

EISA Standing Section //International Political Design

Section Focus

Could we make algorithms that *improve* world politics? Emancipatory computational designs for global publics? Artistic installations that jolt us into critique? Crafted objects that generate reflection on war, violence, and alternative futures? Designs for different international futures? These questions are at the core of a standing section *International Political Design* of the [European International Studies Association's annual Pan-European Conference](#). The section explores how IR and associated disciplines might expand the focus of its intellectual, normative-political, and quotidian practice beyond what Friedrich Kittler termed the “monopoly of writing” so as to explore the potential of new forms of design and making within the discipline. The section invites contributions that explore themes such as the following:

- Conceptual, empirical, and practical work on **how IR might integrate different forms of material and aesthetic design or making into its practice**, including but not limited to:
 - Computational or digital making (the design of apps, algorithms, databases, etc.);
 - Artistic making (installation, painting, collaging, etc.);
 - Visual making (photography, cinema, dance, etc.);
 - Architectural design and practice;
 - Craft-based making (metalworking, woodworking, weaving, stitching, pottery);
 - Game-based making (map design, lego, etc.);
 - Engineering (‘technical’ making of all kinds);
 - Digital fabrication (3d printing; circular economies, etc.);
- Reflections on how to design **international things** that explore, for example:
 - How and why designed material and aesthetic objects spread globally and exert power;
 - If it is possible to predict or control the effects of such circulations of designed objects;
 - If it is possible to reconcile local, indigenous, situated needs/desires with global designs (following Mignolo);
 - If non-coercive, democratic or emancipatory designing of international things is possible.
- Reflections on **the ethics and politics of engaging in design and making**, including vis-a-vis:
 - How design/making can be more than ‘problem-solving’ in its ambition and effects;
 - The relationships between ‘basic’ and ‘applied’ social scientific work;
 - The risks of political co-option when collaborating with other disciplines and vocations;
 - The dangers of devaluing traditional academic work through engaging design and making;
 - The capacity (or not) for design and making to escape commercial and neoliberal logics.
- Engagements with the pragmatic possibility to expand the practice of IR beyond the written word and/or logo-centrism that explore themes such as the following:
 - The opportunities and challenges of transdisciplinary collaboration;
 - The political economy of (commercial) academic life;
 - The challenges posed by the functional differentiation of academic and social life to such work;
 - The continued prevalence of Snow’s ‘two cultures’ within the scientific field.

The section is entirely open vis-a-vis the disciplinary or sub-disciplinary fields employed. This might include, for example, approaches within international political sociology, critical security studies, science and technology studies, design theory and research, critical making, speculative design, engineering, ergonomics, and fear beyond. It welcomes contributions that explore other forms of design that complement or challenge the above foci, including for instance literatures on policy design and transfer.

Section Format:

Roundtables:

...are intended to open and invite discussion on a specific aspect of International Political Design. The speakers on the roundtables will open with a short (**5-7 mins**) statement on the theme of the roundtable. This will be followed by rounds of responses and comments making space for the audience as well as for exchanges among the roundtable participants.

Panels:

... are intended to delve on a range of specific arguments on a given theme developed in a range of written papers. Panelists will send their papers on **26 of June** to the session chair who will distribute it to the other panel participants. Each panelist will be given **10 mins** to introduce their arguments. The discussant will comment on the papers drawing connections among them and to the workshop theme in **10 mins**, opening the general discussion that will follow and involve all.

Special Sessions:

... are intended to give an in depth understanding of one specific project that speaks to the International Political Design agenda. This project will introduced in some detail (**40 mins**). Following this one or two discussants will lead the discussion and open the debate about the project and its connection to the section themes.

Section Program

Session 1: Computational Design and Making in World Politics (Roundtable)

Friday September 2nd, Seminar B5, 11:15 – 13:00

Can algorithmic agency be a force for world political progress? Is it possible to imagine posthuman utopias in spite of what appears to be looming dystopia? Can we make peace with the computational? This roundtable explores these questions by asking how IR and related fields might engage with the practice of computational design and making in world politics in more normatively-minded, careful, and potentially emancipatory terms. We ask how it might be possible to co-opt and divert the power of digital technologies towards different political ends that could transform our world. To do so, contributors draw on a multiplicity of theoretical and methodological perspectives but will discuss – in particular – how we might integrate the practice of computational design and making more closely into social sciences such as IR. In the end, we ask each contributor to reflect on how we can speculate about alternative computational futures within international relations.

Participants:

Anna Leander, *Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva.*

Tobias Blanke, *The University of Amsterdam*

Pedro Dos Santos Maia, *Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva.*

Fabio Cristiano, *Utrecht University*

Georgios Glouftisios, *University of Trento*

Rocco Bellanova, *University of Amsterdam*

Session 2: Architectural Design and Making in World Politics (Roundtable)

Friday September 2nd, Seminar B5, 14:30 – 16:15

Architecture is at the core of multiple forms of politics. But its role within international relations remains relatively neglected, especially vis-à-vis how forms of architectural design and making might be more closely integrated into the (normative) practice of IR. In this roundtable we discuss whether or not it might be possible to integrate the quotidian practice of architectural practice, its conceptual and theoretical insights, and its methodologies for re-designing social space within social sciences that explore world politics. In particular, we ask whether there is an positive-political – or even emancipatory – potential lurking within the field of architecture that might be leveraged for re-imagining world politics.

Participants:

Anna Leander, *Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva.*

Javier Fernandez Contreras, *HEAD, Geneva*

Delf Rothe, *University of Hamburg*

Dan Oberg, *Swedish Defence University*

Tanja E. Aalberts, *Vrije Universitet*

Gregoir Castella, *Ecole Polytechnique de Lausanne*

Session 3: Activist Design and Making in World Politics (Roundtable)

Friday September 2nd, Seminar A1, 14:30 – 16:15

Can forms of craft, design, and making provide radical new avenues for activist political practices within world politics? Though technological development and design has more recently been associated with neoliberal politics and political danger, there exists a long history of seeing these material and aesthetic practices as tools of emancipation and liberation. In this roundtable, we explore how we might reinvigorate those possibilities. We do so by speculating on how a form of 'International Political Design' might emerge in which the practice of the discipline of International Relations is reorientated towards leveraging the power of material-aesthetic practice for different political ends. While the questions we pose our speculative, our goals are concrete: how can we translate critical social scientific theorizing about world politics into 'change' in the real world? Does this require a radical shift towards non-logocentric and non-alphabetical forms of design and making? Or would that undermine the purpose of critical social inquiry?

Participants:

Jonathan Austin, *The University of Copenhagen*

Daniel Moller Olgaard, *Lund University*

Isabella Hermann, *Independent Scholar*

Christine Andra, *TU Dresden,*

Thomas Gmuier, *Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva.*

Session 4: *Special session on Unmaking Data: A creative Hack into the Aesthetics and Politics of Algorithmic Culture with Donatella Della Ratta*

Friday September 2nd 16:14 – 18:30 – Seminar A4

Discussants: Rocco Bellanova (University of Amsterdam) and Juha Vuori (Tampere University)

Chair: Anna Leander (Geneva Graduate Institute)

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated a process of 'platformization' of our daily life that started a while ago, with the digital taking over all things human, from working to learning to socializing. Digital -and platformized- has become the new black, something that looks inescapable, unavoidable and inevitable. *Unmaking Data* explores creative ways of thinking out of the digital box, escaping platformization and subverting processes such as quantification and algorithmic prediction that are enforced by today's hegemonic digital culture. Showcasing different creative projects, from the critical video essay (*VVV: Violence, Visibility, Viruses and Who Wants to Live and Die Forever?*) to the live multimedia performance (*The Vanished Image*) and the transhuman online/in presence show (*Queer Dada*), the talk dissects the aesthetics and politics of today's data culture, unveiling its glitches and lapses and showing ways out of the digital rabbit hole.

Donatella Della Ratta is a media ethnographer, writer, performer, and curator specializing in digital media and networked technologies, with a focus on the Arab world. She is Associate Professor of Communications and Media Studies at John Cabot University, Rome. She holds a PhD from the University of Copenhagen and is former Affiliate of the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. From 2007 until 2013 she managed the Arabic speaking community for the international organization Creative Commons. In 2012 she co-founded the website SyriaUntold, recipient of the Digital Communities award at Ars Electronica 2014. She has curated several international art exhibitions and film programs on Syria, including “Syria off frame”, (Fondazione Luciano Benetton and Fondazione Cini, Venice, 2015), and “Syrian New Waves” (The Eye Film Museum, Amsterdam, 2017). She has published a wide range of books and essays on media and networked technologies, among them *Shooting a Revolution: Visual Media and Warfare in Syria* (Pluto Press, 2018); [Teaching Into the Void](#) and [Shot Theory](#) (INC, 2021); [Selfies Under Quarantine: Exploring Networked Emotions in the Time of 'Social Distancing'](#) (Imaginations, 2021). With Geert Lovink, Teresa Numerico, and Peter Sarram she has co-edited the collective volume *The Aesthetics and Politics of the Online Self: A Savage Journey Into the Heart of Digital Cultures* (Palgrave McMillan, 2021).

Session 5: Making International Things Differently (Panel)

Saturday September 3rd, 09:00 – 10:45, Seminar A1

Chair/Discussant: Jonathan Luke Austin (University of Copenhagen)

Anna Leander (Geneva Graduate Institute)

- What if we were there? A counterfactual exposition on why IR has the responsibility to design-with/in world politics

Jonathan Luke Austin (University of Copenhagen) and Anna Leander (Geneva Graduate Institute)

- W.E.B. Du Bois and the Emancipation of Data: Lessons for IR

Kiran Phull (Kings College London)

- Designing Errant Futures: Black Thought and the Politics of Unruly Forms of Making
Farai Chipato (University of Glasgow)
 - Burn It/IR Down? Unmaking, unthinking, and destruction as/in politics
Laura Sjoberg (Royal Holloway University of London)
 - Sounds of militarized borders in the form of a prayer
N. Kolttilainen (University of Jyväskylä) and S. Hast (Theatre Academy Helsinki)
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Session 6: Humanitarian Design and Making in World Politics (Roundtable)

Saturday September 3rd, 14:30 – 16:15, Seminar A12

Humanitarians are increasingly preoccupied with deploying emerging technologies in order to augment their capacity to intervene across the world. Equally, humanitarian organizations have begun deploying 'design thinking' and related tools with the stated goal of increasing local participation in their activities. Each of these developments has been radically critiqued from within IR and social sciences, often for very good reasons. However, a growing number of practitioners and applied scientists have begun to re-think the place of design and making in relation to humanitarianism in quite different terms. This includes a shift away from 'high technological' interventions towards a greater appreciation for the place of more mundane yet vital technological interventions in humanitarian settings across the globe. It also includes the integration of more critical theoretical toolkits - ranging from feminist to postcolonial theory - within these approaches. In this roundtable, we explore these changes and ask whether it is possible to imagine a more progressive political role for the material and technological within humanitarian action. Can technology help repoliticize, rather than depoliticize, humanitarianism? Could the tools of digital or industrial design, as well as architecture, hold emancipatory possibilities that would allow us to reimagine what humanitarianism constitutes? And what is the role of social sciences like IR within that process?

Participants:

Jonathan Austin, *the University of Copenhagen*

Peer Schouten, *Danish Institute for International Studies*

Pol Bargues-Pedreny, *Barcelona Centre for International Affairs*

Kristin Bergtora Sandvik, *Peace Research Institute Oslo*

Katja Lindskov Jacobson, *the University of Copenhagen*

Janine Bressmer, *Geneva Graduate Institute*

Session 7: *Special session on Scènes de Nuit: on Night, Media and Architecture with Javier Fernandez Contreras*

Saturday September 3rd, 16:45 – 18:30, Seminar A4

Discussants: Laura Sjoberg and Tanja Aalberts

Chair: Jonathan Austin

SCÈNES DE NUIT explores the role of night in the construction of contemporary cities and societies, illustrating how, still today, architectural theory and critique are associated with sunlight and diurnal paradigms. It is structured around the hypothesis that, since the 19th century, night has transformed not only night-time but most importantly daytime activities and architecture forever. The project addresses the technologies, networks and forms of design deployed in nocturnal architectural spaces and their associated communities, engaging with both local and global audiences through a broad network of practitioners and theoreticians in architectural and night design, as well as experts from different fields, such as sociology, economics, philosophy and media studies, that are relevant to understanding the intersections between space, night and society at large. *Scènes de Nuit* presents nocturnal encounters seeking to examine and reflect upon the spaces, activities and media found in night culture, using evening events and ephemeral scenography as the main presentation platform. Research is conducted in various formats, temporalities and conditions, focusing on nocturnal architectural spaces through, but not limited to, inhabited scenography, performative exhibitions, international conferences, debates and screenings. *Scènes de Nuit* proposes that there is no difference between format and content, between the production of nocturnal knowledge and the scenography of night. (see <https://scenesdenuit.ch/about>)

Javier Fernández Contreras is an architect and an associate professor at HEAD – Genève, where he heads the Department of Interior Architecture. Contreras studied architecture at the University of Technology of Delft and at the School of Architecture of Madrid – ETSAM (MA, 2006; PhD, 2013). In 2015 he was a finalist in the 10th arquia/tesis competition with his doctoral thesis, *The Miralles Projection: Thinking and Representation in Architecture by Enric Miralles*. He has taught architectural design at various institutions, such as ETSAM in Spain, XJTU in China and ETH Zurich in Switzerland. Contreras is the author of the books *Fragmentos de Planta y Espacio* (Ediciones Asimétricas, 2018), *The Miralles Projection* (Applied Research + Design Publishing, 2020), and *Manifest of Interiors: Thinking in the Expanded Media* (HEAD – Publishing, 2021). His critical essays have been published, among others, in *Massilia Annuaire des Études Corbuséennes*, Marie-José Van Hee Architecten, *Perspectives in Metropolitan Research*, 306090, CIRCO, *Drawing Matter*, RADDAR. With HEAD – Genève, recent distinctions include an invitation to the 2021 Seoul Architecture Biennale for the Circa Diem project (in collaboration with EPFL), the *Brands and Communication Red Dot Award* 2020 and the *Innovation Frame Award* 2020 for the *Space Duality* project, as well as a *Design Prize Switzerland* 2019 nomination for the #Looslab project. In 2019 he curated the exhibition *Scènes de Nuit* at Far Lausanne (in collaboration with Youri Kravchenko, Manon Portera and the students of the BA in Interior Architecture at HEAD – Genève).

Session 8: Design and the World Politics of Care (Roundtable)

Sunday September 4th, 08:00 – 09:45, Seminar 5

Can forms of material, technological, and aesthetic design provide a 'care-full' mode of engaging with world politics? Is it possible to imagine developing objects or technologies that intervene into pressing international dilemmas in ways that minimize the risk of causing (unintended) harm and instead actively co-produce a kinder and more caring form of politics? This round table explores these questions as they relate to practices of design and making, broadly conceived. It does so from multiple conceptual, empirical, and methodological perspectives that speculate on how we might re-imagine novel modes of positive-political normative engagement with world politics. This ranges from approaches within science and technology studies that describe the importance of caring engagement with the world, through architectural theory that seeks to reconsider methodologies for co-producing the built environment, and towards speculative and critical design theories that seek to create new imaginaries for our collective political futures.

Participants:

Jonathan Austin, *The University of Copenhagen*.

Francesco Ragazzi, *Leiden University*

Kristin Eggeling, *The University of Copenhagen*

Christine Hentschel, *Hamburg University*

Jef Huysmans, *Queen Mary University London*

Session 9: Designing War and Peace in World Politics (Panel)

Sunday September 4th, 15:15 – 17:00 B3

Chair/Discussant: Jonathan Luke Austin (University of Copenhagen)

- War as transgressive creativity
Dan Oberg (Swedish Defence University)
 - The Digitalisation of Peace Mediation: A window of opportunity for conflict resolution?
Karin Aggestam¹, E. Hedling².
 - Constructing/Deconstructing the International with Intertextuality and Beyond
Sima Baidya (Jawaharlal Nehru University)
 - Designing simulations to foster cooperation within and between international organizations
Lucile Maertens (University of Lausanne) and Z. Cheli (University of Lausanne)
 - Gardening Vegetables with Cadets: Cultivating knowledge and sensitivity to environmental challenges in armed forces
Marcel Mangold (Swedish Defense University)
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Session 10: *Special session on EssentialTech - Engineering for development, humanitarian action and peace promotion with Grégoire Castella*

Sunday September 4th, 15:15 – 17:00, Seminar A4

Discussants: David Chandler (University of Westminster) and Monique Beerli (Geneva Graduate Institute)

Chair: Anna Leander (Geneva Graduate Institute)

According to the UN, an estimate of more than 235 million people needed humanitarian assistance in 2020. The same year almost 80 million people were displaced because of conflict and violence. These figures are unheard of since WWII. This reality is dramatically diverging from the positive impact the 4th industrial revolution has on the quality of life of some of the world's population. Emerging technologies affect entire sectors like health care, banking, food and supply chains and will have long lasting positive effects on many aspects of human well-being and prosperity. All too often however vulnerable populations have been left behind and do not benefit from this increasing pace of innovation. EPFL EssentialTech center, driven by the conviction that science and technology can be better leveraged to bridge this gap, developed an original methodology to build sustainable solutions for development, humanitarian action and peace promotion. This methodology will be presented through its application on two specific technologies: GlobalDiagnostic, an innovative X-Ray machine, developed for African rural hospitals, and SmartPPE, an Ebola personal protective equipment developed with Doctors Without Border (MSF). Best practices will also be drawn

from these examples in building partnerships between international organizations and the academic sector. The presentation will be followed by an open discussion, focusing on the interplay between engineering, design and social science.

Greg Castella is passionate about innovation, humanitarian action and social entrepreneurship. He holds a PhD in Life Science from the University of Lausanne (Switzerland). He worked several years for the *International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)* in different regions affected by armed conflicts (Afghanistan, Colombia, Central African Republic and Ivory Coast). He then worked as deputy director for the [Antenna Foundation](#), a charity based in Geneva and incubating innovative solutions to meet the basic needs of people living in poverty. He also led *MSF Switzerland* Innovation Coordination where he aimed at harnessing the power of medical, humanitarian and digital innovations to meet the needs of patients and more generally people affected by disasters. He is the co-founder, and currently VP of the board, of [Watalux SA](#), a social startup developing innovation for safe water and better hygiene in hospitals, and board member of [SwissSolidarity](#), a leading swiss philanthropic foundation. He is now leading the Humanitarian Division [of EPFL EssentialTech Center](#), an initiative supporting humanitarian organizations to better harness science and technology to increase their impact.