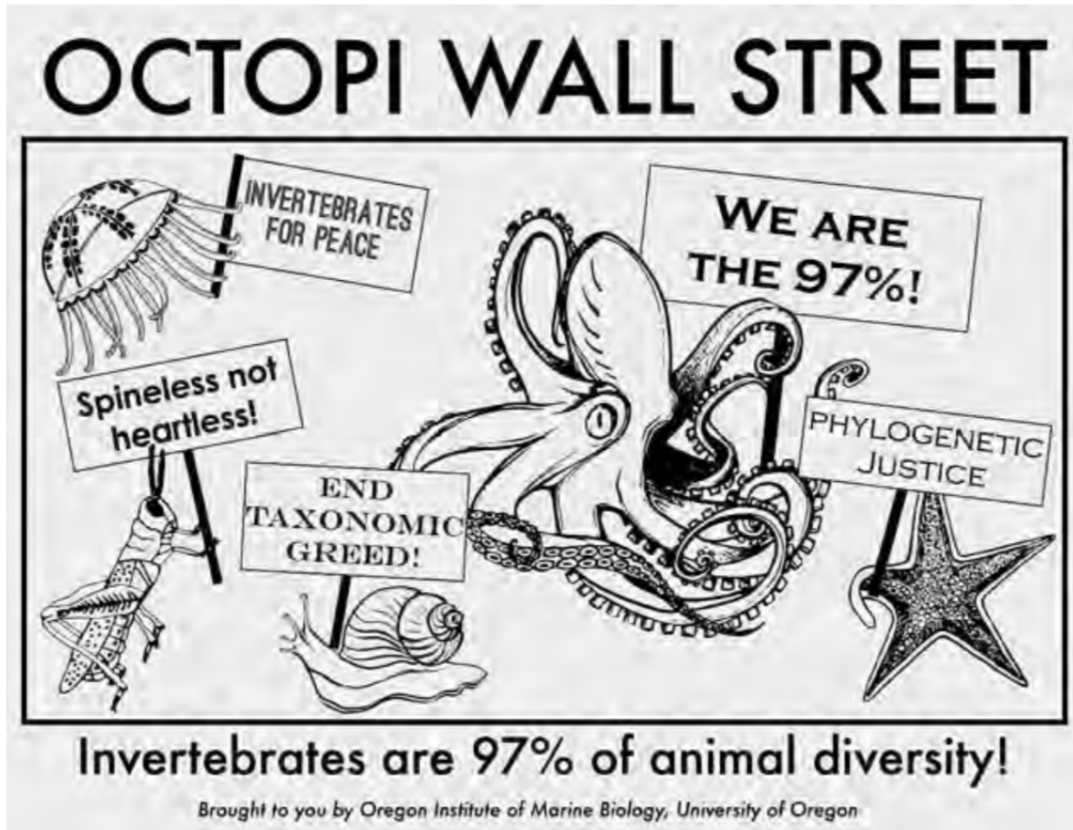


[MOVE_SEMANTICS] :: RE/ORIENTATION ROUNDTABLES
FIELD MATERIALS>>>ALLIES

CO-OPERATIVE THINKING, MAKING & BEING
WITH PLANT, ANIMAL, FUNGI, MATERIAL, MEDIA & MACHINE

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RECOMMENDED MATERIALS & READINGS

(available [in this folder](#) if not hyperlinked)

Mitchell Joachim: Ten Archetypes of Nature in Design
Anna Tsing, from "The Mushroom at the End of the World," Chapter 1: Arts of Noticing
Timothy Morton, "From Things Flow;" and
[An Interview with Eco-Philosopher Timothy Morton on Art and the Hyper-Object](#)
Native Knowledge: What Ecologists Are Learning from Indigenous People
[The Promise of Biomimicry](#) (short film) and/or [Biomimicry in Action](#) (ted talk)

CO-OPERATIVE DESIGN WITH NONHUMAN ALLIES : KEY CONCEPTS & TERMS

Allies / Agents / Collaborators, Co-Evolution, Biophilia and Biomimicry, Resilience, TEK, Sympoiesis and Autopoiesis, Symbiogenesis, Capitalocene, Anthropocene, find more that you like!

For [move_semantics], we use the term “**allies**” a lot to describe non-human organisms, systems, and others with which we interact. However, true **allyship** between two humans would always require the participation and consent of both parties: the language assumes *agreement*. We are, always, in relationship to each other, but since the human position is that of more immediate **agency** in terms of not only our experience / conditions / resources, but also that of the others with whom we relate, we have to rethink what it means to truly co-create / collaborate in “alliance” with these others who do not control / manipulate / “build” / apply their intelligence in the ways that we do.

Let's consider some terminology, to help us **re/orient** around languaging our relationship to each other and the biome, and thinking through speculative ways of making and being in collaboration with them.

First we have “**sympoietic**,” the adjective form of “**sympoiesis**.” We draw this term from the work of Donna Haraway, though it was initially developed in 1998 by an environmental studies graduate student named M. Beth Dempster.

Dempster's original definition, as presented by Haraway, is that of “*collectively-producing systems that do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries. Information and control are distributed among components. The systems are evolutionary and have the potential for surprising change.*”

This terminology was developed as an alternative to the notion of “**autopoietic systems**,” another biologically-derived term, used to describe organisms (and here, systems) that “*are ‘self-producing’ autonomous units ‘with self defined spatial or temporal boundaries that tend to be centrally controlled, homeostatic, and predictable.*”

Haraway and Dempster's desire is to move us away from the notion that we (or other allies) really ever operate as individual, bounded entities. While the application of “**autopoiesis**” in design contexts is primarily posed as an opportunity to have a system / structure that in some way self-regulates or auto-generates/responds, the move towards **sympoiesis** both in concept and applied as a design methodology asks us to consider both the ways in which our design can mirror / demonstrate *relationality* between different forms of intelligence in its materials and structure, but also how it can invite and make possible the forming and sustaining of alliances both of infrastructure / elements *within* the system itself as well as occupants / users / inhabitants.

When we talk about SYSTEMS as opposed to STRUCTURES or THINGS, and do so from a biological/ecological perspective, it assists us in taking more of this **sympoietic** approach: ie, understanding that the *system* of anything we build, make, or interact with, from an ecology standpoint,

always includes every force, agent, material, etc that in turn interacts with or in that site. When designing buildings or cities, for instance, the ECO-SYSTEM of *any and every structure* includes human, animal, plant, air, water, gravity, weather etc -- whether or not we design with this in mind.

For our purposes, we want to center the **sympoetic**, understanding processes of thinking, making, and being as **collaborative**, developed in conversation with nonhuman intelligence and strategy. We also want to do so thinking adaptively and dynamically, looking ahead at the ways the systems influenced by and influencing our bodies and the context of the things we make and do may transform and/or be affected by the changes in the greater ecosystem.

In architectural design, the process of creating responsive, adaptive structures has been increasingly framed and understood within the design industry as the building of **RESILIENT** work. Whereas **autopoiesis** and **sympoiesis** are incredibly useful concepts (as are many from the sciences), these are not used widely in the design field. **Resilience**, however, has become somewhat of a buzzword, and is something we've seen increasingly addressed and talked about in the design community in the past few years, as climate emergencies loom (and happen with increasing frequency.)

Resilience is another term that comes from ecology—scientifically it refers to the ability of a system, material, or organism to rebound after damage. In design, we apply this thinking to build systems and structures that are adaptive, can learn from and respond to their environments, and can anticipate, survive, and in some cases evolve in a variety of future scenarios.

Biophilia and **biomimicry** are terms that use the word-root for biology/nature/life “bio” and pair them with “love for” and “imitation of”—when you hear about **biophilic design** it is often used in projects that prioritize the human connection to the natural environment. Design projects utilizing **biomimicry** specifically learn from and mimic strategies found in nature, translating their intelligence into built systems and structures.

TEK, or **Traditional Ecological Knowledge**, is also something you may want to consider in thinking through strategies for your collaborations with other agents / allies, and consider how Indigenous folks can be centered in decolonizing speculative work. TEK is a term used to describe Indigenous practices, strategies and frameworks for thinking through and working with ecological systems, which have in most cases co-evolved with a far more sympoietic approach than much of modern technology. TEK asks us to reconsider modernization and industrialization as a “forward” motion towards “progress,” understanding the incredible intelligence and sensitivity of the resilient systems both traditionally and in some cases still in use by Indigenous peoples worldwide. It's critical that as we think about how to work in collaboration with traditional methods that their voices and leadership governs how and when these methods are employed and by whom.

PROMPTS TO THINK & WRITE ON:

What does it mean to not only invite but set the stage for true collaborative thinking, making, and being, in conversation with other life forms, materials, and types of intelligence? If you see yourself as a responsive *conduit*, in part *carrying out the design* based on the intelligence of these other agents, what does that look like? How is making work **FOR** allies that still centers the human experience and/or POV different from co-producing an intelligent system *with* these allies, while using the material and technical capabilities that are available to us as humans *responsively* to their intelligence?

What does it mean to collaborate not only with animal, plant, fungi, water, and other flows and conditions we deem “natural” but also with **materials**, **media**, and **machine**, understood as allies that may operate not only in relationship with human but with each other as well as with other organisms?

Consider / brainstorm ways in which technology and or materiality can play a role in a system's genesis and resilience. This might be a place to consider **biomimicry**. Do the organisms you seek to invite into collaboration already have intelligence you can apply to your project? Can other plants, creatures, or natural structures offer information you can adapt? What alliances are and would be made if humans were absent, and what can you learn from these?

For all of the above, we want to focus on possibility. What can you imagine is or might be possible? Begin with the ways in which you can imagine your work and the systems that support it demonstrating collaborative intelligence in design and implementation, as well as in the ways it evolves and responds to future conditions. Feasibility can come later,

What questions does thinking through possibility leave you asking? What research does it lead you to? What information / data would you need to know in order to identify next design steps (whether or not you use them for this project).

THINKING ABOUT ALLIANCES / SYMPOIESIS AND ART MAKING / CURATION/ EXHIBITION:

Read Timothy Morton's piece, “From Things Flow,” and this interview with Morton about Art and the Hyper-Object (a term he coined) on [Artspace](#). “From Things Flow” speaks, in part, about the work of Olafur Eliasson, an artist with whom he has often collaborated. [Find more about Eliasson's work here.](#)

What does it mean to make ‘art’ now, and/or in the future? What does it mean to show / display / share / hold space for works we refer to as art in physical places and/or online, as we move into the ecofutures ahead? What does it mean to be thinking resiliently and sympoietically about the ways art is made, as well thinking about the spaces in which it is shared, saved, and displayed as not only “for” humans, but co-inhabitants / collaborating organisms? How can your relationship to your work evolve vis-a-vis your thinking around artmaking in tandem to your thinking about collaboration, resilience, sympoiesis, etc?