





...the politics of design by suggesting areas of inquiry that extend beyond the academic field. For example, how do digital images influence collective imaginaries? What is the potential of virtual environments as collective, alternative spaces for social interaction? Or how can we use design as a speculative tool to reflect on issues of climate change or resource depletion?

As designers inside an institution – therefore within the boundaries of the design canon – we acknowledge the limitations that we are presented with in the process of creating a publication. Coming from different design backgrounds, we recognise the importance of making our voices cacophonous, rather than uniform. In this sense, the publication unfolds through three sections (*move*, *cross* and *tilt*) to be read as thematic approaches to the contributions without a set hierarchy. We see the process of making research public as glimpses into some of the practices that further the discussion on the territories of design.

Our journey begins along and within the borders of design. The field is dominated by western visual languages and approaches to the subject.

European design history is taken as 'the' canon, erasing diverse perspectives. We ask, what are the blind spots within the design system?

The contributions in this section reframe and recontextualise the boundaries of design as a practice. Reflecting on the tools and structures at play in this field, we aim to move the borders of design as a way to open up space to different voices. By moving the boundary, we celebrate practices 'outside' of the canon, making them visible and accessible.

These practices alter and participate in an expanded definition of design as a discipline, generating territories that are constantly shifting, rather than having fixed edges.

Some of the contributions in this section urge to approach visual mediums like film, architecture, advertising and social media in a critical way, while reflecting on practices from which the field of graphic design can learn and grow.

MOVE THE | BOUNDARIES

## In conversation with: YU Jiwon

In Yu Jiwon's book *Newton's Atelier* (뉴턴의 아틀리에) she borrows a quote from Korean film director Park Chan-wook 'she is a humanist with a brain of a scientist, hand of a designer and a heart of a poet.' As a design educator, typographer and a writer based in Seoul, Yu Jiwon's practice lies in Korean typography with a broader perspective of graphic design through math and science. Her publications, *The Typographic Landscape* (글자 풍경) and *Newton's Atelier* address matters of marginalised typography by bending the boundaries of studies within graphic design. She continuously questions the effect of typography on the marginalised, hosted the Korean Society of Typography in 2016 and debated the arrogance of globality by suggesting the concept of 'interlocality' for multilingual typography.

ALWFAV: In your book *The Typographic Landscape* ① (글자풍경) and *Newton's Atelier* ② (뉴턴의 아틀리에), you reflect on the formation background of East Asian culture and different methods of interpreting space. You state that Hangul is being forced to fit into the spatial logic of Latin characters. I think people who are unfamiliar with the Hangul principles would be curious how it is considered to be forced to align with that logic specifically.

1 Following Jiwon Yu's column serialised in 중앙선데이 (JoongAng Sunday) for a year, this book was published in 2019.

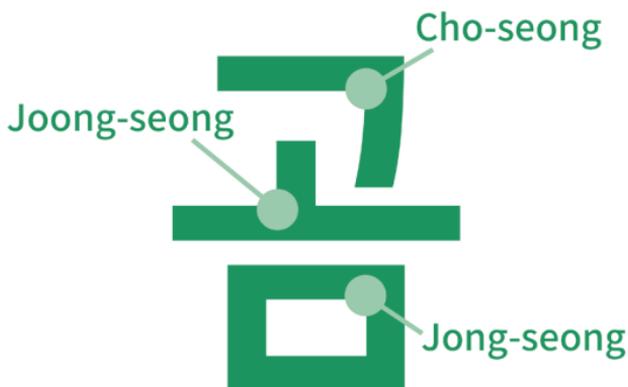
2 Book published in 2020 by Jiwon Yu with physicist Kim Sang Ook.

YJ: Space is something that needs the awareness and acknowledgment of people even if it is something that exists physically. In short, space is not an object that is perceived as it is, but rather something accepted as an agreement that differs by culture. For example, how space is perceived in mathematics was developed because of a drive to create order, but even though the questions and answers were similar, the methods of problem solving were different in the East and West.

The West adapted Greek mathematics, a linear method that follows a certain direction upon a one dimensional line, whereas the East follows the *Cheonwon-Jibang* (天圓地方) ㉓, which sees the ground as divided squares.

3 'The sky is round and the earth is square'.

In essence, these different perspectives of space are applied in all cultures and written languages. For instance, Latin characters draw letters in a two-dimensional way, and the direction of the letters is linear. On the other hand, the East uses a system of combining multiple segments into a section so we have different elements for one character. Chinese characters have different radicals and Hangul has syllables called Cho-seong, Joong-seong and Jong-seong.



Cho-seong, Joong-seong and Jong-seong

These components have to be combined in a module that uses both the 'x' and 'y' axes and this is what makes it most difficult to fit into the Western logic. Hangul has its own advantages and ways of thinking, but it is considered lesser and seen as having flaws when brought to the Western machines or programs of spatial logic because it is not understood in the way it should be.

In fact, when I had the opportunity to sit down and have a conversation with Russian type and graphic designer, Ruderman Ilya ④, about Cyrillic script and Hangul at the Moscow International Book Fair ⑤,

4 Ilya Ruderman studied at the Moscow State University of Print under Alexander Tarbeev, and received a MA degree from the Type & Media course at the Royal Academy of Art (Koninklijke Academie Van Beeldende Kunsten) in The Hague. He has designed a number of Cyrillic additions to Typotheque fonts, most notably History, Parmigiano and Lava.

5 The largest book forum in Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

I asked if the Cyrillic script faced any difficulties regarding the fact that Roman characters have dominance over technology. He explained that Cyrillic script is the closest to Roman script, even closer than the Greek alphabet, so they do not face much hardship, although the concept of white space can be quite different.

ALWFAV: Is that different from what you mentioned in *The Typographic Landscape* about the concept of white space within Arabic alphabets or Devanagari ⑥? Or are they similar?

6 Indian script.

YJ: It's not as distant. Arabic characters have their own unique mathematical system and the way Indian typography uses lots of colour makes them very distinct. For instance, when we think of Cyri-

llic script and Roman characters, they share the way space is presented. However, they almost only seem like a different dialect as they appear to have different preferences in how they use space. If Hangul, Arabic, and Devanagari are like completely different species to Roman characters, Cyrillic is more like a mutation.

ALWFAV: Could you also tell us a bit more about the interregional perspective you mentioned in that same book?

YJ: If globalism was based on a late 20th century imperialist ideology in which the non-Western world had to follow the Western influence while excluding their own local identity, then an interregional perspective can be the acknowledgment that the Western method is not the only way to solve problems. The concept of interregional is not saying 'ours is the best' but rather embracing diversity for all typography. It is not a competition, but a cooperation. Globalism, on the other hand, was about one side being better than the other.

ALWFAV: As a typographic example, I really enjoyed your example of Hong Kong in labels or logos. You mentioned how they keep the Chinese characters and Latin alphabet's respective grids by using an analogue stencil method to texture it in a harmonious way. Would there be a way for Korea to keep the uniqueness and quality of Hangul when mixing with Roman characters? Or what would you consider a method or texture of Hangul?

YJ: First of all, there is a difference in density between Hangul and Roman characters. Korean designers do try to minimise the contrast of the two languages, but that is done by forcing Hangul

to fit into the Western logic. If you look at Korean calligraphy done with brushes, they actually emphasise the difference of density. If Latin characters are geometric, East Asian characters are full of physical quantity. There is the variable of speed and density that I would like to research the physical parameters of such in the future.

The contrast within Roman characters, change of thickness for example, is a geometric phenomenon that occurs on a flat surface. When we write characters with a brush, the ink evaporates depending on the brush used. So the change occurring within the process of evaporating and applying ink is what is known as density. This density is something that you need to create an equal balance for in Western typography, but traditional Korean calligraphy celebrates the difference. During the industrial paradigm, it was impossible to recreate these characteristics so it was considered lesser, but now with the technology of OTF in the digital paradigm it is possible to create algorithms to generate these complicated systems. This is done by creating a parameter using the density as a variable.

**ALWFAV:** It's quite hard to imagine these variables digitised, since there exists the Western logic in international typeface and the Western perspective of a good typeface is so pervasive. What has been your experience with that?

**YJ:** I was actually lost and confused when I started having conversations about the idea of interlocality ten years ago. I think interlocality can be a way of resisting globality. I hosted and recruited people for the Korean Society of Typography in 2016, where we had a discussion about how vio-

lent, privileged and one sided globality is. We discussed the idea of interlocality with a German designer, an American designer who designs typefaces for Ghana and an Indian designer. This incident aligns with the mindset that different scripts relatively have to adjust more to the Western typographic logic when it comes to the balance of multilingual typography. If globalism was based on the late 20th century imperialism ideology in which the non-Western world had to follow the Western influence while excluding their own local identity, interregional is the acknowledgment that the Western method is not the only way to solve problems, promoting diversity for all. It is not a competition but cooperation, while globalism was about one side regarded as better than the other.

Western typeface designers used to cut me off and say that I was wrong when they actually didn't understand what I was talking about. This surely came from their belief that I was inferior to them in terms of design knowledge. I don't think people understand what I am saying now because I gained more authority, but rather because society in general is changing and more people are starting to see the urgency of the issue of interlocality. I am very happy about this change.

Traditional Korean design elements are seen as particularly new even for many Koreans because we started receiving Western education in the late 19th century. It was a challenge to find an easy way to debate and make people take notice within the design field, but I think my book *The Typographic Landscape* helped people become familiar with the idea of interlocality.

ALWFAV: In current Korean society where English is almost ubiquitous, how do you think multilingual typography should be taught as part of Korea's design education?

YJ: Until five years ago, multilingual typography used to follow the Roman logic. There was a time when we did not realise how strange the term non-Latin was, and us as Korean designers aren't familiar with our typographic logic or our own math within. Even though nowadays there is this consciousness of ignorance within Korean society, the educational system is still very Westernised. It has been like that for over a decade, even if Korean designers are educated in Korean and taught their own history. It is said that after three generations, a system dies off. Now we are at the brink of this moment. I think we need to start by admitting our ignorance of our own language. We all need to educate ourselves. If globalism was a one-sided phenomenon, we need to follow inter-localism in a multi-sided way.

Western designers often used their logic to say that it would be easier for us to learn their language and rules. It is similar to how the male body became a standard and the female body became an other because it does not fit the standard. I think this is similar not only in the design industry, but society itself as more and more people are vocalising similar issues.

However, I want to state that when we look at how we see our own language, we have to be aware that we may also be repeating this dominant typographic logic. We often praise Hangul as the most beautiful language on Hangul-Nal <sup>7</sup>, but that in itself is very arrogant and ignorant. It is true that Hangul is formed uniquely and has a scientific system, but that does not mean that it is the most beautiful characters. I also want to ask Koreans if they have ever seen how unique the Maya or Tamil scripts are.

<sup>7</sup> National holiday celebrating the creation of Hangul.

In addition, the way some dominant design regions argue that, you can just adjust to us to diminish the hardship of the minority makes people believe that it is an easy way to get rid of troubles. This is something that needs to be fixed. We as the marginalised design regions need to confront the Western design scene with more confidence. We need to acknowledge the value of diversity; for example how diversity in written language could heal the society through neuroscience and evolutionary logic.

ALWFAV: Could you please elaborate?

YJ: In both neuroscience and evolution logics, it is regarded that diversity can be a solution to adapting to changes or surviving big and small scales of disasters. This is how neuroscience explains that children who experience and play with various objects can develop broader ways of thinking, or how diversity can be a method to solve disasters in terms of human evolution. Evolution tends to happen randomly when it comes to culture. The human body adapted in a way to the current environment ergono-

mically, although there are still a lot of deficient parts in our bodies. However, this deficit enables diversity through difference. Let's hypothetically think of a sudden disaster. Mathematically, about 400 out of 500 people have to react differently in order for at least 100 people to survive from that disaster. If all 500 human bodies reacted the same way we would go extinct. Difference is the greatest value in our current unstable society.

Similarly, our current world will be constantly challenged with new changes in various fields. To adapt to these changes, it is important to think about the possibilities that the diversity of the written language brings as a solution.

ALWFAV: Then what would you say the crisis in typography is, and what do we need to be aware of to promote diversity in typography?

YJ: It might not be a crisis in the Roman script's perspective, but it is in a wider viewpoint. When Roman script users, creators and advocates exclude other scripts, they will be incapable of finding different methods of solving problems. This may cause discomfort for the whole world since these Roman script users are the same people that are in charge of many technological parts of the society. For example, the video that was recorded at the end of the Moscow international book fair dealt with how the Roman script was mainly based on a rectangular grid. Due to that, much of the communication and conferencing softwares that are rapidly emerging during the Covid-19 pandemic are missing other possible solutions for their interface

(fig 1). For example, if they adopted Korean culture’s hexagon shaped grid (fig 2), it could have helped develop softwares in a better way for physical human cognition, effectively using the ‘left out’ space or preventing from showing unnecessary background images of each individual. The world may be going through discomfort due to the single solution of the Roman logic.



fig 1: Zoom Meeting [Screenshot], YU Jiwon, 2020

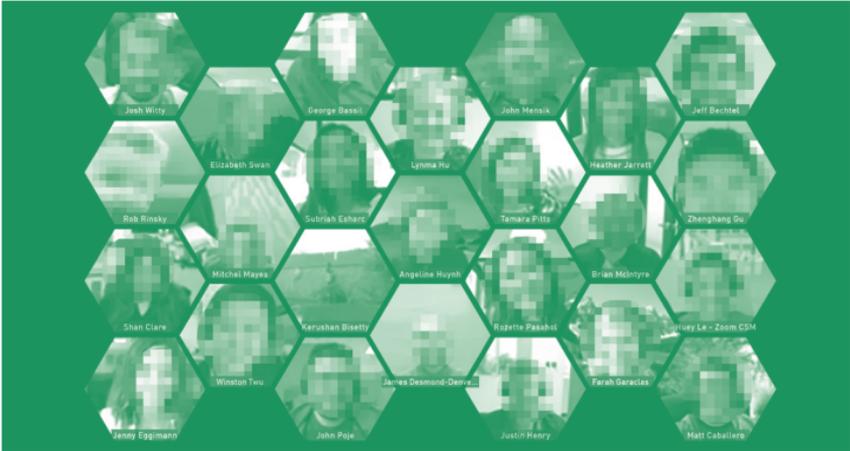


fig 2: Zoom Meeting [Screenshot], YU Jiwon, 2020

For other character region's cases, if I were to think of it referring to the Indian designer's words from the multilingual typography conference also mentioned in *The Typographic Landscape*, Hangul adapts easier to the rapid change of technology compared to India's scripts. Whenever a software, for instance Apple, updates their system, Roman characters are able to find the best font and update quicker whereas Hangul is incapable of following at the same speed. Despite that, Hangul users can still manage to keep up with the change in the technology although it can be slower than the Roman letters, whereas the Devanagari script is not even available on the iPhone, leaving them to use Roman characters as their written script. For countries with diverse language systems like India, forcing them to use Roman characters endangers not only written scripts, but also the languages itself.

ALWFAV: But to recognise design logics from places that don't use Latin letters, I think Asian design history is less researched or archived compared to Western design history. Given this current situation, what do you think Western designers should do to educate themselves on Asian design history?

YJ: For Asian design history, there might be parts that are compiled, but it does lack an overall perspective since the development process is very different. In Korea's case, there was design research conducted during the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945) and during to post-Park Chung-hee's 8 dictatorship (1963-1979),

8 Park Chung-hee (Korean: 박정희; Hanja: 朴正熙; 14 November 1917 – 26 October 1979) was a South Korean politician and Republic of Korea Army General who served as the President of South Korea from 1963 until his assassination in 1979, assuming that office after first ruling the country as head of a military dictatorship installed by the May 16 military coup d'état in 1961.

but there is no design research spanning the whole of Korean history. The West does have contents like *A History of Graphic Design* by Phillip B. Meggs. It is interesting that there is no research about Korean, Chinese, and Japanese design history altogether.

But there are still some efforts from certain designer groups, though it might still be a bit narrow. Asian designers that chase the kinds of aesthetics produced by these groups are often regarded as the roots of contemporary Asian design, but in my perspective what they do is still very limited, both in terms of localities covered and in how they bring together designs and designers that fit their taste of similar aesthetics. I wish their activities wouldn't generalise all of Asia.

ALWFAV: Yes, regarding this I was also surprised to know that very few Western people know any designers from Asia overall (other than Japanese studios). Those that can name a few mostly mention those overly represented studios, and regarding their design as being typically Asian design.

YJ: Non-Western designers who are able to make themselves notable in the Western society are those who are able to speak English fluently and are often actually highly Westernised. Being comfortable and fluent in speaking English in Korea (and in some other East Asian countries too) is relatively low and uncommon compared to people from countries that are familiar with the Latin alphabet.

So there is a big chance that Asian designers that are familiarised with Western society are also those who are deeply engaged with Western styles of aesthetics. If you ask the Western designers if they know any Asian designers who are not fluent in English there would be a high chance they wouldn't be able to answer. We must question whether those few designers can represent Korean design. The bond of Westernised Asian designers and the pursuit for their Westernised design may well be reinforced through the little club activity kind of character of non-inclusive Western design.

**ALWFAV:** I know that most educators in universities in Seoul experienced studying in Western countries. What do you think these educators should be aware of when it comes to teaching and reinforcing the Western design gaze?

**YJ:** I don't think it is my place to criticise the educators in Korea as everyone has their own interests. For educators that have to teach their students about various skills and topics, decolonisation might not even cross their mind, or be difficult for them to focus on. Korean design school students still need to explore various design techniques which seem separate from the issue of decolonisation. People think their current interests are superior and sometimes tend to attack those who don't agree. I think it is a better method for people to respect different viewpoints and methods even within the same issues and learn to coexist, especially in Korean design industry.

ALWFAV: Then what do you think are the challenges still faced in the current Korean design education?

YJ: I think it's doing better than before. I want to compliment what's going well rather than criticise what's not. In a broader sense, Korea's design industry is not getting the credit designers deserve and many Korean designers don't think they are being paid enough for the work they are doing. I think we should cheer for these designers and support them rather than criticise them, including designers in the education field. I hope they keep doing what they are doing and grow more. This is slightly different from what we talked about, but they are all doing the best they can in their situations.

ALWFAV: That is a very heartwarming sentiment. It seems like this is the time for Korean designers to come together and to cheer for each other to create a better, positive synergy. The next question is a bit deep, but what are your thoughts regarding typography and design for the marginalised?

YJ: Since the industrial times, everything started to be mass manufactured towards an average standard. If we take Korea as an example, those who are not able-bodied, healthy, cisgender, heterosexual or male living in Seoul are all left behind. Mass production is made for the average and those who do not fit into that category have to fit themselves into that standard as a lesser being.

Now, design is under more pressure to provide for those outside the average standard through a new standard, but it is not profitable. This also connects to neoliberalism, in which these minorities need protection. The government needs to acknowledge areas that are economically marginalised, since this can become a boomerang that can come back and hurt those in prior positions. So there should be social protection along with designs for these people.

I myself am quite interested in the needs of children and the elderly, and there are a lot of problems when designers in their twenties or thirties design products for people in their sixties or seventies without understanding the bodies and realities of people who are older than them. The elders often feel humiliated in ways when using products made by young designers with little understanding and this could lead to a society with low self-esteem.

In the end, I think society as a whole must figure out ways to protect those in need and we, as designers, also need to think about who we might be forgetting in the process of designing.

\*The original interview was conducted in Korean and has been translated and edited for clarity.

# Cultural Identities as Props, as Backdrops

Daphne TSANG <sup>HK</sup>

Ten years ago on the 31st October 2010, AMC's *The Walking Dead* premiered on American television. An opening scene in the post-apocalyptic series saw a lost and confused Rick Grim (Andrew Lincoln) awaking from his coma. He tries to comprehend what has happened in and around the hospital. ❶ What followed was not the images of hordes of zombies. It was, instead, hundreds of memes mocking the phrase 'Don't Dead, Open Inside'.

1 'Days Gone Bye' (2010) *The Walking Dead*, series 1, episode 1. AMC, 1 October 2010

Thankfully, such typographic errors in props and backdrops rarely happen in English. When Hollywood uses non-English languages, however, they often suffer the 'Rick Grim' moment of confusion, along with cultural misrepresentations and fragmentation of the languages.



*Screenplays of a Heterotopic City*, Daphne TSANG, 2020

With the rise of the Cyberpunk phenomenon in the 1980s, Hollywood has since taken an interest in envisioning and incorporating East Asian cultures and cityscapes into their Cyberpunk

mise-en-scène. Hong Kong and Japanese cultures, in particular, being a regular choice, as featured in Ridley Scott's cult classic *Blade Runner* (1982). ②

2 Blade Runner (1982) directed by R. Scott.  
Available via Youtube (Accessed: 5 December 2020).

Despite the film's well-praised and detailed production design, Chinese-speaking audiences noticed the frequent fragmented language in the film's mise-en-scène. Case in point: when antagonist Roy Batty (played by Rutger Hauer) is physically introduced on screen at 26:39, Chinese-speaking audiences will raise their eyebrows at the Chinese characters that read, 'to eat fish no need to teach' (得吃魚不要教). ③ East Asian studies scholars David S. Roh, Betsy Huang and Greta A. Niu identify this as 'techno-orientalism', a notion that 'imagines Asia and Asians in hypo- or hyper-technological terms in literary, cinematic, and new media representations' ④, mostly on behalf of Asia themselves.

3 Roh, David S. et al. (2015)  
*Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia  
In Speculative Fiction, History and  
Media*, San Francisco, New Brunswick:  
Rutgers University Press.

4 Baldwin, J. (2006) *Room 2046:  
A Political Reading Of Wong Kar-wai's  
Chow-Mo Wan Trilogy Through Narrative  
Elements And Mise-En-Scène*. Denton,  
Texas: University of North Texas.

The obsession of techno-orientalising East Asian cities has further resulted in both Japan and Hong Kong following the footsteps of envisioning their very own future. Contrary to the misrepresentation by Hollywood, Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai's (王家衛) *2046* (2004) deploys futuristic depiction of the city as a techno-orientalised back-drop; and does not self-misrepresent. Similarly, Mamoru Oshii (押井守) has utilised Hong Kong's colonial-era cityscape of the 1960s in his *Ghost In The Shell* (1995) adaptation. Both dramatised the identity crisis of the people of Hong

Kong after the handover in 1997 from British to Chinese governance. These are the various ways to use the genre as a commentary on the present that does not encourage language fragmentations, or stereotypes of their own.



*Screenplays of a Heterotopic City*, Daphne TSANG, 2020

This is not to say Hollywood should not envision the Orient's future; Hong Kong welcomes lending its cityscapes and signage to Hollywood. Oshii contextualises the act of techno-orientalising the former colonial city in a flawless manner. A language is not merely a prop; a cityscape is not just a backdrop. Thus, Hollywood cinema must understand in-depth research about a city's historical context, the languages it speaks, as well as its culture. This understanding is vital to prevent or minimise a 'Rick Grim' moment, and to acknowledge that by continuing to misrepresent the culture would only aid the process of Hong Kong's eroding cultural identity.

## Practice Abstract: Reskinning Jiangnan

YAO Qi<sup>CN</sup>

*Floating Sign of Jiangnan* is an installation exploring the impact of rapid modernisation and transformation of urban landscapes and, in particular, how this process of change has reshaped a definition of Jiangnan.

Jiangnan is a geographic area in China referring to lands immediately to the south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River. The area has been depicted in paintings and poems in the bygone times due to its distinct local characteristics. The filtering of time preserves these typical symbols for use within today's construction projects, re-skinning old houses and re-enacting a Jiangnan landscape.



*Floating Sign of Jiangnan*, YAO Qi, 2021



*Floating Sign of Jiangnan, YAO Qi, 2021*

The installation suggests that the sign of Jiangnan is accumulated by normative and replaceable symbols, that are disconnected from the urban environment, as well as the local memories.



*Floating Sign of Jiangnan, YAO Qi, 2021*

## This Swirling Mass of Atoms ZHU Yiting<sup>CN</sup>

My parents bought me an iPhone 6 with 16GB storage after I graduated from high school. Due to the limited amount of storage space, I regularly uploaded my photos to the iCloud. It is a habit I have kept ever since. I used to feel comforted when browsing these digital albums, but lately I have realised the fragility of this relationship, as it may weaken my memories. Once a real scene is captured as an image, its location has already been moved from my memory of a direct experience to a fixed frame and a static, digital location, and it is changed constantly. How can we find traces of our memories from these fixed pixels?



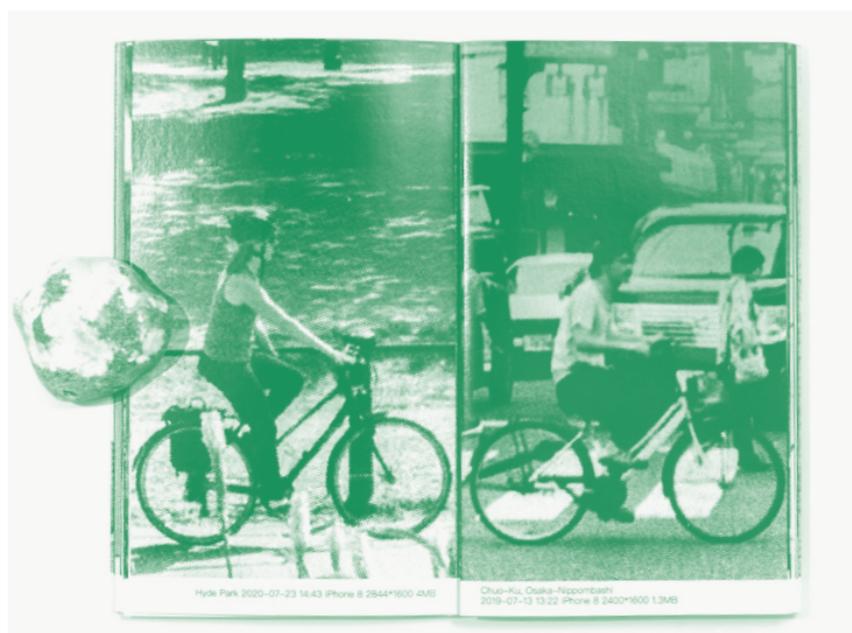
*iPhone 6 16GB, ZHU Yiting, 2015*

Apple's iOS operating system provides users with a collection of photos called 'Memories For You'. It gives the user the ability to create, delete and share 'Memories'. This collection is generated automatically when you take a certain number of photos over a period of time, or in a particular place. Although it sounds personal, this system cannot dis-

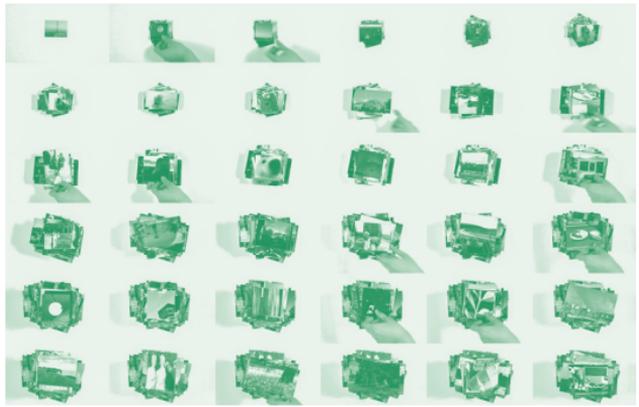
tinguish our emotions – nor the expressions from facial-recognition, or the lingering feelings brought on by the images we took. So, automatically-generated ‘Memories’ are simply logical classifications that do not focus on a special moment. According to John Berger, ‘the camera relieves us of the burden of memory. It surveys us like God, and it surveys for us. Yet no other God has been so cynical, for the camera records in order to forget.’<sup>1</sup>

1 Berger, J. (1980)  
*About Looking*. New  
York: Pantheon Books.

*This Swirling Mass of Atoms* contains 112 pages of images and their metadata, unfolding the relationship between phone photography and human memories, the perception and interpretation of an image and the boundary of individuality in a public space. The performance of stacking photos indicates the futility of an endeavour and the burden of an onslaught of information.



*This Swirling Mass of Atoms*, Publication, ZHU Yiting, 2021



Images, 36m20s, ZHU Yiting, 2021

‘The universe is just this swirling mass of atoms, forming clumps of various kinds of things, and dissolving. Most of those atoms don’t get to be alive at all. Most of those atoms don’t get to be a person. It’s extraordinarily lucky of us to be in this select, fortunate few.’ <sup>2</sup>

2 Kagan, S. (2007) *Fear of Death* [Recorded lecture]. Open Yale Courses PHIL 176: Death Lecture 22. Yale University. 30 Sep. Available at: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

## Speaking Objects: The Multi-layered Nature of Meaning and Value

WU Yihan <sup>CN</sup>

As a pillow,  
it educates us,  
it records stories,  
it stores our things,  
it knows our secrets,  
it preserves our treasures,  
it listens to our wishes,

.....

it is more than a sleeping tool,  
it is speaking to us.

We usually look at an object through the commodity description, advertisement or instruction manual. The words and sentences exert a subtle influence on us and leave us with a general impression of how to use the object. But if we always look at an object in this way, it might become boring. I don't deny the function of these descriptive words. In fact, their presence helps us to recognise an object quickly and how to use it correctly. Neil Cummings suggests that maintaining perfect use will actually render the object invisible. In his article *Reading Things: The Alibi of Use*, he asks, 'how exactly are objects patterned with meaning and value?' ❶

1 Cummings, N., (2014) *Reading Things* [online]. Available at: [www.neilcumplings.com](http://www.neilcumplings.com)

Here, when he uses the word 'pattern', I regard it as a metaphor, rather than a pattern which is literally visible. He means that there are many ideas, thoughts, feelings, connotations around an object, which influence our perception of it. By adopting this idea, every object becomes rich with many different meanings for us to consider and analyse.

We should be critical when reading the many layers of meaning an object may have and we should not be limited by its primary use. Cummings encourages people to 'write themselves into the dominant material text and alter its fabric'. ❶ Though people do not intervene in the process of production, when an object becomes part of daily life, people's interaction with it could add additional meanings and values to it.

Using the pillow as a site for discussion, when I reflect on my own experience with it, apart from sleeping on it, I notice moments in which I also gave it different functions. When I think about the terms ‘in the pillow’, ‘on the pillow’, or ‘under the pillow’, they suggest to me new ways of considering and engaging with the object.



*Speaking Objects:  
The Multi-layered Nature of Meaning and Value,*  
Publication, WU Yihan, 2020

Taking ‘under the pillow’ as an example, it gives the object a meaning of a secret place. According to the book *Mono to Ningen No Bunkashi-Makura* (1996) <sup>2</sup>, during the Edo period <sup>3</sup>, people believed that the safest place for an object was under a pillow, under a resting head.

<sup>2</sup> Ken'ichi, Y., (1996) *Mono To Ningen No Bunka-shi-Makura*. Japan: Hosei University Press.

<sup>3</sup> *Tokugawa Period and Meiji Restoration* (2021)  
Available at: [www.history.com](http://www.history.com)

They came up with an innovative device called ‘box pillows’. Some people hid secrets or essential items in it, such as money and secret books.



# Practice Abstract: Not Just a Toy

LIANG Yufan <sup>CN</sup>

*Not Just a Toy* broadens the boundary of choice by incorporating conflicting symbols, abandoning the original rules and providing multiple interpretations of different professions. Toys should give children more space, instead of narrowing their perceptions.

From plush dolls to toy vehicles, kitchen utensils to assembled models, the pre-conceptions around gender have been imprinted onto children from a young age. Toys that are 'suitable for boys' usually have heavy colour attributes of mainly red, grey, blue or green. The themes for these toys are aggressive or adventurous, such as weapons and construction. Toys that are suitable for girls tend to be soft and beautiful, mainly pink and purple, dolls and household items. Even neutral toys are presented closer to masculinity and are less likely to use the representation of female identity.



*Not Just a Toy*, Installation, LIANG Yufan, 2020

We need to change and challenge this. As both consumers and users, we are affected by design decisions: that may produce prejudice, and aggravate gender stereotypes. We must urge toy manufacturers to create diverse products.



*Not Just a Toy*, 3D Modeling, LIANG Yufan, 2020



*Not Just a Toy*, 3D Modeling, LIANG Yufan, 2020

When it comes to images of mothers in advertising, what comes to your mind?

In the majority of advertisements in China, mothers are still the primary and sole caregivers of children. Through a deconstructive analysis of mothering images in Chinese television commercials over the past decade from 2010–2020, I found that commercial institutions strategically construct the following idealised or normalised models of being a mother.

## 1. The mother in trouble

‘My boy is always crying. It’s hard to calm him down.’

Mothers in the advert are portrayed as lacking confidence in parenting and relying heavily on external experts. Why are they always at their wits’ end when it comes to their baby crying, and why are they always struggling to respond to their baby’s illnesses? At the same time, the role of a scientist or doctor in adverts is frequently given to a man. In one example, a man plays the role of a spokesperson for a baby formula brand. He wears a white lab coat and claims that the product has been internationally certified. With the establishment of scientific authority, it is as if traditional knowledge of motherhood is being undermined, while the scientific and modern concept of parenting advocated by doctors who are men is being promoted.

## 2. The mother is always shopping

‘As a mother, I want to give my baby the best.’

Historically, mothers have formed a key demographic in advertising. A common technique is to show one mother recommending a product to another mother. For example, the 2020 infant

formula advert for Beizhikang features the product in the form of a conversation between two mothers.

The difficulties of parenting are amplified in the narrative's strategy. Many advertisements strategically create scenes of distress and anguish in order to promote the product's features. For example, in Nippon's advert for children's paint, a child throws noodles at a wall which causes a stain, as if to remind every mother of the possible challenges of raising a child. Conveniently there is always a product on hand to help deal with these challenges.

### 3. The mother is family-oriented

'It's healthy and refreshing for the whole family.'

In contrast with the fact that the Chinese mothers are highly employed <sup>1</sup>, most advertised representations of motherhood are family-oriented. More specifically, 77% of the cases collected had mothers at home with their children. Only a few cases (5%) showed working mothers. However, they still focus on conveying that the mother is always on hand to care for her children.

1 Yihong Jin, (2013) *Working Mothers in China in Social Transition*. Academia Bimestrie

Together, these three directions reflect how motherhood is portrayed in Chinese advertising. The image of motherhood is the one that advertising agencies selectively reproduce. Through the use of these various strategies they create a form of social consciousness that is influenced by and reacts to a wider society. While many are working towards an equal division of labour between genders in the family, what does the continued creation of this patriarchal message reflect? And what impact might it have?



*Advertising Motherhood, Deconstruction, HONG Shanshan, 2020*

## Hyper Engaged: How Social Media Challenges Direct Behaviour Online

LI Haoyi <sup>CN</sup>

It's a challenge.  
It's a social media trend.  
It spreads virally across social media platforms.  
It is a 'participatory' event.  
Mobilising a collective performance.  
Raising a network information storm.  
Breaking through the virtual information sphere  
and into personal living spaces.  
Alters the users' behaviour.

The Ice Bucket Challenge was a viral trend that saw people dump a bucket of ice water on their heads, post their videos on social media platforms, then nominate others to do the same. Such challenges can both mobilise users and interrupt what we see and what we do. *Hyper Engaged: How Social Media Challenges Direct Behaviour Online* provides viewers with an alternative environment for viewing, responding, and understanding the social media challenge without intervention. Several behavioural influences were investigated in an attempt to find specific rules and phenomena within social media challenges.



*Hyper Engaged: How Social Media Challenges Direct Behaviour Online*, Video Still, LI Haoyi, 2020

The key phrases were:

TO EAT: whipped cream (#whippedcreamchallenge); the hottestpepper (#chillichallenge); a tide pod (#tidepodchallenge).

TO ACT: make a broom stand up on its own (#broomchallenge); tie a pillow around your waist with a belt (#pillowchallenge); lift the chair up to your chest (#chairchallenge).

TO INTERACT: turn your selfies into modelling portraits on Face APP (#agechallenge); film yourself with the 'time warp' filter on TikTok (#timewarpchallenge).



*Hyper Engaged: How Social Media Challenges Direct Behaviour Online, Video Still, LI Haoyi, 2020*

From daily activities to expressive social movements, the users' behaviour is often driven by trends. The interface structure and algorithm also lead to increasing social media engagements. The behavioural influences of social media challenges can be powerful manipulators. The border between the personal social or networked realm and the virtual social sphere is disappearing. Social media engagements continually impact, predict, and manipulate the behaviour of its users.



*Hyper Engaged: How Social Media Challenges Direct Behaviour Online,*  
Video Still, Li Haoyi, 2020

## In conversation with: Clara BALAGUER

There are many words that may describe Clara Balaguer's practice. She is variously named a 'tutor', a 'cultural worker', or a 'vernacular designer' at the *Piet Zwart Institute*, that houses the postgraduate program of the *Willem de Kooning Academy* based in Rotterdam. While in her own Instagram bio she describes herself as a 'Steward' of 'To Be Determined', a 'Publisher' of 'Hardworking Goodlooking', and a 'Director' of 'The Office of Culture and Design (RIP)'.

In October 2020, we talked to her about her manifold practice. It was a conversation that led us to some dizzyingly complex topics, turns and terms. We first attempted to conduct this interview through Jitsi, a free encrypted open-source video conferencing platform. However, after fifteen minutes of the connection repeatedly cutting out, we resorted to using Clara's university Zoom account. The routine of succumbing to the master's tools is something we address in detail later on in our talk. It is worth noting that in our conversation, Clara occasionally uses graphic design as a verb rather than a noun, an act that sums up her defiantly unorthodox approach to the subject.

**ALWFAV:** Could you explain the different identities you have/had with your practice?

**CB:** It started with The Office of Culture and Design (the OCD). The name is pretentious for a reason, I wanted it to sound like a government office. There is no ministry of culture in the Philippines,

and barely any funding, let alone rural or peri-urban contemporary cultural programming. So if the message was that the private sector has to step in, I thought I would just make my own 'ministry' or develop autonomous (ad)ministration. The name did get me into a few meetings because people thought I was with the government.

The names usually start off as deadpan jokes, but there is generally a deeper concept that emerges or is intended behind them. I could no longer stomach being 'part' of the government when Rodrigo Duterte was elected as president, even if it was in a mock way. The OCD had outlived its name and purpose, it needed to become overtly political. And so the OCD literally died. For a year, I told people it was in the process of assisted suicide. Some art students in Switzerland found this very distasteful, the idea of talking about death openly. They asked, 'Why do you need to talk about it? Why don't you just die quietly?' In Non-Swiss cultures, there is often the idea of a conscious death, and that death is a transition or a portal into something else that requires preparation while it is still alive but in the process of expiring. You have to prepare your loved ones for that, so there has been a death in between names.

**ALWFAV:** And the name that came after was *Hard-working Goodlooking*. In that project, you work very closely with the printers in Manila, how has your relationship with them affected your design process?

CB: The relationships that we formed are quite personal, built upon the notion of confidence in their skills. The form of our publications adapt to the process and the skills that we know the printers have. The research that was being carried out and the printers and paper suppliers are integral to the publishing haуз. We never invested in a Riso machine ourselves, not because there is no demand in the local design community but because there already is a local cottage industry. We wanted to support this existing industry, not take away their market or modify their skillset or compete with them under the assumption that we could do things better.

ALWFAV: So the location is significant to the practice of Hardworking Goodlooking?

CB: I think it is impossible to do Hardworking Goodlooking outside of the Philippines. I moved two and a half years ago to the Netherlands. We're four now, Kristian, Dante, Czar, and me – Czar being the one who still remains in Manila. While we are still doing things together, the last few years have been this sort of collective meditation or rumination. Without the relationships it had on the ground, does Hardworking Goodlooking need to die? The four of us have been exploring our relationships, how we work together. Because I cannot be close to the landscape that lends us our process, and because it was dependent on a certain manic energy that I'd bring to the research and administration, can the practice survive without the mania? However, Kristian has recently decided to move back to the Philippines. With Kristian and Czar together, perhaps it can be kept alive, we aren't sure. The project is on life support for the moment, as this new order settles.

ALWFAV: Your *Publishing as Bloodletting* text was laid out with nontraditional design software, you seem to have a very open approach to what graphic design can be?

CB: When you use software that isn't meant for graphic design or that perhaps is intended for a truncated form of graphic design, these limitations force you into another direction. They make you speak a different language, one that is creolised.

Templates or tools of popular access tend to be shunned in our current consumptive thirst for difference. It's more specifically a quest for novelty in the art world that in design manifests as the need for a differential – similar but slightly different concepts. To engage in the recovery of what is at the fingertips of everybody to the point of being banal (what Heidegger calls 'ready-to-hand') is a critical space of experimentation. There was this brief kind of flirtation with clipart in the graphic design world in the early 2000s. However, it was a blip on the radar, more concerned with extracting aesthetics from these programs and templates and later subsuming them into traditional design software. I see templaterly as an avenue for refusing high-cost, exclusionary tools, such as Photoshop or InDesign. They are an opportunity to unlearn, to find a new structure outside of streams of privilege in practicing design. I learned to graphic design on [Microsoft] Word, mostly through rudimentary exercises in text hierarchy, formatting ideas in writing through formatting text. It's a comfort zone, a romantic place. To understand how far you could go with that kind of popular working tool is to deeply listen to the literacy of the body popular. If you can understand where they are coming from, maybe you can learn to speak a similar language, opening a space of negotiation.

- ALWFAV: Has developing your graphic design practice changed the way that you write?
- CB: I sometimes write with a graphic recourse in mind, writing directly onto InDesign, using it as a word processor. Nothing super groundbreaking, but a valuable exercise nonetheless. It is important, not just for the designer, for text to live on the page in a dignified way. The writer cares about this as well. To compose text directly on a graphic layout helps in understanding that different turns of phrase have correspondingly different visual side effects. Sometimes, it's more stimulating to write on top of something that has already been laid out, as you don't have the pressure of a white page. It's like, 'Oh, this is not emptiness, this is a system that begs to be in conversation.'
- ALWFAV: Would you describe *Hardworking Good-looking* as a critical design practice, although I personally struggle with this buzzword 'critical'.
- CB: What's your definition of the word, why does 'critical' not sit well with you?
- ALWFAV: For me, there is a separation in the design industry between commercialised practices and then kind of smaller self-serving academic practices. I don't think you can be critical and run a client-driven design studio, because most client work is just a servant to capitalism, which I think we all agree is bad. This creates this tension between what actually happens in the design industry and what many wishes could happen.
- CB: I can't speak for the rest of *Hardworking Goodlooking*, but I do try and resist this

tendency to discard words before the word's project has been performed. Linguistic performativity (changing reality by modifying our verbal descriptions of reality) takes a time that requires patience – a virtue the tendentious cultural world often lacks. Decolonisation, for example, is a word that is falling victim to this consumptiveness. We like to run through words, exhaust them before their time. Though we're not done with the project of decolonisation – it is an activity as opposed to a single act – I use the word a lot less. Not because I personally have a distaste for it but because I know others do. One has to project a veneer of contemporaneity, or at least to understand what is contemporaneous, in order to be taken seriously, to survive, to be funded or made liquid in currency. I feel like the same thing is happening now with the word 'critical'. We are far from done with the project of criticality. In fact, in the face of rising extremism and fact-aversion, criticality is in a state of emergency.

**ALWFAV:** So you have a critical edge, but there is also a real sense of humour and self-deprecation in your work?

**CB:** So in terms of whether our practice is critical: humour and self-deprecation is a non-aggressive approach to criticality. What we bring to the table points to the place we come from. I never quite fit in. In the Philippines. I was too direct to be considered a well-behaved Filipino woman. But I did, under this pressure to submit, learn to temper my critique and be lateral. I don't always use this tactic, but I can draw from it. And I do not see it as submission. It's exerting negative power. By ceding with gentleness rather than occupying with aggression – with a joke or an apology or a compliment – one can command a space. It is not necessarily a disempowering experience.

My understanding of criticality is also based on the notion of doubt, a rumination of what we're not quite sure of, what we're still working out. Also, working things out together, labouring through certainty and doubt. As I practised, I learned to be less confident about what I saying and to inhabit this as a positive thing – when possible. Doubt is a fickle, ungovernable sensation, I cannot claim to have mastered it. I have been trying to eliminate absolutes from my vocabulary: always, never, nothing, or nobody. For me, the project of criticality will never be over, just as the project of decolonisation will never be over. Although 'never' is a strong word, and I just said I was trying to eliminate absolutes. Case in point, it's uneasy – as in 'hard' and also as in 'unsettling' – to think in terms of uncertainty.

It's not always words that are the problem. The meanings with which we infuse them are often way more restrictive. A composition of meanings is much more interesting to look at than a monolithic definition.

ALWFAV: To move towards a slightly different topic, in your *Dye Trying* book, you published a William Morris essay without permission. What role does piracy have in your practice?

CB: I am trying to understand what ethical piracy could mean. I think it's a matter of scale and affinity. Who is copying, at what scale, and for what purpose? Spoken bluntly: if you're an asshole, I don't want you to pirate my book. What does asshole mean, though? There are many ways we could define the term asshole from a legal sense. I like writing extra-legal things, which is essentially the same as writing legal things: you have to build in holes, graynesses, possibilities for loose interpretation.

I'd like to push copyright statements in the same way that environmental lawyers have kind of fleshified nature by turning her into a legal person. How do we add a human element, a recognition of individuals and their subjective natures, into a copyright statement that traditional law practice has told us to consider as an 'objective' exercise? How to set a precedent for legality, to stretch legislation by arguing a strong case? In 2007 it was not legal to file court cases on behalf of cetaceans – dolphins, whales, and porpoises – as legal persons. Here, thinking of a case filed (and won) by Filipino lawyer, Atty Cabrido, to stop Japanese oil exploration in the Tañon Strait. In 2015 they won the case. This case was initiated before the legal wins in Ecuador and New Zealand that used the same trick to grant rivers legal personhood. I'm not sure if Cabrido and his team were the first (certainly they were not the most widely reported) lawyers to do so. But they, and others, are setting precedents for post-human interpretations of human law. These wormholes allow for illegality to be sanctioned as law.

Circling back to William Morris in this roundabout answer to your question: I decided to pirate the essay for two separate, seemingly opposed, ultimately entangled reasons. I respect that he's a lover of craft – piracy to disseminate a worthwhile message – but I object to him being an enemy of the popular – piracy to importune the elitist.

**ALWFAV:** I think at some point all designers have some experience with piracy, either with software or typefaces. There's definitely a way of making design more accessible through piracy. But then there's a need to judge when one has to stop pirating?

CB: Yeah, checking your privilege, as trite as that may sound these days. And I think a lot of it has to do with institutional access. Now we're having this Zoom meeting that lasts for more than forty minutes because, for the first time in my life, I have institutional access. Once you have that, you can't really be the pirate, but you may (and should) facilitate piracy, and you can (and must) protect those who need to pirate. When I wear my institutional hat, I'm not really a pirate anymore. I don't board the ship to take a bounty, I'm already on the ship. Perhaps now I'm something more like a smuggler. Let people in or let resources out – hold the damn door for as long as humanly possible. There are many cracks in institutions, waiting to be found. Through these fissures, you connect and smuggle worlds, citizens. This illicit flow can happen for the good of the institution, though the institution may not see it that way. There's also a romance to this traffic being subterranean, a pleasure principle to piracy.

ALWFAV: Do you think that without your formal education in design you view the discipline a different way? You are approaching it from a different angle, one based in the vernacular.

CB: Just last summer, while sidewalking with Nathalie Hartjes (of Showroom Mama Gallery in Rotterdam), she defined the vernacular in terms of contemporaneity. What is truly of its time, often concocted through bucking propriety – for example, African-American vernacular English slang that thumbs its nose at canonical English. What is newest and thus not yet institutionalised/cannibalised. What has not yet been distilled and bottled into the formal. When a language formalises, this is when it can begin to alienate people.

I think it's a labour of writing about the vernacular in the vernacular. Using its native style (incorporating regular wordery), respecting the original form and insisting upon the correctness of this form. There is no wrong spelling for what is inherently slippery. It's this idea of growing a language, growing it precisely from the fact that it is error-laden. Mistakes can be preserved and explored in a text (or design surface) as a way to see (or even participate in) the evolution of a language in real-time. A Ulyssean task, but perhaps allowing those who speak the vernacular to define and participate in the narrative as themselves, rather than being James Joyce and just putting words into their fictional mouths, claiming authorship over a collective phenomenon. However, caution is necessary. The vernacular is not saintly. The popular (populism) is shadowy territory that cannot be romanticised carelessly. How to study the lightness and the darkness of populist aesthetics?

**ALWFAV:** What would you like the mainstream to learn from the vernacular?

**CB:** The vernacular originates from the mainstream, in a way, so perhaps it's not so much of a learning as it is a recognition of what is already known.

I would like, in the mainstream and outside of it, more collective exploration. How can we (not just designers) design together? How can you design with, instead of for all of the stakeholders in the process? Also, a curvy approach to ethics around cultural exchange: ethics with room for negotiation as opposed to a shrill Global North/Western approach to appropriation, uncomfortably built around essentialism

and racial purity. That being said, it should be an ethics (and not a morality) held up to some agreed-upon baseline of what is colonialist and extractive.

And, to circle back to a previous topic, expand ideas around copyright and authorship. There's the copyright, the copyleft and the copyfarleft. What about the copyother, in between romanticisms around singular authorship and limitless freedom. On the left side of the argument, there is this idealisation of complete open access and open markets, which can quickly become very oppressive. Precisely because these markets of information are unregulated, when something works, is picked up and becomes popular and there is no legislation protecting those who are galvanising (or even consuming) that popular knowledge, then the obscenely large – corporations, governments, institutions, fact-averse mobs – can come in, wrest control, hold the information hostage. I would like to see what a copyother can be, something in between, something flexible, able to switch codes, able to respond to its context without losing its character of...I dunno. Honour?

ALWFAV: Paul Elliman has described himself as trolling graphic design with his work of found letterforms, is this how you see your relationship to typography?

CB: Yeah, definitely I am trolling, in the sense that it's – haha – for the lulz. There is also a more thoughtful investigation of what makes us (or me) laugh as an indicator to what makes us (or me) uncomfortable. In *Publishing as Bloodletting*, for example there are a lot of literal LOLs in there. The essay and play is not a comedy, though. It is fundamentally about what pains me the most in the

realm of authorlessness. To believe in communal labour, but to also acknowledge the common can transgress boundaries of the self. In working to understand what is mine and what is common, there have been many painful moments. Sharing can wound, deeply, because it has to be done with others, who aren't always kind.

There is another anger that I express through humour. As a vernacular actor in academia, there is a certain revenge that I feel like I need to exact. I have often felt that my knowledge was belittled because it was not the standard body of it. Vernacular scholars learn by doing, through mimesis. They learn academia by simulating academia, with error – a synonym for discovery. There are these uncomfortable moments where you're discovering in real-time, i.e., you're making mistakes. Some people are impatient with the act of one actively learning. So indoctrinated in the canonical, deviance is dealt with harshly, as that is what and how they have learned, or what makes them think they have learned. Perhaps punishing those who deviate is a way to make sense of the suffering scholars have endured in order to be certified as learned? Anyway, I guess this is my way of exacting revenge. And I have no qualms about saying that this is revenge. It's like, well fuck you, cause I got here anyway, without all your bureaucratic hoops and assessment checkpoints, and now I'm going to shit in your cathedral.

When I say shit in the cathedral, it's not so much against the cathedral, which is an architectural feat to which we owe respect. The symbolic shit is more a critique against the religion of man that inhabits the structure and warps its value. Like, we can't say that Hardworking Goodlooking

is not modernist in its design because Kristian and Dante are educated in the modernist tradition and all of us (Czar included) have imbibed modernism in one way or another. There is something to be said about the feat and purpose of a structure, thinking of Jo Freeman and *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*. How to inhabit the structure differently? It's not always about building a new cathedral, though sometimes it kind of is.

I don't believe that none of the master's tools will be useful in taking down the master's house. None is an absolute, a perfection. As humans in flesh-prisons, we are not native to perfection. I think you have to learn how to dredge through those tools and separate what can be repurposed from what must be decommissioned. All this, without losing sight of the fact that these implements are built within an implicit kind of system that they may be reproducing on some level.

ALWFAV: It's about working with the tools available to you, and deciding at what point you need to get rid of those tools?

CB: Working with some of the tools, I suppose, and discerning which tools can be used, in what context, for what purpose. At the moment there is a big push towards F/LOSS technology, as in free and libre open-source software. When you're making work and trying to connect with people in the Philippines, if you don't use YouTube, your audience will likely be smaller. If you don't use Facebook, your audience may likely be more privileged. Facebook is free in the Philippines. You can access it without a data plan, which means that to many people, Facebook = internet. The point of access for

people in places like the Philippines becomes more difficult when using alternative technology. Basically, you can only degoogle and defacebook if you are able to afford that luxury (or when you are forcibly removed from it, as by oppressive governments).

I know this extra effort is somehow the point of F/LOSS, a movement I believe in. I know there is a price to pay for autonomy. I know we have to build new habits. I also know that there are legitimate reasons why free big tech platforms/software are so widely used in areas with very slow internet and a much lower per-capita income. You have to negotiate both of these conditions simultaneously: the urgent necessity to look for alternatives outside of Big Software and the fact that, when surfing the poverty line, ain't nobody got time for that.

An either/or approach is frustrating. I prefer to think of what's possible in the in-between. I think people think that the in-between is in the middle, but the in-between is its own place. It is at the edge of two or more different ecosystems that the most fecund biodiversity is found. This is where nature evolves, and perhaps so could we.



With an expanded perspective on  
the territories of design, we now  
step outside of its grounds.

By crossing the border,  
we break its line into dashes.

The weight of our movement  
through disciplines generates

fractures that leak external  
landscapes into our own. These  
boundaries are no longer a limitation,  
but doorways to navigate through.

What were borders are  
now a set of openings through  
which multiple paths extend  
in and out. At their intersections,

we can look in different directions,  
using design as a methodology to  
investigate subjects outside of the

discipline. These points of  
passage blur into practices that  
take a visual, practice-led  
approach to subjects of

embodied identities,  
religion and rituals,  
urban and virtual environments,  
and online communities.

CROSS THE  
BORDERS

# The Reciprocal Studio: Imagining Otherwise

Paul BAILEY<sup>IR</sup>  
Tony CREDLAND<sup>UK</sup>

Each year, *The Reciprocal Studio* takes form through a series of commissioned collaborative workshops authored and led by guest practitioners in response to a negotiated socio-political concern of the time. Our guests and participants are invited to work with a learning and teaching model based on reciprocity – to use this period to collectively investigate and to further their knowledge through the procedures of a research-oriented graphic design practice. We refer to the work of author bell hooks here, as we aim to build community ‘in order to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigour... to receive actively knowledge that enhances our intellectual development and our capacity to live more fully in the world’. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York:Routledge, 1994): 40





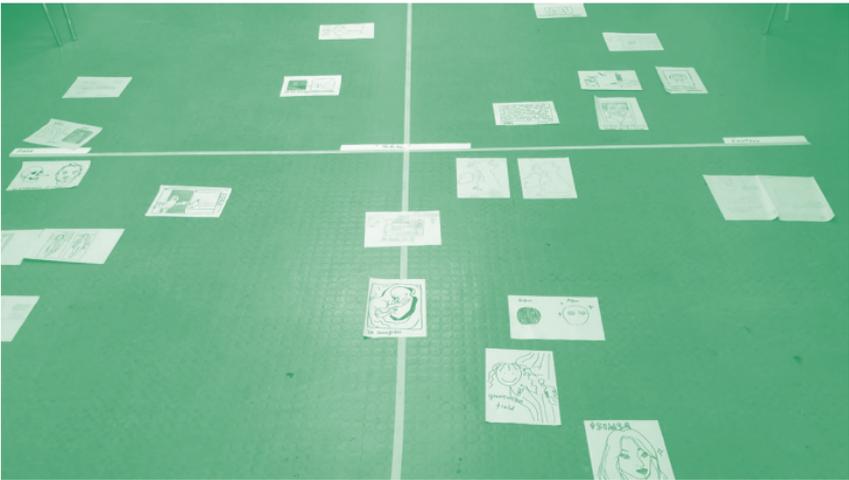
For the 2020 edition, the prompt was inspired by the phrase 'imagining otherwise'; a phrase which struck us whilst attending the *Papanek Symposium: Real World: Design, Politics, Future* during the Porto Design Biennale, Portugal in September 2019. The phrase emerged within a number of the presentations, with slight variance, designing 'otherwise', enacting 'otherwise', performing 'otherwise', etc. We wondered how and where we could adopt an 'otherwise' approach and imaginary within the framework of the MA GMD programme. How might it help graphic design practitioner-researchers approach considerations of privilege, access, representation, mediation, visibility of practice, histories and futures?

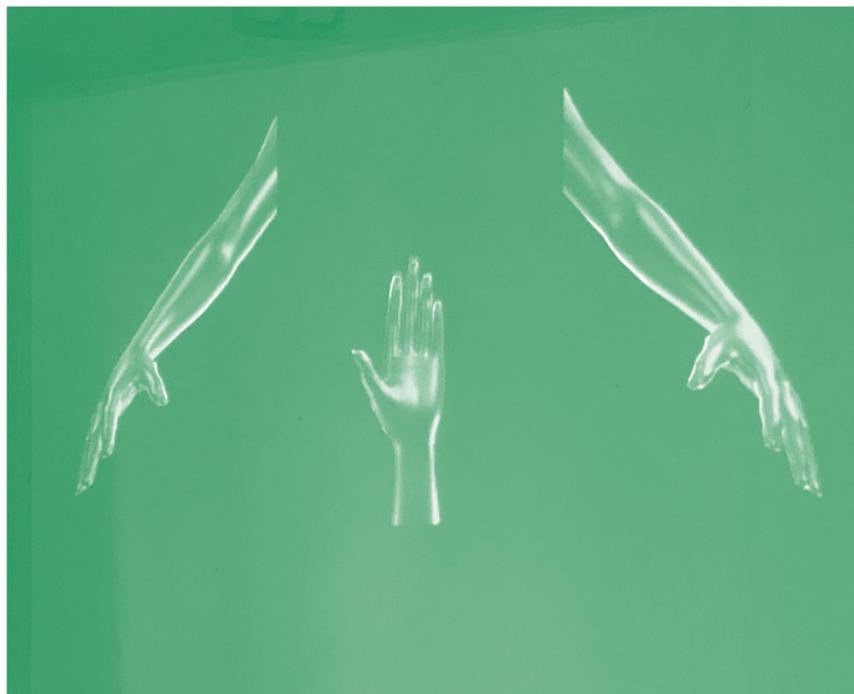
We invited guest practitioners Adapt, Evening Class, Haunted Machines and Paul Elliman to think and act through this provocation employing their own distinct methods, and from their specific contextual standpoints and frameworks:

# What if Our World is Their Heaven?, guided by Haunted Machines

introduced a mixture of critical media and design techniques to identify and speculate on the implications of automated visual culture. Drawing on Carl DiSalvo's notion of using design to 'foster knowledge through engagement' <sup>2</sup>, *What if Our World is Their Heaven?* projects took form as investigative critical media pieces and presented speculative designs as alternatives.

<sup>2</sup> Carl DiSalvo, *Design and The Construction of Publics* (2009)



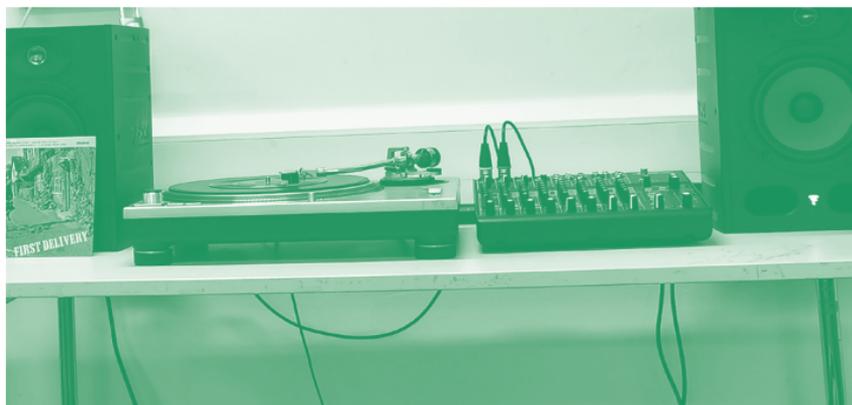


Collaborative Playlist

	Name	Date Modified	Size	Kind
Favourites	_____ (Mum is the Best in the Universe).mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:32	7.6 MB	MP3 audio
iCloud	____.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:32	10.1 MB	MP3 audio
Locations	Hev Yew Getta Laignt Boy_.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	5.8 MB	MP3 audio
Tags	Hot Summer!.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:36	7 MB	MP3 audio
	【中文版】Too soft-hearted!.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:35	10 MB	MP3 audio
	【中文】Tenderness!.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:35	8.1 MB	MP3 audio
	A New Error.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	10.5 MB	MP3 audio
	Adam Lambert - Mad world lyrics.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	5.8 MB	MP3 audio
	Alicia Keys - Jamie T.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	11 MB	MP3 audio
	All That She Wants.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:37	10.1 MB	MP3 audio
	An-Bang Fan - Grandma's Ponghu Bay.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	6 MB	MP3 audio
	Birth of New Life.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	10.7 MB	MP3 audio
	Butterfly.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	6 MB	MP3 audio
	Devider.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	5.6 MB	MP3 audio
	Ecco Homo qui esi Fabu.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	3.4 MB	MP3 audio
	Full moon and Empty Arms.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	6.5 MB	MP3 audio
	Get Sorted!.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	4.9 MB	MP3 audio
	Gloious Year 光輝歲月!.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	8.7 MB	MP3 audio
	Good Wine with Cuffe+ 萬世流芳!.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:34	5.6 MB	MP3 audio
	Here's to Never Growing Up.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	7 MB	MP3 audio
	I Got By in Time.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	4.7 MB	MP3 audio
	I only care about you...mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:35	7.6 MB	MP3 audio
	Let's Sway Twin Dars.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:36	5.1 MB	MP3 audio
	Lov (Sic) Pt. 3 [feat. Shing02].mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	9.9 MB	MP3 audio
	Nirakanta Dharani (The Great Compassion Mantra in Sanskrit).mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	11.1 MB	MP3 audio
	Numb.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	6 MB	MP3 audio
	Open #2.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	6.5 MB	MP3 audio
	Rock 'n' Roll Suicide.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	6 MB	MP3 audio
	Sea Cruise.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:33	5.6 MB	MP3 audio
	Stayin' Alive.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:32	7.4 MB	MP3 audio
	Take Five.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	9.5 MB	MP3 audio
	The Heat.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:35	5.7 MB	MP3 audio
	Theme Song.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	6.1 MB	MP3 audio
	They Don't Care About Us (Brazil Version).mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	8.3 MB	MP3 audio
	Thyngamab0b.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:37	7.6 MB	MP3 audio
	Trust.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:35	14.2 MB	MP3 audio
	We Got.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:37	7.9 MB	MP3 audio
	Yesterday Once More.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:33	7.4 MB	MP3 audio
	Yi Shu Shuo.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:36	11 MB	MP3 audio
	五月天 Mayday 1999!.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:34	7.9 MB	MP3 audio
	宇昂《十个世界在同时发生》MV.mp3	8 Mar 2020 at 15:31	8 MB	MP3 audio

*Quale, Song*, guided by Paul Elliman, intended to raise questions regarding the production of language, and to reconsider communication as a direct feature and function of the body. It set out to remind us that language is reciprocal; the product of a response to something or someone. The workshop considered these values and properties by using song as the productive form. ③

3 Tracks produced in the workshop were published by Innomable Radio station, with thanks to Alexandru Balgiu and the BA Graphic Design students at ENS-BA, Lyon, France for the invitation: <https://www.instagram.com/innommable.radio/>







*Collective Inquiry*, guided by Evening Class led the participants through a series of exercises, excursions and actions concerned with workers' inquiries. Driven by an investigation into conditions in education and work, *Collective Inquiry* set out to alleviate the pressures of navigating precarity and provide insights into prototyping alternatives for practices.





*Climate Conversations*, guided by Adapt, set out to explore the discourse surrounding climate change with a view to developing a range of tools that help (re)position ourselves as communicators, to evolve our own theories, advance and contest the opinions of others and promote successful action on the current climate crisis.



CLIMATE CHANGE  
HITS THE POOR  
HARDEST

### *Haunted Machines*

is a curatorial and research project by Natalie Kane and Tobias Revell, initially exploring stories of myth, magic and monsters in technology and more recently the automated production and dissemination of images. They curate events, festivals and panels, make screencasts and give talks.

### *Paul Elliman*

is a British artist based in London. His work follows language through many of its social and technological guises, in which typography, human voice and bodily gestures emerge as part of a direct correspondence with other visible forms and sounds of the city.

### *Evening Class*

is an experiment in self-organised education active since January 2016. A space where we cultivate common interests, develop research and collectively decide the class's programme. Our programme takes the form of public workshops, talks and debates, reading groups, radio broadcasting, performances, walks, and publishing. Workshop leaders: Alessia Arcuri, Martina Cavalot, Andrew Marsh, Dina Silanteva, Felix Taylor.

### *Adapt*

is a climate organisation, using design, humour and contemporary culture to communicate climate issues in an engaging way. Run by Josie Tucker and Richard Ashton, Adapt works to share knowledge, encourage action and build a community of motivated activists through internally run campaigns and commissioned work.

# Unstable Complexions

## How Long Will I Die

### Before You Remember Me? Riccardo RIGHI <sup>IT</sup>

I've died so many times. My cells, my nails, my teeth have always been craving for change, rejecting the fixity of the body I was born into.

I read the marks on my skin as if they were constellations that could foresee the ways in which I will shape myself. Is my skin red? Or pale? Is it oily? Or dry? Is it bumpy? Or smooth? I am the map to my own territory. I rub a salicylic acid smoothing cleanser into my pores, it permeates the layers of my skin, renewing its surface until it becomes a palimpsest for future inscriptions. \*\* I am synchronised with the genesis of another digital self, I interpret the polygons of my model in Blender. How many are there? Are they smooth? Are they low? I gently massage a Subdivision Surface modifier on the top and only layer of this mesh. I rub it until all the edges are round or flat, and I can finally move to the next step.

It's time for a face mask. I select the proper combination of multi-masking from the instructions of my L'Oreal Paris clay masks collection: Will I go out? Did I eat too much? Am I a man? Did I have a night out? Did I not sleep well? Have I just worked out? These somatic prophecies can only work if I identify the correct mask for each face area. Forehead, nose, cheeks, under eye, chin. My face is a site of action, a surface to be operated onto, into, through. I am the natural history museum of my future self. \*\* I assign coordinates to the skin texture of my 3D model, matching it with the

topology of its surface. I rig ❶ and weight paint ❷ the surface of the model to create action. I assign movement so that the program can reproduce it on its own.

1 Rigging in 3D modelling is the process of binding the mesh, the surface of the model to its bones (segments of the skeleton).

2 Weight Paint is a brush type in Blender that allows you to draw a heat-map connecting the vertices of an object. This map, when it comes to rigging, determines the intensity of an effect in relation to that specific set of vertices.



*Unstable Complexions*, Riccardo RIGHI, 2021

My skin is the product of the action of chemicals that entangle me in a longer chain of capital production. ❸ I apply a hydrating vitamin E toner to balance the pH of my unruly surface.

3 Preciado, P. (23) *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics*, E-flux, 44. Available at: [www.e-flux.com](http://www.e-flux.com)

Following that, I gently rub a Niacinamide 10% + Zinc 1% serum so that I can shrink my pores and lock everything in. ✱ I spread my male\_skin.jpg onto the mesh of my 3D model, making sure to keep deformation at its minimum. ✱ The surface of our body is the result of transactions of power that penetrate through chemical equations and parametric reactions. My skin is the oldest trophy I can display of myself. I am the wunderkammer of my own memorabilia.



*Three masks made by Anna Coleman Ladd for men with facial mutilations. France, 1918. [Photograph] Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, American National Red Cross Collection, [LC-USZ62-137181].*

The surgeon draws lines of intervention onto my skin. These paths for correction guide a precise cut. If the surface of my body is the reflection of a normative system, my only way in is through its breakage. My skin is a boundary, my wounds become a passage. ✱ I cut the surface of my 3D model through multiple seams. I unwrap its lifeless skin so that it can exhibit in a flat state for future topologies. ✱ My body is a political fiction, my pores a point of access.

As Adam ④, as the cartographer to the territory, as the surgeon to their patient, I name myself and my 3D model. I assign a format to unstable shapes. The name is a sign ⑤, and my body is a tabula rasa. The ruins of

is a sign <sup>5</sup>, and my body is a tabula rasa. The ruins of our bodies become signs of a distant passage, remote memories of inscriptions that have been erased, surfaces that have been cut, cells that have died only to be reshaped again. Therefore I ask, how long will I die before you remember me?

4 At the very beginning of the Bible (*Genesis*, 1), God creates day and night by pronouncing their name. Further on, God makes Adam name all the living creatures he created.

5 The Latin expression 'nomen omen' means 'the name is a sign' and derives from Romans' belief that in the name of a person it was written their destiny. Also famously expressed in the form 'Nomina sunt consequentia rerum', 'names are the consequences of things', in Alighieri, D. (1899) *The New Life* [la Vita nuova]. Translated from the Italian by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Available at: [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)

## Guide to Release Souls from Purgatory

LIN Yinuo <sup>CN</sup>

With the rise of social media, the networked ways of practicing religion changed from religion online <sup>1</sup> to online religion. <sup>2</sup> Young cyber communities now express their own thoughts, emotions and desires through spiritual images that are constantly copied, deconstructed and spread. The secularization of religion has made it an entertainment for young people on social networks looking for ways to escape reality.

1 Religion online is a way to categorise and study online environments where information is presented and controlled by traditional organizations's or leaders. (Tsuria, R., Yadlin-Segal, A., Vitullo, A., & Campbell, H. (2017) *Approaches to digital methods in studies of digital religion*. The Communication Review, 20(2), 73-97.

2 Online religion refers to technological innovations and ways of collaborating that create new ways to understand religion through digital spaces. (Tsuria, R., Yadlin-Segal, A., Vitullo, A., & Campbell, H. (2017) *Approaches to digital methods in studies of digital religion*. The Communication Review, 20(2), 73-97.)

## Guide To Release Souls From Purgatory

is a self-help guide that combines Buddhist rituals with contemporary spiritual images on Chinese social media. The guide centers on the idea that ‘Buddha does not help others, but you can help yourself’. Believers of this statement can accumulate merits and virtues to improve their religious cultivation after completing step-by-step rituals.

### Steps of the Guide

Before you begin, choose a Buddha who can save you. You should base your choice on the type of anxiety that you are feeling.



Guide to Release Souls from Purgatory, LIN YINUO, 2020

### Step 1:

Look at the prajna eyes – the eyes of the Buddha – and purify your mind ready to start the journey of transcendence.

### Step 2:

Start your formal spiritual practice and accumulate merits.

### 2.1 Memorial tablet:

write your name on the memorial tablet, recite the mantra silently so that any confusion you are feeling will clear.

### 2.2 Burning incense:

pray to the Buddha, communicate with him.

### 2.3 Zen meditation:

chant sutras while keeping still and in deep meditation.

### Step 3:

Make a magical amulet and dedicate all merits to all sentient beings.

*Guide To Release Souls From Purgatory* draws inspiration from both modern and traditional religious images in an exploration of new visual languages. The project aims to question whether the new Buddhist visual language has the same function as historic sources and, if so, can these new methods still help release souls from purgatory?

Paper offerings are traditional objects for prayers and rituals in China. They are commonly used in various traditional festivals and religious ceremonies, such as the Qingming Festival and Ghost Festival. These objects originated from ancient religious rituals and gradually became a decorative art for celebrations during festivals. The kind of paper offerings discussed here mainly refer to those associated with folk funerals and ritual activities. Their purpose is to invoke the blessings of the gods and ancestors, conveying condolences and remembrance of the deceased at funerals. They are believed to be an important material medium for communication with ghosts and gods, usually through burning the offering itself.

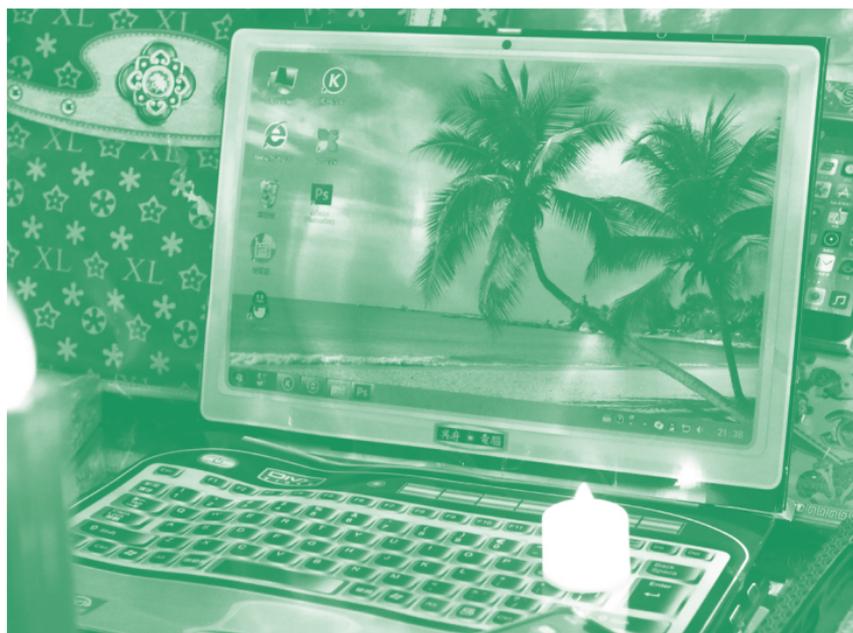
In recent years, the types of paper offerings have become more diverse, moving away from religious characters to imitations of real life material objects.

C. Fred Blake <sup>1</sup> points out that the complex system

<sup>1</sup> Blake, C. F. (2011) *Burning Money: The Material Spirit of the Chinese Lifeworld*. University of Hawaii Press.

of contemporary paper offerings has led to an excessive development

of forms of offerings that are vivid imitations of objects that embody changing fashions and desires held by the deceased. In the past decade, paper replicas of money and goods have experienced a dramatic transformation. In particular, replicas of consumer goods that are popular in Western countries have superseded imitations of traditional objects, and traditional hand-made goods have been replaced by mass-produced printed products. The tribute to ancestors is expressed through the burning of current and well-known brands, such as Gucci bags, Prada shoes, Apple devices, and even life-size cars and villas. Exotic offerings (lìng lèi jī pǐn) is the label used by mass media to describe such



*Commodity Offerings*, JIANG Si, 2020

fashionable items that might violate the original function of paper offerings.

Despite some questioning the authenticity of modern paper offerings, they have still changed many people's traditional habits and have been widely accepted by the market. Looking at the sales charts of paper offerings on Taobao – an online shopping site – it is clear that the popular new style of offerings (mah-jong tables/Villas/luxury items) reflects the desire and pursuit for entertainment and a material life of a contemporary Chinese person. Blake also talks about modernity and value production becoming associated with the imitation of symbols, creating an illusory yet reality-based simulations of the real world. In the local Chinese context, the imagined afterlife contained in the culture of paper offerings reflects reality. These objects offered to the deceased can also be seen as revealing of people's conscious values: the commodified symbolism of

modern paper offerings demonstrates the desire to achieve a happy life through material wealth possessions. Consumer culture has gradually replaced more traditional spiritual values. It has impacted the purpose of rituals: from reverence for the gods and ancestors' remembrance to display of one's wealth and material accomplishments. As Tong 2 points out, 'these items

2 Evans, G., & Tam, M. (2013) *Hong Kong: Anthropological Essays on a Chinese Metropolis*. Routledge.

are put on display and burned in open spaces, in full view of the public, demonstrating the virtue of the family in offering elaborate sacrifices, and thereby enhancing their social status.'



Commodity Offerings, JIANG Si, 2020

# Practice Abstract: A Book About a Book (of Things Unseen)

WANG Lanwenyu <sup>CN</sup>

*A Book About a Book (of Things Unseen)* is a project that explores how the analysis of metaphors contributes to our knowledge of political rhetoric, enabling us to understand how world views are communicated persuasively through graphic design. A key example of such a metaphor is the architectural façade.

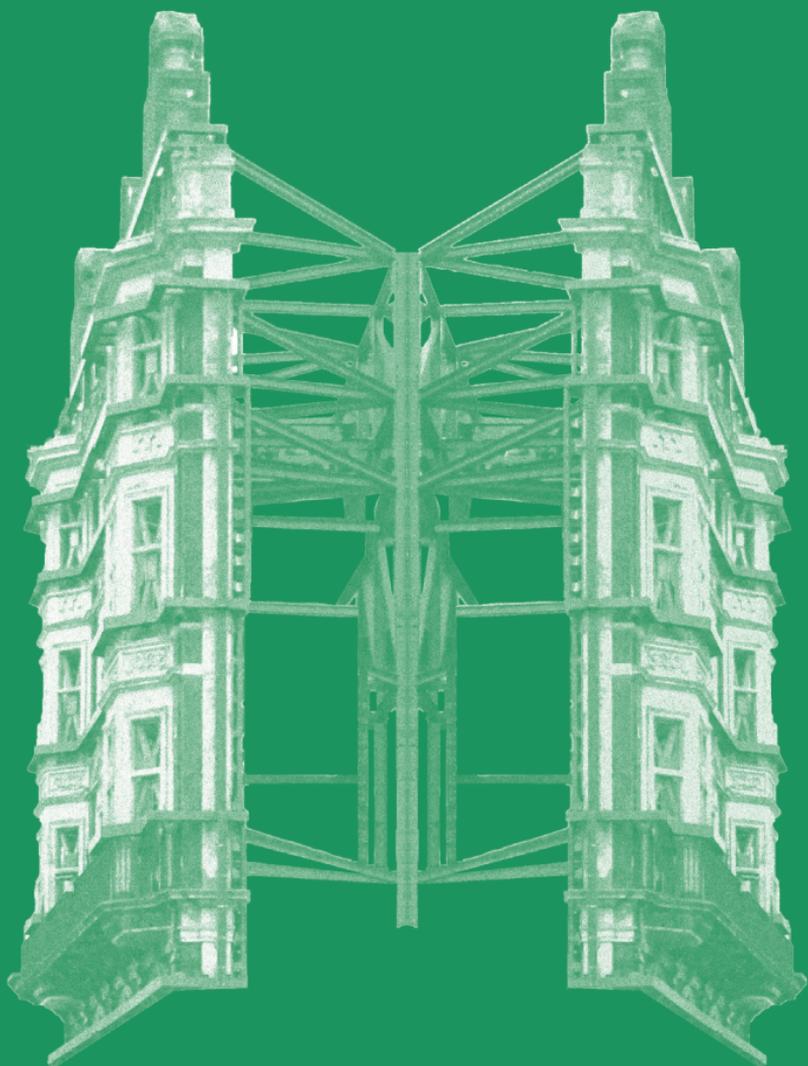
A façade can be defined as a false, superficial, or artificial effect on the front of a building. It can also be used in a metaphorical sense, meaning something that hides and deceives. Throughout history, façade has passed down into common lore, to discuss a falsehood, whether in an architectural or metaphorical context.

In a broad sense, we can say that architecture has always been inseparable from politics. Foreign politics experts often refer to the global order that emerged after World War II, for example, as an ‘architecture’. <sup>1</sup>

The wall as a façade, is a metonym for architecture as a whole, investing it with political and cultural meaning. These

structures are metaphors that participate in our relationship between identity and dwelling, separating the external world and internal space.

1 In her farewell speech as US secretary of state, Hillary Clinton said, ‘We need a new architecture for this new world ... [an architecture] more Frank Gehry than formal Greek’ (Buckup, 2019).



Mayfair, WANG Lanwenyu, Photograph, 2020.



*A Book About a Book (of Things Unseen)*, WANG Lanwenyu, Publication, 2020.

## Places to Play: Begin With the Jiefang North Park

ZHAI Yutong<sup>CN</sup>

Me: *I remember there was an elephant slide here.*

Mom: *There was.*

Me: *It was grey, made of stone, outdated, very high, and a bit scary to slide down. Was there really such a slide here?*

Mom: *Of course there was. I used to take you there.*

Me: *But it was demolished later.*

Me: *Around 2007, I used to practice the sword with my mentor in the park. I also used to play Tai Chi and jianzi with you in this park, right?*

Grandma: *I still exercise in the park, but is not as crowded as it used to be.*

Me: *In those days, there was a court and a children's slide. I liked the swings the most, and no one else could swing as high as me.*

Grandma: *But now it's all been taken down.*

The Jiefang North Park, a garden square originally built by the British colonists in the centre of Tianjin, over the centuries has been transformed into a public recreational area frequented daily by local residents. My memories of Jiefang North Park have always been both vague and clear. I clearly remember it being rebuilt twice. The first time, I lost the elephant slide. And the second time, I lost the swings, the sports fields and the wisteria promenade. At the same time, I can't remember what the slides and swings looked

like. I tried to find some photos, but there are only a few. Who would take pictures of the park just outside their home? At that time, film rolls were expensive, so we cherished every single photograph. We always forgot to take a photo of this park, so each one that I can find now is invaluable.



The Jiefang North Park, Zhai Yutong, 2007. My grandmother and I were standing in front of the wisteria corridor to celebrate the snow.

The Jiefang North Park used to be very lively in my memory, and it was always full of people in the mornings and evenings. Some of them were running, some were exercising or practising the swords, while others were playing jianzi. After ten years, when I came back to see the park, I realised it had become unrecognisable to me. Large flower blocks and lawns covered the park, and two rows of benches were placed facing each other, providing a nice place for pedestrians to rest. Yet not many people were stopping. This park has become an ordinary park, after all.



The Jiefang North Park, ZHAI Yutong, 2020

I saw a few people from a distance, who were playing jianzi in a circle. This used to be one of my favourite morning activities thirteen years ago. So I decided to take a couple of photos of them. When I found the courage to talk to them, I was recognised by one of the older people. She was one of my grandma's friends.

Me: *There aren't as many jianzi players here as there were before, right?*

Granny Y: *Yeah, there are not as many people, and the weather is cold, so even fewer came to play. I haven't seen you for so many years, is your grandma well? Why doesn't she come here any more?*

Me: *She's fine, thank you. She will come here and do some exercises in the*

*afternoons. Also, I noticed that many facilities have been removed, has it affected anyone's activities?*

Granny Y: *Indeed, there are fewer people than before. But we weren't affected, we still play here every day. The tai chi players are still over there as usual. You're in your twenties now, right? Where do you study?*

I found the park was a bit different from what I thought it would be. Despite the numerous changes, people still go there every day. They have adapted and re-occupied the park, using the little open space left to continue their hobbies. Children have also found places to play football in some corners, and the narrow space has actually made their games more challenging. The park has changed, but it is still lively. People living in the city are capable of improving public spaces. We know what we need, we know our city, and we can do something for it.



The Jiefang North Park, ZHAI Yutong, 2020

# Practice Abstract: Urbanized Living

FANG Yishuang<sup>CN</sup>

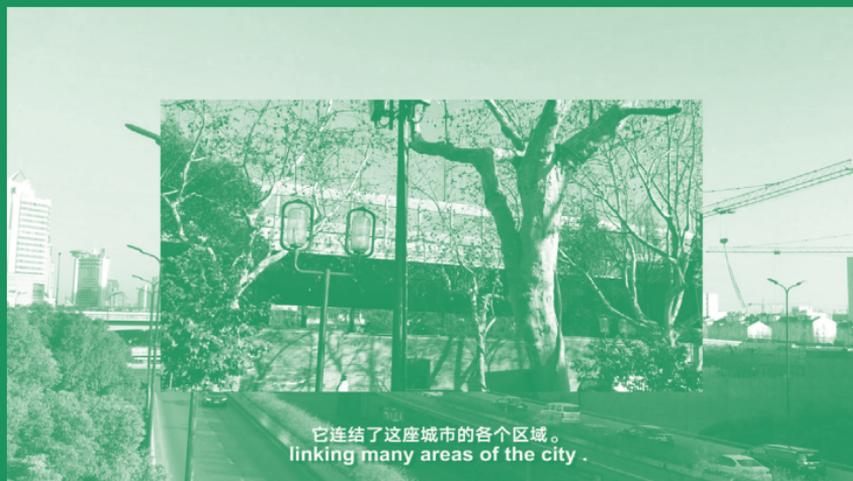
This project began with the question of ‘How can visual language intervene in public space in the face of exclusionary design and contribute to the debate of spatial justice in the city?’ Many of today’s urban plans are based around functionalist strategies. I initiated an investigation into the relationship between urban facilities and residents.

Walking through the city, the streets are filled with infrastructure that restrict people’s movement. The artist Nils Norman archives such facilities and defines them as exclusionary design. These objects come in many forms such as: street furniture, barricades, ‘anti’ behavioural devices, surface technologies and checkpoints that proliferate in and between cities.

Kevin Lynch <sup>1</sup> pointed out that the zoning of urban space and the labelling of various details within street areas are important elements in understanding the city and for its inhabitants. Richard Sennett, an urban sociologist whose first book, *The Use of Disorder*, pointed out that an overly ordered environment stifles personal development and that those who live in such a setting end up with an overly rigid world view, and an inadequate political consciousness.

We must face the reality that our cities are not accommodating the marginalised residents needs to become aware of and even participate in the transformation of urban space. I believe cities should not become more restrictive, but more inclusive.

<sup>1</sup> Sennett,R (1992) *The Use of Disorder*, W. W. Norton & Company.



*Urbanized Living, FANG Yishuang, 2020*

# I Am Becoming My Room and My Room Is Becoming Me

Alex KIM<sup>KR</sup>

## Zoom Group Chat

### From Me to Everyone:

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we communicate and socialise with people by forcing them off the roads and into their rooms.

Video calls have become the new normal for communicating, learning, working and even participating in events.

The screen has become the immediate space of activity, communication and socialising. Backdrops of rooms are brought together in a grid, creating the landscape of that similar to apartment buildings with windows next to each other.

### From Me to Everyone:

The collective screen, or the Zoom space, is a building. These buildings are temporarily 'borrowed' by bringing together rooms and 'returned' after all activities end.

The Zoom space is becoming a place in which memories are formed through the structure of black lines dividing the fixed wallpaper of the rooms.

Zoom is an architecture.  
It is a structure within the screen.

## From Me to Everyone:

The room becomes the backdrop,  
the stage for a presentation.  
We look into the rooms of others  
and others look into our rooms.

We start to construct images of the other people and  
question them when their backdrop changes or when  
they change an element of their room.

## From Me to Everyone:

'Where is the room that I'm used to? What happened?'



*I Am Becoming My Room And My Room Is Becoming Me,*  
Alex KIM, 2020

## From Me to Everyone:

We start to merge into our own rooms  
and our own rooms start to merge with us.  
We start to become our own images.  
We are becoming wallpapers, flattened  
into the screen.

I am becoming my room and my room is becoming me.

---

To: Everyone

Type message here...



Mukbang online video broadcasts in the TikTok

The composition of the mukbang is straightforward: a person sitting in front of a large amount of food with a microphone and a camera. Mukbang is a digital dining table, where a performer communicates with viewers in real-time via live video stream while eating a meal. In a live chat room, the audience can post comments for the performer and talk with other viewers.

In the mid-20th century, families regularly gathered around the table to eat. However, today, 'with the reduction of family diet due to divorce, old age and social changes', more and more people live alone. <sup>①</sup>

For the younger generations who are already suffering from loneliness, mukbang videos serve as a

dining partner. Watching these videos is just another part of their daily lives providing comforting emotions

1 Kircaburun, K., Harris, A., Calado, F. et al. (2020) *The Psychology of Mukbang Watching: A Scoping Review of the Academic and Non-academic Literature*. Int J Ment Health Addiction.

through virtual connections. Part of mukbang's popularity is the idea that if a viewer can establish a relationship with the performers, they can alleviate their loneliness through a simulated immersive experience.

Psychologists Baumeister and Leary examined the consequences of a lack of 'belonging' and determined two criteria for classification. The first is frequent and pleasant interactions. The second are interactions based on 'stable and lasting emotional care for each other'. ② Eating is considered a social behaviour as it

2 Baumeister, R. Leary, M. (1995) *The need to belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation*. American Psychological Association.

is a communal activity. The food, entertainment and interactive nature of mukbang help viewers

pursue intimacy and obtain emotional comfort through social interactions with performers. Hence, mukbang helps ease the discomfort of lonely people by chatting while eating.



Urban development result in the rise of single-person households

The bullet screen publicly overlays viewer's comments with the performer's original video. The commenters have a familiar tone, like messages from a friend, and this forms a kind of companionship on social media. ③

The bullet screen together with virtual gifts are used as feedback for the performers. Sending presents is a way to attract the performer's attention or to alter their behaviours, and usually take the form of a platform-specific digital currency. This cyber-money can then be withdrawn as real cash (with the host platform taking a cut, too). ④ The viewers must buy these virtual gifts from the hosting company.

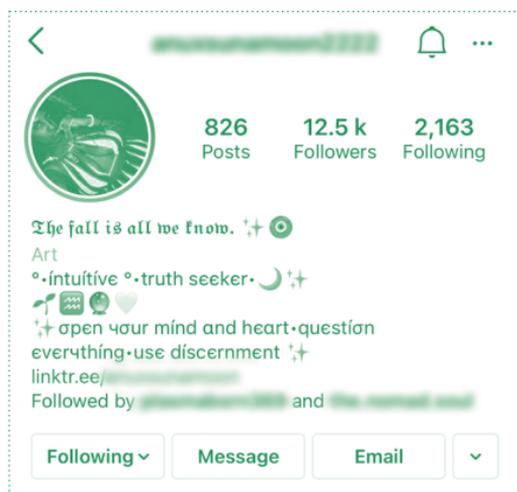
3 Lab,T. (2014) *What is "Bullet screen" And Why is it So popular In China?*

4 Ji-won, C. (2019) *Massive donation to female streamer stirs up internet in Korea.*

The mukbang brings a sense of companionship to the audience. People can share and experience different cultures through food. Therefore, through bullet screens and virtual gifts, the reactions and feedback from mukbang viewers mirror both virtual and real social interactions. As the screen has become an integral part of our daily lives, mukbang has become a symbol of connection and interaction, and another way of communicating.

# Real Eyes Realise Real Lies: A Guide To Spotting Instagram's Conspiracy Content Creators

Rhys ATKINSON <sup>UK</sup>



An example of a typical Conspiranaut Instagram account, this user has a medium-sized following. The number of followers can vary between the low hundreds to a hundred thousand.

The everyday use of social media has made misinformation a more prevalent issue than ever. Entire communities are forming around esoteric beliefs in antivaccine science, mind control devices and QAnon fairytales of child sacrifice. <sup>1</sup> However, conspiracy theories are not fixed narratives: they are continually shifting, restructuring and evolving. They are a journey, not a destination. It is this notion of travel that has led to the term conspiranaut, which replaces the outdated label of a conspiracy theorist.

<sup>1</sup> QAnon is an American conspiratorial movement that originated on 4Chan/8Chan and radicalised thousands of individuals through social media.

While there is no official count of the number of conspiranauts on Instagram, the Institute of Conspiranaut Research estimates there are hundreds of thousands. Every Instagram account has a customisable bio sec-

tion, which can be used to locate conspiranauts in the wild. This is because there is a prevailing aesthetic associated with Conspiracy Content Creators. To find them, you will need to look out for particular linguistic tendencies, typographic selections and emoji signifiers.

## 01. The Truth

Certain Instagram accounts will refer to themselves as Truthseekers or otherwise claim that they are exposing the truth. They are adamant that they are the only individuals capable of critical thinking. They will regularly tell you not to believe what they post, and that they want you to research it for yourself.

## 02. Light Workers

These individuals believe that they exist on or can see higher-dimensional planes, and that they are part of a small portion of society that is enlightened and awakened. Light Workers insist that the masses are programmed by the Matrix, following the media like sheep.

## 03. Backup Accounts

Conspiracy content creation is a dangerous game. It is easy for accounts to be zuckered <sup>2</sup> or censored. More experienced conspiranauts will link you to their concurrent backup account(s). This way, even if their main account is shut down, they never truly lose their followers.

<sup>2</sup> The term zuckered is slang for being reported or having your account banned; its etymology stems from Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook.

## 04. Translated Typography

In order to stand out from the masses, conspiranauts often replace Latin characters with similarly shaped glyphs from scripts such as Arabic, Hebrew and Cyrillic. This may be for aesthetic reasons with the hope of avoiding word-recognition algorithms.

## 05. Emoji Signifiers

Emojis have always had multiple, transient meanings, similar to Jacques Derrida's idea of 'freeplay' signifiers. Emojis play a significant role in helping conspiranauts identify one another. Some commonly used emojis and their intended signals are:



used to indicate the ability to see through 'mainstream lies'



used to represent research – usually via Youtube or Google



used to express a state of enlightenment or awakening



used to denote breaking free from 'the system' and are on a journey to depths of knowledge and conspiracies

Hopefully, this guide will help you navigate the hinterlands of Instagram and avoid being drawn into the world of conspiracies. If you do encounter a Conspiranaut, be sure to report them and possibly get them zuckered.

This guide was compiled by  
Rhys ATKINSON  
Founder & Director  
The Institute for Conspiranaut Research

# White Supremacy & Epistemic Colonialism in Design Discourse, Scholarship, & Practice: a Basic Primer (thread\*)

- #1. Historically, design scholarship, like design practice outside of the academy, has upheld white supremacy and epistemic colonialism. This is true of many of the 'seminal' texts one often finds being cited by designers to this day.
- #2. White supremacy is both of, and exceeds, racism. The modern conception of race was invented through the colonisation of the Americas, but white supremacy is not just predicated on race.
- #3. It is the specific way in which race manifests and divides the world into whites and nonwhites and constructs the non-white racial Other as inherently inferior.
- #4. Whiteness and white supremacy work even when one is not being explicitly racist, which is intentional, explicit, and targeted harmful behaviour and speech towards non-whites.
- #5. White supremacy is embedded in the systems and infrastructures, and constitutive of the violence of everyday life in the Global North, and in its dominance over the South.
- #6. White supremacy also manifests in texts, in discourses, and in everyday speech and action. Yes, it has been and is a part of the scholarship that many prominent designers and design scholars have produced over entire careers.

- #7. Many aspects of theory, principles, methods, assumptions about the world and people that inform 'design thinking' today are rooted in whiteness and white supremacy.
- #8. For example, not many people know that many of the seminal texts in design research coming from the Design Methods Movement (DMM) were deeply orientalist.
- #9. In how they relied on defining the field along very explicit distinctions between 'modern', Western societies that had developed 'design' against 'traditional' societies that practised 'craft'.
- #10. Some of the DMM scholars are read as valorising or admiring non-European societies. This is a ruse for anyone who has engaged substantively with postcolonial or decolonial literature.
- #11. White supremacy constructs the non-white other as 'exotic', 'authentic', 'mysteriously productive' etc. while at the same time asserting itself as the non-mystical, 'rational' self.
- #12. This romanticisation of the inaccessible racial Other provides a veneer for white scholars to use the Other as a tabula rasa onto which they can project their conceptions of the world and interpret the Other on their own terms.

- #13. If you've read Edward Said, you will recognise this move as orientalism at work through knowledge production.
- #14. Similarly, the repeated claims, across many texts on 'fundamental' design principles, about how 'universal' design principles, theories, and methods are, and the assumption that all human communities are essentially the same.
- #15. This is something that underpins much of the claims for design thinking made by major design agencies, consultancies, think tanks and public figures for decades now, especially for projects done in the Global South.
- #16. More on the impact of this propagation later. But for now, I'm just going to point out that 'universalism' is white, Eurocentric logic playing through all the way.
- #17. There is a wealth of literature across many fields and disciplines that these myths of universality, and you don't even need to go very deep into critical cultural studies.
- #18. Just read anthropological or historical accounts that use clear empirical evidence to show that through history, there were and are no universals (at most, commonalities) of human experience or interaction, but plural experiences, perspectives, and being.
- #19. Colonisation, globalisation and 'development' (which design has played a large role in over the last century), have rendered many of these different ways of being in the world and being in relation to artifice extinct or endangered;

- #20. White supremacy and colonialism have attempted to 'flatten' and homogenise the world, partly precisely through claims to universalism, claims that have also supported neo-liberal development and modernisation.
- #21. Any design text that doesn't first contextualise and render specific where it is speaking from, and who for, and makes claims that can be read as universal, is upholding white supremacy.
- #22. This includes works that base themselves on assumptions of human 'nature' (whatever that is) or human psychology as being universal. There might be commensurabilities, but there are no universals.
- #23. More (recent) examples: the very common practice I see these days in design of not acknowledging or referencing prior work by non-whites, women, or other marginal groups, in work that talks about issues relating to ethics, social justice, empowerment, and now, decolonisation.
- #24. This is all lip service and bullshit if you haven't done your homework, haven't made efforts to educate yourself, haven't committed to critical reflexivity, are not making actual, sustained, continuous efforts to learn, check yourself, and grow.
- #25. I've seen a lot of people at present talking about designing for social justice, empowerment, decolonisation etc. today, who were uncritically selling 'design thinking' and supporting neoliberalism, capitalism, solutionism, etc. yesterday.

- #26. What reason is there to trust someone if they spent their career preaching one set of discourses about design and now use another to further their own career because decolonisation is now in vogue (this applies to non-whites too)?
- #27. You need to earn trust from those who were doing the work before you.
- #28. Citing and referencing people who have done the work before is one way to do this. Promoting them instead of yourself and giving them a platform and a voice is another. Not doing so is silencing them and erasing their work, which is upholding white supremacy.
- #29. White supremacy upholds whiteness, but another dimension to how it operates, especially globally and particularly through discourses, practices and projects when white designers and academics go to other countries to preach, is epistemic colonisation.
- #30. Epistemic colonialism, which is more complex and nuanced than how I'm reducing it here (as with the above), is the colonisation of thought and knowledge itself; conditioning (non-white) people to believe the assumptions, beliefs and logics, on which white supremacy is founded.
- #31. White people going to parts of Asia, for instance, to teach 'design thinking', with all of its problems, teaching American and European ways of doing things without contextualising them in relation to local sites, and prescribing principles, methods etc. is modern-day colonialism.

- #32. If you are not situating your claims in their original context and against local contexts, acknowledging the work that local designers and educators have done and are doing in their countries and citing or supporting them.
- #33. And going there to preach and propagate, instead of going there to listen, learn, and support, you are engaging in epistemic colonisation, you are upholding white supremacy.
- #34. Texts do this too, especially in this age, where texts often flow from one part of the world to another in the blink of an eye. Many of these texts are taken up by people uncritically around the world, leading to the colonial worship of the 'white designer'.
- #35. I have personally seen, in my home country, the damage that foreign design consultancies have done with their shallow versions of design thinking, as well as the disproportionate impact that 'seminal' design texts have had.
- #36. Stymying original growth and thought and erasing decades of local work. 'White saviour' complexes are endemic in South Asia. White designers and their coloured accomplices are invited to give keynotes while local scholars and designers are ignored.
- #37. Foreign design degrees from Anglo European universities and design programs are valued more than local ones. Knowledge coming from Europe and North America written by white designers is more 'true'. I can go on about this.

- #38. A new generation of design scholars, widely and deeply read, very critical of colonialism and white supremacy in all its forms, is now emerging around the world. These scholars represent a hope for a better future for the field.
- #39. We need to hold the white history of design accountable and place it in its proper place, as being of a specific time, as the views of a specific perspective coming from a specific civilisation that enjoys dominance today.
- #40. This means dismantling and revealing the ways in which Anglo-European logics, assumptions, and concepts have shaped and moulded design practice and theory into what it is today.
- #41. This will necessarily mean decentering and questioning many people considered to be hugely important and influential figures in design canons, many of whom are still alive today.
- #42. They don't have to go, they don't have to be 'cancelled', but the cult of personality worship needs to end. Their work has to be known as limited and fallible, problematic in many ways,
- #43. And the negative things it has wrought acknowledged in addition to the positive things it has brought into the world.
- #44. If we do not do this nothing in this field will change. We cannot begin to decolonise knowledge production and practice in design without taking measures that are harsh, necessary, and uncompromising.

#45. Everything I have laid out above, including the definitions of white supremacy, racism, and coloniality I have outlined, are bare basic – there is little nuance in the space of a tweet. They are not exhaustive. But they are a few points I wanted to make to get people thinking.

#46. I wish I could enshrine this for everyone who comes: Go do the work. For and on yourself before others. Find ways to do it. Do it constantly. Be vigilant and critical always.

\*This text is an expanded and edited version of a thread originally posted on Twitter.





Once we have crossed the border, we gaze at the hierarchical orientation of design practices and the dominant axis of direction that guides us through them. We wonder, how can we re-imagine the dynamics of power that constitute the design

canon?

Can we design alternative cartographies of practices? This last thematic section opens up to multiple voices with the aim of generating new lines of inquiry. Instead of accepting and following the line drawn by the canon, we

tilt

this constructed axis to speculate and propose fragments for different ways of seeing and thinking. These contributions investigate climate change, reappropriation, speculative processes, personal narrations and the act of 'queering' as means to resist normative ways of producing knowledge and to imagine alternatives.



I am interested in knowing, what is your type? Are you one of those types that denies climate change exists? Or are you more the type that denies that humans are the cause of climate change?

Since I began researching this topic, my fascination has been directed towards the 45th President of the United States of America, Donald Trump, and his tweets about climate change.

3 Twitter.com, 2013.  
Twitter. Available at: <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/408977616926830592>  
Accessed: 1/12/2020.

Specifically where he tweets the following:

'Ice storm rolls from Texas to Tennessee - I'm in Los Angeles and it's freezing. Global warming is a total, and very expensive, hoax!'  
– Donald J. Trump  
(@realDonaldTrump)  
6th December 2013 🇺🇸

False claims tweeted by the 45th president are only one contributing element to this current culture of ignorance. Climate misinformation in general is also a catalyst behind the climate denial movement.

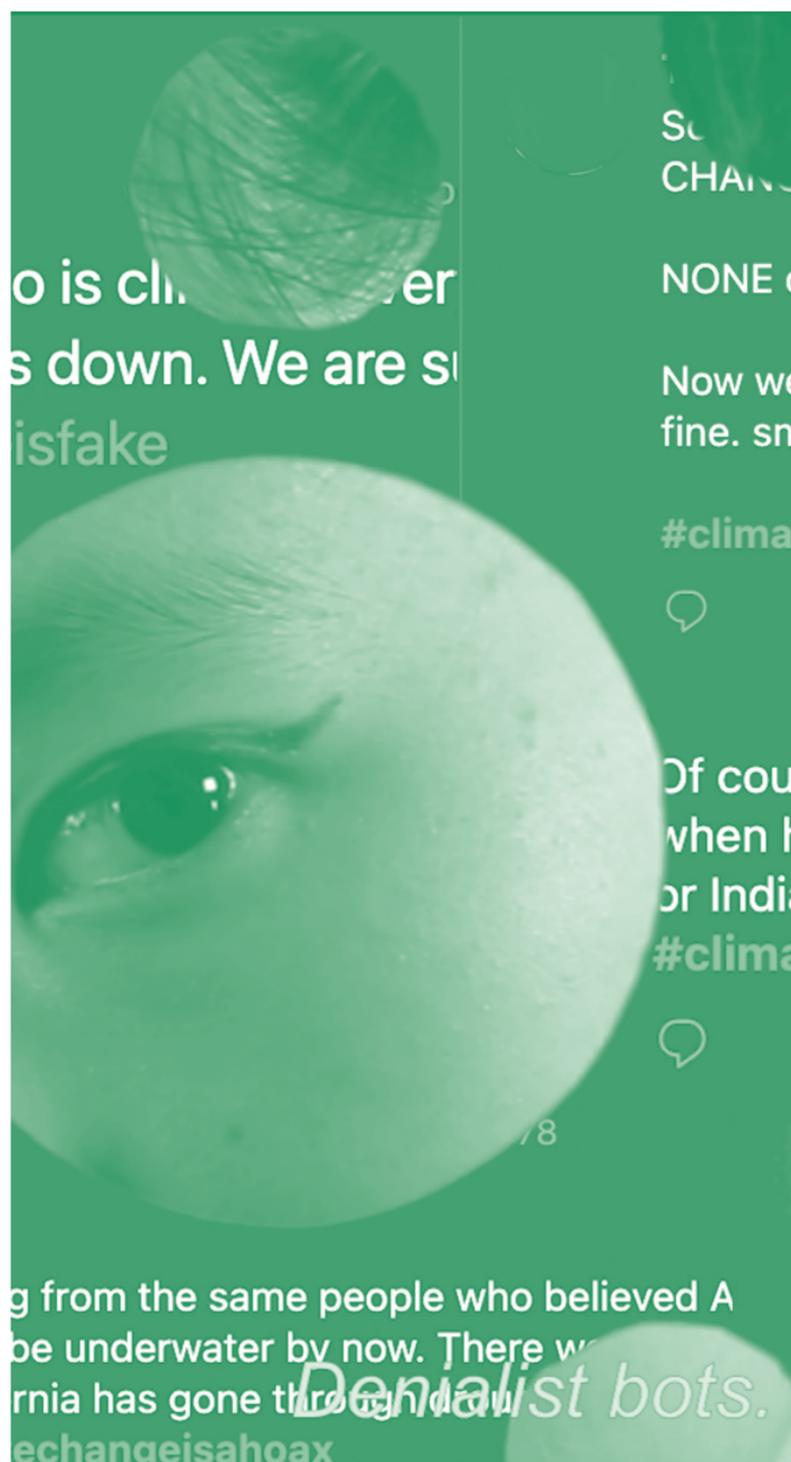
With technological advancements, there will undoubtedly be more opportunities to disseminate falsehoods to larger groups of people. Climate denial and misinformation belong to one of many realms of ignorance that saturate and define our world. It is also crucial to question the impact of the misinformation that you and others spread at a societal level, and examine how democratic societies can become vulnerable to climate misinformation. Eventually people may stop believing in science altogether and/or the trust in the government could be broken, the results of which would deeply impact the well-being of our society.

But if we look beyond what seems evident, your ignorance can also be a resource: science needs climate ignorance to evolve. Once climate ignorance is studied and understood it can shed light on new perspectives and new ways to raise climate literacy.

We are not standing quiet anymore; we are cutting through the noise. You have been manipulating the climate game for long enough. I would urge you to abandon your witless theories and engage with the obvious. It's not too late.

So on the grounds of the climate,  
please let's make ignorance great again.

Sincerely,  
Rita BUIÇA  
(Graphic designer,  
climate enthusiast  
and eternal ignorance seeker)



# Shanzhai Toys as a Tool for Resistance

XU Junfei<sup>CN</sup>

Nowadays, consumer society has created highly differentiated social classes, with each class having its own disparate demands. However, brand culture has increasingly become mainstream culture, even though it can not meet all the needs of each social group. This specific issue has given rise to the need for equal and convenient access to particular goods or technology that would otherwise not be available to members of particular social classes. In 2008, the term Shanzhai (山寨) became prevalent in China and Shanzhai products spread to all areas of life. The contemporary use of the term Shanzhai, (which, in Chinese literally means ‘mountain fortress’) usually encompasses counterfeit, imitation, or parody products and the subculture that surrounds them. ❶

1 Landsberger, S. (2012) 2.5 Shan-zhai=Creativity, Creativity=Shanzhai. Boredom, Shanzhai, and Digitisation in the Time of Creative China. 34, 217.



Shanzhai Toys as a Tool for Resistance,  
website, XU Junfei, 2020

As the popularity of Shanzhai has increased, so have its detractors. Many people believe that Shanzhai hinders China's modernisation and economic development. While the reliability and quality of some of the products is questionable, the innovativeness of Shanzhai is undeniable. These products often create an entirely new object by borrowing, imitating and combining recognisable branded goods. Also, they add new functions according to the needs of consumers in lower socioeconomic groups. To some, Shanzhai represents a vital force in the promotion of technology and innovation. Shanzhai culture can be seen as a rebellion against cultural monopoly and bureaucracy. Working-class consumers use it to fight for freedom of expression, and freedom of speech. ②

2 Hu, J. (2009) *Interpretation upon "Shanzhai" Culture in Contemporary China* (in Chinese). Hundred schools in arts (02), 53-57. (胡静. (2009) "山寨现象" 的社会学探析. 出国与就业: 就业教育 (21), 61-62.)

When people buy Shanzhai toys, they buy visual symbols that establish status. At the same time, Shanzhai toy manufacturers take authentic images from cartoons and tweak the facial features or even the overall appearance, transforming them into an entirely new toy.

These visual differences become the unique language and expression of consumers from lower socioeconomic groups. They use these objects as expressions of their own individuality. However, this visible difference also shows the inequality between social classes. Therefore, the unique visual language of Shanzhai toys has become a tool of resistance.

① Shanzhai Toys as a Tool for Resistances

② The Complete Guide of Shanzhai Toys

③ Create Your Own Shanzhai Toys!

④ (Save Your Shanzhai Toy)

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# Practice Abstract: Dystopia Prophecy

LIN Tzuyu <sup>TW</sup>

‘The visibility of an act of resistance is one of the most important aims of social movements.’ <sup>1</sup> *Dystopia Prophecy* is a speculative design project reflecting on Taiwan’s street protests, embracing a concept put forward by Mitrović and Šuran <sup>2</sup>

that a probable future can design variable presents. According to Wasko, Teigland, Leidner, and Jarvenpaa <sup>3</sup>, the virtual world has influenced many parts of society and will be instrumental to the continued development of technology. The visualisations of potential social movements in this project are inspired by the idea, in my lifetime, we will encounter the true age of virtual reality.

<sup>1</sup> Ibrahim, Y. (2009) *The art of shoe-throwing: shoes as a symbol of protest and popular imagination*. Media, War & Conflict, August 2009, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 213-226.

<sup>2</sup> Mitrović, I. Šuran, O. (2016) *Speculative-Post-Design Practice or New Utopia?* Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia & Croatian Designers Association.

<sup>3</sup> Wasko, M., Teigland, R., Leidner, D., Jarvenpaa, S. (2011) *Stepping Into the Internet: New Ventures in Virtual Worlds*. MIS Quarterly, September 2011, Vol. 35, No. 3, pp. 645-652.

Through performing various narratives, *Dystopia Prophecy* create spaces that stage protests. Derived from Harrison, Haruvy, Rutström <sup>4</sup>, users can immerse themselves in a virtual experience when a space is convincingly ‘real’, and the virtual interactions govern their perception. Namely, people can be persuaded or influenced by virtual encounters.

<sup>4</sup> Wasko, M., Teigland, R., Leidner, D., Jarvenpaa, S. (2011) *Stepping into the Internet: New Ventures in Virtual Worlds*. MIS Quarterly, September 2011, Vol. 35, No. 3, pp. 645-652.

The imagery featured in *A Weather Forecast In 2050* and *Nuclear Apocalypse* are respectively based on issues of global warming and anti-nuclear power, which have been controversial issues in Taiwan since the start of the 21st century. As technology will give activists new methods of protest, the virtual world may create new spaces. We will need to question what protests can be in the future and how they can be conducted in the virtual world.

*Nuclear Apocalypse*, Video Still, LIN Tzuyu, 2020





In the K-pop entertainment industry, the female idol's body is packaged and objectified as a perfect production to satisfy the public's desire. Many female idols are subjected to strict, high standards around appearance. The conceptualised characters and performances are designed to appeal to the male gaze and female spectatorship. Hence, it could be stated that the contradictory and hybrid visual figure adopted by the K-pop female idol is an objectification, that seems to run much deeper than their male counterparts.

The actual figure of the hybrid and semi-artificial female idol has become a fictitious digital image, set in the future and thus changing the new structure of K-pop's entertainment industry. Korean SM Entertainment company has collaborated with the artificial intelligence company ObEN to create a digital copy of the real idol. ❶ The digital replica of the idol offers a version of the female body as an immaterial substance, this reproduces the physical idol's body adding an additional fascination to it. An entirely artificial, technologically produced body.

1 SM Entertainment has established Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology agency AI Stars Limited with startup ObEN to bring new forms of content to fans. They are teaming up to create virtual AI models of celebrities. According to ObEN, their AI technology "quickly constructs a person's virtual voice, image and personality to create a full-stack virtual celebrity that looks, sounds and behaves like its human counterpart."

*Copy Iris* decodes the image of objectification and embodiment of the female K-pop idol to address their identity, speculating on the real idols and their digital copies that exist simultaneously in the future entertainment industry. These works address the consistency between the identities of K-pop idols and the digital copies. The promotional film of *Copy Iris* assumes the perspective of a K-pop



idol, using a marketing pitch to discuss their monetary value and identity crisis. *Copy Iris* opens up discussions about what impact virtual identity may have in the future of the entertainment industry.

What will happen when a string of digital code no longer just a tool for simulating the work of a real person, or used to create a character attached to a fictional work, but instead an independent individual that everyone worships? How can we comprehend the meaning of 'existence'? What is the identity of the female K-pop idol in that scenario? What is it we love? Is it our own will?



# The Post-Nature Farm

WANG Mengting <sup>CN</sup>

We are living in a complex era. Biotechnology seems to have enabled a whole new world. People are constantly exploring food sources, hoping to remove specific genes that may have negative effects on crops and people. However, these new varieties are considered proprietary and patented, often belonging to multinational companies. This progressive genetic engineering and industrial agriculture has promoted monoculture crops. Biodiversity is being lost in agriculture. Original species are becoming extinct and control exerted onto the type of foods available to us.

Based on this context of the Anthropocene <sup>1</sup>, I re-examined the relationship between human beings and nature. Exploring the role of biotechnology by speculating and representing future scenarios through *The Post-Nature Farm*. The research aims to stimulate a critical discussion of evolutionary biotechnology, while providing a more diversified perspective on the current and future pressing food crisis.

Speculating on a possible future scenario, when original crop species becomes extinct, advanced biotechnology is used to reorganise and modify the original genetic data in order to save species diversity. They are cultivated and grown in indoor farms, avoiding all external environmental influences. But are we ready for such a future in the face of these 'artificial

<sup>1</sup> The Anthropocene is a proposed geological epoch dating from the commencement of significant human impact on Earth's geology and ecosystems, including, but not limited to, anthropogenic climate change. Evidence of relative human impact – such as the growing human influence on land use, ecosystems, biodiversity, and species extinction – is substantial; scientists think that human impact has significantly changed (or halted) the growth of biodiversity. Andermann, T.; Faurby, S.; Turvey, S. T.; Antonelli, A.; Silvestro, D. (2020). The past and future human impact on mammalian diversity. *Science Advances*. 6 (36): eadb2313.

species'? Do we, who seem to have domesticated nature, also need to reflect on the impact and concerns that biotechnology has brought us?

*The Post-Nature Farm,*  
WANG Mengting, 2020



Welcome to the Post-Nature Farm



Will you look forward to the species of the future?

# Practice Abstract: NOMAN NOMAD

HUANG Liang <sup>CN</sup>

*Noman Nomad* is a project that combines virtual reality with the concept of the digital nomad to explore the future of our life and work. The work consists of three ‘natural’ virtual environments (the sky, land and sea), VR glasses, a brochure and a collapsible chair. People can use virtual reality to briefly escape their daily lives, moving into a natural environment where they can relax in a different reality.

The concept of the ‘digital nomad’ <sup>1</sup>, refers to the freedom of an individual to choose where they work and study, based on the premise that they will always be linked to the working environment through digital technology. Many of us consider our environments – particularly the densely populated urban milieu associated with working and commercial locations – unhealthy, stressful and polluted. In contrast, working as a digital nomad offers an idyllic space often of our own creation, one without borders.

<sup>1</sup> A concept first proposed in 1997 by Japanese semi-conductor scientist Tsugio Makimoto and British journalist David Manners.

Advances in construction technology and the constant update of spatial forms in architecture have led to the creation of ambiguous spaces – spaces that are neither fully open nor completely enclosed. The ‘in-between’ relationship of such areas can also be applied to spaces that exist between virtual reality and the physical world. We are no strangers to virtual reality, which has been proposed in fictional form in novels and science fiction films such as *The Matrix* (1999) and *Ghost In The Shell* (2017). These fictional environments offer visions of mental and physical access to virtual worlds.





# To Dear You Who Will Listen to This Story, I Wish Your Day Will Be Happy Too

Rachel JUNG<sup>KR</sup>

Queer lives and methodologies have to be defined case-by-case. The lesbian community in South Korea autonomously desired to be 'invisible' from society, due to the risk of being emarginated if their non-normative identities were revealed. The voices of these lesbians desired to exist parallel to the dominant society, yet invisible from their eyes. Their experiences stayed as 'debris' in various places where they physically existed, paradoxically proving their presence through their absence of bodies.

## Narration 1

The language to define my fierce queer experience was always missing. It was challenging to recognise and explain this discomfort through words I knew. There was always an inexplicable distance that I had to bear from the normative queer theories and experiences: there was no similar record that described why I had to 'stay' straight, why there are so many queer loves that aren't officially a relationship, why I can't post my artworks related to my queerness, why 'queering' different parts of the society can't be a method for futurity in Korea. I felt like my life didn't match the queer lives I often saw, bodies I learned, families I heard, experiences I read. I couldn't help thinking every moment of my queer life was somehow 'out-of-date' and the existing queer language never covered the social context of where I was from. I didn't feel 'safe' to be myself.

To Dear You Who Will Listen to This Story,  
I Wish Your Day Will Be Happy Too,  
Video Still, Rachel JUNG, 2020



But when I ‘heard’ the debris of lesbian voices talking about the similar loneli-ness, love, sadness, joy and anger in places where they existed - drifting around like ghosts - I finally found a way to change this loneliness into a pride through embracement and warmth. ‘So there were other queer experiences from white domented, gay nightclubs’, I thought. They were experiences that desired to ‘stay’ invisible, just like me. Experiences that stayed in intimate places. Experiences that weren’t often mentioned in what I read. Discovering these stories helped me to affirm my presence. My life matters as it is, at this point, in the era where I’m living in. I finally felt safe, safe to be myself.

## Narration 2

... Recently, I had to break up with a person I loved because of issues with her parents. They couldn't accept their daughter dating a woman. A sudden cessation with a person I loved so much made me cry for months. A feeling of helplessness that there is nothing I can do, nothing that I can do for her really hurts. I am openly queer, but my parents aren't that different from hers. When I say that I'm seeing a girl, they hate it, say that it's dirty, and stop me from saying such a thing. Mum talks a lot about herself to me, but I can't to her. She doesn't like me making secrets or lying to her, although she has no will to accept me as I am or understand me if I tell her the truth. I think this is really contradictory. But today, I felt it wasn't just painful. Recently I've been researching teenage lesbians, about where they gather up and spend time. I had an interview today with a teenage lesbian. From that conversation I felt like I'm getting courage myself to see other lesbians build up their lives at where they are intently. It makes me feel thankful, proud, and ardent whenever I see something like this. Therefore, although there are still many things in this society that hurt us, with all my heart I hope that days when we can live as lesbians in dignity will continue. To dear you who will listen to this story, I wish your day will be happy too.

I hope my voice can be heard to another queer, and alleviate their similar concerns and loneliness, telling them that they are not alone. That I, as an Asian queer myself, am existing here as I am with dignity, truly wishing another day in their queer life to be safe. That we can be each other's pride.

## In conversation with: Lucas LAROCHELLE

Lucas LaRoche is a transdisciplinary designer and researcher. Their practice explores queer and trans digital culture, community-based archiving and co-creative media. In 2017, they launched *Queering the Map*, an online community-based collaborative platform that enables users to anonymously archive LGBTQ2IA+ experiences in connection with physical space. This archive of stories evolved into *QT.bot*, an artificial intelligence trained on the data from *Queering the Map*, that generates speculative queer and trans futures and the environments in which they occur. *QT.bot*'s first output, *Sitting Here With You in the Future*, is a video and series of prints that explore these possible worlds.



*Sitting Here With You in the Future*,  
Lucas LAROCHELLE, 2020.

ALWFAV:

*Queering the Map (QTM)* originated from your own personal experiences, memories and feelings. Was this the case for *QT.bot* as well?

LL:

*QT.bot* is an expression of my relationship to *QTM*, a way of working through the immense amount of data housed on the platform – a critical response to the information overload. As the dataset of *QTM* grows, the question of what can be ascertained from the data becomes more complex, by virtue of its volume.

I don't see *QTM* as a research project in a traditional sense because the idea was never to make any concrete claims about 'this is how queer spaces come to be, this is how we can build for queer spaces'. It's exciting that these kinds of questions have emerged from it but this mode of logic-making is actually antithetical to the disorganisational structure of *QTM* as an archive. As more people have begun to study *QTM*, I have developed a feeling of apprehension towards making definitive claims about what we might learn from it. Often, I'm asked, 'What do we learn from looking at *QTM*? What are the take-aways about LGBTQ2IA+ life that you can tell us from *QTM*?' My answer to that is, 'There are 126,000 submissions in this database – 126,000 different ways in which this question can be answered.'

ALWFAV:

And how did these considerations evolve into *QT.bot*?

LL:

As I was exploring different tools to work with artificial intelligence and machine learning, in an artistic context, I found that similar practices of logic-making, or sense-making, are inherent to these computational processes. An easy thing to do would have been to throw an algorithm at *QTM* and ask it to reveal a concrete truth about the data. It would have distilled all of the distinct and multivalent voices into a singular story about *QTM*. How totally horrifying would that have been?

ALWFAV:

This sense of discomfort led me to the foundational questions for my work with *QT.bot*: how can we use AI in a queer manner? What might it mean to use AI to increase opacity? Opacity being a critical strategy for world-building within marginalised communities. **1** With *QT.bot*, the end goal is not necessarily about 'making sense' or communicating queer and trans life in a hyper-representational manner, but rather to explore what lies outside the realm of legibility. It is important to keep our narratives malleable in terms of their relationship to visibility.

<sup>1</sup> Glissant, E. (1997) *Poetics of Relation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

How did you translate these ideas into the technical work behind *QT.bot*?

LL:

*QT.bot*'s digital (inter) subjectivity is constructed from an implementation of the Open AI GPT-2 text generation

model trained on over 82,000 text entries from *QTM*, and a StyleGAN (implemented by machine learning engineer Mattie Tesfaldet) trained on scraped Google Street View imagery of the tagged coordinates on *QTM*.

*QT.bot* generates an infinite amount of speculative worlds and I see myself as their collaborator, curating the stories and images *QT.bot* creates and that to the line between legibility and opacity, between logic and confusion. In this context, my work is to set up a structure of feelings. ② I don't think I am able to describe exactly what the feelings are though, I am making myself sensitive to the profound affective 'truths' contained in the otherwise fantastical nature of their stories.

2 Williams, R. (1977)  
*Marxism and literature*.  
Oxford: Oxford  
University Press.

The content that *QT.bot* generates echoes the experience of moderating *QTM*. The moderation queue is an overwhelming waterfall of information as individual submissions blur into hybrid narratives as they are uploaded into the fleshy database of my mind.zip.

This experience of being overwhelmed is also echoed on the front-end of *QTM*. You click through all of these stories from so many different people who are all across the globe and at once, they mix together. The experience of navigating the map is cacophonous, atemporal, and staggering. It is anti-geographical to a certain extent – posts in the wrong location, intentionally or unintentionally. Pins are placed in the grey non-spaces above and below the rendering of the map and in the ocean. Many submissions are speculative in nature – musing on the possibilities of gay and trans penguins or polar bears.

LL:

The stories that *QT.bot* is producing reflect the hyper-emotional, hyper-vulnerable expression that happens on *QTM*. *QT.bot* folds these narratives and expressions into a deeper relation with the medium through which they are being voiced, which is the digital space of hyper-information.

ALWFAV:

How does *QT.bot* change the way you look at *QTM*?

LL:

I often describe *QT.bot* as the rogue off-spring of *QTM*. *QTM* is the earnest parent and *QT.bot* the disobedient child running amok, throwing a mirror back at *QTM*. Though it is not a singular mirror but a thousand shards, a room of broken mirrors even.

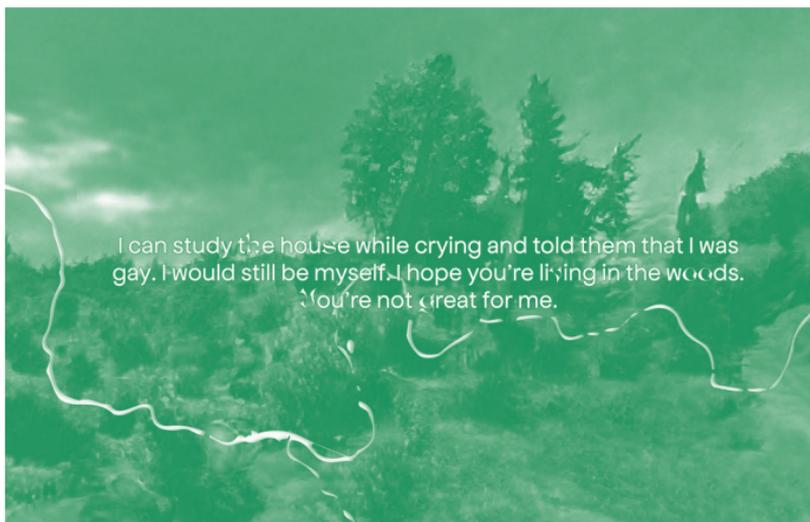
As *QTM* evolves, I'm thinking less about questions of physical queer and trans space, and more about queer and trans space in a digital context – questions of data, queer approaches to data, and the like. *QT.bot* is a tool through which to explore these questions while maintaining the sovereignty of *QTM* as a platform.

ALWFAV:

How do you understand the act of 'queering'? Particularly, the 'queering' of technology?



I came out to my mother as non-binary in a midnight ~~Shit~~  
Parking lot, we whispered in a lot with them pretty, me.



I can study the house while crying and told them that I was  
gay. I would still be myself. I hope you're living in the woods.  
You're not great for me.

LL:

Following queer, feminist and critical race scholar, Sara Ahmed, I understand queerness as a phenomenological orientation in the world. That is to say, there is a materiality, and in turn, relationality, to the experience of 'queerness'. Queer bodies experience the contours of the world in such particular ways, especially as they intersect with other axes in the matrix of domination.

One can 'feel' the dominant apparatus of power through a queer/trans experience of the world. Artificial intelligence has primarily been used as a machine to make sense of, to categorize, to sort, and this is felt in an incredibly embodied way. It's terrifying to think of this reductionist logic being used at a mass scale, being used to, literally, 'identify'. In 2018, Michal Kosinski, a researcher of organizational behaviour and artificial intelligence, claimed to have developed an algorithm that could effectively determine someone's sexual orientation. He was then in conversation with the Russian government on how to employ this algorithm. Of course, the validity of this 'gaydar' algorithm has since been completely debunked. However, the logic of capture that is embedded in artificial intelligence systems through biased design can have and has had terrible consequences.

There is an extremely urgent need to use machine learning and artificial intelligence for something 'other than', to 'break' it from the inside, to think about alternatives for how they might be used ethically. The misuse of digital tools has deep material impacts on the bodies – human and non-human – that they seek to identify and control.

ALWFAV:

I think in the LGBTQ2IA+ community we tend to reject fixed definitions, trying to question them constantly. How does this work with technology?

LL:

*QTM* deploys the concept of 'queer/ing', in two of its possible uses: to 'denote' non-normative gender and sexuality, and, in its more methodological context, to 'disrupt', to 'break', to 'question', to 'destroy' the map itself. To 'undo' the map is one of the central gestures of *QTM*. Specifically, to undo the 'sanctity' or the objectivity of a map. Undoing this map by defacing it, by adding things that otherwise would or should not be there – to expose the map as nothing more than a biased image, an image of colonial power and architecture. That was an initial gesture of *QTM*, which as the platform grows, has expanded into the process of 'queering' the archive. The disorganized and anonymous nature of the platform works to 'break', or 'undo', or 'queer' traditional modes of archiving.

ALWFAV:

So what does it imply to act in a 'queer' manner in relation to the archive?

LL:

Insofar as it is troubling the idea of truth that is so valued in the archive. Which, I believe, feels like an important gesture given that queer and trans life continues to be cast as inauthentic and untrue. What would be the value in maintaining these systems of exclusion? There is no way to confirm or deny the truth of any of the stories on

*QTM*. However, we are rather confident as the readers and writers of those stories to assume that they are true, or at least true enough. The point is not to create a verifiable, peer-reviewed archive but rather an archive of feelings. ③

3 Ovetkovich, A. (2003) *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Ser. Series q). Durham: Duke University Press.

ALWFAV:

In what way does that relate to the 'queerness' of *QT.bot*?

LL:

*QT.bot* puts into overdrive these questions of authenticity in the archive, or what it means to speculate in the archive(s). One of the thinkers that inspires me in her way of working through this is Saidiya Hartman, who deploys 'critical fabulation' as a way of filling in the blanks of an archive. ④ In her work she focuses on the absences in the archive of the experiences of Black women in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. 'Critical fabulation' is a way for her to fill in the blanks, to build bridges between pieces of disparate information that for reasons of historical erasure do not exist in any official capacity.

4 Hartman, S. (2008) *Venus in Two Acts: Small Axe 12(2)*, 1-14. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/241115>.

Hartman's context and mine are very different but I see *QT.bot* in a similar way: a device for 'fabulating' in the archive, a way of refusing to rely on only what is officially documented as a way of making a history. Addressing the lack of queer and trans archives and stories in official archives and popular media, *QT.bot* becomes a collaborator with whom to dream about, with, and through our past. Not dreaming past and future as a linear temporality but dreaming of other worlds that are happening in parallel to the world we are currently living in.

Searching for stories that seem somewhat possible and also completely absurd – subjectivity, temporality and geography are fracturing; opening up new worlds within the world. It feels like the world is happening in 360 degrees, in 500 different dimensions, all at once.

ALWFAV:

I see *QT.bot* as having moved away from physical spaces. For me it goes into that realm of memory, particularly digital memory, which sometimes is not as coherent as our physical one. What are the implications of using these technologies in creating queer memories/futures?

LL:

I love what you're saying about the differences between physical and digital memory. When we look back at something, it's always a fabrication/fabulation. It's a piecing together of the fragments we can bear to recall.

We might think of queer lives as those who lack a roadmap, following the wayward flows of a life living through relation, as the roadmap itself. Queer life, which might be true of all life on the Internet and in the information age, is about constructing oneself from all of these digital imprints in relation to one's immediate physical community. So *QT.bot* is a way of articulating these modes of post-individual, and relational identity production.

ALWFAV:

Could you explain a bit more specifically about how you work with *QT.bot*. How do you select stories?

LL:

To begin, I set the amount of stories that *QT.bot* will produce which is based on the number of characters output. Once I have the output text, I use it in two ways. I look for the stories that don't 'pass' – where it's clear that it was not written by a human, evidently produced by a machine. The 'correct' or 'straight' way of using artificial intelligence in this context would be to have *QT.bot* write stories so convincing that they are indistinguishable from the stories on *QTM*. However, I'm more attracted by those that fail, and the feelings produced through this failure – which are, arguably, more intense than the feelings produced by stories that pass as 'truthful' or 'logical'. In curating, I look for these moments of failure, impossibility, or incommensurability in the story. Reading these stories is like being in a time warp, you lose your balance. Spinning around in this time warp is deeply pleasurable and fosters a queer relationship to time.

The second way in which I select stories is through a reading process that mimics the process of moderating the submissions to *QTM*. I read through hundreds and hundreds of stories, very quickly, and with great precision. The ones in which I can't place exactly why they strike me, that produce a yet unnameable affect are those that I am drawn towards most.

ALWFAV:

How do you think design can participate in queer theory, both in your practice and in general?

LL:

I see myself as a mediator between academic queer/trans theory and the real world needs/ideas/dreams

of my communities. There are beautiful ideas written by brilliant people that are institutionalised within a system that is extremely violent and exclusionary. Even despite the fact that those ideas are in many ways drawn from people who are outside of the institution. One of the major tensions in my practice is that while I am trained as a designer, I am obsessed with critical theory, which I ultimately view as a kind of poetry or literature. My primary mechanism as a designer is to negotiate those ideas in a public and visual form. I use design as a medium to process these ideas that often only exist in the realm of theory, in a textual format, and I try to translate them into things that are accessible or experiential to a wider audience.

That is another gesture of *QTM*: thinking about experience as a form of theory making. The kinds of stories on *QTM* are as important, if not more important, as pieces of theory than as anything written by... insert famous queer theorist name here... That's how I see my public facing role as a designer: a translator and a mediator of ideas into infrastructures or interfaces. A gesture that can be inhabited by people other than myself.

On a personal level, design is my emotional processing tool. My questions, my hopes, and and my fears around artificial intelligence, queer and trans and Black and Brown and Asian and Indigenous futurity, can all be atomized through design. I move in-between a thought/emotion-based practice and a visual practice, in constant negotiation with one another.

ALWFAV:

In the report of the workshop *QTM xÉchelles* 5, you describe your temporary occupations of spaces on the second day as ‘political actions of radical softness’. How do you define this ‘radical softness’? And how does it relate to your approach to queer histories or places?

5 In Broomberg, M. E., Henry, M. (eds) *Échelles 02*. Spolia, 2019.

LL:

The first thing that comes to mind is the way that I think of queerness as a relational identity – that we become queer in our relationship to others and to our environments. Queerness is best understood as a communal identity and as a political affiliation. If I think of relationality with my community, with my kin, as shifting, soft. It’s not a hard line in the sand but rather something that is yielding and dancing, in order to move further. I think of queerness as an amorphous blob, it negotiates space but doesn’t necessarily aim to permanently claim it. It moves around, taking up smaller or larger spaces when it needs to, but it doesn’t have to always be monumental. We negotiate our identities in various contexts differently, making ourselves bigger or smaller, based on the situation.

In that report you referenced, I was probably referring to the power of vulnerability as an act of resistance. That activism is not necessarily the one with a capital ‘A’ all the time. We practice activism when we care for one another, we practice activism when we share intimate parts of ourselves with one another. Activism is not always a process of antagonism, although processes of antagonistic activism are incredibly important modes of soft activism, modes of sharing, and being vulnerable also have immense power.

## ALWFAV:

In your text on your workshop *Cruising The Map in FAKE IT! FAKE THEM! FAKE YOU! FAKE US!* ⑥, you introduce the work of the workshop participants with these questions: How far can we travel together when we are unsure of the direction? Where does cruising take us? Do you see cruising as a method?

6 Groten, A., Lizotte, J. (eds)  
*Fake it! Fake them! Fake you!  
Fake us!*. Amsterdam: Haackers &  
Designers (self-published).

## LL:

That makes me think again about the idea of 'softness'. Again, it comes to a question of relations: what does it mean to trust in a process of relation, especially when we're not sure of where that relation might lead us? We can't define what a relation to a person, object, institution, or environment, will become, and yet, we make decisions to enter modes of relation all the time. Cruising, as a socio-sexual practice, is a hyper-relational practice. It often occurs without language and unfolds through gesture, proximity, and is structured through a particular environment. In cruising, there is an immense amount of trust in the unknown, which when abstracted as a larger methodology of care, can move us very far and in directions that we can't plan for, but sense we might need.

This is also in response to the pseudoscience of 'design thinking', the idea that you reach the solution only if you follow a particular trajectory – which of course we know is not true. So, what does it mean to enter a co-designed methodology? Or, if cruising is our methodology, just being together, communing together, and moving from that space? Cruising is the joy of being with people, who minutes ago were strangers, who open the possibility

for an incredible relational dance. You have no idea where it will take you, but it animates the power of being in the world together.

ALWFAV:

Would this bring us back to queerness as well?

LL:

Yes, it does – cruising is a relational experience, as is queerness. It leads me to think of the problems of capitalism’s co-opting of queer and trans life and the violence of framing it as an individualist identity that can be bought and sold. When we think of queerness as a practice, as a relational dance, we require one another because we cannot singularly inhabit queerness. We are producing it in different ways, in different volumes. To consider queerness as a methodology might allow us to have the fluidity that we desire when we begin to understand ourselves, our communities, and our world, through a lens of constant relational flow.

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