the world."[21] Also, facts alone cannot cause the designer to intent them as lacking something since no existing reality carries intrinsic meaning. The designer is the only one that brings meaning onto factual realities. What is left is that "the indispensable and fundamental condition of all [design] action is the freedom of the acting [designer],"[22] a freedom that consists in the designer's projection of a particular end. Because design is intentional action, factual reality is always intentionally perceived in terms of lacks.

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[15] H. Simon, *The Sciences of the Artificial* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 111.

[16] Ibid. Also, Galle defines design within the scope of intentional action; accordingly, design is intrinsically intentional action. See P. Galle, "Design as Intentional Action: a Conceptual Analysis," *Design Studies* 20, no. 1 (1999): 57-81.

[17] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 560. Sartre calls the objective lack a "negation" (*négatité* in French).

[18] Ibid., 561.

[19] Simon, *The Sciences of the Artificial*, 111.

[20] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 562.

[21] Ibid., 59.

[22] Ibid., 563.

Designers can therefore confer new meanings on any factual conditions of a given reality.[23] Also, the designer's freedom is the condition of design practice.[24] This leads to one important consideration, designers empower themselves with reasons, causes, and motives to act. However, design action is not explained by these causes and motives, rather, it is the designer that "decides its ends and its motives, and the act is the expression of freedom."[25]

Simone de Beauvoir in *The Ethics* of *Ambiguity*,[26] which further develops Sartre's ontology in the realm of ethics, addresses this problem. She asserts that human actions should be intended to benefit and facilitate freedom in regard to political, artistic, and economic life. She realizes that everyone at times acts in the name of what one thinks is one's freedom or the freedom of others, which concerns all actors of design. Also, even if everyone for some reason were to act from true motives of freedom, there is no pre-established harmony by which all purposes would be realized and all frustrations rendered harmless.

Design implies that there are antinomies of action in which the designer's freedom inevitably oppresses others (client, user, community, etc.). Beauvoir recognizes and embraces this instead of dismissing it. The evil is real and unavoidable. Moreover, action is measured by its immediate quality and consequences. A series of evils cannot sum up to an ultimate good, and a series of immediate goods cannot excuse a terminal evil. There is a sense of immediacy, concreteness, and even impatience about the doctrine that makes it congenial to restless times. More than that, it does give design a moral dimension; it makes every design moment significant, because it is the designer's choice that gives it particular meaning.

If the designer is ontologically free and striving, then we might conclude that every designer is already acting freely and is as ethical and

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[23] For Sartre, the apprehension of conditions and their meaning "implies for consciousness the permanent possibility of effecting a rupture with its own past, of wrenching itself away from its past so as to be able to consider it in the light of a non-being and so as to be able to confer on it the meaning which it has in terms of the project of a meaning which it does not have." Ibid.

[24] For Sartre, causes and motives "have meaning only inside a projected ensemble which is precisely an ensemble of non-existents. And this ensemble is ultimately myself as transcendence; it is Me insofar as I have to be myself outside of myself." Ibid., 564.

[25] Ibid., 565.

[26] S. de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. B. Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948).

existential as one can be. However, it is not possible to anchor design ethics in freedom if freedom means only subjectivity. There is no causal correlation between being free and acting ethically. In existentialist terms, for the designer to be ethical it involves not only to be free but also to want oneself free. In that regard, Beauvoir makes a distinction between two types of freedom: ontological freedom and moral freedom. This distinction makes possible the shift from ontology (being) to ethics (ought to be). This sets the frame for establishing a basis for an ethics of design freedom and subsequently for design ethics. Ontological freedom is the approach to freedom that Sartre describes in *Being and Nothingness*. Moral freedom is of particular interest for design; it is situated in and related to practical life, the freedom that the individual chooses as opposed to ontological freedom, which is given.

Moral freedom is possible in two different ways to relate to ontological freedom. One cannot choose not to be free because freedom is an ontological structure of human existence, but one can fail to choose to want oneself free. Given the fact that humans are ontologically free then designers are left with choosing freely the way to engage their own freedom in design. On the one hand, designers can persist in the pointless desire of being a given (being-in-itself) and not to want themselves free. On the other hand, designers can want themselves free by accepting their freedom and by being active in projects. This ultimate choice leads the designer to achieve moral freedom. As for the former option, we can say that

> in the very condition of man there enters the possibility of not fulfilling this condition. In order to fulfill it he must assume himself as a being who 'makes himself a lack of being so that there might be being.' But the trick of dishonesty permits stopping at any moment whatsoever.[27]

For both Sartre and Beauvoir action is the only means for avoiding ontological dead end. Design for and on behalf of freedom can imply a specific program. To decide what program it implies depends on how the motives to ensure that a design action is not an escape from freedom are analyzed. What Sartre and Beauvoir bring into consideration is that designers cannot, on this account, refuse to take the responsibility for what they design or do not design. Any attempt to disregard this responsibility is an ontological aberration. Perhaps the only ethical judgment of any design action is whether it does or does not represent a conscientious decision for freedom.

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[27] Ibid., 34.

Sartre would advice designers to be as honest and thoughtful as possible in deciding what their freedom implies, and to engage design with all the strength at their command. This definitely casts the designer into the social arena for better or for worse, and only the unfolding events can ultimately reveal the better or the worse.

If designers do in fact pay attention to their humanity and conclude that design is indispensable, that design for the sake of freedom is our ethical duty, then the question of whose freedom is paramount. Explicitly, Sartre speaks often of other persons and their freedom. Following Sartre, every design choice is a kind of universal legislation, because by it the designer is a witness to the value of design not only for oneself but also for all individuals in similar circumstances. Indeed, it would be self-contradictory to choose less than the best in a particular design situation, which means that anyone in a similar situation should do likewise. Hence, if freedom is the absolute value for the designer, it must be so for all design actors involved. This is what Sartre would likely argue for in the realm of concrete design practice. Whether one's freedom (the client's, user's, citizen's, etc.) might have to be opposed would depend on whether the designer's practice, which includes choices, actions, and projects, furthers or hinders freedom.

> To will that there be being is also to will that there be men by and for whom the world is endowed with human significations. One can reveal the world only on a basis revealed by other men. No project can be defined except by its interference with other projects. To make being 'be' is to communicate with others by means of being.[28]

Thus, meaning constitutes the territory of the designer's activity. Values in design have no meaning aside from the other design actors involved who can create values and evaluate, and

> if it is true that every project emanates from subjectivity, it is also true that this subjective movement establishes by itself a surpassing of subjectivity. Man can find a justification of his own existence only in the existence of other men. Now he needs such a justification; there is no escaping it.[29]

In brief, if to be a designer means to be concerned about the tension between actuality and potentiality, then designers are *de facto* concerned about the others and for what is their potentiality, power, and freedom.

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[28] Ibid., 71.
[29] Ibid., 72.

This brings about the concept of engagement, which is central in Sartre's philosophy. By assuming full responsibility for their choices, actions, and projects in design, designers fundamentally engage with the beginning and the end of human existence. Consequently, to be is to act, and since designers act in whatever social situation they happen to be in, then there is a strong argument for the participation of everyone in social action. For designers to say that politics or economics or public welfare or ecology does not concern them is similar to say that the laws of physics do not concern them; this shows the absurdity of such statement. Designers are always engaged anyhow. They can no longer refuse to take a direct part in social action without the ethical trouble of creating a case for this choice. Sartre makes it clear that not to participate is itself a choice that has as much or as little justification as any other choice. The call for engagement is more a call for self-awareness and self-analysis about why, how, and what to design than to design anything in some way in particular.

This is the concrete meaning of engagement in design, but it also means that any design actor's action is a statement of personal attitude toward existence. The result is an existential reality that shows the tension and ambiguity of the designer's dilemma. This might lead to a criterion that separates the honest design practice from the dishonest one, the serious one from the trivial one.

The concept of engagement is essential for designers since it concerns their involvement in social action, in design education, where future designers are to become conscious of their social responsibilities, and in the process of practicing design as an authentic mode of existence.

To expect every designer to act according to what one professes to believe in and do is one thing, and the existentialist emphasis on it is another attack at hypocrisy and absentmindedness. If the designer believes that personal civic responsibilities has to be assumed, for instance practicing sustainable design, then to choose not to do so oneself is hypocritical. There is a sense in which any designer is called upon not only to say the truth but also to witness and act on it.

Any view about human existence is more than relevant for design practice since design is an agency for encouraging one way of life and being-in-the-world rather than another.

There is a diversity of philosophical creed reflected in design, but it is difficult to fit the existentialist one into any of them. In Sartre's perspective, designers cannot seek justification in any well-established traditional domains of knowledge like sciences or humanities. Any source of justification is dismissed and one can only realize that there is none.

Therefore subjectivity is paramount in design. Design practice, even in its more traditional forms, is mostly responsive to the demands of particular professional needs and expectations.[30] Sartre's philosophy suggests that designers must be freed from rigid preconceived patterns of conduct. There can be no greater emphasis on the designer's individuality than is found in existentialism.

In design practice, although the insistence may appear to be on having each designer thrive in a unique manner, it does, in reality, have an ideal adaptive expectation for every design practitioner. It is to comply with the needs of any professional design practice, to be efficiently responsive to the needs and requests of the community and society, and to actualize an ethical design intelligence character. If we recall the anguish, despair, forlornness, guilt, and tension that characterize the designer's existential reality, it can be difficult to see what kind of adaptation this is to be. It seems that what an ethical design intelligence character means is almost precisely what Sartre calls a flight from the ambiguity and tensions of human reality. In reverse, what he would call achievement in the designer's enterprise involves emotional intensity, introspective concentration, and self-concern.

This points to reconsider the designer's personality coherence as being more than a series of specific design practice criteria. Rather, the particular designer's personality should be regarded as a unique lived story that carries a range of distressing and comforting possibilities. However, acknowledging and accepting the singularity of the designer's personality entails an expansion of the boundaries of freedom in intellectual and social behavior, which is more limited in the design professions and design education. If designers are encouraged to act in and for freedom and to address the meaning of freedom in every particular design practice situation, then we have to face conclusions that defy conventions, beliefs, and values that have come to be acceptable and necessary over time and with an extended design practice.

Perhaps the most important implication for design lies in the existential notion of engagement as a mode for designers to reveal and actualize their existence in and to the world through design practice. This leads to take on unavoidable questions: what does the role of designers mean as an expression of reality? To what extent does it free the designer's powers? To what does it register the designers' endeavors to impress their mark on the realm of design value and action?

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[30] An instance in architecture is the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB), which is very clear on that point.