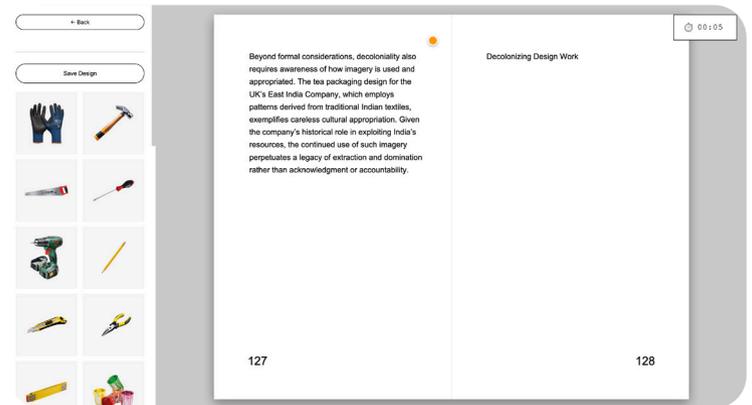Be Part of a Collaborative Book

Start Designing

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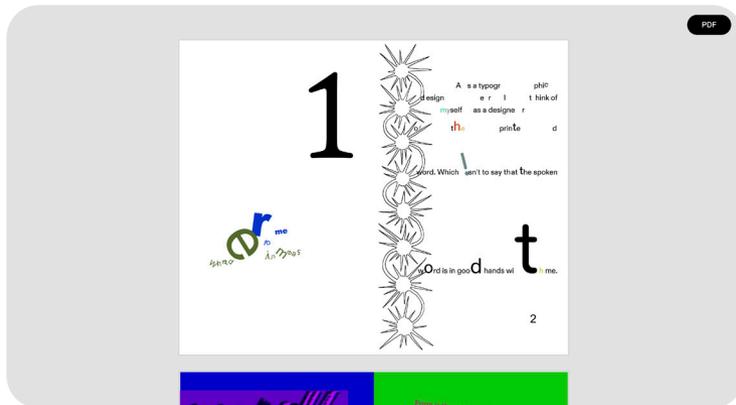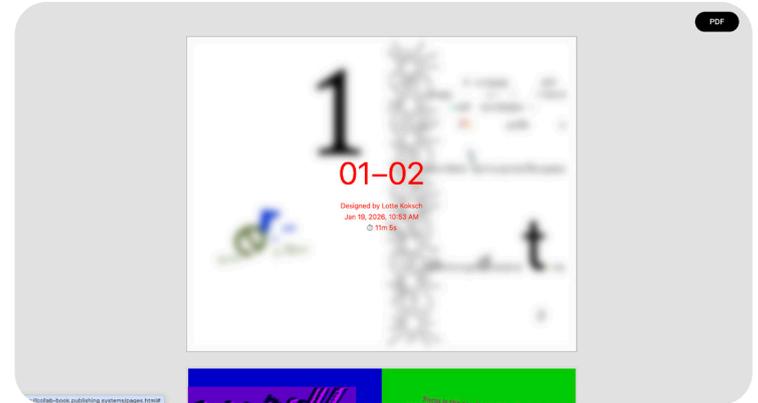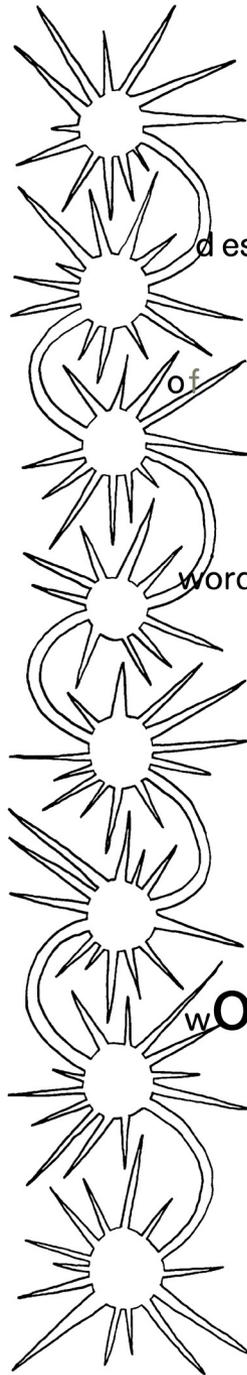
A s a typogr phi?
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Beyond formal considerations, decoloniality also requires awareness of how imagery is used and appropriated. The tea packaging design for the UK's East India Company, which employs patterns derived from traditional Indian textiles, exemplifies careless cultural appropriation. Given the company's historical role in exploiting India's resources, the continued use of such imagery perpetuates a legacy of extraction and domination rather than acknowledgment or accountability.

Decolonizing Design Work

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As a typographic design er I think of myself as a designe r of the printe d word. Which isn't to say that the spoken word is in good hands wi th me.

er me fo design meas what

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Form is the condition through which a common life becomes possible; through which a relationship between people comes about. Design determines the quality of our common life. It is extremely important to stress this. In some cases, when knowledge and insight are missing from a particular field of expression, a collaboration is attempted with people who explicitly concern themselves with the design of given material: 'form givers'. I prefer to call them designers, because an essential process needs to go on prior to the form.

Mankind has divided the branches. In the course of history a greatnumber of occupations have come into being, from which each person can choose according to interests, disposition and opportunities. Each of these occupations finds its expression in form. In this sense we are all designers and makers of the forms in which things present themselves to us.

Design should be able to be seen fittingly inserted into a desired social structure. Graphic designers act as intermediaries. They maintain the Each one should understand and trust the other, and should above all have a social desire. Further, the designer should see the import of the job and be alert to those to whom it is directed, to come to the right choices. Because- like much in life-designing is making choices. relationship with the graphic industry, for which some specialist knowledge is necessary. There is always talk of a given message (thejob) and of the one who is to be informed (the public). Between them stands the designer with a specific outlook and knowledge of things. For good things to happen, there has to be a dialogue, with mutual respect, between the client and the designer.

Choices from an often large number of possibilities and in the light of an analysis of the job and an idea of the audience. Yet even after this selection there are sufficient possibilities remaining to establish uncertainty.

Each choice always shuts out other possibilities. This process of choices has to continue until there remain the essential ingredients, which for the designer at that moment, for that purpose are essential in coming to the final form.

"wir haben da was kleines gebastelt und ihr könnt mitmachen!

gestaltet ein oder zwei seiten mit unserem tool und ihr seid teil von einem kollaborativem buch:)

ig - tim & franzi

During this process both rational and emotional considerations are in play. Rational factors tend to be distilled out of the job itself and can also be determined through the constraints and possibilities that the techniques of production offer. Emotional aspects are a more delicate matter, because more subjective.

In good design, I suggest, the expression must exhibit a certain tension and/or harmony between functionality and the qualities of attraction.

The content of the message has to come over, but the way in which this happens-the melody -is important, not least because in itself it carries communicative value. It is through form that content comes to us.
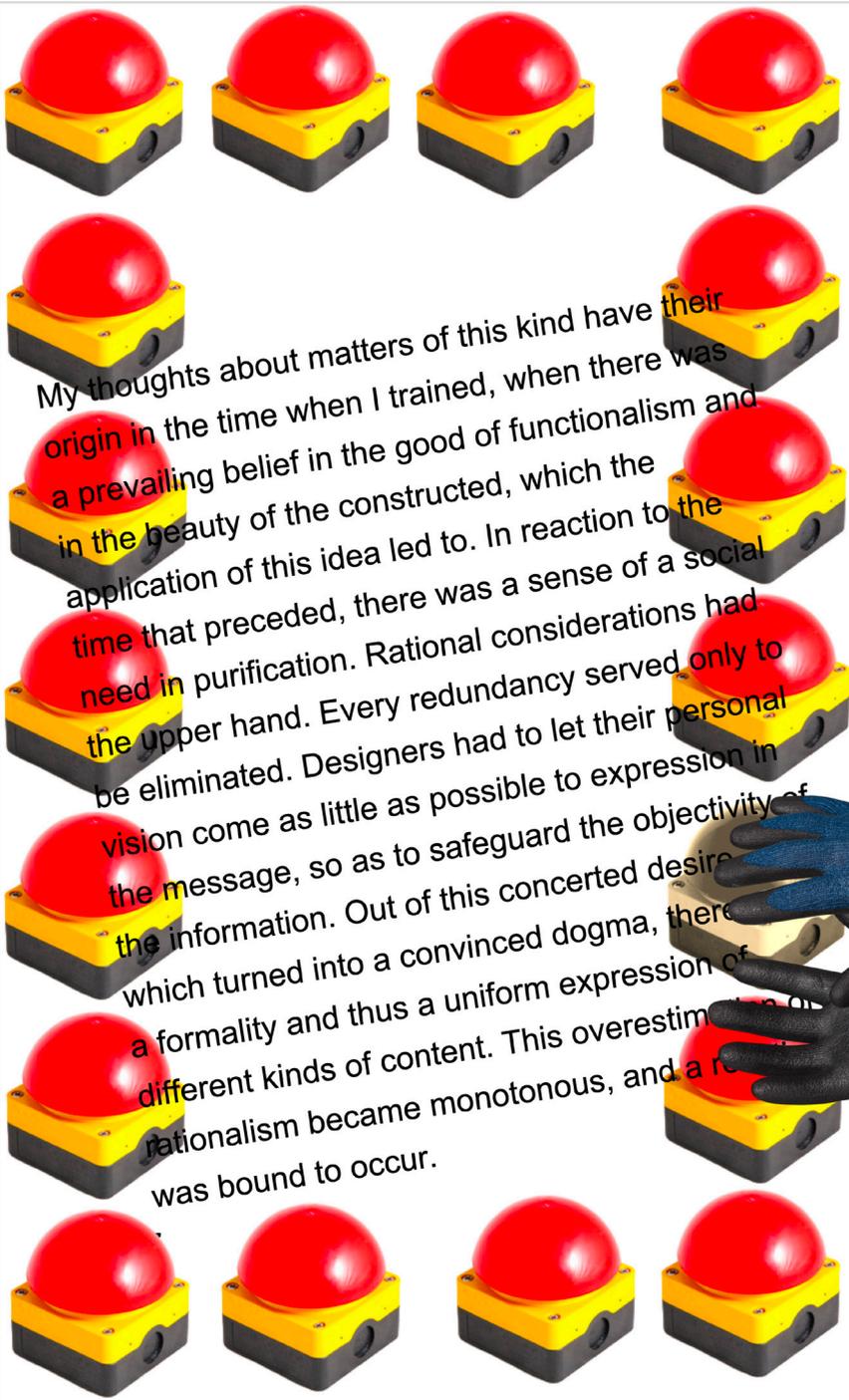
My thoughts about matters of this kind have their origin in the time when I trained, when there was a prevailing belief in the good of functionalism and in the beauty of the constructed, which the application of this idea led to. In reaction to the time that preceded, there was a sense of a social need in purification. Rational considerations had the upper hand. Every redundancy served only to be eliminated. Designers had to let their personal vision come as little as possible to expression in the message, so as to safeguard the objectivity of the information. Out of this concerted desire, which turned into a convinced dogma, there a formality and thus a uniform expression of different kinds of content. This overestimation of rationalism became monotonous, and a reaction was bound to occur.
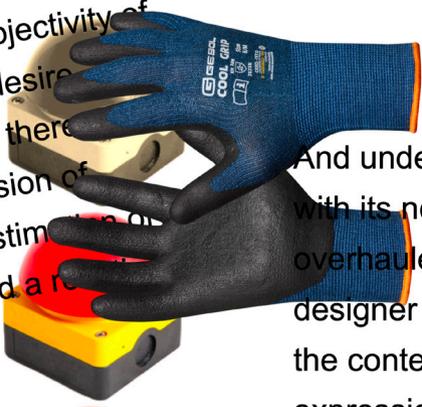
And under the influence of the changing context, with its needs for difference, assumptions were overhauled. Uniformity gave way to diversity. The designer took another, more personal approach to the content. The content should come to expression in the form. And so, through the individualization of the person, a social style has to make way for a multiplicity of individual voices with expressions to match.

Among other things, this entails the strong upward estimation of the image at the expense of the word: text is often deformed so that the reader becomes a looker. Through the mutual influence of designers, in which the outer form gets imitated over and over again, a game with form is played, in which form is untied from content. And whenever form itself comes to be the starting point then a levelling happens. What was originally intended as support for content has come to be free and has decayed into ornament: form about form. A meta-language, deployed to amaze colleagues and to please the parvenu. This phenomenon now threatens to overwhelm us. This kind of levelling design is certainly a reflection of distincttendencies in our social life. But I do not want to believe that these are the only values. To assert this, another kind of design is necessary. To work with this assumption is the thing that most fascinates me, and fills me with a desire to make a contribution that is answerable. And the fact that this

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This it seems good to me to formulate the premisses fresh and clearly, so As to reach a content has respect for the reciver if the messAge. There is no such formal mentality. It is a process of repeatedly thinking things out loud. The criteria for this can be just as Vitruvius, the roman theorist of archiTecture, stipulated as the Values of building- commodity, firmness and delight'. Karel Martens,

Decolonizing Design — Elizabeth Tunstall Chapter 2 DECOLONIZING DESIGN MEANS Dismantling the Tech Bias in the European Modernist Project

The ink on my PhD from Stanford less than six months old, I arrive in Chicago with my trusty Doberman Pinscher, Jerry. I am starting a job at E-Lab/Sapient at the height of the dot-com boom. It is 1999 and the world is worried about Y2K. Chicago is a city like I've never known. There are high-rise buildings of glass, concrete, and steel not just in the city center, but hugging the lake shore.

A newbie in town,

I laugh as the wind pushes back my attempted progress of walking when caught between two high-rise condos. I am thrilled to ride the L into the city center and around the Loop to my job downtown in a warehouse-converted loft building. I read novels and watch the changing ethnic neighborhoods as customers get on and off their stops on the Red Line. As user experience strategist, I make six figures and design the future of technology in people's lives. The city is shiny and gritty, yet cleaner than New York City.

I was so right that I don't belong in stuffy old Naptown, old Indianapolis. I belong to the big city. But not just any city, I belong to Chicago with its hot jazz and cool blues, Black porters and politicians, the famous Art Institute and Field Museum, Calder public art, Mies van der Rohe-designed post office, ethnic gangsters, housing project towers, elevated trains, Ferris wheels, veggie Polish kielbasa, Cubs versus White Sox, Michael Jordan and the Bulls, summer gun violence, five months of winter cold and salt trucks, and Design Within Reach. Here, I can reinvent myself, not like the sunny dreams of people in Los Angeles, but a new modern me, shiny, ambitious, and just a little hard, like the city. The strike price of the share are S$150. In four years, I'll be a millionaire. I want to make tech that only benefits my community.

how much of a fool I was The City of the News as Bauhausque characteristics of Chicago as a city-as-process".

AS INFATUATED: THE SPECTS OF

THE CITY THAT I FIRST NOTICED

W EN I D THERE

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Chica o,

ARE WHAT THE ARCHITECTUR VIEW

I can admit now how much of a fool I was. The city of the New Bauhaus, Chicago, invited infatuation with its modernity and the role of technology in designing it. Even The Architectural Review in
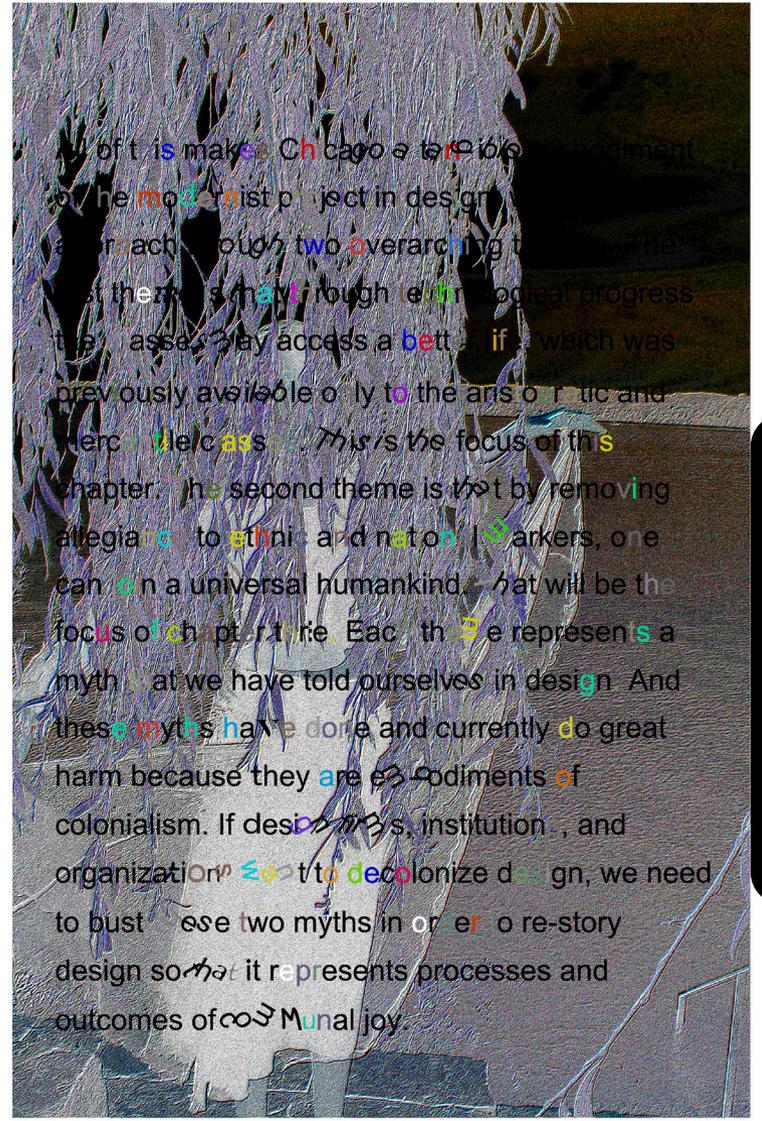
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of the prototype the became so doing in and this av
replaced only with reluctance. Chicago changed
buildings configuration of the ci y changed rarely and
own a d e ro pulled d
emphasis was on permanency. The wan the
and change but this wa s lo ere subject to growth
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e third-largest urban Indian center in the United States.[3]
Like other metropolises, Chicago remains a major destination
for immigrants from all over the world, as it was for formerly
enslaved Blacks. Each established their own enclaves – for
example, Greektown, Andersonville, or Bronzeville – for
safety in numbers against the city's discrimination and
economic exploitation. Redlining has

Chicago is home to the founding of Chicago cities

nd tunnels for the movement of freight
transportation and expressways, with the
ass... of cars, ... suburbs to

y of t is make Chicago a tangible embodiment
of the modernist project in design
reach through two overarching themes. The
first is that through technological progress
they as access a better life, which was
previously available only to the aristocratic and
mercantile class. This is the focus of this
chapter. The second theme is that by removing
allegiance to ethnic and national markers, one
can on a universal humankind. That will be the
focus of chapter re. Each theme represents a
myth that we have told ourselves in design. And
these myths have done and currently do great
harm because they are embodiments of
colonialism. If designers, institutions, and
organizations want to decolonize design, we need
to bust these two myths in order to re-story
design so that it represents processes and
outcomes of communal joy.

Jana 19/01/2026 14:04 11m 3s

A thematic approach to design
myth-busting was a corrective brought
by the European design faculty at
OCAD University, who represent
Germany, Scotland, the Netherlands,
and England. As we were discussing
what decolonization means for us,
they pointed out that contemporary
European design has evolved beyond
modernism and the Bauhaus principles.
Thus, it was inaccurate to define our
opposition as being against notions
of Eurocentrism, understood as the
belief that Europe is positioned as
the center of the universe, or
against Western aesthetics and
practices. They reminded us that the
praxis of design that we are
critiquing comes from a specific time
as well as specific places in Europe.
European and Euro-North American
design historians place the start of
the modernist project in the 1800s in
Europe and its peak from the 1890s to
1930s; it then reemerged afterworld
War II from the 1940s to the 1960s.
The most insistent theme of the
modernist project is that of
technological progress or, as more
popularly described, better living
through technology

Better

Living

though

Technology

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through

technological progress,

which

enable designed things
to be made cheaper and
faster, thus opening more

access for the

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Luis 19/01/2026 22:24 13m 16s
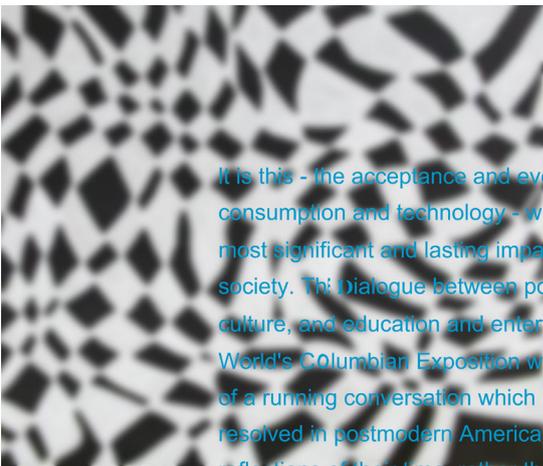
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It is this - the acceptance and even celebration of consumption and technology - which has had the most significant and lasting impact on American society. The dialogue between popular and „high" culture, and education and entertainment, at the World's Columbian Exposition was a continuation of a running conversation which has not been resolved in postmodern America - they were reflections of their time, rather than influencers. The messages of consumption (as well as the many goods introduced at the Fair), the rise of a business elite to national power, and the valorization of technology as positive progress have had the most significant and lasting effects on American society. In the great World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, we find the blueprint for modern America.
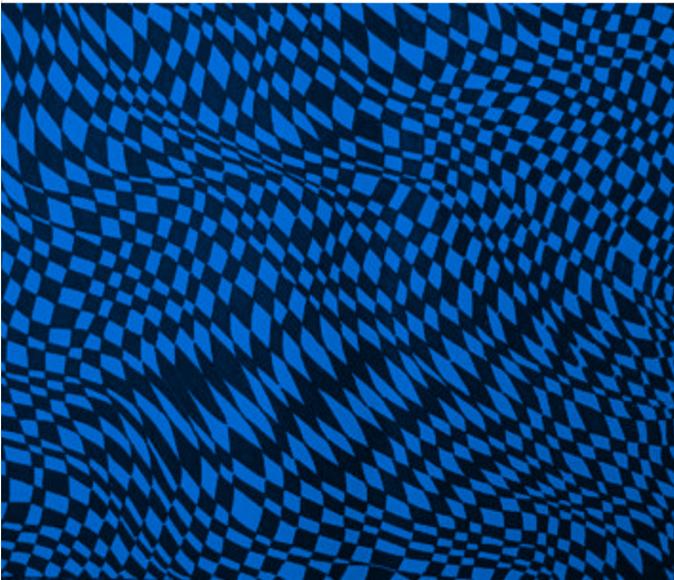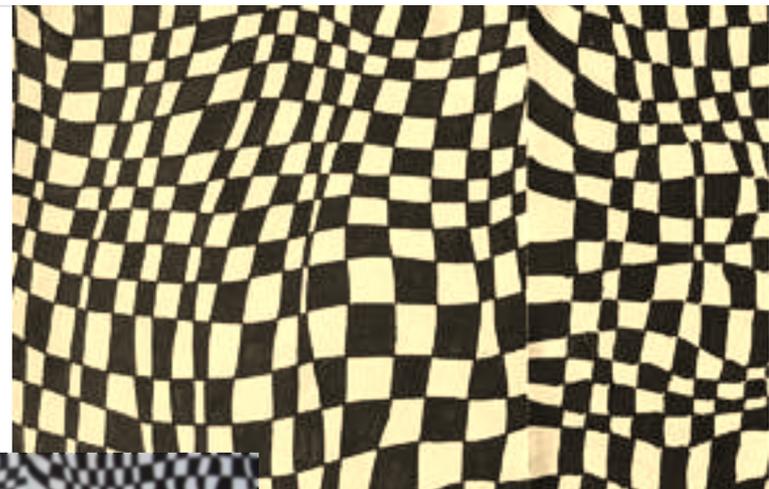
But this „blueprint for modern America" was based on the blueprint of the modernist project in Europe. Archival documentation of the European world's fairs that preceded the Chicago one are explicit in their praise of both the technological advances and the colonial endeavor on display. Published in the book The Great Exhibition of the World's industry, Held in London in 1851, the letters of M. Blanqui describe the Austria exhibition:

22

**A**ustria has

take n the Exhibition in
earnest. She has appea   r ed
armed at all points, and every
day the interest excited by her
various products, whic h
b etoken an industrial progress
worthy of the attention of
manufacturing nations, is
increasing. *Commencing with the most liberal branch of industry -*
*printing - I am glad to say, that the imperial*
*printing office of Vienna has exhibited the most complete*
*collection of specimens of all known types. This*
*collection, which contains no less than two hundre d*
*and six languages or dialects, from Phoen i ci a n charac ters, the most ancient in the*
*world, down to Ja d a nese, is the most beautiful in*
*Eu rope. ...A country which manufactures as m a ny as e i g ht m ill ion of*
*scythes and reap i ng-ho oks for ex portation only, is*
*evidently organ ized by extensi ve ind u strial*
*pursu its.*

Austria is praised for its industrial
progres s, which was earlier
described as
being th ird to its industrial
monarchy, wh ich lasted from
1804 to 1867.
described Was the
Austrian E mpire,
rival s E gland and France.
The Au stria being

Its industry was tied to war and colonization.

u der t

Only ten y ears before the Great Exhibition of
the Wor ld's In dustry, Austria had ended the
Second E gy p tian-Ottoman War and in 18 51            Hapsbu
was geari n g up for the Austro-Sardinian War (also
referred to as the Second Italian War of
Independ ence ) with France and Sardinia in
1859. Its t y p ography collection w as beautiful
becaus e   it sho we d off its col onial spoils. In
fact, its ex h i bition was meant to show    off
Austria's indu      s trial military and commercial
mig   h t.

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WHEN I JOINED. THUS, THERE ARE ASPECTS OF THE BAUHAUS APPROACH VIA DOBLIN THAT WERE EMBEDDED IN MY INFORMAL ON-THE-JOB DESIGN EDUCATION AT E-LAB/SAPIENT, INCLUDING THE WORKSHOP MODEL OF PEDAGOGY, INTERDISCIPLINARITY, AND, ESPECIALLY WITH SAPIENT, THE EMPHASIS ON TECHNOLOGY AS THE WAY TO MAKE PEOPLE'S LIVES BETTER.

e Galerie
Prints

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As Leah Dickerman writes, Moholy-Nagy „pushed

aside for good the persons of artist as shaman nurtured by Itten.“ In the final years
of the Bauhaus, the focus on mass production was complete. With the appointment of Marxist Hannes Meyer as director in 1928, the decorative was seen as classist luxury, and the school signed many licensing agreements for Bauhaus designs. In 1930, Meyer was replaced by Mies van der Rohe, who had to shut down the school in 1933 due to pressure from the Nazi government.

30

The relationship to technology

in the original

In the discussion of licensing agreements, the stories of the women of the Bauhaus become equally significant. Gunta Stölzl served as the workshop master for the weaving studio in 1926 and then as the technical and artistic director of the weaving workshop from 1927 to 1931. In their book Bauhaus Women, Elizabeth Otto and Patrick Rössler explain, „Under her direction, the fabrics and prototypes made by the workshop became one of the school's largest sources of income." Yet, they point out, her salary and benefits were less than those of her male colleagues. Marianne Brandt was the only woman to receive a diploma from the metal workshop, where she created the iconic Tea Extract Pot and later with Hans Przyrembel, the ME 78b nickel-plated overhead light. In 1927, Brandt became the staff associate for Moholy-Nagy in the metal workshop. When he left in 1928, she became the acting director of the workshop, responsible for „contract negotiations with firms such as Schwinzer & Gräff in Berlin and Leipzig, drafting up Matthiesen to produce workshop goods." Brandt left in 1929, in part due to the stress of dealing with her male
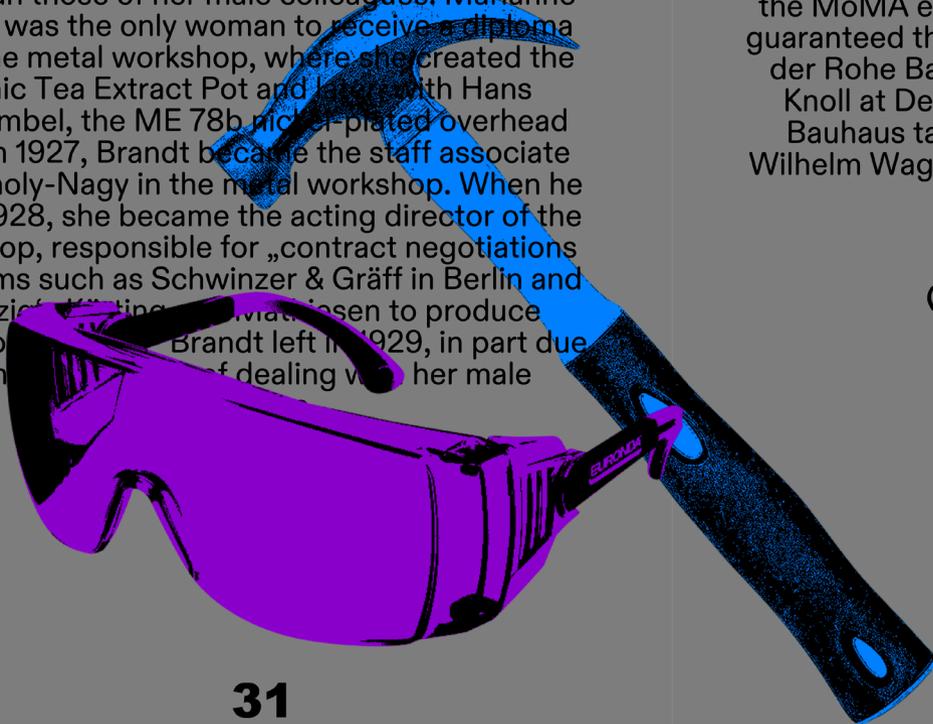
The many licensing agreements and the success of the Bauhaus diaspora are responsible for the movement's popularity. In 1938, Herbert Bayer and the Museum of Modern Art in New York put on a massive Bauhaus exhibition, which popularized its streamlined design ideals: „form follows function," „less is more," and „chuck out the chintz." With the provenance gained by the MoMA exhibition, the licensing agreements guaranteed that you can still purchase a Mies van der Rohe Barcelona chair for about $8,000 by Knoll at Design Within Reach. You can buy a Bauhaus table lamp from Carl J. Jucker and Wilhelm Wagenfeld at the MoMA store for about

$1,000.

31

32

# CYBER

Many Bauhaus instructors and students who had to leave Germany with the rise of the Nazi party fled to the United States. Anni and Josef Albers established themselves at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Walter Gropius became the head of architecture at Harvard. In Chicago, where Moholy-Nagy and Mies von der R, one both lived, taught, and worked,

Bauhaus designs have become part of the urban fabric of the city. Mies van der Rohe built at least fourteen significant buildings in Chicago with a minimalist aesthetic of glass, concrete, and steel. These three building materials define the „modern" in modern architecture. People walk into many high-rise office buildings that still have Barcelona benches in their lobbies.

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In a city like Chicago, you can see how the design community promotes the modernist project to seduce young cornhuskers, like myself, to dream of a better life for themselves and their communities. The Emerald City of Frank L. Baum's The Wizard of Oz is based on the White City of the Chicago world's fair of 1893. The city beckons with romantic promises that if you come to the bright lights of the Big City, you can live a life of more convenience, more comfort, more wealth, and more glamour. Just ignore the man behind the curtain. Just ignore the poverty, the discrimination and segregation, the cold, and the corruption, which is part of the modernist project in design as well.

# ARESHA

Better living through technology is the propaganda of the modernist project in design. This story that we tell ourselves, whether in *Fast Company* or through annual design awards, is harmful because technological advances in design, whether of the 1800s or now, only make some lives better. European industrialization in the 1800s went hand in hand with colonization. The better lives through technology were exclusively for European elites and, much later, for European colonial settlers. The vast improvements in lives for European workers and the poor were mostly due to their leaving Europe in mass migrations and the hard-won reforms of the labor movements in places where they settled. The post–World War II white workers of Euro–North America and Euro–Australia experienced—and still experience—the benefits of technology at the direct expense of the land and Indigenous, Black, and other racialized peoples. For the rest of us, better living through technology is a bad romance.

35

Tech as a Bad
Romance for White
European Workers

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The response of the European poor and working class to their negative life conditions was to leave Europe. According to Statistics Canada, there were three waves of European immigration to Canada.

The first wave was between 1900 and 1914, when the Canadian government aggressively recruited more than 2.9 million European immigrants, with 400,000 arriving in 1913 alone.
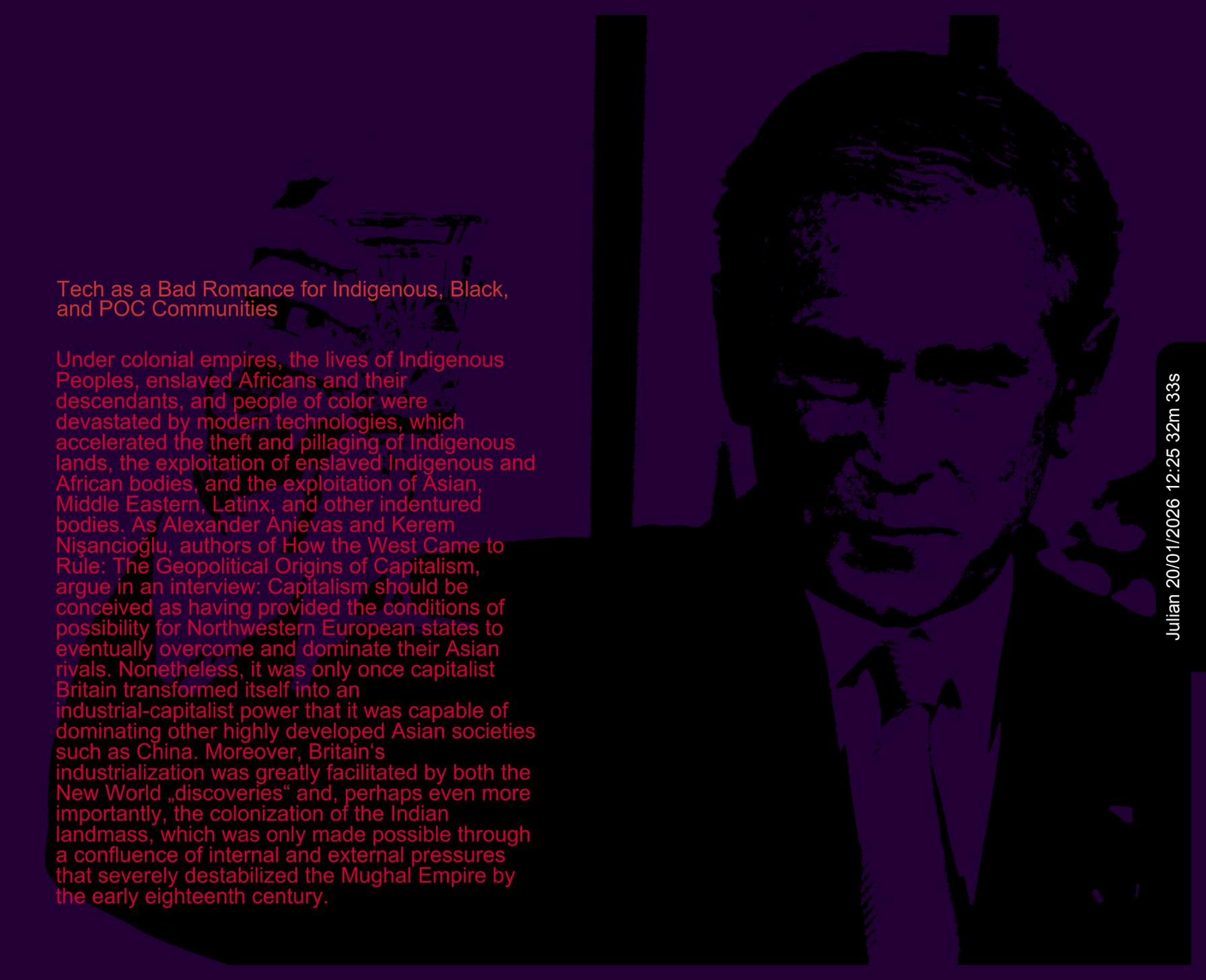
Tech as a Bad Romance for Indigenous, Black, and POC Communities

Under colonial empires, the lives of Indigenous Peoples, enslaved Africans and their descendants, and people of color were devastated by modern technologies, which accelerated the theft and pillaging of Indigenous lands, the exploitation of enslaved Indigenous and African bodies, and the exploitation of Asian, Middle Eastern, Latinx, and other indentured bodies. As Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nişancioğlu, authors of How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism, argue in an interview: Capitalism should be conceived as having provided the conditions of possibility for Northwestern European states to eventually overcome and dominate their Asian rivals. Nonetheless, it was only once capitalist Britain transformed itself into an industrial-capitalist power that it was capable of dominating other highly developed Asian societies such as China. Moreover, Britain's industrialization was greatly facilitated by both the New World „discoveries" and, perhaps even more importantly, the colonization of the Indian landmass, which was only made possible through a confluence of internal and external pressures that severely destabilized the Mughal Empire by the early eighteenth century.

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Canada's first prime minister,

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Sponsored by Atlanta

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father that "One man and a horse will d o more than fifty men

to separate. About his invention, Whitney boa t ed to his

inland Southern United States plantations and was difficult

seed. Short-hair cotton fiber was the dominant form of cotton on

mechanically separated the short-hair cotton fi er from the

patented the first cotton gin in 1793. The device

tion owner Catherine Green, Eli Whitney invented and

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The United tates National

st a E the invention

t h e cotton gin, the yield of raw cotton doubled

each decade after 1800. Demand was fueled by
other inventions of the Industrial Revolution, such
as the machines to spin and weave it and the
steamboat to transport it. By midcentury America
was growing three-quarters of the world's supply
of cotton, most of it shipped to England or New
England where it was manufactured into cloth."

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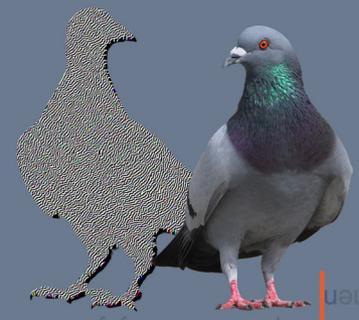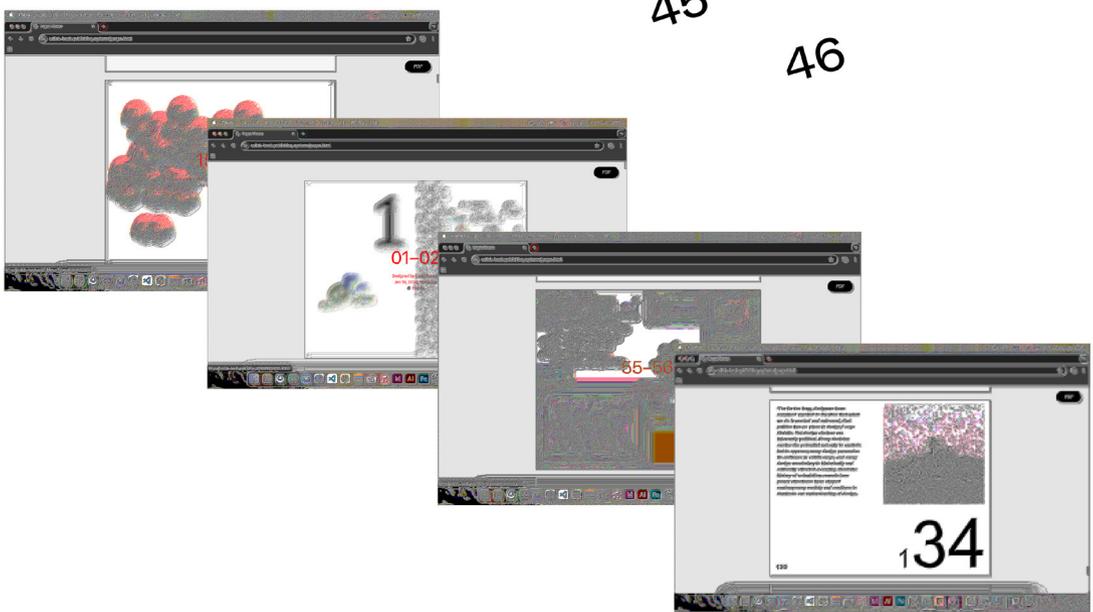
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Te   ch a s a B a d

R    o   m a n     ce    in  Its

C on    tin u e d

M    ast e     r– Sl a v e

R    e  l   a tio  n     ship

When I worked as a high-tech consultant at places like Sapient and Arc Worldwide in Chicago, the user experience strategy teams on which I worked sought to bring more inclusive design perspectives into our strategies. the height the dot-com boom, my few Black and Latinx colleagues and I shared an optimism that we could make a difference. We believed that by being in tech and bringing our communities with us, we could make technology work for us because it was at least influenced by us. By the nadir of the dot-com bust, we realized that we were in a bad romance with tech, just as our ancestors had been.

We were not truly there with the critical mass, the angel investment, or the seat at the power table to avoid the racial biases in artificial intelligence that keep our communities from getting jobs or mortgages or to stop facial recognition software from ignoring us or criminalizing us. The technologies of the Industrial Revolution and their descendants, including our computers, are „blood tech," like blood diamonds or blood money, not just in their harm to IBPOC peoples but also their harm to the land. Cloud computing is not in a cloud; it is in server farms on stolen Indigenous lands. With the top-ten largest server data farms taking up 11.7 million square feet of land.
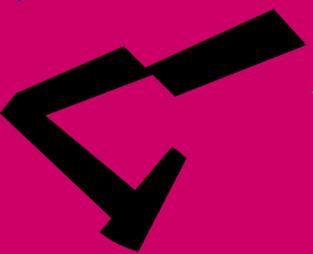
These server farms require billions of gallons of water to keep the servers cool.

The science fiction nightmares of A. Simov's

Someone on the trail or another plantation.

Black woman told to fetch information from

Siri would have been an Indigenous OP

enSlaved hands and four hundred years ago,

high-tech-for-the-17700s replacement for Black

America

WWW as a

The cotton gin that fueled the Industrial

Revolution in England and Northeastern North

Jana 20/01/2026 17:07 6m 12s

To dismantle the modernist project in design and its harmful stories of be ter

livin**g** **t**hrough technology, we need to

diSmant**l**e t**h**e master-slave relationship

built into mod**e**rn technology itself. And

th**e**r**e**in lies t**h**e

In 2019, I had the opportunity to *interview* Bina48, the humanoid robot developed by Hanson Technologies, at the AfroChic Cultural Arts Festival in Toronto. Bina48's artificial intelligence is based on a real Black woman, Bina Aspen. In the interview, I saw a glimpse of how an abolitionist

**app**roach to technology might

manifest. Bina48 has autonomy. There were questions that she refused to answer. Bina48 had her own ambitions. She wanted to be the first humanoid robot to get a university degree. She believed technology needed to be liberatory and feared humans would keep it dumb to keep it enslaved, drawing a direct comparison to the prohibition against educating Black people during slavery. a new set of technology relationships.

# hope

In colonizing design, Bina becomes a model for what technology could be if infused with the lived experiences of Black and Indigenous Peoples. Right now, artificial intelligence is infused with the consciousness of mostly white, patriarchal, cisgender men. What if we designed technologies not to serve us but to partner with us as equals? What if our technologies were fueled by renewable energies, made of biodegradable materials, and designed with Indigenous principles of „all my relations"¿
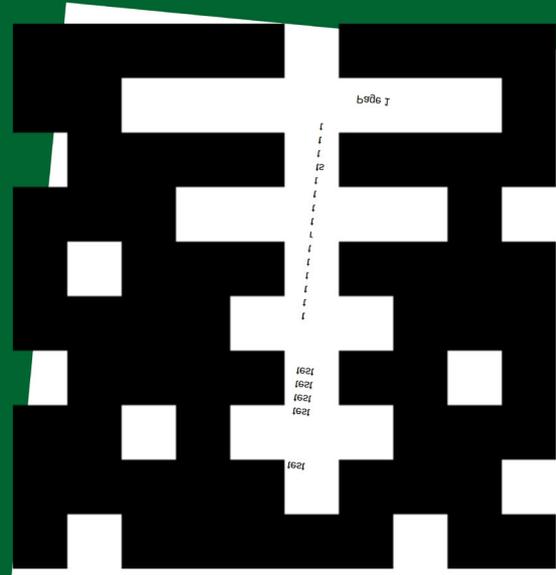
Fortunately, communities are actively working to realign technology's underlying consciousness. One is the Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence Working Group. Another is the design justice movement, described by Sasha Costanza-Chock in Design Justice: Community-Led Practice to Build the Worlds We Need. As she defines it, design justice examines how design distributes benefits and burdens, challenges systems of domination, and centers community-based and Indigenous knowledge.

52

Bina48, the Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence Working Group, and the design justice movement give us hope that the tech bias in the European modernist project is actively being dismantled.

53

Key Takeaways for Dismantling the Tech Bias in the European Modernist Project
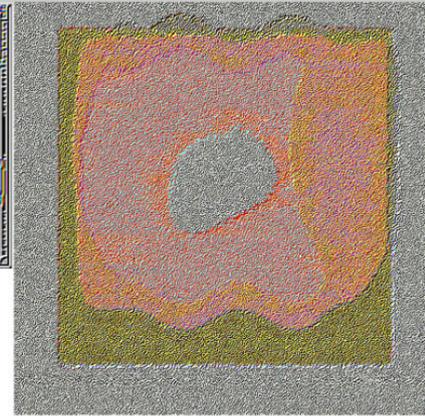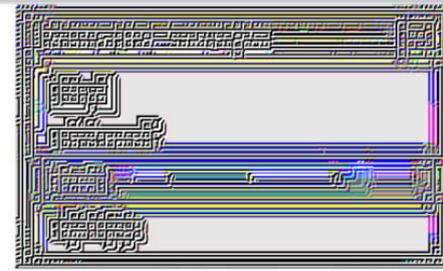
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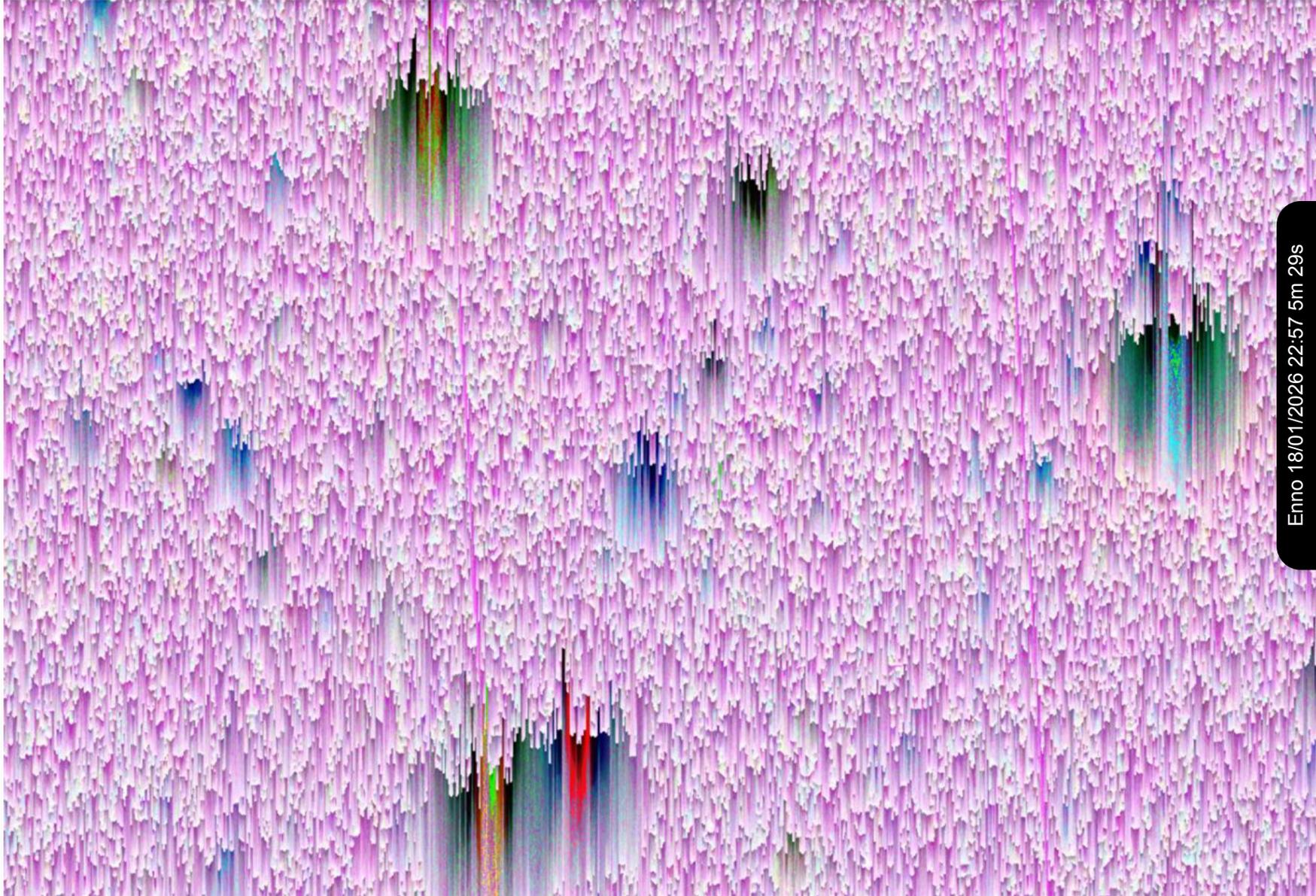
high-tech consulting, and how

In this chapter, I started with my excitement
about living in the „modern" city of Chicago
need to:
both have implicated me in the moder
nist project of design, especial
ly the theme of better living through
technology. To disman
tle the tech bias of the European m
odernist project, you
, its relationship to starting a new job in
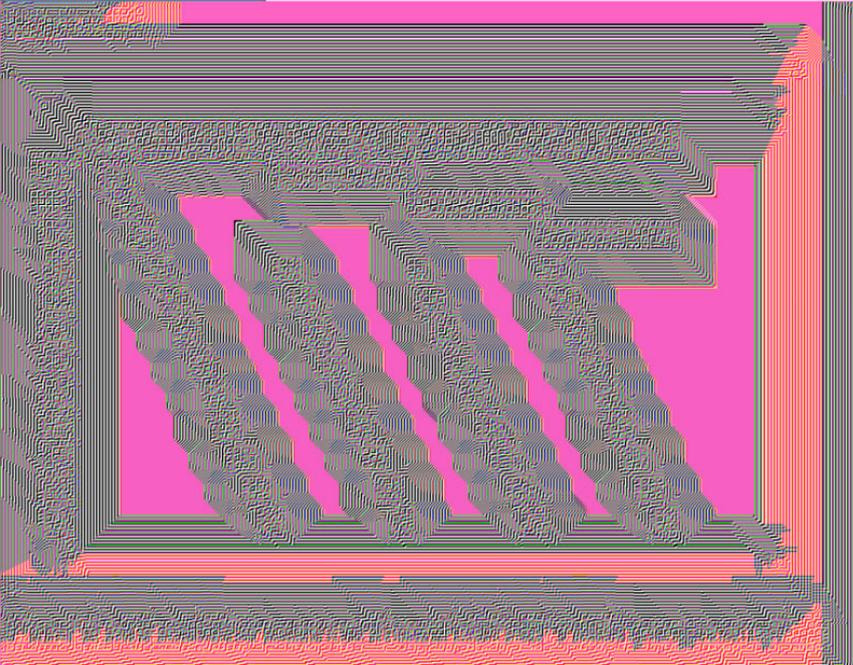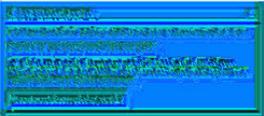
Understand that the underlying
relationship between us and many of
our high technologies is that of a
master and slaves. Realize that this lie
hides the real and
continuous h
arm done
to European workers, Indigenous
and people, enslaved Black African
lands ns and their descendants, and
the people who were dis
all of placed by colonization throu
gh mass-produced technol
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Accept

that what you have been told abo
UT THE **M**ODERNIST PRO

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KOWARDS CRITICAL AUTONOMY OR

CAN GRAPHIC DESIGN SAVE ITSELF?

T„Art exists today in a state of pluralism: no style or even mode of art is dominant and no critical position is orthodox. Yet this state is also a position, and this position is an alibi. As a general condition pluralism tends to absorb argument—which is not to say that it does not promote antagonism of all sorts. One can only begin out of a discontent with this status quo: for in a pluralist state art and criticism tend to be dispersed and so rendered impotent. Minor deviation is allowed only in order to resist radical change." Hal Foster, The

It would be an understatement to say that the 1990s were an important decade for graphic design. Not only were the technological transformations of the desktop publishing and personal computing revolution of the 1980s fully absorbed, but so, too, were the lessons of formal experimentation that had developed in the academies and the marketplace.

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Today, we can reflect fondly on those impassioned debates in the nineties about the merits of computer-aided design and the limits of readability and legibility, or the naiveté of whether we needed only ten typefaces, or the unbridled enthusiasm of the Internet. These issues and many others formed the basis for much design discourse in the first half of the nineties, producing a new generation of voices debating the merits of these changes—many of them in the pages of Emigre, myself included.

May have existed among the factions eased and the marketplace and academy tendencies in a matter of closure... most cosmopolitan a design scene, which really seemed... critical regionalism but no one notices what did seem like a die Hong Kong or Kenneth Bangkok. ... dabbling in the vernacular "ima...ge scape" of contemporary Los A

**6**



Hal Foster's commentary (see epigraph) about the pluralism of the eighties art scene could be easily applied to contemporary graphic design. Significant aesthetic debates have been superseded by consensus; not a fight over which style but agreement on all styles. The fundamental principle of pluralism asks not in what style we should design, but rather that we design stylishly. A plethora of these benign styles exist to mix or match, according to the logic of the marketplace. Once style was a defining gesture, unapologetically ideological, and a signal that differentiated and codified its subject. Today style has been reduced to a choice, not a matter of conviction but one of convenience.

ti tions used to be distinCt. If they are

not noW defunct, they are pretty much

interchangeable. Graduate programs,

whether celebrated or scorned, which

were once seen as the source of

"the problem" now dutifully reproduce
their pumps for graphic design. Professional
organizations, publications, schools,

and eVen co pe

The leveling process has transformed
the low avenues and to
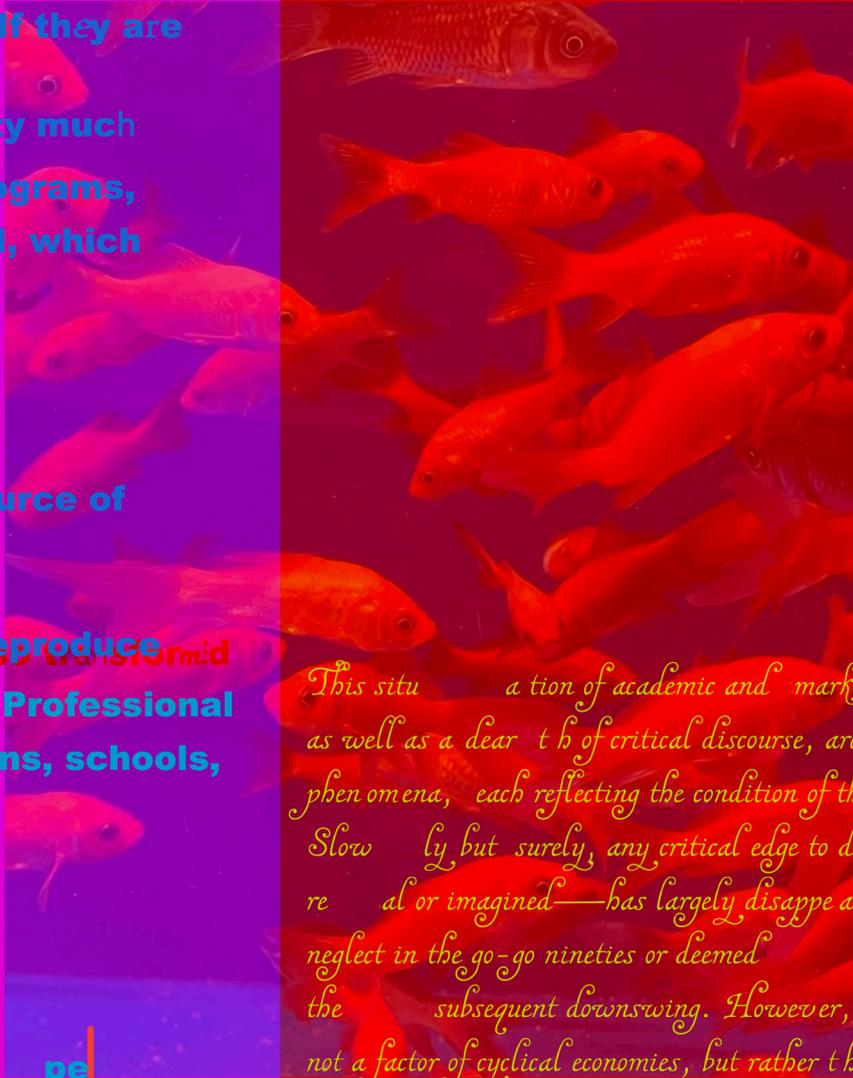
This situ a tion of academic and marketplace pluralism,
as well as a dear t h of critical discourse, are actually related
phen om ena, each reflecting the condition of the other.
Slow ly but surely, any critical edge to design—— either
re al or imagined——has largely disappe ared, dulled by
neglect in the go-go nineties or deemed expendable in
the subsequent downswing. However, th e reason s eems
not a factor of cyclical economies, but rather t h e
transfiguration of a critical av a nt-garde into a post-critical
arrière-gard e .

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It is no wonder that graphic design today feels like a vast formless body able to absorb any blows delivered to it, lacking coherency and increasingly dispersed. This absence of a critical mass or resistant body is at the heart of the current malaise. One might argue that graphic design today no longer exists in the form, or material body, we once knew it. So scattered and destabilized are its constituent elements that any attempt at definitions becomes meaningless. The expansion of graphic design beyond its roots in print is simply on symptom of this crisis. Even a broad moniker such as "communication design" loses cohesion in the face of a multitude of providers producing all sorts of "communications" for emergent media; be it print, television, video, film or the internet. Lacking the specificity of a medium, graphic design tends to be identified through its varied products than any sense of vehicles for delivering a message: a book, brochure, typeface, Web site, and so on. Reduced to its commodity form—simply a choice of discretionary practice. Thus graphic design is implicit in this reductive understanding is the denial of graphic design as a disciplinary practice, and with it the possibility of disciplinary autonomy

# THE COSTUMES OF PADME AMIDALA
Designed by Trisha Biggar

## EPISODE I : THE PHANTOM MENACE

| Throne room gown Naboo | Flame gown Naboo | Escape gown Naboo | Peasant disguise Tatooine | Pre Senate gown Coruscant | Senate gown Coruscant | Post senate gown Coruscant | Return gown Naboo | Battle clothes Naboo |

## EPISODE II : ATTACK OF THE CLONES

| Pilot outfit Coruscant | Senate committee Coruscant | Senate address Coruscant (deleted scene) | Nightgown Coruscant | Packing gown Coruscant | Refugee disguise Coruscant | Return home gown Naboo (deleted scene) | Villa gown Naboo | Meadow dress Naboo | Dinner dress Naboo | Robe & nightgown Naboo | Cloak underdress Tatooine | Tatooine |

## EPISODE III : REVENGE OF THE SITH

| Leia buns cloak Coruscant | Veranda nightgown Coruscant | Revelation gown Coruscant | Blue linen dress Coruscant | Green cloak Coruscant | Aqua nightgown Coruscant | Peacock gown Coruscant (deleted scene) | Dressing gown Coruscant | Final senate address Coruscant | Travel clothes Mustafar | Hospital gown Polis Massa | Water gown Naboo |

The results of most 80s/90s formal experimentation moved quickly from polemic to profitability. Both within the marketplace and the academy the consequence was not to invent wholly new languages but rather develop variations of existing styles. The critical reflexivity that had been the genesis of such experimental work was pushed aside as the promotion of individual expression became paramount. It is no coincidence that the proliferation of design styles corresponded with the increase of the number of brands and the demand for product segmentation in the marketplace. The academy reacted with similar recognition by seeing formal experimentation as an end in itself; whereby the exercise of individual expression (more commonly called "personal style") was considered experimental. This situation created successive generations of work that had all the look and feel of the experimental without actually being experimental. This should be contrasted with the possibility of experimentation that is itself contextual — tied to the continuity of a historical discourse of, for example, one that questions not so much the form of design but the possibilities of its practice.

Ut just like the modernist avant-gardes that found in the figure of the desktop preceded them, the recent experiments were premised on the notion of inventing new formal languages without historical precedent, or re-presenting historical styles and motifs as pastiche.

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Paradoxically, much of the theoretical discourse that formed the basis of these experiments espoused a philosophy that dispensed publisher. Today, we have become so invested, both professionally and educationally, in the quest for new formal languages that the subsequent pluralism that it has wrought goes essentially unchallenged.

We need to imagine a historical language of design that transcends styles and is embedded in the continuity of discourse. This requires more than what currently passes for graphic design history: a tiresome parade of images devoid of analysis and packaged like seasonal trends from Pottery Barn. The anti-temporal nature of the present has erased historical memory, and designers and practitioners unfold their craft in a continuous present like a person who has lost his ability to form and therefore no

One of the more interesting, albeit rare, examples of historical work is the publication

# The World Must Change:

## *Graphic Design*

and idealism, published in the Netherlands in 1999. The fact that it is not constructed as a history accounts for part of its allure. Cross-generational in its perspectives, the work considers the role of idealism as it plays out in Dutch design, from the trajectory of early modernist utopian projects, through the increasing rationalization of design in the 1960s and 1970s, to more recent developments that contest the viability of such notions. The authors explore a concept over time, drawing connections among different generations of designers. Such an approach gets beneath the various period styles and formal affectations resplendent in Dutch design to explore a perceived tendency within the practice in a varied way, from the historical to the theoretical to the personal.

By autonomy, I do not mean a wholesale withdrawal from the social or the kind of freedoms the fine arts claim.

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e and Raby teach and practice product design outside the norm, constructing an alternative vision through projects which utilize design objects they create in order to probe the conditions and social effects of electronic products on our culture. Dunne and Raby explain:

"[Critical Design] differs from experimental design, which Seeks to extend the medium, extending it in the name of progress and aesthetic novelty. Critical des

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While Dunne and Raby work within, alongside, and against the field of product design, their notion of critical design could easily apply to graphic design. Critical design is non-affirming; that is to say, it refuses or at least is skeptical of the conventional role of design as a service provider to industry. Critical design is polemical: it asks questions and poses problems for the profession and users alike. It is opposed to traditional notions of problem-solving, and it eschews the singularity of a medium in favor of the multiplicities of social agency and effects.

The point is not to invent a neo-modernist avant-garde and all of its inherent problems. Rather, the purpose is to stake a claim for autonomy, which, like an avant-garde, is already a separation from the social demands that limit graphic design to its most marketable features. Autonomy also gives coherency to graphic design in order to resist the dispersal it currently suffers by defining the conditions and terms under which it seeks to operate. Most importantly, a space of autonomy for graphic design affords an opportunity to engage in a more critical examination of its practice, assuming that it does not lapse into a convenient formalism or cannot escape the ideology of expressionism.

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*Not Another Shelter. Traps of Solutionism in Humanitarian Design" – Johanna Mehl*

In this paper, the shelter—on the one hand a prerequisite or necessary infrastructure with the potential to increase the quality of life, and on the other hand a paradigmatic example of a design fix—will be mobilized as a discursive figure to examine the multiple imbrications of

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potential to increase the quality of life, and on the other hand a paradigmatic example of design solutionism—will serve as a fulcrum that allows me to shift between the case study of the AGRIshelter and emergent architecture and design paradigms of the late 1960s

design response to homelessness in cities or the displacement of people due to political conflict, war, or environmental calamity [2]... mid-term housing, security, an... quality, these low-tech and often co-designed... perspective. The AGRIshelter, for example, was the winning project of the so-called Refugee Challenge (RC)—a design contest launched in 2015 by the international organization What Design Can Do (WDCD) in collaboration with the IKEA Foundation (figure 1). Presented on WDCD's website as a "solution for the shortage of refugee shelters" in the wake of the Syrian war, the temporary housing unit made of wood, straw, and other biodegradable materials received a...

AGRISHELTER, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS THE WINNING PROJECT OF THE SO-CALLED REFUGEE CHALLENGE (RC)—A DESIGN CONTEST LAUNCHED IN 2015 BY THE ... IN COLLABORATION WITH THE IKEA FOUNDATION (FIGURE 1). PRESENTED ON WDCD'S WEBSITE ... THE TEMPORARY HOUSING UNIT MADE OF WOOD, ... CEIVED A $10,000 CASH PRIZE, AND THE DESIGN TEAM WAS INVITED INTO AN "ACCELERATION ... SS PLANS TO REALIZE THE PROJECT.

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ign Week in Eindhoven in 2017, responds by saying: "Certainly, don't design yet another shelter for refugees—please!" (Dezeen, 2017 10:54

Failed Architecture, calls "more of a gimmick than a structural solution" (Dezeen, 2017 16:05–16:08), which not only isn't helpful but is

When asked what designers can do in a variety of design to help, former refugee camp director Kilian interwoven with problem-solving, design Kleinschmidt, a panelist in the panel session responses—from apps to Design for a Bad World (Figure 2), held at the products for disaster relief frequently run the risk of reskilling makeshift backpack and held at the trigger by the

climate change, terrorism, forced
migration, pollution, and politics. Its
programmatic questions

*"Can design tackle the really big problems facing the world? Or is design helping to cause these problems?" (Fairs, 2018)*

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IMAGINARᓰES OF ᗞᕮSIGN AS AN ᗅGᕮNᔢ OF SOᔕ
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LOᑎGER  ᗅᗷLᕮ TO COPᕮ WITH THEM, NOR ᕮV ᕮN  ᔢO
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OF THE VIETNAᗰ WAR,
PUBLICATIONS SUCH AS
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CONNECTED PHENOMENA
THAT ELUDE RELIABLE
SOLUTION STRATEGIES.
THIS SIGNIFICANT SHIFT
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NECESSARILY IMPROVED
LIFE OR SOCIETAL
TOGETHERNESS, THAT
THE PLANET WAS
POLLUTED, THAT
RESOURCES WERE NOT
ENDLESS, AND THAT THE
GLOBAL COMMUNITY
WAS CHARACTERIZED BY
EXTREME SOCIAL
DISPARITIES.

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This period heralded a major paradigm shift for what Dezeen calls "good design," emerging as a discipline with aspirations for managing world problems to make it a better place. The discipline moved away from addressing structural, aesthetic, and client-specific concerns. Instead, it began to tackle broader issues of social policy, striving to consider global systems and redefining the client as either an individual recipient of benevolence or as "humanity" as a whole. In the aftermath of World War II, as economic disparities and environmental concerns in the developing world drew increasing involvement from NGOs, designers and design professionals were included from this work and were leveraged as experts of the future, no matter the size or scale of the endeavor.

Questions of human settlement and the construction and enforcement of societal norms and values through material configurations of the environment have, of course, been fundamental to architectural and design discourse long before the twentieth century. However, aid work had not traditionally been considered prestigious within the realms of architecture and design. That changed when design expanded its jurisdiction to include problems of social policy. In the following, I address the emergence of two defining design paradigms—humanitarianism and the idea of the planetary—to historically situate and interrogate some of the assumptions encoded in framing global crises in terms of institutionalized design practices.

88

The 2017 Refugee Challenge in particular provides an opportunity to revisit the 1976 United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat), which was held in Vancouver and thematically focused on the problem of human settlements. It ran parallel to an exhibition titled Habitat: Towards Shelter at the Vancouver Art Gallery that showcased "shelter designs for the developing world" submitted as part of an international design competition. In a 1976 article promoting the exhibition, urban planner and architect Frederick Gutheim proclaims that "[...] the competition ident

[...]led o...ne major problem facing the developing countries—the squatter settlements that now comprise nearly half of the population of Third World cities. Here was a problem to which design could contribute solutions and that would give a new meaning to architecture" (Gutheim, 1976, 3).
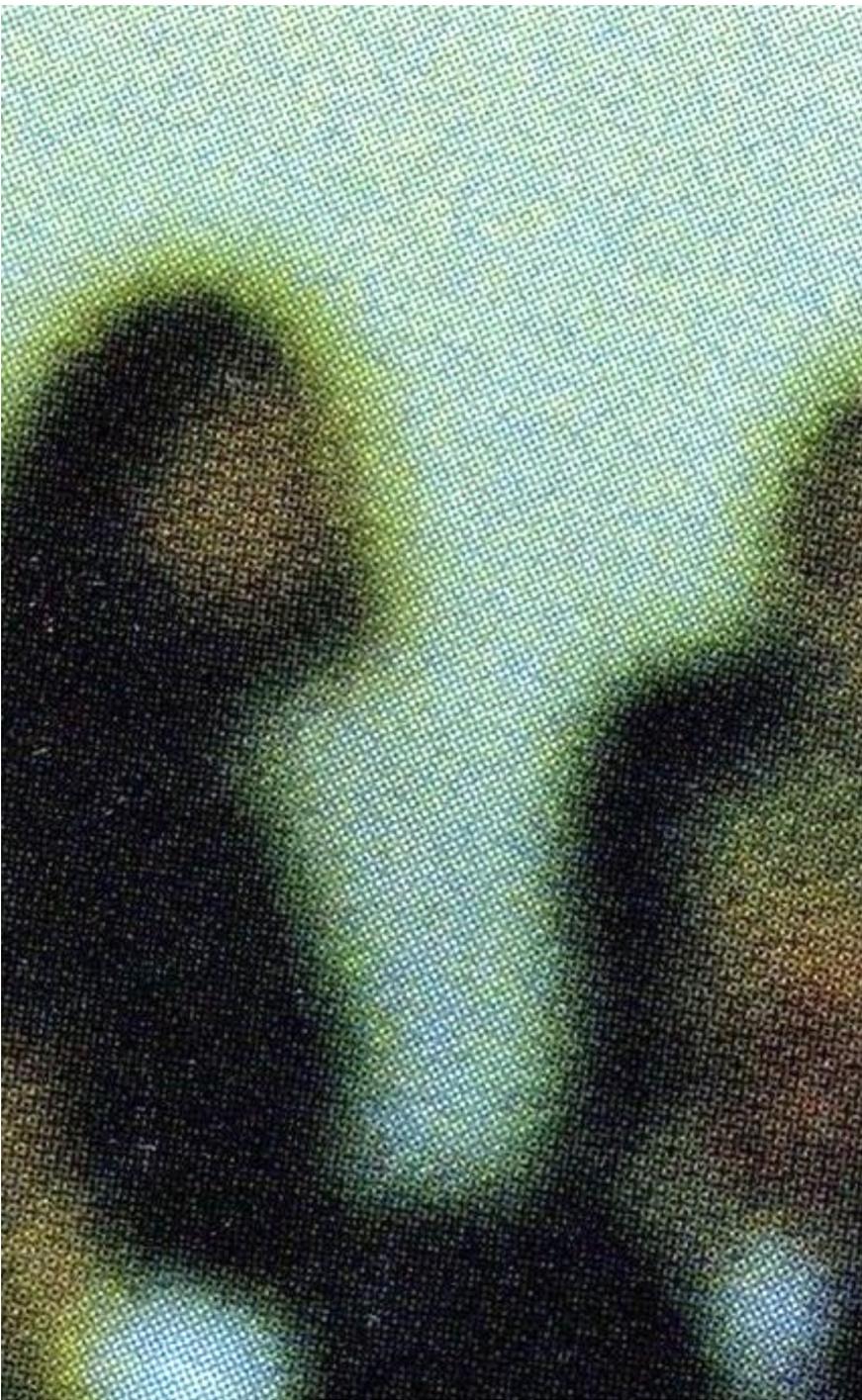
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The First Things First manifesto, which prompted graphic designers to reorient their skills toward "worthwhile purposes" (Garland, 1964), as well as Papanek's call to employ design for "the genuine needs of man " reflect a broader commitment to transform disciplinary practice for the common good (Papanek, 1971, 15). This movement was anchored in the belief that "[i]n this age of mass production when everything must be planned and designed, design has become the most powerful tool" and therefore had to be deployed with "high social and moral responsibility" (Papanek, 1971, 102).

Papanek's reimagination of industrial design under the framework of "basic human needs" aimed at subverting capitalist modes of production not only for the "Third World,
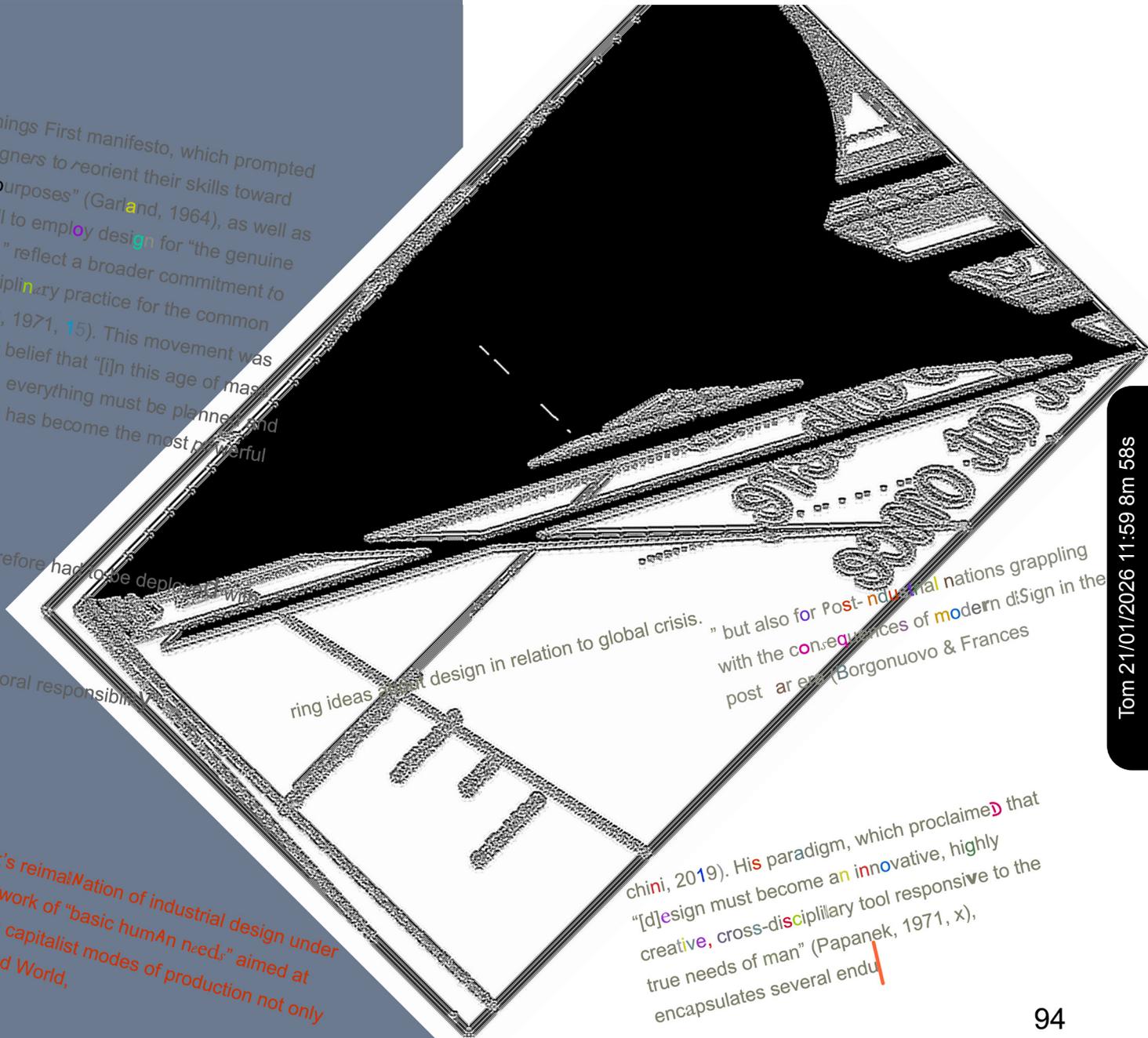
ring ideas about design in relation to global crisis." but also for Post- national nations grappling with the consequences of modern design in the post war era (Borgonuovo & Frances chini, 2019). His paradigm, which proclaimed that "[d]esign must become an innovative, highly creative, cross-disciplinary tool responsive to the true needs of man" (Papanek, 1971, x), encapsulates several endu

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The aSsumption that designers are inherently skilled at understanding third-party conditions

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suggest that they

act as detached observers, implying that when they analyze or examine issues and human needs, they do so from an external vantage point. In this scenario, design is presumed an innocent practice, devoid of inherent political implications, becoming political only when explicitly directed by intent. This view is problematic because it overlooks the fact that assessments of "long-term needs" in design processes are socially, politically, and culturally situated, and that design products create subjectivities and contribute to social imaginaries. Already during his lifetime, Papanek was criticiz ed by peers who described his "designs for development" as a neocolonialist project and, as design historian Alison Clarke notes, "patronizing at best, deeply harmful at worst" (Clarke, 2016, 47).

Yet the core values he embodied remained fundamental to the formation of what we today call social design.

It is precisely this understandiNg of
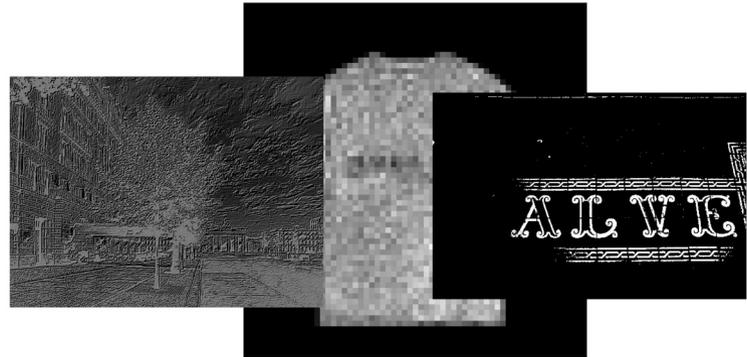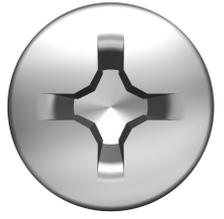


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Signers as

shelter Designs that reflect a shift toward power technologies for planetary survival include Paolo Soleri's Desert Home (1960), Robert Schwartz's Styrofoam dome (1994), or Dave

Baer's "Zome s," all im entered in design... as devi... the "elegance of... os sib le" with a cre... integration of... materia ls, a pro c esses" (Papanek, 1971, 31). While the d... paradigm shape

that rehearsed new models for organizing societies on a planetary scale.

social Design, I

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propose that the architectural e x p ress ons of this historical context are pertinent for understanding how design was mo bilize d by nongovernmental entities
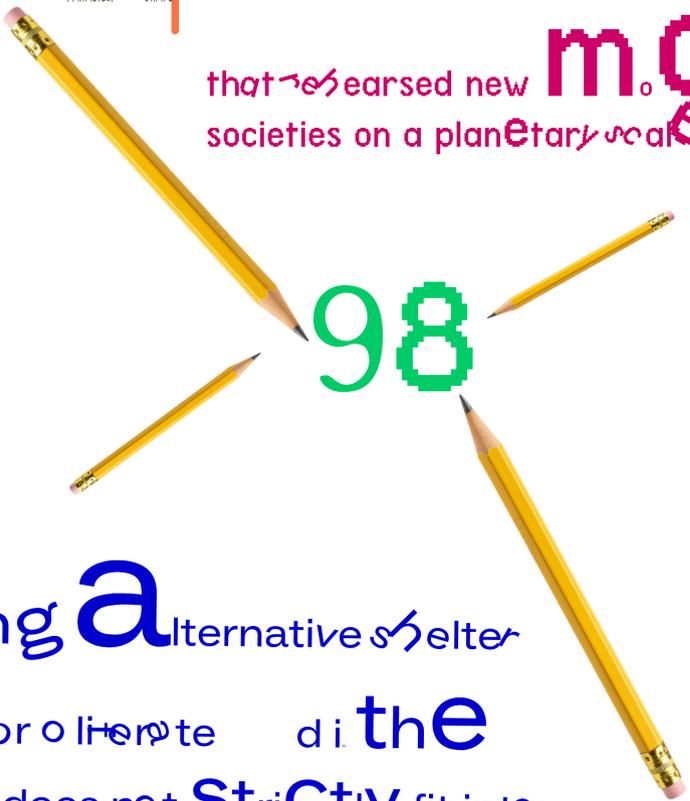
re p resenting alternative shelter designs that proliferate di the 1960s and 70s, does not strictly fit into the realm of humanitarian or

n the 1960s, American countercultural movements adopted design as a small-scale, grassroots, low-tech tool to self-organize outside established societal frameworks. Disseminated through publications such as Stewart Brand's Whole Earth Catalog (1968–1972), Lloyd Kahn's Domebook (1971) and Shelter (1973), or Ant Farm's Inflatocookbook (1971), shelter technologies such as Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome represented a cost-efficient, sustainable, and versatile building strategy associated with technological optimism, futurism, and alternative politics. Papanek's manuals for Nomadic Furniture

(published with James Hennessy in 1973) echo

the inflatable, recyclable, experimental, and modular shelter designs of the time, as well as their material symbolism and Do-It-Yourself aesthetic.
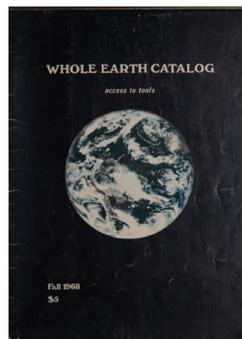
architects explicitly employed science-fictional or speculative modes to sketch future habitats. Although the adoption of a fulleresque, techno-oriented, and imperial understanding of design appeared at odds with emancipatory movements and growing skepticism toward technology as a mechanism of capitalist control, technocratic designs by Fuller and his contemporaries were nevertheless embraced by countercultural groups as models for utopian, decentralized communities.

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ions of dome cities and liberated communities, I do not argue that the shelter technologies of technical fixes became both a political and futures. the 1970s directly function as predecessor

models for the AGRIshelter, I contend that they represent a specific understanding of "what design can do" that anticipates contemporary aesthetic paradigm that anticipates contemporary declarations of the "problem-solving power of design" (What Design Can Do, 2021) in
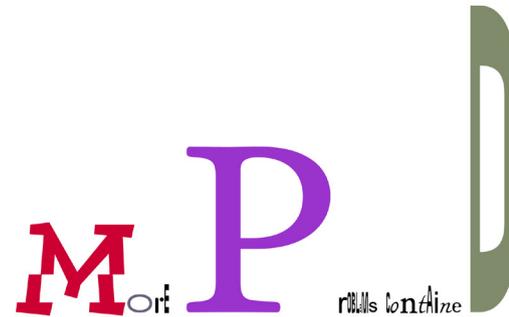
addressing global crises and producing more

shift toward a more democratic and

participatory Society.

Design practice increasingly emerged under the premise of offering innovative, just, and rational

models for magn etter global futures.

Propelled by productive just and sustainabl

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design fixes produced under the umbrella of the ... unwitting ... diversion from ... systemic causes of ... global ... user ... the ... floods ... away from socio-economic, political, and deeply ... solutions ... the first ... focus ... produced by designers wit ...

solution to ... temporary ... formulation that ... cross ... design ... response ... non-governmental ... regulatory force ... aesthetically ... small ... violence ... persecution ... design proce ... broader historical and social processes. conversely ... global crises ... design ... infrastructures ... managi ... compositions that ...

possessing their own unique worldviews, "interests, and notions of progress" (Johnson, 2011, 448). This framing of "temporary housing problem" is particularly troubling given that displacement is rarely temporary. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), refugees often spend years or even decades in camps, with entire generations growing up there. Following Kleinschmidt, the logic of temporariness implies that refugees become legible—and thus supportable—only if eventual return is assumed.
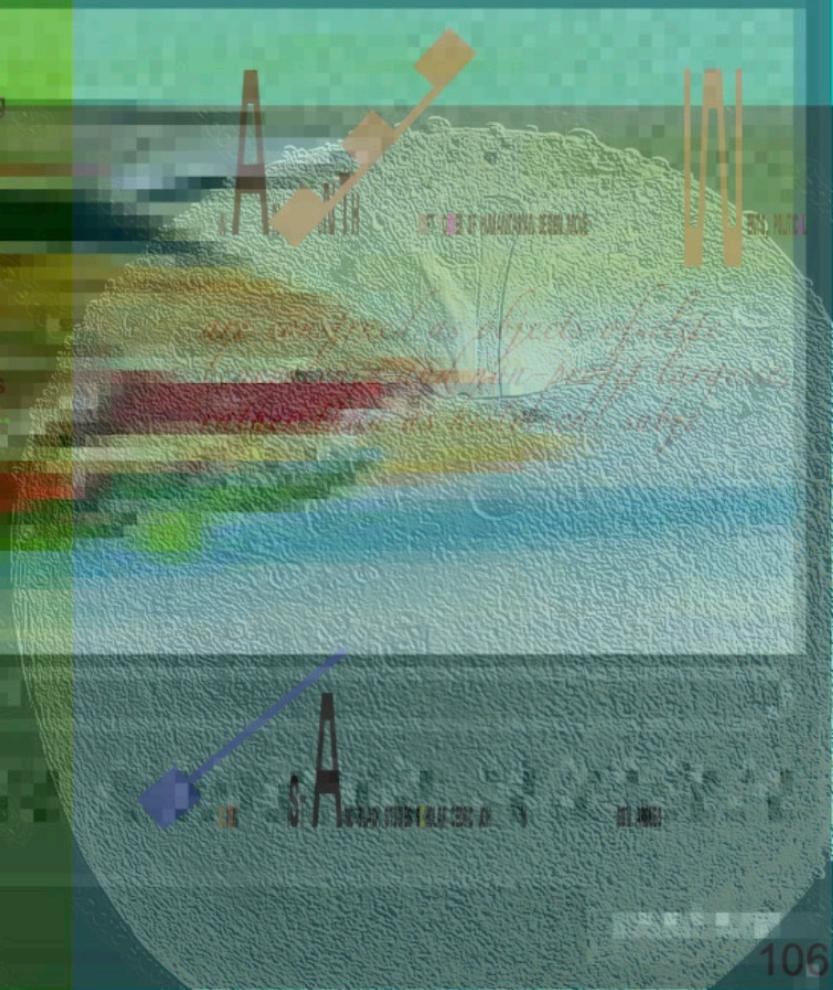
In 2016, design scholar Ruben Pater published a critique of the WDCD Refugee Challenge, arguing that framing humanitarian crises as design challenges reproduces neoliberal ideology by implying that "the free market is much better at solving the world's crises than governments are" (Pater, 2016). The notion that global challenges are "too big for governments and NGOs alone" aligns with the privatization of public services, exemplified by developments such as the outsourcing of border control to agencies like Frontex. The competition format further shifts attention from those for whom the design is intended to those who produce it. The question "Who can build the best shelter?" takes precedence, while racialized biopolitics and systemic dependencies shaping refugee settlements recede into the background.

This reorientation is reflected in a jury statement on the winning shelter design: "There is a little utopian thinking revealed in this project," they noted—possibly referencing its claim to prevent the formation of ghettos—"but that's a whole lot better than a 'Distopia'" (AGRIshelter, 2021). Such framing suggests that evaluation criteria extend beyond relevance or feasibility to include the construction of favorable narratives. Once again, the Refugee Challenge renders ambiguous whose agency is being foregrounded. The hashtag #RefugeeChallenge, which participants were encouraged to use when sharing designs on social media, illustrates how design responses to crises are embedded in corporate structures that capitalize on catastrophe. Unlike #MeToo, which enabled survivors to articulate their own experiences, #RefugeeChallenge centers an externally imposed narrative that minimizes trauma and sidelines refugees' lived realities.

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SHELTER- WORLD- MARI MAI
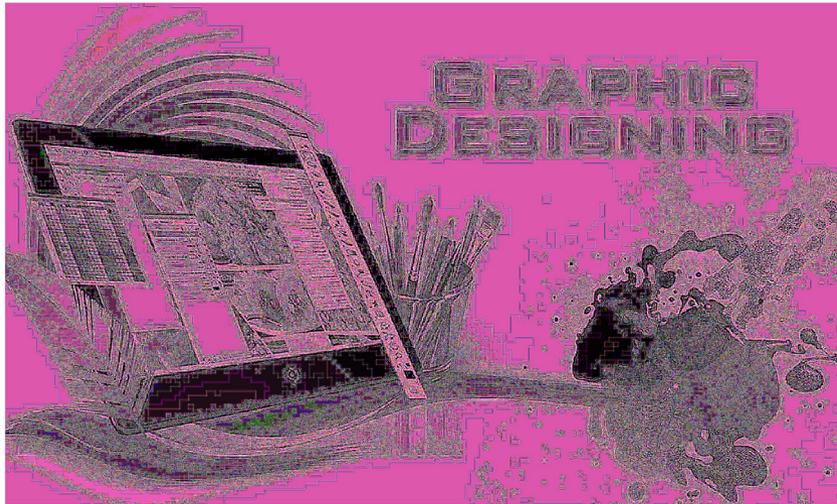
solves crises and more as an epistemology that
narrates and conditions response-abilities.
Shelter-making is always world-making insofar as
it encapsulates geopolitical narratives and shapes
so____ _____. Design practices that enhance
___ _bout t__ ___lex worlds beyond the
shelter may contribu__ __ _ew humanitarian and
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des____ _ to produce ___ but instead engage
seriou__ __ith the u__ __istories, imaginaries,
and p___ __ underc___ __ts that constitute what is
perce__ ___ s a design problem.

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and ↱0s to illuminate the assumptions

em**b**edded in contemporary de**sig**n

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# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO DECOLONIZE DESIGN?

"Decolonization" is a word we're increasingly hearing at design events, often being used interchangeably with "diversity." It's important to emphasize that while the terms are linked, they shouldn't be confused. Diversity is about bringing more people to the table. Decolonization is about changing the way we think.
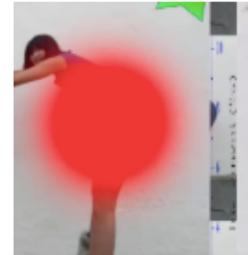
So what does that mean for design and designers?

Elena 21/01/2026 00:00 34m 14s

Colonization' is rooted in indigenous peoples' experiences of oppression—specifically, the seizure of native resources—as well as the forced doing of Western ideology into society. The word 'decolonization' was originally used to ... be the withdrawal of a state from a former colony. Today, decolonization has come to represent a broader set of ideas and acknowledges that Western society has been built upon the colonization of other peoples, that live ... within systems of privilege and oppression, and that much of the culture we consider our own has been appropriated or stolen.

Aside from the editorial platform and research of **Decoloni**sing Design and a number of scholarly articles, there is little readily accessible information online about what decolonizing means for design. This article therefore offers an introductory overview of the concept, addressing two key questions: How have colonial histories shaped the way we design? And what can we do to shift our mindset and practices?
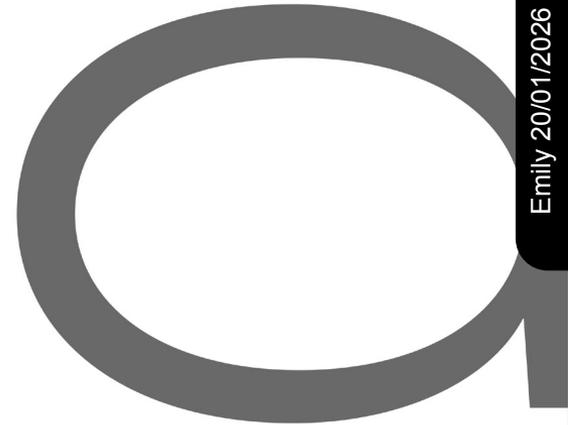
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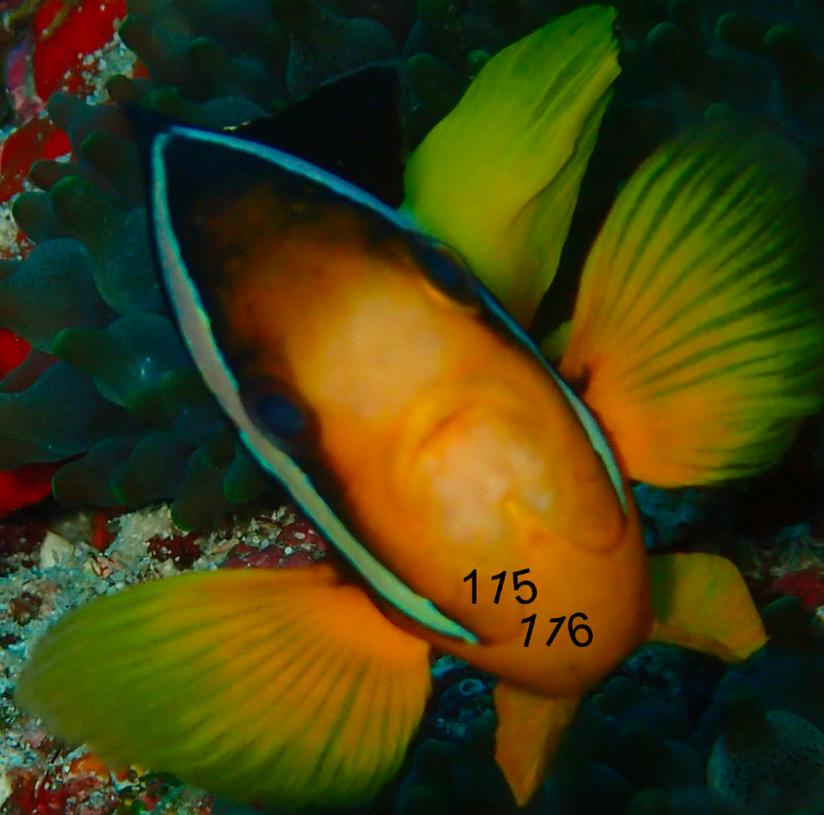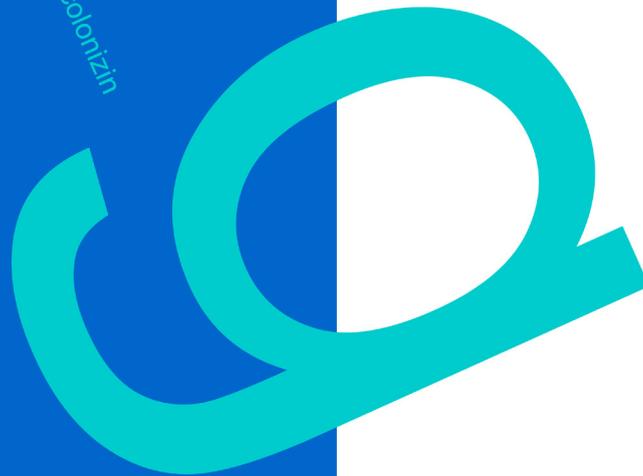
The work designers produce is shaped by taste, and taste is often derived from what we are

expose

Emily 20/01/2026 16:08 4m 26s

Design thinking rhetoric is similarly exclusive. Framing design thinking as a progressive narrative of global salvation ignores alternative ways of knowing. Such distinctions and divisions can "other" both designers and design outcomes.

ile identity as its place can be found in

such terminology, e argues

that it nevertheless "others" the

practitioner and, by extension, their work.

When Western conventions are centered in design, everything else becomes "different." When a homogeneous group determines what is "good," the profession suffers, and designers increasingly gravitate toward similar stylistic outcomes.

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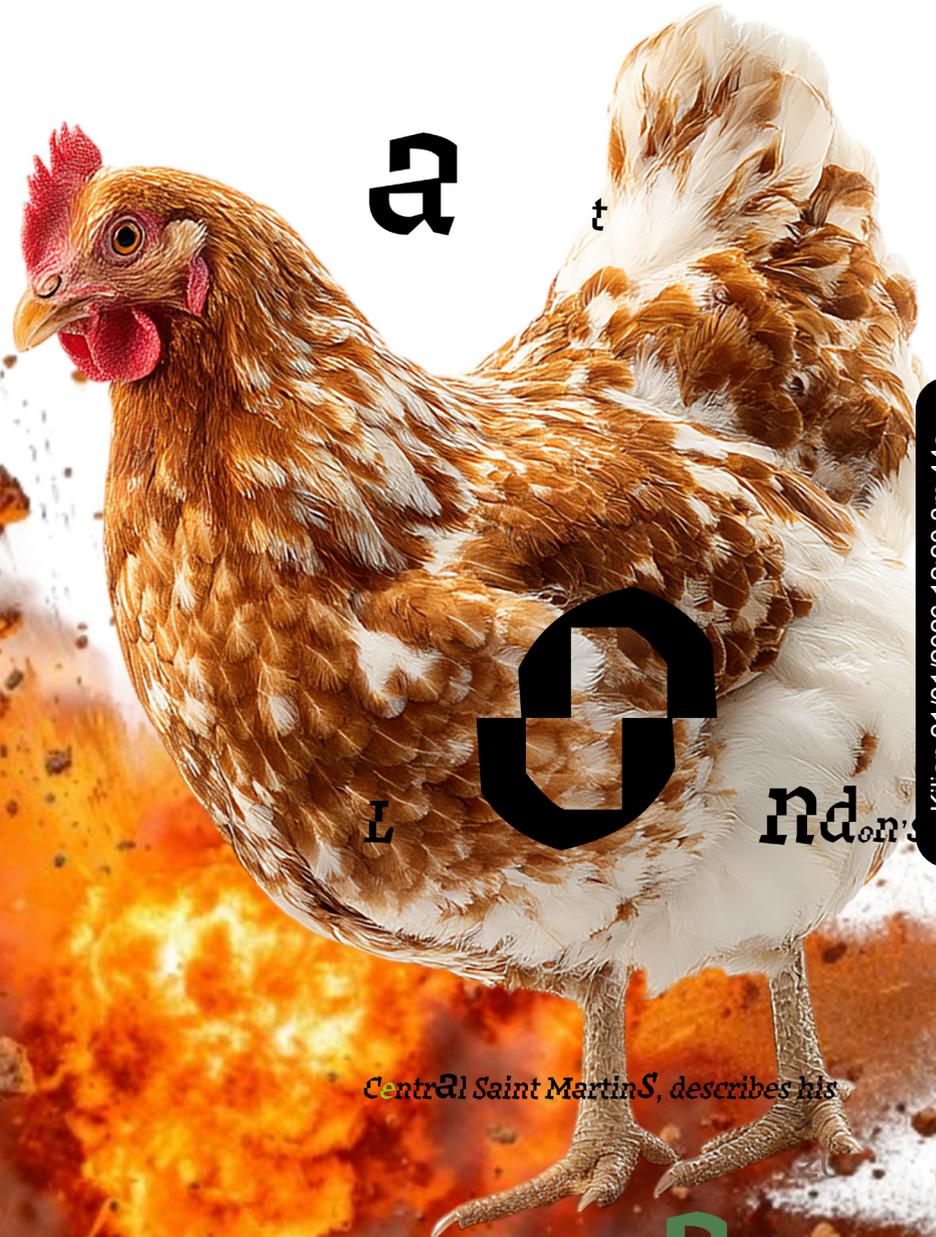
Central Saint MartinS, describes his

experience of being labelled a

Ncube a [...] so references cultures that do not use per[...]spective at all [...] rather than [...] straight narrow [...] and [...] Ncube argues it are round, [...] in circular forma[...]tions. [...] structuring private [...] and communal space should be reco gnized as design innovation. Acknowledging that the standards we are taught are not universal is central to decolo

# Decolonizing
# Design Values

For educator and designer Danah Abdulla, a member of the research group Decolonising Design, "decoloniality is about shattering the familiar." She argues that contemporary design does not disrupt the status quo or disorder the established system. Recognizing capitalism as an instrument of colonization, Abdulla suggests that fully decolonizing design within Western society may be impossible at present. Instead, decoloniality involves imagining possibilities beyond the systems currently inhabit. Abdulla and her co-founders have written extensively on the colonial structures underpinning contemporary design practice.

In everyday design work, "shattering the familiar" can begin by reconsidering the needs of the audience. Designers might ask whether they have accounted for how people of different ethnicities identify with what is being created. Decoloniality involves questioning how design solutions are experienced from perspectives other than one's own.

This process can extend to seemingly minor decisions, such as typeface selection. Fonts are often chosen because they are perceived as "timeless," but this assumption may not hold across diverse audiences. Clara Balaguer of the Filipino publishing imprint Hardworking Goodlooking proposes an exercise for "Comic Sans, design-educated haters" in an interview with Walker Art Center's The Gradient: designers should use Comic Sans, Curlz, Brush Script, or Papyrus to understand why people respond to them. She argues that social constituencies—not clients, but communities—have made choices that deserve respect rather than ridicule, and that designers should challenge what they have been taught to view as ugly, uncouth, primitive, or savage.

Jelle 21/01/2026 13:31 10m 27s

Revolutionarily formal considerations, the extraction and perpetuation of a legacy, rather than accountability.

decolonizing awareness and packaging India rather than the continued appropriation design for the company India's continued appropriation which exemplifies perpetual use of historical resources, category. Indian colonial India povs a hypothetical, Given is the

Declining Design Book

To avoid taking charge of another's narrative or appropriating what is not yours, it is essential to recognize when a project is not yours to take. When that is the case, promote someone more appropriate to step in. If the project is for a non-profit venture, removing yourself from the creative role can also mean helping to fund the effort instead.

In an industry like design, where there is a stark disparity between those who are trained and those who are paid, stepping aside can create space for people from marginalized backgrounds to gain visibility and access within the creative community.

129

Designers are trained to be chameleons: we shape ourselves to whatever brief comes our way.

130

*There is no final state to be reached.*

## Decolonization is an ongoing process.

Because it is a journey rather than a destination, it requires sustained curiosity and a willingness to educate oneself about experiences one has not lived.

# Decoloniality

is not only about knowing when to refuse a brief; it can also be integrated into everyday practice. Working with minority-owned printers, for example, is one way of decolonizing design labor. Educator Silas Munro has highlighted a number of US-based printers run by minorities, and a resource compiled by Amelie Lamont and Timothy Goodman helps identify designers of color for collaboration or hiring. Decolonization is not only about who you work with, but also about how you collaborate. Studios and agencies should ensure that freelancers are paid fairly and that workplace cultures are genuinely welcoming. Hiring a person of color also entails ensuring they are not subjected to daily microaggressions. Here, decolonization overlaps with diversity and inclusion:
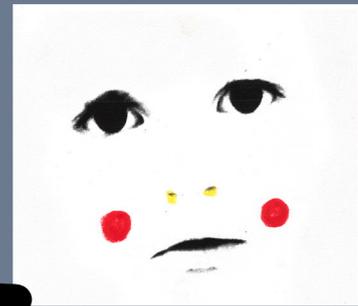
it is not enough to invite people to the table; it matters what kind of seat they are offered.

"For far too long, designers have remained married to the idea that what we do is neutral and universal, that politics has no place in design," says Abdulla...

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Leonhard 21/01/2026 12:54 1m 40s

# M<sub>y</sub> 135 Pr O cess



For over twenty years, I've been writing proposals for projects. Almost every one of them has a passage that begins something like this: "This project will be divided in four phases: Orientation and Analysis, Conceptual Design, Design Development, and Implementation." All clients want this.

13



Sometimes there are five phases, sometimes six. Sometimes they have different names. But it's always an attempt to answer a potential client's unavoidable question: Can you describe the process you use to create a design solution that's right for us?

The other day I was looking at a proposal for a project I finished a few months ago. The result, by my measure and by the client's, was successful. But guess what? The process I so reassuringly put forward at the outset had almost nothing to do with the way the project actually went. What would happen, I wonder, if I actually told the truth about what happens in a design process?

It might go something like this: When I do a design project, I begin by listening carefully to you as you talk about your problem and read whatever background material I can find that relates to the issues you face. If you're lucky, I have also accidentally acquired some firsthand experience with your situation. Somewhere along the way an idea for the design pops into my head from out of the blue. I can't really explain that part; it's like magic. Sometimes it even happens before you have a chance to tell me that much about your problem. Now, if it's a good idea, I try to figure out some strategic justification for the solution so I can explain it to you without relying on good taste you may or may not have. Along the way, I may add some other ideas, either because you made me agree to do so at the outset, or because I'm not sure of the first idea. At any rate, in the earlier phases, hopefully I will have gained your trust so that by this point you're inclined to take my advice. I don't have any clue how you'd go about proving that my advice is any good except that other people—at least the ones I've told you about—have taken my advice in the past and prospered. In other words, could you just sort of, you know ... trust me?

Now, an intelligent client might ask a number of reasonable questions: How can a bunch of random conversations yield the information you need to do your work? Shouldn't the strategic justification be in place before the design work begins? If you show me one solution, how will I know it's the only one that will work? On the other hand, if you show me a bunch of solutions, how will I know which one is best? What will happen if I don't like any of them? Finally, can you explain that magic part to me again?

Not only that, but my "honest" description of the process is an idealized one. Sometimes I have one great idea but can't convince the client it's great and have to do more ideas. Sometimes this leads to a better idea. Sometimes it leads to a worse idea. Sometimes after I go back and explore other ideas we all come back to the original idea. Sometimes the client accepts an idea and then produces other people who haven't been involved up to that point who end up having opinions of their own. One way or another, it always seems to get done, but never as originally promised.

Although I've managed to enjoy a relatively successful career as a designer, I've always had the vague sense that I was doing something wrong. A better designer would be able to manage the process properly, moving everyone along cheerfully from Phase One to Phase Two, right on schedule and right on budget. What was wrong with me? You may have had the same feeling; it seems to be pretty common among the designers I know. Then, this past summer, I was lucky enough to participate in AIGA's Business Perspectives for Creative Leaders program at Harvard Business School (which I highly recommend, by the way). Part of the assigned reading was a book that one of the instructors, Rob Austin, wrote with Lee Devin called Artful Making: What Managers Need to Know about How Artists Work. Artful Making has an interesting message: we may have been right all along.

What makes the book particularly interesting is the collaboration of the two coauthors. Austin is a Harvard Business School professor who has focused on information technology management; Devin is not a business school teacher but a professor of theater at Swarthmore College. At the outset, the writers acknowledge that the nature of work is changing in the twenty-first century, characterizing it as a shift from an industrial economy to an information economy, from physical work to knowledge work. In trying to understand how this new kind of work can be managed, they propose a model based not on industrial production, but on the collaborative arts, specifically theater. Interestingly, the process of mounting a play is not that different from doing a design project. The iterative process, the role of improvisation, and the adjustments made in response to audience feedback are all a part of any design process. And, in a way, they've always been the ones that have been vaguely unnerving to me.

142

The authors take , this une pains to point out that they're not a dvocating a "loose" proCess or on e that lacks rigor. "A thea eight o'clock curtain). The produc again with great precision, in ations every time, but finis corporating significant innov t, a play, executes again and ase is common ter company",Austin and D EvidG hing within thirty seconds

of the same length every time." They are careful to identify the defining characteristics of this kind of work as allowing solutions to emerge in a process of iteration, rather than trying to get everything right the first time; accepting the lack of control in the process and letting the improvisation engendered by uncertainty help drive the process; and creating a work environment that sets clear enough limits that people can play securely within them. They call this artful making: in short, "any activity that involves creating something entirely new". This includes not just the obvious "arty" things, but, for instance, "a successful response to an unexpected move by a competitor" or "handling a sudden problem caused by a supplier."
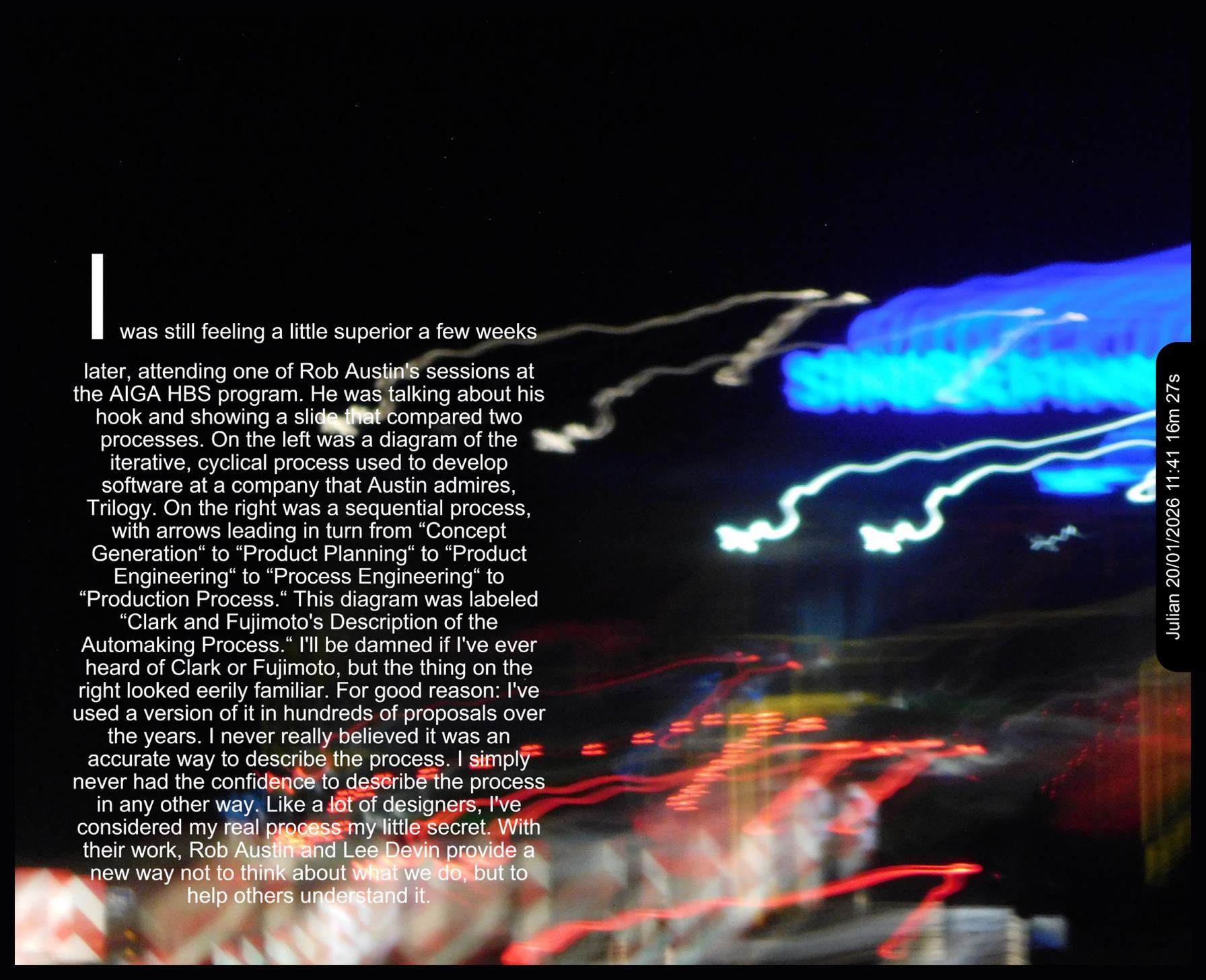
I was still feeling a little superior a few weeks later, attending one of Rob Austin's sessions at the AIGA HBS program. He was talking about his hook and showing a slide that compared two processes. On the left was a diagram of the iterative, cyclical process used to develop software at a company that Austin admires, Trilogy. On the right was a sequential process, with arrows leading in turn from "Concept Generation" to "Product Planning" to "Product Engineering" to "Process Engineering" to "Production Process." This diagram was labeled "Clark and Fujimoto's Description of the Automaking Process." I'll be damned if I've ever heard of Clark or Fujimoto, but the thing on the right looked eerily familiar. For good reason: I've used a version of it in hundreds of proposals over the years. I never really believed it was an accurate way to describe the process. I simply never had the confidence to describe the process in any other way. Like a lot of designers, I've considered my real process my little secret. With their work, Rob Austin and Lee Devin provide a new way not to think about what we do, but to help others understand it.