

Ecosophy and Production of Subjectivities in Design

Ecosofia e Produção de Subjetividades
no Design



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ABSTRACT

This study highlights the importance of the production of subjectivities in the field of design, especially when considering socio-environmental issues and the reorientation towards ecological thinking. The present article offers Ecosophy, an ethical-aesthetic-political paradigm proposed by Félix Guattari, as a theoretical-methodological framework for regenerative design processes. To illustrate this proposal, a case report is made on a design process and the co-production on registers of ecological subjectivities, and of social and environmental relations. The main effort centered on the development of metadesign contemplations which sought to overcome the subject-object dichotomy and propose an ethics-aesthetics-politics in the form of manifestos to guide the design development process.

KEYWORDS

Subjectivities; Ecosophy; Regeneration.

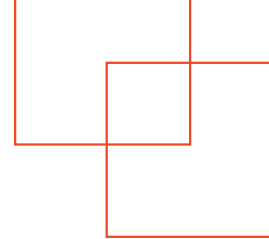


RESUMO

Este estudo destaca a importância da produção de subjetividades no campo do design, especialmente ao considerar questões socioambientais e a reorientação para o pensamento ecológico. O presente artigo oferece a Ecosofia, um paradigma ético-estético-político proposto por Félix Guattari, como um referencial teórico-metodológico para processos de design regenerativo. Para ilustrar essa proposta, é apresentado um estudo de caso sobre um processo de design e a co-produção nos registros ecológicos das subjetividades, assim como das relações sociais e ambientais. O principal esforço concentrou-se no desenvolvimento de contemplações metadesign que buscavam superar a dicotomia sujeito-objeto e propor uma ética-estética-política na forma de manifestos para orientar o processo de desenvolvimento do design.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Subjetividades; Ecosofia; Regeneração.

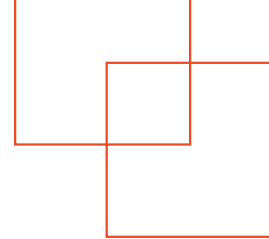


1. INTRODUCTION

For Guattari, subjectivity is, "the set of conditions that make it possible for individual and/or collective instances to be in a position to emerge as a self-referential existential territory, in adjacency or in a delimitation relationship with an otherness that is itself subjective," (Guattari, 1992 , p. 19), that is, subjectivity is a production that takes place not only in the individual instance, but also in collective and institutional instances, and which produces difference, or singularity. Subjectivity is different from interiority and it does not concern a supposed essence inherent to individuals. It is easy for us to fall into this understanding due to the subject-object bifurcation that we inherited from modern and Cartesian thought. Subjectivity is not something that belongs to a subject, on the contrary, subjectivity is also social and collective (Mansano, 2009), like lines of force that feed us, shape us, that we consume, and that we use to produce ourselves in relationship with the other, with the world, and with ourselves (Deleuze, 1996).

Perhaps it is easier to understand subjectivity not as a noun, but as a verb, "to subjectify", that is, perhaps it is more understandable to speak of the production of subjectivities, both multiple and diverse. This way, we can focus on the productions that take place in social and environmental relations and that produce subjects. These productions of subjectivities are multiple and can lead to the "subjection" of individuals (in a more negative, oppressive aspect, "subjugation"), or can, positively, create lines of flight, resingularizing individuals towards greater emancipation, or even, a singular and creative expression of them (Deleuze, 1996; Deleuze, Parnet, 1998).

This is an attempt to reconcile the concept of subjectivity with Latour's proposal of a non-bifurcated reality. For Latour, the project of modernity was to separate and isolate, or "purify", the world into two great domains: that of Nature and of Culture, or "humanity" (Harman, 2009). This project becomes quite visible when we look at the natural sciences and the human and political sciences. Another bifurcation resulting from modern thought is the subject-object separation which leads us to subjectivist and objectivist perspectives. The production of subjectivities, in the terms of Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari, is not

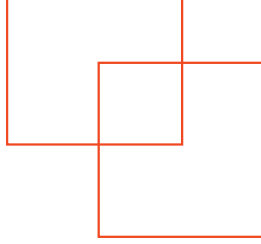


subjectivism. On the contrary, it goes beyond a supposed objectivist neutrality to regard a continuous production of subjects and cultures that takes place in relationship with the world.

Design, as Forty (2007) shows us, is a great producer of subjectivities as it produces tools and environments that, in turn, shape the subjects themselves. By assimilating a societal value and making this a means for products and services to be more easily understood and desired, designers also reinforces the production of subjectivities that sustain cultures, as well as the designers themselves, withing the status quo. The emergence of modern design in the industrial revolution served industrial and financial efficiency and disregarded socio-environmental impacts. Design in the last century has undergone transformation by progressive systematization and objectivization, which increasingly distanced it from artistic and political perspectives, while also increasing focus on the needs and desires of customers and users. Such changes have either been the product of a neoliberal agenda or are, as Latour adduces, the design implications of a modern and bifurcated worldview.

However, there are also propositions that support another type of design capable of producing of human subjectivities guided by an ecological worldview in which the various ecosystem relationships are understood and respected, be they human/non-human or alive/inert. Guattari in 1989 proposed Ecosophy, an ethical-aesthetic-political articulation in three ecological registers: subjectivity, social relations, and the environment (Guattari, 2001). Though he seems to allude to the environment in a general way, the philosopher calls on us to bring about ecosophical objects (Nadaud, 2015), that is, a confluence of the aforementioned concepts, or registers. In Guattari's view, we need to foster productions of subjectivities and subjective formations in an intentional and molecular manner to create the conditions for a way out of the socio-environmental crises that we find ourselves in, and which are engendered by a homogenizing subjective impoverishment that is in, "general movement of implosion and regressive infantilization" (Guattari, 2001, p. 8).

Guattari's vision of heterogeneous flows and machinic processes that carry values (Nadaud, 2015) is very similar to Latour's vision of ontological pluralism. Latour proposed the Actor-network

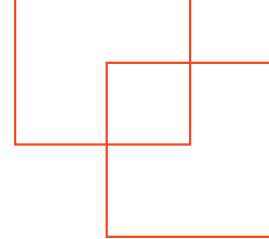


theory and Modes of Existence years ago. Such views go back to a philosophy of process in which happenings/events are understood as the smallest instances of reality, and this stands in opposition to atomistic models based on matter. In Latour's terms, we have actors (or actants) inseparable from the relationships that constitute them, such that we have neither subjects nor objects and only actants doing things, producing themselves, and establishing realities. Latour cites Foucault's work as a beautiful example of what he proposes stating, "follow the actors, see what they are doing, which other actors they are connecting with." Deleuze (Guattari's partner) also cites Foucault as "the cartographer", or more specifically, cartography is a practice proposed by Deleuze and Guattari that could serve ecosophical purposes. Given that changes to paradigms and worldviews are much needed, designers can respond by seeking alternative design modes, and the Ecosophy framework proposed by Guattari and Latour offers a potentially fruitful response.

2. GUATTARI'S THREE ECOLOGIES

In naming the three ecologies: the environment, social relations, and subjectivities, Guattari is expressing his indignation at a world that is slowly deteriorating. As our planet undergoes intense technical-scientific transformations, these engender ecological imbalances that threaten life today in the Anthropocene. Individual and collective ways of living are progressively deteriorating and affective relations such as family and social relationships are increasingly routinized and reduced to their poorest expression. The relationship between subjectivity and its exteriority, be it social, animal, vegetal, or cosmic, finds itself in a movement of implosion and regressive infantilization.

Guattari indicates a possible response to the ecological crisis as an, "authentic political, social and cultural revolution reorienting the objectives of the production of material and immaterial goods." This would be a revolution, "not only in the relations of visible forces on a large scale, but also in the molecular domains of sensitivity, intelligence and desire," (2001, p. 9). Both on the individual and collective scales, this is about, "looking into what the devices for producing subjectivity could be, moving towards individual and collective re-singularization,"



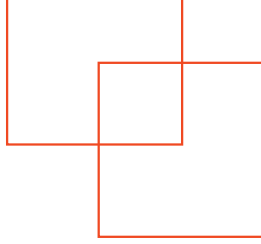
(2001, p. 15).

Guattari points to the need to reinvent our relationships in the social and environmental sphere by seeking, “antidotes to media and telematics standardization, fashion conformity, manipulation of opinion through advertising, polls, etc.,” (2001, p. 16). The way to reinvent singularity is more art than science, and it is, “urgent to get rid of all scientific references and metaphors to forge new paradigms that will, preferably, be of ethical-aesthetic inspiration,” (2001, p. 18). For him, the dynamics between the three ecologies and their ecological praxis must strive to, “detect the potential vectors of subjectivation and singularization,” and to seamlessly, “make the Registers evolve in a constructive, process-based way,” (2001, p. 28).

Guattari is realistic in stating that it is from the interface of the three ecologies that more efficient political actions in relation to the environment can arise and that, “the particular principle of environmental ecology is that everything is possible, both the worst catastrophes and flexible evolutions.” It bets that, “increasingly, natural balances will depend on human interventions,” (2001, p. 52) thus making it possible to engender other territories of existence which can gradually provide an engagement for a possible life and speculate on other ways of living. This would be a movement with multiple faces, capable of promoting another subjectivity and establishing another socius, another phylum maquínico, with technical-scientific universes as a reference, as well as other aesthetic worlds (2001, p. 53-55).

What Guattari presents to us in Three Ecologies is the need to conceive of an ethical-aesthetic discipline which in fact points to heterogenesis, that is, the production of a continuous process of resingularization where individuals become at the same time supportive and increasingly more different from each other.

For Guattari, subjectivity through transversal keys can be established simultaneously in the environment and also with large social and institutional registers, and, “symmetrically, within the landscapes and ghosts that inhabit the most intimate spheres of the individual,” the reconquest of creative autonomy in many fields. This regaining of humanity's trust in itself can happen, procedurally, through the smallest of means (2001, p. 55-56).



3. CASE OF IMMERSION REGENERATION

In the Master's research of Natalí Abreu Garcia (Garcia, 2022), we worked with Guattari's three ecologies to create methodological inputs which foster regenerative design processes. As part of the field research, an immersive experience was conducted which aimed, above all, to experiment with new processes exploring the production of subjectivities through the concept of regeneration and the three ecologies. We can understand immersion as a delimited and open field for experimenting with registers and intensities on a common plane of immanence. This process seeks creation by way of 'regenerative design', and aims for production, emergings, and lines of flight that could transform the field of design practices as we know it. In other words, seeking becomings for a design based on a delicate and careful resingularization process.

When we started thinking about an activity to experiment with it was decided that regenerative practice, care, autonomy, ecological awareness, and communality were important values. This was 2022, and we had just spent two years enduring the social distancing imposed by the Covid pandemic. Natalí intended to provide the best conditions in which the group could spend fruitful and happy days together, not only for the benefit of their research, but also for a transformative experience for everyone involved. This activity was inspired by the transformative education offered at Schumacher College and by the ecosophical journeys of Rodrigo Reis (Rodrigues, 2020). Natalí thought it was essential to return collective coexistence to creative processes and also to reestablish another relationship with time and territory. To this end, she found a place where we could be immersed in an environmental preserve in the Cantareira Mountains in the state of São Paulo where there is also space for human development. This choice was also based on the opportunity to experience a territory in which the regeneration proposal would be urgently needed. Another crucial factor was to consider which people should be invited to participate in the immersive activity. We needed

people with different backgrounds, and also with some knowledge of and a genuine interest in the regeneration proposal. Together we wrote up the list of people who would be invited while discussing what contributions each of them could make. This included people with backgrounds in the arts, design, anthropology, and environmental engineering who also had professional and personal experience in either education, economics, fashion or intentional communities.

Figure 1 – Photo collage of Regeneration Immersion



Source: Adapted by the authors from Garcia, 2022.

Natalí prepared all the activities very carefully. She put together welcome kits (figure 1) for the participants who later said that they truly felt appreciated by the personalized touches. The kits were an expression of care, attention, and affection for the participants. Meal preparation accounted for vegetarian, vegan, and organic diets, as well as dietary restrictions over these four days of regenerative practices. Participants received materials in advance to understand the territory and the relationships within the activity space.

People arrived at different times and the group's first encounter was a collective breakfast. Everyone naturally greeted and introduced themselves, then started a friendly conversation – like any newly formed group, it is only natural to seek some common ground to build upon. When everyone was at ease, Natalí began to explain the "nodes" of the networks that connect us. A collective organization of the day's

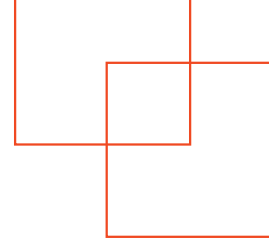
activities emerged in which decisions were made about what dishes were to be prepared and the best place to cook in and to enjoy meals. Afterwards, Natalí briefly explained how the immersion would work and the materials that everyone would receive. The richness of this meeting was due to the presence of each individual, and the generosity expressed in everyone's sharing was well appreciated. The cues for the Immersion of the Regenerative Practitioner were presented, (figure 2) starting with cultivating the state of presence, a state of contemplative attention to people in the moment, to the environment around them, and especially to their own subjectivity. An important cue was sentipensar, which is connecting with the body and emotions to explore multiple modes of expression beyond rational thought. It was suggested that participants map mindful feelings that could be shared with researchers in various locations: in the welcome kit's notebook, or in images and videos uploaded to the cloud. Furthermore, the research space was to be a space for constructive criticism towards the creation of an ethics-aesthetics-politics oriented towards an ecological worldview. And finally, the collaboration required a good atmosphere within the group as it was to be a collectively lived experience in organizing the space and preparing meals.

Figure 2 – Cues for Regenerative Practitioner Immersion



Source: Garcia, 2022.

Sentipensar is a term for the process through which thought and feeling work together. It is a design attitude with great affinity for



metadesign in understanding the regenerative paradigm, that is, it is a way of placing oneself in the world and sentipensar about this experience opens us to new ways of being (Bittencourt, Freire, 2022) in a process of resingularization. Exploring this dimension was important for us in creating a common plan and aligning attitudes within the group's existential state.

To conduct this qualitative exploratory research, we proposed using cartography. According to Costa (2020), cartography is more than just a research method and can be understood as an ethical-political inspiration, as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1995), which seeks to complement and strengthen qualitative research. Through cartography we can follow processes by analyzing their immanent lines (Costa, Amorim, 2019). These lines are articulations and are mixed together. The great challenge is to untangle them in what Deleuze calls mapping (1996). We install ourselves along these lines, traveling through unknown territories, drawing maps.

The initial activity was a metadesign conversation circle, with the intention of having production of subjectivities. It began with presenting the research and the participants, and Natalí went first by freeing herself from the expected temporalities that marked her previous design practices and let herself be affected by the process. Each participant read their cover letter and the atmosphere was one of real presence. In the letter, people were to write about who they were, what mattered to them, and what in their view needed to be regenerated.

Each participant reading their letters to the group was a poignant way for participants to introduce themselves and express their ideas and positions on the topic. This self-revealing activity was important for creating an affective and safe space of trust for exchange and listening. By expressing what regeneration means to them, they revealed that they attribute a very subjective meaning, oriented towards new purposes and ethics, which emphasize, "the importance of dreaming," "caring," the, "internal, external and spiritual," the, "regeneration of relationships," and that, "transformation needs to start with us," as well as learning from the, "wisdom of the living world." While the participants introduced themselves, the others were also taking notes, writing and drawing in their notebooks from the welcome kit (figure 3).

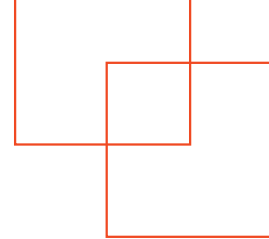


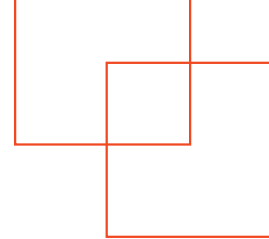
Figure 3 – Illustrations from one of the participant's notebooks



Source: Garcia, 2022.

The activity was very rich, offering the time necessary to read each letter, and it was conducted in a space that permitted contemplation of the cartographic registers. Initially, participants sought elements which connected them. Next, everyone presented a topic drawn from their own specialization which related to regeneration so that their way of seeing the world could be shared with the group. The activities started at 3pm and ended after dinner at around 10pm. Interior and exterior spaces were used, and the atmosphere was informal, observant, motivating, and conversational. In this constructed dialogue, they came to understand what they knew and what they did not know about the topic. The questions they asked shed light on the subject and also found the shadows in their knowledge. Natalí stated that criticism was an attitude of generosity that allowed someone to grow, and the challenge here was to put such varied cosmological and epistemological foundational values into dialogue.

An environment of trust was created, and by the end of the first day, each of the cues had led to insights for the regenerative practitioner's immersion. The state of contemplative attention and openness to learning from others was palpable. Sharing regenerative practices and what needed to be regenerated was fundamental to putting subjectivities into dialogue and to practicing *sentipensar* as a collective. Feelings and apprehensions were shared and discussed. Co-collaboration emerged organically in the preparation of dinner as it



grew out of the conversation circle. Everything continued to flow. At the end of the working day, the group understood that the regeneration that was required was of our own mentality, our worldview, and that to regenerate our own subjectivity we needed to decolonize thought, to learn from the indigenous peoples, seek other metaphors for our relationship with the body and with nature. Regenerating social dynamics was also necessary. This was to be regeneration that crosses through the three ecological registers and linked especially to a sense of rebirth, of revitalization, and of the ability to see new potential, a transformation that honors its immanent essence and that creatively achieves new structures and patterns of behavior. These metadesign cues, experienced 24 hours a day over 4 days of work, were fundamental for elaborating the “regenerativist manifesto” which resulted from the group's sentipensar within an Artist polyphony.

During the immersion, the group also took a reconnaissance walk through the natural territories and buildings of the site to understand the history and patterns of the place. They conducted a grounding activity by going barefoot on the grass and soil to explore the sensations of biodiverse topography. On this sentipensante walk, participants were able to experience the natural environment and foster bonds among the group. This activity was part of the mapping and fed into a cartographic task.

After visiting the site's buildings and going on a sentipensante walk, participants allowed their perceptions to emerge in a cartographic exercise. Contributions were both individual and collective. The writings and shapes, traces of immanent lines, mixed and recombined to produce new meanings. It was observed that cartographic production plastically reproduced the territory, with the water lines that surround and form the landscape. So too, the values and perceptions of those who had been there and experienced the place.

The group also prospected visions for and capacities of the site after consuming information about the larger context of the Cantareira Mountains. For example, a sketch of the site's nesting was made with the Capuava neighborhood the local the mountain region, with nesting as a guide to ecosystemic understanding and design decision-making. Starting from the uniqueness of the place, we understand the site's role

and potential as an ecological and sustainable laboratory to inspire the protection of an important conservation area in the Cantareira Mountains. The capacities necessary to foster environmental protection among the ecosystem of actors in the region were prospected. Among the possible actions and capabilities that resulted, while carefully taking environmental and communality aspects into account, promoting a local cooperative and festivals among the local people were agreed upon.

As a result of the movements practiced during the immersion, two video manifestos regarding design and metadesign were produced based on participants' contributions and findings. The first is an ethical-aesthetic-political manifesto for the site, the ecoperformance "The sorceress and her magic" (figure 4). The second is the metadesign manifesto on the Regenerative movement which proposes values and premises for regenerative design (figure 5).

Figure 4 - Ecoperformance "The sorceress and her magic"



Watch on: <https://youtu.be/mYmjX2QZoEE>. Direction and performance Rodrigo Reis.

Source: Garcia, 2022.

Figure 5 – RegenerARTivist Manifesto “Regeneration”

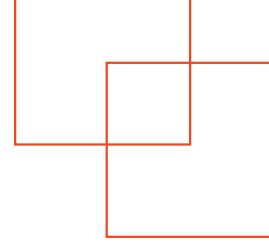


Watch on https://youtu.be/bhGTd0A6o_4.

Source: Garcia, 2022.

The title of the ecoperformance “The sorceress and her magic” alludes to a text by Levy Strauss originally published in 1949. In it, the anthropologist narrates an event that took place in 1938 while he was with the Tapajós Indians in the Brazilian Amazon. The report refers to a member of the village who was stigmatized by the community and forced to live on its margins, thus becoming a sorcerer. However, before describing the details of the performance recorded in the video that make up the immersion work, it is necessary to conceptualize ecoperformance and its regenerative character in the context of contemporary arts. It is a term created in 2009 by Maura Baiocchi, director of Taanteatro Cia,

aimed at investigating tensions between body, environment and ancestry. The performer's eco poetic and ecoethic presence, understood as an interaction of forces and forms in time-space, triggers an atmosphere of tensions that configures, in turn, an environmental process with the same characteristics as his presence. An ecoperformance takes place in natural or urban landscapes and can, among other possibilities, honor or reaffirm the interconnection between humans and the environment, raise awareness of the impact of certain harmful human actions on this environment, and,



consequently, be a vehicle for reporting. (BAIOCCHI; PANNEK, 2018, p. 90)

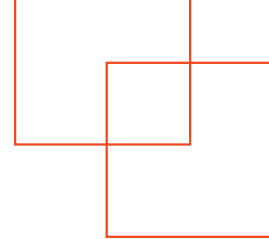
The performance took place following the group's visit to an archaeological site that is currently incorporated into the territory of the immersion, and upon which once stood the house of a sorceress of, perhaps, black and indigenous descent. According to local oral history, the sorceress's house was demolished after her death to make way for a chapel dedicated to a Catholic saint. This story resonated with the group's heightened sensitivity during the immersion as it spoke of a clash between white, male colonizing and occupying forces and minority, female resistance forces. It stands as part of the larger story of exploitative European colonization that continues to impact us today.

Thus, in the ethical and aesthetic articulation of the three ecologies, a debate about regeneration and decolonialization ensued and the production of subjectivity was encountered by the group's sensitivity. As can be seen in the video, the whole process culminated in an artwork where the body, environment, and ancestry of that territory eco-perform, updating their strengths and virtualities.

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout this study, the production of subjectivities and the significance of this for the design field have been presented, especially in design regarding socio-environmental issues that seek reorientation towards ecological thinking. Guattari's Three Ecologies point a way towards the construction of theoretical-methodological proposals that explore co-production in the concomitance of ecological registers of subjectivities together with social and environmental relations.

From the present case study of an immersive design process, we can conclude that for the production of subjectivities, encountered through *sentipensar*, it is important to be located in a more natural environment. This highlights our relationship of ecosystemic inter-existence and locates where it is possible to adequately explore the dimension of the body within an extended period of sharing and conviviality to truly foster reciprocal relationships. This is fundamental within the context of the Three Ecologies in which Guattari and Deleuze call us to a sensitivity that requires the involvement of bodies and



affects.

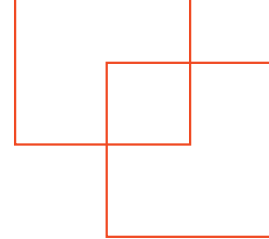
To this end, a contemplative metadesign experience was developed that managed the production of subjectivities at the intersection of the three ecological registers. These registers emerged as an ethical-aesthetic-political proposal in order to catalyze a necessary transformation in subjects and their ways of being.

For a design that aims to overcome the bifurcation between subject and object, we also need to call upon the notions of subjectivity, desire (as potential and impulse toward creation registered for the production of difference), and immanence within social and environmental collaboration. This is done to array regenerative practices and, at the same time, monitor and map out relational and vital processes as they occur. To implicate the subject and its singular powers, both cognitive and affective, we need to adopt another design attitude, one that puts the body into action, that is, in a state of *sentipensar* and in a dynamic between absorption-contemplation and creation-production.

It is also important to reflect on the need for cooperation that elaborates on the limits of design from the purely specialist viewpoint and its centralizing focus on place, that is, an ecosystemic perspective. Also, the inclusion of a diversity of perspectives, especially the more invisible ones such as those of traditional communities and their customary and vernacular practices, as well as minorities and indigenous peoples.

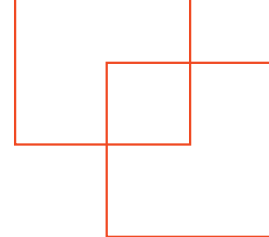
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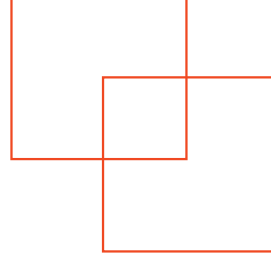
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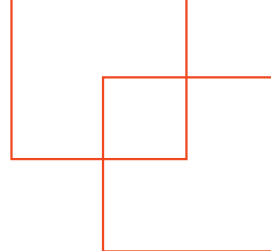
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