The Future Is Over

Theses on the Philosophy of Design at the End of History

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Furniture Design in the Department of Furniture Design of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island

By Dotan Appelbaum
2024

Approved by Master's Examination Committee:

Pete Oyler, Professor, Department of Furniture Design, Thesis Chair

---

Jennifer Liese, Director, Center for Arts and Language, Thesis Advisor

---

Glenn Adamson, Independent Curator and Author, Thesis Advisor

Dotan Appelbaum
@dotanappel
dotanappelbaumstudio.com

Photographs by author unless otherwise credited

Set in Garamond, Basic Sans, and Adobe Caslon Pro glyphs

The Future Is Over

Theses on the Philosophy of Design at the End of History

Dotan Appelbaum

Contents

The Future Is Over

Acknowledgements

My success is not only my own but the success of many who have supported, guided, empowered, and enabled me to achieve what I have achieved.

Thank you to my educators, past and present, who have encouraged me to become the artist, designer, thinker, maker, and writer that I am. Thank you to Abigail Boggs for teaching me social and critical theory and being the first to encourage me in directing it toward my work as an artist and designer. Thank you to Tula Telfair for seeing potential in me, encouraging me to pursue the paths I have taken, and continuing to be a supportive mentor and friend. Thank you to John Dunnigan for seeing in my first-year-lack-of-direction the potential for highly researched critical approaches to furniture design. Thank you to Eric Anderson for working with me to develop the core of research and writing that became this book.

Thank you to my thesis committee. Thank you to Jen for helping me develop my discordant draft into a coherent written work and for encouraging me at every opportunity. Thank you to Glenn for offering explosively dense hours of expert feedback and guidance in the refining of this project. Thank you to Pete for many hours of productive critique, knowledge, reality checks, and faith in my work. This project would not have been possible without their wisdom, analysis, and experience.

Thank you to my friends and peers for countless hours of conversation, learning, critique, assistance, and making grad school fun. I came here in search of a community engaged in the conversations I wanted to have. I found that and more. A special thank you to my friend Chris Baker for always being a thought partner, my greatest critic, and a generous second set of hands when I needed it.

Thank you to my parents for supporting me over the past two years and throughout my journey as a furniture designer. Without you, I would not have been able to take the risks I have taken.

Abstract

The category of history is constructed out of the narratives by which we organize the substance of all that has ever happened. Our understanding of the contemporary moment is determined by how we shape our history. The future is a promise that emerges from how we contextualize our place in time.

The starting point of this thesis is the acceptance that the futurity promised by enlightenment liberalism is inconceivable in the face of contemporary horrors and climate catastrophe. Given this reality, what are we doing as designers? With a Benjaminian understanding of history and a Foucauldian approach to it, this thesis constructs a history of design that follows from my starting point and helps us to better understand the present moment and design's role in creating it.

This project is broken into three chapters that each loosely deal with the three categories of time. First I work to construct a genealogy of design. Second, I analyze the contemporary condition both as it relates to design and culture at large. Third, I will theorize possible futurity, or the lack thereof. If there is no future, what do we do tomorrow? Interspered throughout the chapters are images and descriptions of the studio work that makes up this thesis. Each is an attempt to make sense of design history as I am narrating it, or at least disrupt how the discipline operates.

This project culminates in a manifesto. Just as artists of the early twentieth century attempted to contend with a rapidly changing world by strongly proclaiming new positions on culture and history, I argue for an arrest of how we understand and operate within design. The future is over. All we have is what we have.

Introduction

Since October social media has been inundated with images of war, devastation, and mass suffering. The images of what happened in Israel on October 7th affected me profoundly. For weeks I was completely disengaged in my life—in my work and in my relationships. These images of mass death—of suffering and horror—are psyche-altering. In the months that followed we have come to witness untold brutality inflicted in zealous revenge. A large number of civilians in Gaza took to social media to enter the role of citizen journalists. They have skillfully employed the platforms to bring the war to the United States by making it impossible to ignore that we, here, are implicated in what is happening in Gaza. For those many million Americans who spend hours every day on TikTok, the platform becomes a place to either witness atrocities or choose to disengage.

Whatever the daily life of these Americans looks like, it has, to some extent, been disrupted. In my context as an artist, maker, and designer, the very space of the studio is charged with a tension of complicity. I have often operated under the cheekily arrogant attitude that there is nothing more important than the work I am doing in the studio. It's an attitude that my undergraduate painting advisor first shared with me as a way to cope with the necessarily selfish and isolating act of being an artist holed up in one's studio. It is a generally useful quip. If you begin to wonder what good you could possibly be doing by putting paint to canvas, or sculpting, or producing work in a studio craft field, motivation comes from convincing yourself that there is nothing else in this world more important than the work you are doing. However, it is

an untenable attitude in times of disruption like this. To see a father cradling his dead baby, parents carrying parts of their children in plastic bags, or people searching for their loved ones under the rubble of what used to be their neighborhood changes how an individual meets the world. It certainly arrests the idea that nothing is more important than one's studio practice.

Design is implicated in the worst the world has to offer because design is implicated in everything the world has to offer. Design is present in the bombs that rain down on civilians and it is present in the infrastructure they destroy. Being an artist myself in a design program, all the goals I had for my work in September (applying critical theory to design, investigating histories of ornamentation, writing academically about my field) have since coalesced into an attempt to cope with the present as a designer and artist.

However, it is not only the events of the last eight months with which I am attempting to cope. Speaking with a generational disposition, and through highly informed and lived experiences, I say that the world is ending. Though I have not lived through previous instances, I can say that this proclamation of the end times is different from those of the past because it comes from a place of scientific consensus and measured certainty. Thresholds we refer to as "tipping points" in the fight against climate change are regularly crossed. If there is any uncertainty left it tends towards a decreased timeline until climate catastrophe. Climate change is not the only condition that my generation was brought up to be aware of. We grew up in the post-9/11 world of forever wars and surveillance.

We have seen multiple recessions in our lifetime and ballooning unaffordability of basic living expectations. The promises told to emerging adults about their futures seem a distant fantasy.

This book, then, is an attempt to cope with being a designer in the contemporary state of the world. I argue that the present conditions are a result of the breakdown of enlightenment liberalism and its logics. That method of organizing social and political relations which proclaims itself to be the only method to create human equality has also created the conditions which call into question whether there is a future at all. Liberalism offers a teleology of inherent progress which it employs to explain away the vast examples of inequality and suffering for which it is responsible as aberrations in an otherwise progressive history.

This project gives special attention to categories of time, picking up and moving through past, present, and future in critical and specific ways. The realm of history is unstable. It is organized and manufactured. The present is similarly unstable. We move through the present understanding it to be unique. The conditions of today are never wholly new. How we understand the present is more a matter of what comes to the forefront of the privileged world's attention at any given time. The future is inseparable from the past and the present. For centuries the future has been understood through narratives of progress. This work joins a large chorus of voices in critical theory to argue against these narratives.

It is from this understanding of time that I give this work the title *The Future Is Over*. By this title I do not mean that the future came and ended. It is not to say that the techno-future dreamed up throughout the 20th century has

run its course. It is to say that these futures never will come because the very basis upon which we give shape to a future is irreparable. The future is over. What do we do as designers now?

I ground this book in Walter Benjamin's last work, "Theses on the Philosophy of History." This essay was written in exile as he fled the Nazi regime. In the context that would ultimately take his life, Benjamin argued against any inherent nature of the future and the progression of history. Time is both an empty, homogenous realm that contains the totality of human action and experience, and it is terrain on which theorists narrativize human civilization. From Benjamin I take the idea that history does not tell any story and that the future promises nothing. Each chapter in this book begins with an epigraph taken from "Theses on the Philosophy of History" which helps ground the temporal focus and theorization of that chapter. It is from Benjamin's work that I subtitled this book "Theses on the Philosophy of Design at the End of History."

Though the condition this book engages is the all-encompassing condition of the present, the subject of this book is design. The work is informed by my experience in design spaces, specifically as a graduate student in furniture design at the Rhode Island School of Design, and before that, at the Center for Furniture Craftsmanship. I arrived at this project via an undergraduate degree in sociology and studio art, time spent in craft settings, and now have been immersed in two academic years in this institution as it currently exists and teaches.

Given the particularities of my background, involvements, and academic field, it is worth framing and explaining my total approach to design, rather than a specific focus on furniture. I refer to myself by many labels: designer, artist, studio craft maker, etc. My academic training and credential is specifically in furniture design. Furniture is only one subset of design. It is often said of furniture that it is the meeting point of art, design, and craft. As such, I feel at home in this discipline. However, in many ways I am primarily an artist whose subject is design. I am immersed in design but I do not engage in a conventional design practice. Rather, I comment on design through design and art.

Since I began this project I have been concerned about my ability to theorize on design. In academic settings, at least in my academic setting, it often feels as if the overarching discipline of design is industrial design. If any theorizing is to happen on the subject, it ought to happen in that specific context. However, I reject not only this subset demarcation of the discipline, but any such divisions.

In design historian John A. Walker's introduction to his book Design History and the History of Design, Walker defines his framing in opposition to a previous anthology of design, which separates the study of the discipline into focused studies of different sub-categories:

> To divide the subject in this way is a perfectly valid, if conventional, procedure and it matches the way it tends to be organized in educational establishments, however, this is not how the subject is tackled in this text. No doubt historians do encounter differences between the study of dress and graphics but, arguably, these differences are minor compared to the basic

> theoretical issues common to both. The disadvantage of dividing the subject into separate fields is that discussions of these basic issues are bound to be scattered, … fail[ing] to encompass design in its totality.[1]

Given that this project is concerned with a total understanding of design as a discipline, how it is received by the public and how it interacts with various discourses, I take up Walker's position.

If there is a primary theoretical framework through which this project proceeds it is a Foucauldian discursive framework. Michel Foucault's "Will to Knowledge" defines discourse as being "characterized by the demarcation of a field of objects, by the definition of a legitimate perspective for a subject of knowledge, by the setting of norms for elaborating concepts and theories. Hence, each of them presupposes a play of prescriptions that govern exclusions and selections."[2] In other words, the realm of discourse describes the boundaries of legitimate knowledge production, which in turn dictates the possibilities of world-making. Furthermore, discourses do not refer to individual works, and do not always coincide with disciplines. Rather, many disciplines might make up a discourse, or a discourse might pass through disciplines. This theoretical framework is concerned with knowledge production as the locus of power. By defining the boundaries of knowledge and the acceptable terms of debate, discourse passes into discipline in two ways. The first is by producing disciplines, the noun. Disciplines are how discourses translate into contexts that condition thought and action. In the case of this project, the discipline of design is a demarcated field of action that is defined and conditioned by the discourses

that pass through it. The second is by affecting bodies through the power of discipline, the verb. Here, discipline refers to power that conditions bodies into certain modalities of being. Beyond Foucault, I also pick up Marxist, feminist, disability, and critical race theory to understand the history, present, and future of design.

This book is broken into three chapters, with each centering on one temporal category. Chapter One employs the critical theory approach to understand the broader social context of design history. The chapter is an exercise in Foucault's "genealogical method." In an undergraduate sociology class, a professor of mine—a Foucauldian herself qualified The History of Sexuality by explaining that Foucault was not a good historian. Strictly speaking, by academic convention, Foucault was, in fact, a bad historian. However, he was not practicing history, per se, so much as picking it up as a tool for understanding the present. I take Foucault's use of "genealogy," or his call to produce a "history of the present" as a guide in my work. The method of genealogy seeks to disrupt the progressive linear understanding of history and instead understand the complex relationships that influenced the past and present to create what we might mistake as a given or inevitable state of the world.[3] Lisa Lowe, theorist and professor of American Studies, further elaborates on the genealogical method:

> By genealogy, I mean that my analysis does not accept given categories and concepts as fixed or constant, but rather takes as its work the inquiry into how those categories became established as given, and with what effects. Genealogical method questions the apparent closure of our understanding of historical progress

> and attempts to contribute to what Michel Foucault has discussed as a historical ontology of ourselves, or a history of the present.[4]

Drawing on Foucault, I will theorize a (brief) genealogy of design—one that both creates a history of the present and, necessarily, engages with pop culture, design education, and design media for mass audiences.

Chapter Two focuses on the contemporary state of being a designer immersed in the horrors of the present. Having grounded ourselves in a history of the present, this chapter discusses the frustrations of the day. Here I also add a theorization of neoliberalism to better understand how design as a discipline operates differently than it did in Chapter One. It is in this chapter that I also begin to theorize on how meaning and meaning making are changing in design as we move deeper into the digital age. In addition to the conditions this entire book is an attempt to cope with, I also discuss how the inundation of content changes discursive knowledge production. I argue that it is perhaps in this inundation and fragmentation that we might find an answer to the question of designing in the face of contemporary horrors.

Chapter Three theorizes an end of history through the conditions of the present which ultimately means a lack of futurity. When history is ending and the promises of futurity vanish, how do we move forward? What can we do as designers? I argue for a wide range of approaches that encompass both broader political and social organizing as well as a reframing of meaning in design.

This work culminates in an anti-manifesto. Taking from the template of the Futurist manifestos from the early 20th century, I offer an authoritative anti-authoritarian stance on design. The prospect of futurity unfolded in front of the Futurists as a vast landscape of possibility of which they had creative control and freedom. They made authoritative proclamations about what art and design should be. My manifesto is an anti-manifesto because it seldom proclaims what design should be but rather focuses on the notions design should disabuse itself of.

Dispersed between the chapters are descriptions of each of the objects that make up the studio work of my thesis. These objects are an attempt to reconcile my work as a designer and artist given present conditions, employ an approach to design informed by my research and writing, and cope.

Big Leaf

Big Leaf

african mahogany, green rayon flocking

20 x48 x 20 in.

The acanthus leaf is among the most ubiquitous ornamental forms in Western decorative arts. Scrollwork, filigree, vegetal forms, and more are often derived from this source. Once I decided to focus on ornamentation as a broad topic, it was as if I stepped into a new built environment. All around me was ornamentation. The architecture of Providence is absolutely saturated. It is a treasure trove of carved stone and wood and iron scrollwork. If you begin to look, you start to find acanthus leaves specifically—everywhere, in a thousand different forms and styles. I began taking photographs of examples every time I walked outside or went into a home. They're on the architecture (corbels, capitals, wall panels), interior carpentry (trim, banisters, fixtures), furniture (carved relief, sconces, chandeliers), and so on. Eventually I searched for images of the source plant. Acanthus, also known as Bear's Breeches, has distinctive leaves to be sure—large and with regular lobes—but not enough to explain their singular ubiquity. A weed indigenous to and still prolific in Greece, acanthus inspired vegetal decoration thousands of years ago. And that vegetal decoration inspired vegetal decoration, and so on. Millenia later, here in Providence, the ornamentation resembles ornamentation far more than it resembles the leaves of the Bear's Breeches plant. Acanthus has become a caricature of itself.

The acanthus leaf, then, is a generative starting point for an exploration of decoration through design. Prior to the 20th century, ornamentation was abundant because it made objects more pleasing. The logics of industry and modernism changed the priorities of design to favor overall form above

decorated surface. *Big Leaf* asks, "What if we input the acanthus leaf into the modernist calculus of form?" This object takes an acanthus form found in relief carvings decorating wood furniture and interior trim, mirrors the relief into a full-round stand-alone object, and blows it up to the scale of furniture. The decorative illustration becomes the form of the furniture itself.

Big Leaf is made of mahogany because traditional ornamental carved acanthuses are so often made of mahogany. Once made, this neo-post-modern-esque sculptural object existed in that lineage of acanthus abstraction—but not quite enough. It was time to abstract the acanthus ornament form back towards its natural origin. Acanthus leaves are green. Leaves are soft. And so the leaf is flocked with green rayon fibers. Exposed mahogany, styled from acanthus illustrations and engravings, is left in the linework, becoming the veins of the leaf.

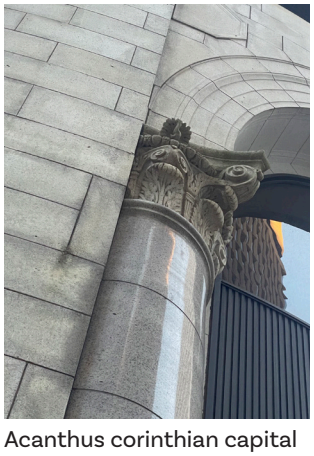
Acanthus key stone

Acanthus manhole cover

Acanthus banister detail

Acanthus lighting fixture

Acanthus bus stop



Acanthus corinthian capital

Photograph by Erik Gould

Photograph by Erik Gould

Photograph by Erik Gould

Photograph by Erik Gould

Acanthus Paperweights

Acanthus Paperweights

bronze, gold plating, chrome plating

5.5 x 1.5 x 1.5 in.

The *Acanthus Paperweights* are the next step in the neo-post-modern-esque exploration of the abstracted acanthus form. These forms are sleek, corporate luxury. Taking the same form as Big Leaf, these paperweights are cast in solid bronze with additional carved detailing. They are buffed to a high finish, and come in three finish options: classic polished bronze, lavish 18 karat gold plating, and modernist bright chrome plating. If your life still includes stacks of paper, you may as well hold them down sumptuously.

Chapter One:

A Brief Genealogy of Design

"History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now."

—Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"

Design encompasses almost everything. If one were to gather all of the definitions of design offered by experts in this or that field there are few parts of the human world left untouched by the category. Design is problem solving. Design is the creation of functional objects. Design is communication. Design is the manipulation of the natural world. Design is innovation. Design is discussed and defined ad infinitum. Indeed, design seems synergetic or even synonymous with a whole range of modes of material affect, from planning to engineering, crafting to fashioning. In this vast expanse, where do we locate design in a conversation about the social? To answer that question, we must create a genealogy of design and its logics.

First, let's establish that there is the *discipline* of design and there is the slippery category of action, disposition, or ways of knowing the world that we *call* design. The second design is ontological. Design historian and theorist Anne-Marie Willis defines ontological design as,

> (i) a hermeneutics of design concerned with the nature and of the agency of design, which understands design as a subject-decentred practice, acknowledging that things as well as people design, and following on from this, (ii) an argument for particular ways of going about design activity, especially in the contemporary context of unsustainability.[5]

This theory of design defines not a practice, but a constitutive fact of the human category. Design is not something that humans do, but it is something that happens with humans and to humans. By affecting and defining the world, humans shape and are shaped. This theorization perhaps explains the source of design's vastness. In the two-way relationship between humans and design, design becomes deeply entwined with the very nature of being human just as much as the classical designer of that first category understands the human to act upon design.

The first design, however, is institutional and historically specific. It emerged in mid-nineteenth century England as a national economic project and coalesced into the discipline of industrial design in the Streamline movement of the 1930s. Throughout, it was organized around capital-production relations, social-Darwinist discourses and liberal-rationalist epistemologies. These logics define a discipline that not only understands its project to be the development of solutions to problems, but believes itself to be capable of solving any problem it might identify. This chapter will first define design, design history, and the story of design before formulating a genealogy of design as we receive it outside of design historical settings in the contemporary day, and how various logics and discourses

pass through this genealogy. Ultimately, I argue that the specific logic-context of the contemporary designer is haunted by the culmination of a historical progression of design discourses that are invested in eugenic philosophy and capitalist economy. These logics reached their crystalized apex decades ago. We inherit the consequences.

Defining design as an institution is the key to opening space for a critical and theoretical conversation about how design acts in society. In "Will to Knowledge," Michel Foucault defines discourse as such: "Discursive practices are characterized by the demarcation of a field of objects, by the definition of a legitimate perspective for a subject of knowledge, by the setting of norms for elaborating concepts and theories. Hence, each of them presupposes a play of prescriptions that govern exclusions and selections."[6] A discursive framework is a tool for understanding how knowledge is produced and how power operates through it. Furthermore, discourses do not refer to individual works, and do not always coincide with disciplines. Rather, many disciplines might make up a discourse, or a discourse might pass through disciplines. By understanding design as an institution or discipline we can begin to map the web of interrelated discourses that weave through it. Through this project we can ask not only what is design, but a meta-version of the question "what is 'good design'"? This question does not seek answers in the form of principles and opinions, rather it seeks to uncover the source of how designers and thinkers answer the question.

The history of liberalism and liberal-rationalist logics are at the heart of the project of tracing design's discourses and logics. Liberalism, here, refers to the historically specific enlightenment way of thinking and governing that brought about capitalist and colonialist relations. It is the self-described theory of universalism and equality which, in practice, created a deeply unequal world.

Political scientist Uday Mehta finds the source of exclusionary tendencies in liberal history to be in the separate theoretical processes of defining universal principles and the conditions set on accessing universal rights. Liberalism's exclusionary nature, it seems, is present in addendums. It is in qualifications of what constitutes the category of human. Mehta describes the process of defining universal principles in liberal theory as a minimalist anthropology. Whereas classical philosophy drew universalism from abstract ontology, liberal theorists would locate human characteristics shared among all people.[7]

The liberal discourses that define the human and the discourses of design often seem remarkably similar. For example, Immanuel Kant famously defined 'enlightenment' as, "man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity," or the ability to think for oneself without the guidance of others.[8] This theorization of the human at its operative potential in the world is foundational to liberal political and economic history. It is the theoretical foundation of Liberal governance that claims that "all men are born free" while enacting subjugation on mass scales. Writing seven decades later in "The Nature of Gothic", John Ruskin seems to locate the universal meaning of human nature in the capacity to think for oneself, as opposed

to simply executing the thoughts of another.[9] Ruskin's work is similarly foundational to the discipline of design, wherein "The Nature of Gothic" is where I first locate the genealogy of design thinking. These definitions point to a thematic umbrella of agency and control in the liberal-rationalist worldview. This theme will repeatedly come up throughout this project. Design as a discipline and as a series of discourses coalesced around liberal-rationalist worldviews, instilling in design a belief in its ability to solve any problem—overestimating the control humans have over their environment.

Just as there are myriad ways of defining design, so too can design history be an unstable category. In 1989 design historian John A. Walker was complicating the historiography of the field in *Design History and the History of Design*. As he well explains, the very definition and boundaries of design history are wholly dependent on how design itself is defined. Walker largely separates the conventions of defining design history into the 'modern' and 'anti- or pre-modern' camps. The popular being the 'modern' convention, it begins design history at the point in which design became a profession or specialization.[10] The dissenting opinion, which Walker credits to historian Simon Jervis, defines human production and activity dating back to the 15th century as design.[11] Though it takes the form of professional disagreement over academic convention, Walker explains the significance of how we define these terms, noting, "it did illuminate the fact that different institutions – museums, polytechnics – tend to generate

different, antagonistic conceptions of design based upon their separate histories and social functions."[12] This is to say, defining design and the boundaries of design history is not a neutral act. It is deeply entwined with the social, theoretical, and political discourses that pass through the discipline. The pre-modern definition of design history can be pushed even further by ascribing to the expansive definition of design as potentially encompassing all of human creative activity or production. This definition, Walker argues, ignores the specific role played by the professional designer in society.[13]

In this discussion it is important to separate design history from the story of design. Design history is a discipline that practices conventions within academic settings. The story of design is how design is talked about in larger contexts. Walker described the growing number of publications about design aimed at non-academic audiences–with limited text and many photographs.[14] Indeed in the intervening years since Walker published *Design History and the History of Design*, there has been a veritable explosion of discourse about design. The broader context of this project is primarily interested in the story of design rather than design history. However, design history is an undeniably crucial component of the discursive production of this story. It is here that I take a Foucaultian approach to academic history. I am not engaging in design history, but I am analyzing how design history produces discursive impacts into the present context.

In the non-academic sphere of design discourse it seems that the pre-modern definition of design history is often very popular. Take, for example, design authors Charlotte and Peter Fiell's *The Story of Design From the Paleolithic to the Present*. From

the Preface of the book they argue, "The history of design is as long as the history of humanity, being essentially the story of how all man-made things came into being."[15] They begin the introduction with,

> Design is integral to human existence; it has shaped our material culture and influenced human history since its earliest origins. It has been and remains an omnipresent feature of daily life, simply because every man-made object is a designed object, and because it is through the use of such objects that we experience the world around us. Defined as the conception and planning of all man-made things, design is also the physical outcome of this creative process.[16]

This definition is about as expansive as a definition of design can be, and it is the premise upon which their historical account of design is based. Rather than resulting from a discussion or investigation of what design is, it is a stand-alone starting point—the assumption at the start of their logical progression.

An excellent example of a book written for a broader, non-academic audience that historicizes the boundaries of design is *Design History Handbook* by historian Domitilla Dardi and designer Vanni Pasca. In the book's preface, the authors justify the middle of the 19th century as the starting point of design history because it was the moment at which, "the professional figure of the designer first began to take concrete shape."[17] In the introduction of the book they state that, "mankind has been designing throughout its existence," but that the more interesting question is, "when the designer as a social and professional figure appeared."[18] In doing so they concede to the expansive definition of design—which most comfortably melds with the pre-modern definition of design history–while setting the terms of their historiography in

the modern convention. Similarly, architectural historian Beatriz Colomina and architect Mark Wigley's *Are We Human?* presents new frontiers for thinking through 'an archaeology of design' with an expansive definition, but their account of the origins of organized design points to the middle of the nineteenth century as the first emergence of the discipline as a reaction to anxieties in England over national economic competition.[19] Dardi and Pasca offer the same historical account of the origins of design, pointing to the British government's support of design as a means to improve the nation's manufactured products,[20] and the consolidation of the discipline in the form of government established design schools in service of this goal.[21] In so doing they establish a difference between separate categories that are both called design—there is design, the activity, and there is design the profession, or institution, or discipline.

So why is this conversation about the historicity of design important? Informed by Foucault, the categories that we refer to should be clearly defined so as to not obfuscate the discourses or logics that work through them. In this project I adhere to the modern definition of design history. Moreso, I wish to be very careful about referring to objects or activities occurring before the nineteenth century as being designed or performing design. Though we, with our modern definition of the term, can retroactively categorize pre-modern design, those objects and activities were made or done without the logical contexts that are inseparable from a discursive understanding of design. The modern term is inseparable from the social, political, and economic conditions in which it came into meaning—even with the slight expansion of its definition over time.

Figure 1. Exterior of the Crystal Palace
Lithograph by Augustus Butler, *Exterior of the Crystal Palace, from Kensington Gardens*, 1851.https://library.artstor.org/asset/26396821.

Figure 2. Interior of the Crystal Palace
J. E. Mayall. *Steel Engraving: Crystal Palace, 1851 Exhibition.* Steel engraving.
https://library.artstor.org/asset/24741234.

It is important to note, however, that the expansive definition of design has gained philosophical merit over the last two decades. Beginning with Anne-Marie Willis's "Ontological Designing," in 2006, a new conception of design and its relation to the category of human has emerged. This is the context in which Colomina and Wigley analyze the state of design theory and the context in which I began this chapter referring to two designs. This way of engaging design offers new frontiers for resisting the dominant logics of the discipline (and beyond), but it should be done so in a self-conscious way. That is to say, engaging in ontological design theorization should be done in a way that acknowledges and works against the discipline of design and its logics.

But the first design is institutional. It is a discursive practice with boundaries and a genealogy. This practice came into formation as a national economic project in Britain, with the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in 1851 being a watershed moment in this history. Many historians, including Raizman, and Dardi and Pasca, write about the importance of this exhibition in the consolidation of the industrial arts into design as a discipline. John Ruskin published "The Nature of Gothic" only two years later. Though his work was primarily inspired by a trip to Venice in 1850, it must have been influenced by his distaste for this emerging discipline, which he published in a scathing review.[22] Being an exhibition of the industrial arts, it showcased the forefront of mechanical and technological production—with standardized and impersonal objects as the focus. Colomina and Wigley add that the mid-nineteenth century workers increasingly, "treated as disposable machine parts and machines were

treated as organisms with an internal life that needed to be preserved."[23] Between this context and the fact that The Great Exhibition—along with subsequent international exhibitions—deepened the sense that England's industrial arts were inferior to Central Europe[24]—it is unsurprising that such an effort was made to individualize the designer and give agency to the practice.

The professionalization of the designer and differentiation from producer evinces a material change and invites an analysis of labor relations. Of course, the emergence of the designer is inseparable from the wider process of the division of labor that occurred as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Many design historians draw this clear connection including Walker[25], Charlotte and Peter Fiell[26] and Glenn Adamson.[27] From a strictly materialist, Marxist perspective, it would be a stretch to categorize designers as bourgeoisie compared to the laborers that produce the work of a designer. The role of a designer was still that of an employed worker—they sold their labor to those who owned the means of production, even if by commission rather than wage. There is, however, a sentimental difference between the labor of a manufacturing worker and the labor of a designer. We associate the factory worker with labor more than the designer because their work is manual and in line with the images of alienation and exploitation that most fuel anti-capitalist politics.

Learning from Marx's "The Secret of Primitive Accumulation," where the political economists explain the origins of wealth as a result of diligence and intelligence leaving the lazy rascals forced to sell their labor, we understand that wealth begins through processes of conquest, violence and deep injustice.[28] The processes of primitive accumulation—referring to the first gathering of wealth that allows an individual to become an owner of the means of production—is not primitive by history. Rather, it is an ongoing process with particular periods of explosive accumulation. One such period was the Industrial Revolution, where new modes of mechanical production produced new owners of production and greater rifts between the rich and the poor. The existence of the petit-bourgeoisie, or later the middle class, is an important logical turn that obfuscates the nature of accumulation, supports the Political Economists theory, and dampens consciousness of material relations. In this context, the role of the designer was that of petit-bourgeoisie. They did not own the means of production, but they had agency and status—and they achieved it by their merit. There is, of course, a question of access. Who was admitted to the design schools? How could one become a designer?

Another element of the labor of a designer that elevated their status is that the designer was *less* alienated from the product of their labor than the majority of the working class. Tied to the elevation of their agency, it was the designer whose good thinking planned the objects that would be made on nebulous factory lines. From this framework, it is no surprise that the role of the designer in the mid-nineteenth century was closely tied with

a sense of morality.[29] Throughout the history of design, it is a constant theme that the disciplines are deeply interested in supporting and maintaining a conception of the middle class while in practice functioning in exclusive or elite ways.

At the same time that divisions of labor came into being, another process of human differentiation was aiding in the establishment of design as an institution. In *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, Lisa Lowe illustrates a crucial 'intimacy' in the relationship between colonial reality and the bourgeois interior life of the 18th and 19th centuries.[30] From the standpoint of design, this history is crucial to consider in both the lineage of designed objects and the genealogy of design thinking. This second differentiation, then, was the emergence of colonized labor which, continents apart, produced the conditions of early bourgeois domesticity. The social role of the designer is complicated by the logical result of this differentiation: with the growth of industry and the trade of manufactured goods being intimately linked to colonial production and accumulation, the designer plays a role in supporting this growing mode of national production.

In the core canon of writing that influenced design history, the watershed moment after Ruskin is Adolf Loos's "Ornament and Crime" from 1913. Loos's essay is held up as a foundational text of Modernist design thinking that inspired the Bauhaus according to popular design texts such as Arch Daily[31] or Phaidons visual manifesto of Modernist architecture titled, *Ornament is Crime*. Particularly when we think of design as a discipline, or through a discursive framework, this text is crucial

for understanding the genealogy of design and its logics. Every student of design or architecture will, at some point in their studies, be presented with this text. Often it will only be explained, rather than assigned for reading, as a historically significant essay due to its strong beliefs and how they influenced generations of designers. Though it may be to the disdain of design historians, the afterlife of "Ornament and Crime" is not as the hyperbolic satire Loos intended it to be, but as a legitimate and genuine perspective on design. Critical analyses of this text are beyond counting. "Ornament and Crime" is thoroughly discredited. Yet, it is worth picking up the text in this project to illustrate how a pseudoscientific, sentimental, and reactionary work transformed into obfuscated design principles.

At the foundation of Loos's essay is the description of humanity as having a historically progressive nature that mirrors Darwinian evolution. In this explanation Loos primitivizes certain cultures and peoples. He infantilizes the Papuans by explaining them to be like children—unknowing, and thus unbeholden to moral judgment. This reasoning is reminiscent of Mehta's description of a 'minimalist anthropology' of Liberalism's universalist theorizing.[32] From this cornerstone, Loos builds his argument on two assumptions. First, he assumes that ornamentation is an impulsion inherent to Papuans and thus to all 'lesser developed' peoples. The second is that 'modern man', by which he means Western white men in the imperial core, prefer objects without ornament. These two assumptions contribute to what appears to be the central argument of the essay. As he puts it, "*The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from objects of daily use*."[33] In the

discussion of how "Ornament and Crime" was subsumed into the discourses of design, it does not matter how genuine Loos was in his intentions or the broader contexts of essays he was engaging in. Popular engagement with design picked up these principles regardless.

An analysis of the Enlightenment liberal tendencies in Loos's formation of the human and narratives of progress is likely to show a system of beliefs surrounding design to be entirely built on sentiment and unsubstantiated claims about racial difference. This analysis would contribute to a genealogy of the present, uncovering the sources of contemporary discourses and sentiment around design. One example of this type of work is historians Jimena Canales and Andrew Herscher's "Criminal Skins: Tattoos and Modern Architecture in the Work of Adolf Loos." What I have described as pseudoscientific sentimental reactionary ramblings in the work of Loos, Canales and Herscher uncover to be Loos's engagement with nineteenth century criminal anthropology. In fact, ornament in the form of tattoos was widely picked up as a physical manifestation of criminality by writers ranging from criminologists to Charles Darwin himself.[34]

The story told by Canales and Herscher is of a calculated use of varied sources that theorized racial difference in evolution and the built environment. They write, "Loos's key contribution to architecture theory was to tie ornament directly to cultural evolution, a move which implied that every aspect of architecture and applied art was determined in the final instance by natural selection."[35] Where a simple reading of "Ornament and Crime" would suggest a

wholly negative attitude towards ornament, it is rather negative only for certain people. This is most clearly seen within the text when he likens Papuans to children, infantilizing people theorized to be less developed, and who are thus excused from the judgment he proposes. They write, "In fact, he not only tolerated but admired ornament in primitives. As the Papuans evolved, their ornaments would one day reach the level of the moderns, and become extinct: 'The Papuans can invent new ornaments, until they reach the total absence of ornamentation.' The problem came when modern man tried to contrive a new ornament: 'I do not consider the invention of new ornaments as a new force, rather – in civilized man – it is a sign of degeneration.'"[36] Here, Loos is stating how he qualifies the developed person, doing so not through judgment but through a deterministic theory of evolution.

It is clear now that the logics of this text derive from the exclusionary tendencies of Liberal humanist theory. Though his use of contemporary discourses is sometimes clear—such as his use of Darwinian evolution—most of his engagement with these ideas is unreferenced and unspecified. Perhaps to his contemporary audience it was clear the ideas he was employing and making reference to. It is tempting in the present day to ascribe intention to the obfuscation of these discourses; of course, we cannot do so. Rather we can analyse the impact it had as the text was disseminated through generations as the referent discourses faded. Divorced from active intellectual contribution, these ideas are instead presented as 'common knowledge'. There is no need to justify the argument—the idea is evident to any reader. Through the endurance of the text, then, the ideas of social evolution,

criminal anthropology, and racial sciences are strengthened in the discipline of design. Direct outcomes are seen in the twentieth century, such as how art historian Christina Cogdell illustrates in *Eugenic Design* the eugenic logics that intermingled with the Streamline Design movement. Cogdell even details the lineage of design thinking that led from Loos's social Darwinism to the eugenics of Streamline Design.[37]

In addition to Enlightenment narratives of human progress, we can also find logical foundations in the text that stem from the first conceptions of the discipline of design. In the essay, Loos is often concerned with wasted labor and resources. This concern is not a Marxist anti-alienation stance, nor a concern with meaning in making à la William Morris or John Ruskin. Rather, it is a concern with the best use of national resources. He writes, "In a highly productive nation ornament is no longer a natural product of its culture, and therefore represents backwardness or even a degenerative tendency."[38] Without historical context we might ask what he means by a 'highly productive nation'. However, it is clear that Loos is operating within the founding logics of design stemming from the English national economic project. If the production of an object does not serve to increase capital and industrial wealth, he is suggesting, it is not good design.

At this point it seems worth taking a step back and acknowledging that what I am saying might come off as obvious statements masquerading as clever contributions. *Of course a design is bad if it loses money*. It is common knowledge that one of the necessary goals of a design is that the product is profitable. However, this project is not interested in accepting common knowledge. The very concept of common knowledge

refers to socially accepted ideas that do not require justification. They are concealed products of discursive sites of knowledge production. If we are to critically understand the logics of design as a discursive discipline, no notion is immune to scrutiny. So in the question of design being in service of national economic interests, this project asks why this 'common knowledge' came about and what alternatives are there to principles of design that may contradict this conventional norm?

The next stop in the genealogy of design thinking is the Bauhaus Manifesto. At this point in the history of design this genealogy is met with an explosion of discourses surrounding design. The Bauhaus Manifesto is a significant textual source on the influence of design thinking, but the Bauhaus school more broadly represents the formation of design academia as it continues to exist. To understand this period in the genealogy of design requires not only analysis of the school's founding document, but also a discussion of how culture and knowledge production occurred in that context, and an analysis of how the Bauhaus was received and displayed by culture defining institutions.

In the introduction to the first chapter of *Bauhaus Imaginista*, art researchers Marion von Osten and Grant Watson describe the beliefs expressed in the Bauhaus Manifesto as being foundationally internationalist and outwardly anti-nationalist.[39] However, art historian Magdalena Droste's reading of the manifesto shows it to be of specific cultural origin. She writes, "Its idealistically formulated goals and recourses to the Gothic and Romantic periods firmly anchor the Manifesto

in German cultural traditions and in the contemporary situation of the country's defeat in the First World War."[40] If we are to understand Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus Manifesto to be influenced by Adolf Loos, and if we are to understand that the genealogy of Bauhaus includes "Ornament and Crime," then we must contend with the universalist assumptions of Bauhaus and begin to ask "who is universal?" This is another area in which the obfuscated discourses of "Ornament and Crime" are significant to the dissemination of its logics. It is this sanitation of Modernism's foundational thinking that would allow for the cognitive dissonance of an international and universalist school to be founded from German traditions.

A further example of Loos's logic carrying forward is in Von Osten and Watson's description of Paul Klee's concerns about how his work was viewed. Seeking to find abstract, universal forms in non-Western cultural ornamentation, he feared the associations that came with ornamental work. They write, "we know that Klee's relationship to decorativeness was ambivalent. As with many of his contemporaries, he searched for so-called pure, abstract forms that already existed in the ornamental, while at the same time seeking to distance himself from the notions of femininity and decorativeness that were often associated with his art."[41] It seems that Klee is seeking to take the ornamental traditions of what Loos would refer to as less developed cultures and accelerate their cultural development towards an abstract universal ideal.

This practice of abstracting ornamental forms was commonplace in the Bauhaus. Art historian Susanne Leeb writes about the explosion of textbooks written about world

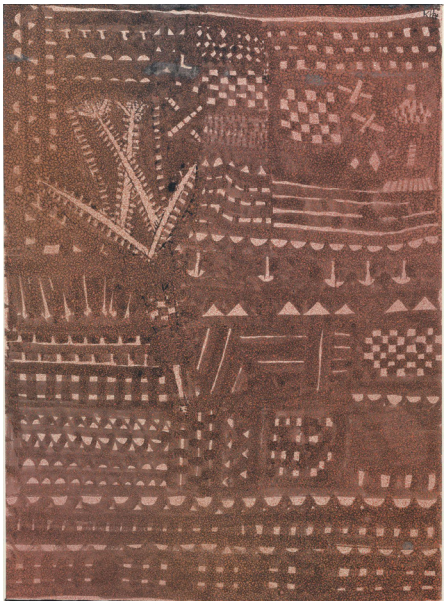


Figure 3. ***In the Manner of a Leather Tapestry, Paul Klee***
Paul Klee, *In the Manner of a Leather Tapestry.* 1925. Ink and spattered tempera on paper, mounted on cardboard, 12 5/8 × 9 5/8 in. (32.1 × 24.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Modern and Contemporary Art; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Saidenberg, 1981. https://jstor.org/stable/community.18479425.

art. Leeb complicates the history of cataloging, studying, and valuing objects of world art by drawing connections to their colonial acquisitions, decontextualizations, and accompanying discourses about non-Western cultural decay.[42] And yet, these artefacts were academically mined for visual influence on a modernist international style. Scholar of architecture and design Mabel O. Wilson writes of MoMA's first formation of what it called "International Style," that "the phrase "International Style" also doubly muted the influence of Northern African and Middle Eastern vernacular in European modernism's use of flat roofs and white or pale-colored walls, much in the same way that white artists had adapted "primitive" forms to unsettle bourgeois art."[43] We see, then, that modernist design contained at once a disdain for non-Western ornamental cultures while relying on its possibilities.

Beyond logics, Bauhaus architecture materially served the interests of colonization. Mabel O. Wilson writes that MoMA defined "a modern 'style' of architecture whose construction techniques and aesthetics could be replicated almost anywhere in the world–an architecture that suited American and European imperialism, which continued to foster colonial infrastructure in Asia, Africa, and parts of South America."[44] All of this was done under universalizing language.

Ultimately, The Bauhaus is the moment at which modernism and its logics become the supreme operative mode of the discipline of design. This is best illustrated by the banality with which we might read much of the works that came out of the school in the present day. In the area of furniture–which many argue is among, if not the most widely disseminated and remembered of the products of The

Bauhaus workshops[45, 46]—the chairs are iconic and striking, even as they are primarily concerned with economic usage of novel and traditional materials through industrial processes. However, the casepieces of the Bauhaus tell a more specific story. A cold reading from a contemporary observer might find them to be conventional, familiar, and lacking in the innovation we typically find in Bauhaus design.

Not many cabinets—defined narrowly as casework that is solely meant for storage–were produced and disseminated at the school. Many tables that include casework storage made it into the catalogue, such as a desk from 1924 made with lacquered plywood that includes a cabinet, drawers, and a built in bookshelf on the back side (fig. 4), or a dressing table from 1923 that includes two mirrors and a series of stacked drawers, both made by Marcel Breuer. Josef Albers produced a number of notable cabinets—particularly shelving systems. One example (fig. 5) from 1923 is a resoundingly simple arrangement of oak boards that makes a bookshelf. Three vertical boards of light oak hold the structure up. The outside boards stand against the wall facing forward. The middle board is oriented with its side to the wall. These three verticals hold up 5 horizontal boards of dark oak that connect via simple lap joints. Another example is a display cabinet, also from 1923, which is similarly planar and rectilinear. A nickel frame holds plates of glass that form three walls and two doors. Nickel framed glass also sits horizontally on brackets to create surfaces on which to place objects. These designs are simple, bare, and open. Breuer also developed a kitchen cabinet system in 1929 which reads remarkably like an early iteration of the standard formica cabinets now found in kitchens all over.

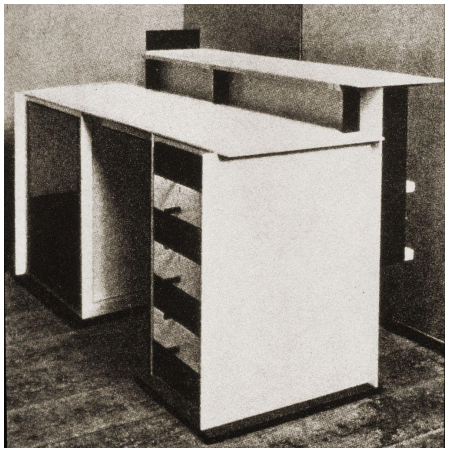


Figure 4. *Desk*, Marcel Breuer
Breuer, Marcel, *Desk*. 1924.
https://jstor.org/stable/community.13737414.

Figure 5. *Bookcase*, Josef Albers
Albers, Josef, *Bookcase*, 1923. Photo courtesy of the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation.
Found in, "A Reissued Bauhaus Bookcase," Rima Suqi, *The New York Times*. June 29, 2011.
https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/30/garden/a-reissued-bauhaus-bookcase.html

These cabinets were bare, simple, and ordered to an extent that had yet to be seen in design. Though obvious to us today, it was at once both radical for the time to eschew decoration to such a degree and the logical and expected outcome of the trajectory of design thinking. The furniture designed by Adolf Loos was ornamental by the standards being set by the Bauhaus. As artists and designers contended with the changed reality of modernity following the technological and industrial leap of the First World War, and its associated horrors, the logics of modernism–from the liberal-rationalist worldview that understands humans to be in control of the natural world, to the colonial and eugenic views of decoration and ornament—solidified into an operative framework that carried into the middle of the 20th century and coalesced into the unscalable peak of American design history—mid-century modernism.

Figure 6. Screenshot of *State of the Art* music video
Gotye - State Of The Art (Official Music Video), by gotyemusic on Youtube.
Directed and animated by Greg Sharp & Ivan Dixon at Rubber House.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWIKQMBBTtk

What is the minimum visual information required to depict the modern domestic interior? Gotye's *State of the Art* music video (2011) might suggest that the answer is seven quadrangles and a pentagon. The pink pentagon floats in the center-right of the screen with five quadrangles emanating outwards from each side in a composition that clearly defines space—walls, ceilings and a floor (fig. 6). On the top three sides of the floor quadrangle are the final three quadrangles marking out a simple floor trim and giving the space a clear feeling of domesticity.

On the beat, the room is sequentially furnished. First a sofa, followed by the quintessential floor lamp, a fur rug,

a painting on the wall, and finally a television (fig. 7). Another sequence of on-the-beat appearances conjures the stereotypical image of the family that might inhabit the space (fig. 8). The father, in a collared shirt and tie, sits on the sofa holding a beer. Across from him sits the daughter reading a book, cross-legged on the rug. The son sits in front of the television playing with a single G.I. Joe. The mother, in a pink dress, dusts the lampshade. The baby at the father's feet shakes a rattle. The first twelve seconds of the music video set the scene on a post-war familial typology in which every person and minimally selected object plays its role—bringing to mind anthropologist Karen Brodkin's description of the "public iconography of white nuclear family bliss."[47]

The song is about the singer's experience receiving a second-hand Lowrey Cotillion electric organ as a gift from his parents. Aside from a few interesting lines, the majority of the lyrics are essentially an inventory of the instrument's features. It is a sentimental song about the joy of experiencing what was once the cutting edge of musical technology. The music video by Greg Sharp and Ivan Dixon at Rubber House Studio, on the other hand, tells a different story about the post-war domestic environment. The scene of the family at leisure is interrupted by an oversize cardboard box that seems to walk through the room, place itself along the back wall, and drop its sides to reveal a brand-new Lowrey Cotillion.

The digital dashboard gleams above the two overlapping keyboards before closeup shots show shiny keys and pedals framed by wood-veneered surfaces. The main switch is turned on and the Cotillion begins to bounce with the first lyrics (fig. 9), "When the Cotillion arrived/ we threw out the television/

Figure 7. Screenshot of *State of the Art* music video
Gotye - State Of The Art (Official Music Video), by gotyemusic on Youtube.
Directed and animated by Greg Sharp & Ivan Dixon at Rubber House.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWIKQMBBTtk

Figure 8. Screenshot of *State of the Art* music video
Gotye - State Of The Art (Official Music Video), by gotyemusic on Youtube.
Directed and animated by Greg Sharp & Ivan Dixon at Rubber House.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWIKQMBBTtk

Figure 9. Screenshot of *State of the Art* music video
Gotye - State Of The Art (Official Music Video), by gotyemusic on Youtube.
Directed and animated by Greg Sharp & Ivan Dixon at Rubber House.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWIKQMBBTtk

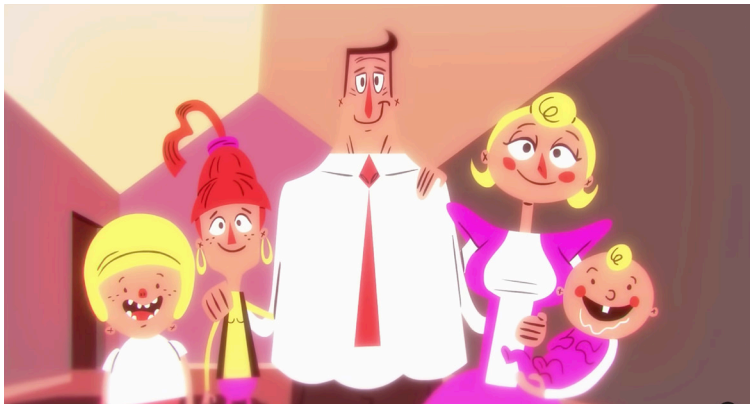


Figure 10. Screenshot of *State of the Art* music video
Gotye - State Of The Art (Official Music Video), by gotyemusic on Youtube.
Directed and animated by Greg Sharp & Ivan Dixon at Rubber House.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWIKQMBBTtk

Figure 11. Screenshot of *State of the Art* music video
Gotye - State Of The Art (Official Music Video), by gotyemusic on Youtube.
Directed and animated by Greg Sharp & Ivan Dixon at Rubber House.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWIKQMBBTtk

Figure 12. Screenshot of *State of the Art* music video
Gotye - State Of The Art (Official Music Video), by gotyemusic on Youtube.
Directed and animated by Greg Sharp & Ivan Dixon at Rubber House.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWIKQMBBTtk

Figure 13. Screenshot of *State of the Art* music video
Gotye - State Of The Art (Official Music Video), by gotyemusic on Youtube.
Directed and animated by Greg Sharp & Ivan Dixon at Rubber House.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWIKQMBBTtk

Figure 14. Screenshot of *State of the Art* music video
Gotye - State Of The Art (Official Music Video), by gotyemusic on Youtube.
Directed and animated by Greg Sharp & Ivan Dixon at Rubber House.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWIKQMBBTtk

Figure 15. Screenshot of *State of the Art* music video
Gotye - State Of The Art (Official Music Video), by gotyemusic on Youtube.
Directed and animated by Greg Sharp & Ivan Dixon at Rubber House.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWIKQMBBTtk

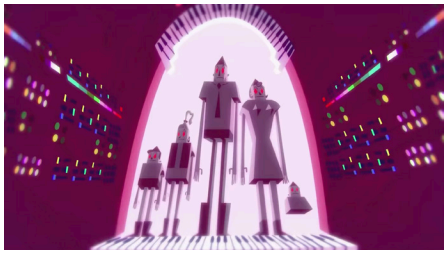


Figure 16. Screenshot of *State of the Art* music video
Gotye - State Of The Art (Official Music Video), by gotyemusic on Youtube.
Directed and animated by Greg Sharp & Ivan Dixon at Rubber House.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWIKQMBBTtk

Model D-575 has custom flute presets/ And Harmony Plus in addition." The husband flips open the manual. The family stands together, arm in arm, facing the Cotillion with expressions of joy, bliss, or perhaps awe (fig. 10). The Cotillion continues to bounce to the rhythm as visual signifiers of its electronic s oundwaves emanate from the instrument. The lyrics continue to list its many features. A phantom arm reaches out to illustrate automatic playing capabilities. Suddenly the hand shoves the husband to the floor. The family crouches behind him, all with faces of shock and horror, "It's a genuine home entertainment revelation."

Phantom hands continue to play the organ and dance to the beat as pipes with red eyes and frowning mouths sing the chorus, "State of the art." The soft features of the phantom arms and visual soundwaves turn angular and electric (fig. 11). The Cotillion grows. Instead of bouncing, it now sways side to side, banging against the walls. Cracks begin to form throughout the walls and ceiling. The lamp falls and the room goes dark.

Bright flashes alternately illuminate the sinister red-rhombus-eyed face of the Cotillion and the terrified faces of the family as their eyes, too, turn to rhombuses. Bolts of electricity surge across the organ and throughout the room as a dim light returns. Broken glass lays across the floor, the furnishings are scattered and toppled. The family is nowhere to be seen (fig. 12).

We turn, then, to the facade of the house. In an explosion the house disintegrates, as if the rapidly expanding Cotillion shed its skin like a snake (fig. 13). We now see five organ pipes, each representing a different member of the family (fig. 14). In a jump, the Cotillion house takes off, flying through the atmosphere, past the moon and sun (fig. 15). Finally, the

Cotillion lands on a new planet. The organ people emerge from the front door, seemingly ready to colonize a new earth for a new cyberhuman species (fig. 16)

This music video is not meant to be taken too seriously, of course, but the image of medieval-techno-core organ pipes parasitising the quintessential American mid-century family is powerful, and a useful touchpoint for a conversation about post-war techno-exceptionalism and its role in unifying the power of modernist design in American culture. In design discourse of the time, technological advancement is both a commonsense good as well as an inevitability. Charles and Ray Eames, as one example, saw technological advancement as a neutral beneficient to a future of human comfort and development. Design historian Pat Kirkham explains,

> Charles and Ray Eames had a vision of life made better through design and technology. Their belief in the inevitability of progress and in the essential role of technology never wavered, and they played a central role in making modernism acceptable to the American bourgeoisie in the postwar years.[48]

Indeed, it was the central project of their design work in the early years of their career to make technologies of war work for commercial production.[49] Yet there is truth to anxieties about technology expressed in the music video—truth that begins with appropriation of military technology for civilian use and continues through to what sociologist David Riesman named The Nylon War in 1951.[50]

The American consumer's distaste for, or fear of, novel domestic technology was a real phenomenon that the cultural wing of the Cold War had to contend with. Pat Kirkham writes of the public perception of modernist design following the end of World War II,

> Behind the jokes about furniture more suitable for operating theaters than for living rooms and the difficulty of finding Bauhaus-style food to match rigidly geometric plates, cutlery, tables, and chairs lay serious questions about semiotics, "functionalism," the relationship between object and user, and a world ruled by machinery. [51]

Yet mid-century modern design has had an enduring life of ubiquity in American culture. Where it was first met with distaste for its rigid rationalism and material unfamiliarity, it often feels today that as far as popular culture is concerned, design ended with mid-century modernism. One often finds an overwhelming desire for "timelessness" which so often appears to refer to visual styles that originated in the 1950s and 1960s.

Design historians can explain the change in popular perception of Mid-Century design in many ways. They would likely argue that sweeping statements about its reception and enduring popularity cannot be made as such. Yet, I argue that in the realm of cultural criticism the enduring stranglehold of the historical moment over how the larger populace views design is the natural conclusion of the genealogy this chapter outlines. What began as a national economic project influenced by liberal rationalist epistemology and eugenic ideology culminated in the techno-logic that could come to fruition after the Second World War. The myriad of novel technologies developed in the war required new homes in industry. Capital, especially related to war, demands constant technological innovation. Once innovation happens, the technology is commodified and finds loci of production and distribution. Viewed through the Marxist base and superstructure model, design culture reflected

the needs of capital. It was far more profitable to discover and design mass-production outlets for moulded plywood, fiberglass, cast aluminum, nylon, etc… than it was to favor the traditional labor intensive hardwood manufacturing that had been constitutive of both American and old European taste.

Mid-century constitutes a moment of perfect convergence. The rationalism of modernism, the development of technology, and the state of economic conditions met the development of design logics to produce a visual culture for daily life that embodied liberal rationalism and the principle of fitness to purpose first brought into design through eugenic and social darwinist philosophies. I do not mean to make totalizing statements about the work produced in the time period and design contexts of the movement, though discursive evidence can be found in design philosophies of the day, such as Dieter Rams' *Ten Principles of Good Design*. Rather, the enduring presence it has in the American mind is tied to the favorable coming together of logics and material (capital) forces.

The most iconic designs we prescribe to that moment in the present day feature primary design considerations of reason and material technology. The Eames LCW and DCW are lauded for being the first to figure out moulded plywood for furniture. The form is acclaimed for being precisely what it should be for the material and function and no more. The same was true for their later fiberglass chair, having finally figured out how to make a moulded seat and back as one piece. The Panton Chair is iconic for being the first chair to be made as one piece from one material through a cheap and profitable method. The form is derived from the shape and position of a seated person and no more. The Eames Lounge and Ottoman,

perhaps the most iconic Mid-century design object, is designed for comfort and material technology alone. By most standards of beauty, it is a hideous object. But it expresses proper use of novel technologies in moulded plywood and cast aluminum paired with the comfort of leather upholstery. Yet this object is a powerful cultural signifier in the 21st century. It appears at times to signify that moment in history, such as in the television series *Mad Men* (2007-2015). At other times it leverages the sense of technological innovation and modern rationalism the object embodies to signify futurity, such as in the television series *Space: 1999* (1975-1977) and the movie *Tron: Legacy* (2010). In all these examples and more the chair signals good taste, further exemplified in the movie *Iron Man 2* (2010).

The enduring obsession with Mid-Century design may best be explained by the ease with which it signifies taste and refinement. Having achieved a plausible purity of reason and explanation, divorcing it from necessary historical specificity in the semiotics of the objects, it is the easiest manifestation of design to admire, or to proclaim admiration for. Beyond the subjective experience of hearing non-designers frequently proclaiming their love for mid-century design, there exis huge numbers of meta-Mid-Century products: objects that proclaim love of mid-century design. There is a devotional aspect to prints of mid-century furniture sold for home decoration. There is an obsessive quality to walking around in a t-shirt with images of iconic mid-century chairs. Design at mid-century has taken on a mantle of ubiquity. As seen in the Gotye music video, the mid-century designed environment is the quintessential designed environment. For the emerging designer it often feels that, beyond the walls of academic institutions and industry contexts, the history of design crescendoed and ended with mid-century.

Of course, design continued and flourished after mid-century modernism. Designers went on to produce work that was fundamentally in opposition to the philosophies of that movement. But for the purposes of this project, for the analysis of the enduring logics and social power described in this chapter, this genealogy culminates and ends with mid-century modernism. When operating through the logics of design in the present day, one is either critiquing, deriving, or outright copying

Mid-century design. Honest materiality. Innovation. Fitness to purpose. Built for comfort. Designed to solve a problem. Free from superfluous detail. Everything has been done before, and Mid-Century designers did it better than we ever can.

"History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now."[52] The contemporary condition of design is haunted by the story of design. The logics and philosophies that combined to create a discipline that is historically and contextually specific have in many ways made the work of contemporary designers irrelevant. This genealogy outlines an operative logic of design that contemporary designers must contend with. Meeting the conditions of the present, this operative logic cannot hold.

Chairs

Chairs

mahogany, assorted wood veneers, cane

17 x 16 x 30 in.

Chairs is an exercise in generative pastiche. This chair is almost entirely a reproduction of a Regency Era chair from 1830's England. I inferred form, scale, dimensions, material, and methods as best I could from a listing on 1st Dibs. The appealing feature of this period chair, and why I found it useful, was the extensive marquetry decoration that adorned its faces. The original is a fine example of ornamentation, craftsmanship, and luxury furniture from a period where industrial production was still coming into being—and before it had come to impact the design of furniture. The marquetry ornamentation is exemplary in that it includes the most conventional depictions of ornamentation in the West at that time: griffins, shields, acanthus leaves, and scrollwork.

I reproduced this chair, produced two decades prior to the formation of design as a discipline, with one key contemporary intervention. Early in the 20th century, form superseded depiction or decoration. Meditating on this shift, I substituted the depictions of conventional ornament with depictions of the most iconic forms of the 20th century: mid-century chairs. The illustration and organization of the marquetry takes further inspiration from Alexander Girard, one of the most iconic design illustrators of that period, and his pattern *Fruit Trees*. The original scrollwork now takes the form of branches, with chairs as the colorful fruits of that tree.

Antique English Regency Side Chair with Marquetry Inlays & Caned Seat, circa. 1830s
Photographs and information taken from a 1stDibs listing.
https://www.1stdibs.com/furniture/seating/side-chairs/pair-of-antique-english-regency-side-chairs-marquetry-inlays-caned-seat/id-f_34902012/
Accessed October, 2023 — May, 2024.

Photograph by Erik Gould

Photograph by Erik Gould

Photograph by Erik Gould

My Favorite Chair Is the Eames Lounge and Ottoman, What's Your's?

My Favorite Chair Is the Eames Lounge and Ottoman, What's Your's?

bronze, brass, copper, sterling silver

3 x 6 x 0.04 in.

The card scraper is a simple, cheap, and highly effective tool used in fine woodworking to clean or smooth a surface. A piece of thin sheet steel is filed on its edge and burnished to produce a bur on one or both corners. This bur gently removes a very small amount of material and leaves a near finish-quality surface. The card scraper is most effective when the user holds it with their fingers on either side and their thumbs in the center, flexing the metal to concentrate the cutting edge in a smaller area. The most common dimension of a card scraper is 3 x 6 in., though they also come in different curves. Because it is such a gentle and effective tool, it is often used for cleaning marquetry after it is glued to a surface to avoid scraping or sanding through the often 1/40 in. veneer.

I felt that delicate and decorative marquetry depictions of chairs required an equally decorative and delicate card scraper. My card scraper was made using the same techniques as marquetry and one similar to the marriage of metals technique in jewelry and metalsmithing. I hand sawed the image of the chair using the double-bevel method of wood marquetry then soldered the parts together into a flat sheet. With both the lack of spring in the bronze background and the image made of precious and semi-precious metals, *My Favorite Chair Is the Eames Lounge and Ottoman, What's Yours?* forces the user to scrape gently lest they scrape right through that precious depiction.

Photograph by Mark Johnston

Chapter Two:

Meeting Contemporary Horrors as a Designer

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This

> storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.
>
> —Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"

The Good Place, a television show that ran from 2016 to 2020 on NBC, follows a group of people who lived less than exemplary lives as they attempt to go from The Bad Place (a stand in for hell) to The Good Place (a stand in for heaven), along with the demon originally assigned to punish them. In the first season characters are told that they are actually in The Good Place. Some clearly know they don't belong and pretend to play the role of a deserving resident of heaven. Over time others come to terms with with the fact that they were not as morally upright as they had imagined themselves to be. Towards the end of the first season they realize that they are actually in The Bad Place; paradoxically, their torture involved thinking they had made it to The Good Place while residing in an excrutiatingly distorted version of it .

The group undergoes a process of learning, unlearning, and growing in order to posthumously become worthy of The

Good Place. They come to learn that the place individuals are assigned to is determined by a point system—a stand-in for a pseudo-utilitarian ethics—where every action is assigned positive or negative point values based on the intentions of the individual and the impact of the action. If you die with a point balance around one million or above, you go to The Good Place.

It is later revealed by the committee that governs The Good Place that no individual had been admitted in 521 years. Seeking an explanation, the demon-turned-ally of the group steals a point balance accounting book. Upon reviewing the book the group concludes that the points system fails because of a changed world. In the modern world every action has a myriad of unintended negative consequences. If one were to buy flowers for a loved one, they are implicated in the exploitation of land and labor and the environmental impacts of growing and transporting. No simple purchase, the show suggests, is un-implicated. No simple action, even with the best of intentions, does not in some way bolster the unethical actions of another. Even those who attempt to live their lives with these considerations, careful not to take any action that may have negative consequences, are still unable to avoid the immorality of the modern world.

The Good Place delivers a poignant and surprising indictment of late stage capitalism, especially for a sitcom aired on a major legacy media network. That we cannot live in modernity without complicity in exploitation, death, and destruction has become a given to the point that popular corporate media can air a series that hinges on it. It is not a radical position.

The horrors of modernity are not new, but now we see them in far more clarity and frequency than ever before. Every year, as we progress deeper into the digital age, we find ourselves more inundated with media than ever imagined possible. The average TikTok user spends 95 minutes a day on the app.[53] Over 150 million Americans, nearing half the population, are on TikTok.[54] A significant portion of those Americans spend hours every day scrolling through videos fed to them by the app's algorithm. I do not take the position that this an inherently undesirable state of affairs. The symbiotic relationship between humans and technology has constantly existed since the beginning of human history—we have always been cyborgs. We have always been augmented by the technologies we produce. But the reality of the technological present is that, in these hours of scrolling, people bounce constantly between comedic content and graphic images of genocide and war, followed by "thirst traps" and back again. The shock of war photography during the Civil War or the journalistic documentation of the Vietnam War making its way to the television screens of America are nothing in comparison to today's incessant decentralized content creation and absorption. We are profoundly desensitized to the horrors of the world. Even when we react, we do not sustain attention long enough for action. We have learned to manage our outrage, our grief, and our sadness such that we can move on to the next video. It is no longer the truth that those of us in the global imperial core are unaware of the suffering in the world. We are aware to the point that we can no longer react with the outrage that these conditions demand.

So here we are, immersed in a state of contemporary horrors. How did we get here? I would argue through the rise of neoliberal governmentality at a time of increasing connection and content absorption. Neoliberalism is something of a chimera in academia, a catch-all for the worst social, political and economic relations of the last decades of the 20th century. Here, I am specifically referring to Foucault's discussion of neoliberalism, which is found only in transcripts of a lecture series. Social theorist Jason Read offers a useful summary of Foucault's theorization,

> [For Foucault,] neoliberalism constitutes a new mode of "governmentality," a manner, or a mentality, in which people are governed and govern themselves. The operative terms of this governmentality are no longer rights and laws but interest, investment and competition.[55]

Foucault thus offers a framework through which to understand contemporary social relations on the basis of economic compulsions. He names *Homo economicus* as an "entrepreneur of the self"[56] who invests in their own "human capital." Within this framework, every decision an individual makes at all times includes a calculus of whether or not it will increase their earning potential.

In 2020 design and technology theorists Tony Fry and Adam Nocek edited and published *Design in Crisis; New Worlds, Philosophies, and Practices*, a collection of essays by scholars in the emerging field of critical design studies. The opening essay, "Design in Crisis; Introducing a Problematic," by Fry and Nocek, has been circulating widely and seemingly jolting the

academic design world into conscious focus on the existential conditions facing both humanity and the field of design, as well as design's complicity in these conditions. Much of "Design in Crisis" is a sort of theoretical overview of the field; wherein the authors ultimately define a *problematic*, in the Deleuzean usage of the term, as an operative framework. They work through a vast landscape of social critical theory that informs various scholars of the small field of *critical design studies*. Ultimately, they argue design must become "unrecognizable to itself." What it means for design to become unrecognizable to itself is unclear, but that's the point. If design cannot solve problems, we cannot solve the problem of design.

At threat of doing precisely what the authors insist must not be done—designing a solution to the defined problematic—I argue that a path forward must seriously contend with the neoliberal governmentality first described by Foucault. Insofar as the authors touched upon the subject, their focus remained on the power of the neoliberal logic over government and industry, but not over the individual subject.

Another theoretical framework that is useful for understanding the present condition is cultural critic Lauren Berlant's discussion of "slow death." Berlant proposes a new way to think about the contemporary experiences of certain populations. The experience in question,

> is simultaneously at an extreme and in a zone of ordinariness, where life building and the attrition of human life are indistinguishable, and where it is hard to distinguish modes of incoherence, distractedness, and habituation from deliberate and deliberative activity, as they are all involved in the reproduction of predictable life.[57]

This experience is a result of what Berlant discusses to be the shift from traditional sovereignty to biopower as Foucault describes it: the right to live or let die.[58] The subject of Berlant's theory, then, is the quasi-sovereignty of the subject in this formation of power, and how they exercise sovereignty in conditions of limited life-building and life-sustaining economies. The turn Berlant proposes is, "to think about agency and personhood not only in normative terms but also as activity exercised within spaces of ordinariness that does not always or even usually follow the literalizing logic of visible effectuality, bourgeois dramatics, and lifelong accumulation or fashioning."[59] Slow death, then, refers to the physical wearing away of bodies in times of ordinariness through moments of agency in life-sustaining action. Berlant illustrates this idea through obesity, recasting it as not a failure of morals and will or as a crisis, but as the result of subject agency in choosing to sustain themselves in the immediate moment within their context. Placed alongside the concept of human capital, we begin to understand the complexity of agency and decision making for subjects of contemporary regimes of power; especially subjects with limited or no futurity.

Design is not only in crisis because of its ethical and sustainability failures, or because of the conditions around which Fry and Nocek organize the *problematic* of the crisis, but also because in the old adage that 'capitalism sows the seeds of its own destruction', design is a center-stage subject. It is well understood that part of what Marx meant by the phrase is that capitalist profit motives—the unending drive that brings with it increasing prices and decreasing wages—results in the

noncapitalist class becoming increasingly unable to afford the objects of production, such that profit is impossible. The ultimate downfall of capitalism may or may not result from this pure self-destruction, but what the present moment teaches us is that these conditions eventually make existence near-unlivable and spread the experience of slow death to ever increasing populations. The 'shrinkflation' of the post-Covid United States has, perhaps, done more to disillusion the Western world's population from the promises of capitalism than anything in history. The supposed logic of inflation has broken as record cost-of-life increases coincide with record profit margins for major corporations.

What does this mean for the field of design if it understands itself to be the creative source in the system of production? The emerging furniture designer, for example, cannot enter the industry as if business is as usual when realistic expectations point to an ever-dwindling market for luxury furniture, or even mid-to-high end furniture. When the vast majority of young adults in the United States cannot imagine themselves owning a house, furniture design is in crisis. Every field of design that concerns itself with products is in crisis. The *Homo economicus* of neoliberalism[60] dissolves without faith that one's investment in their economic potential, or any economic choices, might help them to live the basic dream of having a family for whom they can afford healthcare. If we understand the discipline of design as it was first coalesced and categorized as being intimately tied to (national) production[61], why should anybody care about a new chair right now? When we put together Lauren Berlant's conception of autonomy in conditions of slow death, Fry and Nocek's assessment of design in crisis, and a Marxist understanding of design, the best that

an emerging furniture designer can hope for is the negatively moralized self-sustaining addiction habit of shopping to benefit their own sales. The emerging designer might win in a world of online shopping for fast furniture functioning as a coping mechanism, but it is a moral failure to hope for such a world.

From a purely practical perspective, designers cannot undertake a project of unmaking design when the governing logic of human capital permeates every decision the individual subject makes. Put another way, designers cannot make design unrecognizable to itself when doing so means forgoing the possibility of self-sustenance. We must design communities of care, sustenance, and mutual aid before we can jeapordize our care and sustenance within the operative logic of capital.

In a Marxist analysis of the labor relations of design, how would we understand the class of a designer? Is being a designer a signal of class superiority? Does it mark someone who has the ability to devote time and energy to the pursuit of this thinking and making as opposed to a worker whose labor has been divided into an alienating, machine-like existence—producing part of a part of another person's design? In the early days of design as a discipline, the professional role of the designer grew out of the broader processes of labor differentiation that were occurring as a result of the Industrial Revolution. The designer emerged as the thinker who did not dirty their hands on the factory floor. This role emerged in the context of obfuscating class distinction. Though they did not own the means of production, they were not the image of the working proletariat. The designer has always held a place of distinction—a precarious place of intellectual

respect. It is the ideal for those invested in the making of things. Present realities of privilege are the dreams of a post-capital future. The task of the justice driven designer is to pick up, and operate within, ideal modes of design and undermine their relation to power. Design must be ruthlessly politicized.

Social Design of the 20th century and postmodern design of the 1980s made the case that design is political. It is not a new argument. Yet in the inifinite mass of disparate elements that Ovid called Chaos, and which now takes the form of content and production in the 21st century, a renewed effort to consciously politicize design is in order. On a basic level, the end of this effort might be the grueling, tedious, and demoralizing requirement to consider in every decision the material consequences of every choice one makes when designing or making things—and it is likely true that this is an abstract ethical obligation. A more interesting, inspiring, and perhaps easier approach would be to complicated the practice of design at a deeper level—to engage in the design of things that are compelling to a culture at-large, and that refuse to engage in, or better yet actively critique, capitalist modes of production and neocolonial economies.

The 1960's and 1970's—a time of particularly emphasized social upheaval and awareness—offer numerous examples of radical designers contending with the horrors of their moment. In 1968 the Type Directors Club made a bold choice in the design of their Annual Review. Normally a catalogue celebrating the best of that year's type design, the 1968 issue contended with the seeming absence of current events in the professional work being celebrated by placing full-page images of riots, assassinations, and war opposite winning

designs. Lorraine Wild & David Karwan write of the choice, "Clearly, the organizers of the 1968 competition could not contain their dismay at the disconnect between the optimistic and self-assured work being celebrated against a backdrop of a society that appeared to be cracking apart."[62] In the summer of that same year, the Scandinavian Design Student's Organization came together for an eight day conference to discuss the state of design and their role in it. Through this event, they made public an explicitly anticapitalist "Alternative Mission Statement" which included the following passage:

> We want to put an end to a system in which invented needs are satisfied at the expense of genuine needs. We want to carry out surveys of the genuine needs of people in different areas of the world. We want to analyse the results of these surveys and use them as a basis for participation in satisfying these genuine needs. We want to put an end to a system that misuses our shared resources on the globe. We want to support national liberation movements actively.[63]

These students came together to imagine an alternative to the growing culture of consumerist superficialities which produced artificial desire in the West while relying on exploited labor around the world. Practitioners of design and architecture were also contending with the role their field played in creating the conditions of the present (and possible futures). The Italian design collective, Superstudio, produced non-commercial work that indicted the field of architecture's superficial posturing as a social good. The collective is most well known for their imaginative concept for a future without buildings which they categorized as a "negative utopia."[64] This vision sought to remove production from the world entirely.

Figure 17. Superstudio collage as part of *Supersurface*
Superstudio. *The Fundamental Acts: Life, Education, Ceremony, Love, Death; Life - Supersurface - "Fruits & Wine" (Atti Fondamentali "Vita, Educazione, Cerimonia, Amore, Morte": Vie - Supersuface - "Fruits et Vin")*. 1971; March 21, 1971-March 20, 1973. Collage and photo on paper, 66 x 89.5 cm; N.: 52. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France. https://jstor.org/stable/community.10595314.

Art as a discipline is often charged with responding to the world. Design as a discipline is at all times charged with meeting the needs of a client or user. Successful design in the conventional paradigm works by operating within the logics of the discipline: solve the problem as contextualized not only by the client but by the social and economic relations that dictate one's practice. When the operating logics outside of design fail, design cannot go on as if business is usual without risking irrelevance or being disingenuous. In the late 1960's it might have seemed that design was ceasing to function as it previously had. An emerging generation of designers were washing their hands of the practices that made the discipline complicit in the worst horrors of their contemporary world. Between such radical actions as the Type Directors Club making explicit the politics of design, the Scandinavian Design Student's Organization advocating for a fundamentally altered design practice, and designers like the Superstudio architecture design collective imagining a future without buildings, it might have seemed that design was becoming unrecognizable to itself.

The 20th century is consistently marked by a counterculture that rejected and challenged the contemporary state of modernism and industry. However, the 1960s and 1970s are a period of particularly oppressive social struggle, contradictions, and war that led to major movements and cultural shifts. Andrew Blauvelt defines the rejection which characterized that moment as being different from other moments, especially as it would impact design. He argues that the hippie sought liberation not from totalitarian regimes but from, "affluent society itself," and the rejection of the day was aimed at, "forms of social oppression and economic domination."[65]

Blauvelt, and the hippies of the 1960's and 1970s which he describes, operate within a conventional materialist politics that views history in deterministic and progressive narratives which, at times, crystalizes into moments of crisis that are to be overcome. The era in question likely was a moment of particular turbulence and historical happenings, but the progress promised by the telling of its history never truly materialized.

An alternative theorization of history can help us understand the present moment and its potential. I argue for an understanding of history in line with the experience of the angel of history that Walter Benjamin describes; forever and uncontrollably blown towards the future, facing backwards towards the growing pile of wreckage that we call progress, powerless to stop it. This is an understanding that refuses to refer to a moment as crisis as if it is a determined aberration of history rather than a particular moment of consciousness towards that wreckage. Crisis is often used to defend institutions from the realities they have always produced. Abigail Boggs and Nick Mitchell define 'the crisis consensus' in the context of the university as a subject of study.

> The crisis consensus is a mainstay of political ideology that functions with particular ardor in higher education, where it pivots on the invocation of the university as a good in itself, as an institution defined ultimately by the progressive nature at its core. The crisis consensus thereby settles in advance the constitutive problems and paradoxes — to say nothing of the forms of real expropriation and violence — that continue to constitute the university as such.[66]

The crisis consensus describes a strategy of discursive normalization in which the reasoned and predicted consequences

of a system or institution are reframed as a crisis the system or institution must be saved from. Directed more broadly at society, we should understand the 1960's and 1970s not as a moment of crisis, but as the gross manifestation of the logics under which society has always operated. Put differently by Walter Benjamin, "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule."[67] At that historical moment, many parts of the design world began to see the operating logics of the discipline as being inseparable from the conditions that seemed to threaten society at-large.

I believe that we are now entering a period of vast rejection, much like that of the 1960's and 1970's. The struggles of the past are returning to public focus—economic decline, state violence, and the oppression of marginalized groups. However, this period is unique for two reasons. First, the digital age has completely changed the way we consume information, communicate with one another, and understand the world. This is not an argument that I, or anyone else is making. It is common knowledge.[68] But what is not fully understood yet within the common discourse is how younger generations are fundamentally different by having grown up with such technology—though we are already seeing the desensitization which inundation brings. The second condition is the impending climate catastrophe that has robbed us all of a livable future. Important to add, however, is how the previously mentioned conditions also pose a major threat to the livable future of the younger generations. Between political instability, the crisis of public faith in government eroding, and the unending rise of rent and decrease of wages while a tiny group consolidates the

vast majority of the world's wealth, the promises of American exceptionalism or liberalism's narrative of progress have collapsed. To my generation, these conditions put together are no less than apocalyptic—either society as we know it completely and fundamentally transforms, or it all ends.

The contradictions of liberalism have cracked the foundations on which the society it birthed lay for several hundred years. Whereas previous moments of crisis—though 'crisis' is used to conceal the constant threat faced by the contradictions of capitalism and liberalism[69]— have patched these cracks with the power of the regime of capital and the 'silent compulsion of economic relations'[70], my generation has had to contend with ever more hopelessness compounding through childhood, adolescence, and now adulthood. The very basis of the modernist worldview is that the world can be controlled. But through this very control, humanity faces an existential threat. To put it simply, this logic cannot hold.

A radical approach to design—one which rejects production as a primary motivation and which contends with the horrors of the day—most easily lives in the necessary evil of the art gallery. Wherein capitalist economies—most applicably in neoliberal economies—there is no alternative to engaging in the economic system at threat of death[71], the luxury furniture gallery is the most stable way in which a designer or maker can produce this type of critical work, gain relevance and recognition, disseminate their ideas, and not die. The design gallery is a fraught site of possibility for critical discourse and politicizing conversations on design in the public sphere. However, the gallery remains a fundamentally exclusionary and capital driven institution.

The operative logic of the gallery demands that the work it represents is still palatable to an audience that will purchase work at its pricepoint. Political work always risks becoming a commodity. This is an obvious statement; by definition, all work sold by a gallery is a commodity. The risk, however, is that the politics of the work are commodified as well. Certain work is sellable because it feels right for a wealthy audience to buy into a particular political message. It is a demoralizing reality for the political artist or designer. The Superstudio collective experienced a similar issue when explicitly political prototypes of their making were decontextualized and turned into commodities when shown at the MoMA[72]. This experience pushed the collective towards their imagined future without buildings–work that not only rejected being a commodity, but explicitly imagined a world without commodities[73]. Yet I argue that there is still value in the work being shown because it reaches a wider audience for conversation than it reaches for sale. If the gallery is the only place political work can be shown, so be it.

A video was posted to TikTok on May 1, 2023 by the user @dey0derant. It is a compilation of found video and images. Instrumental music builds throughout. The compilation opens on a video, likely posted to Youtube or TikTok, that follows the 'man on the street' trope, in which a creator will stop people on the street and ask them questions. Here, a young man in a suit is asked on the sidewalk how much he pays for rent in New York City. He answers $6400. We then go to a scene in the Chicago O'hare tunnel. The walls are lit

up with color. The ceiling is a mirror. It reflects the neon light installation that hangs beneath it along with the innumerable mass of travelers that seemingly fill every square foot from here to infinity. The video switches to a woman on tiktok standing in front of a Christmas toy aisle in a Walmart. She says, "have y'all ever just looked down an aisle at a store and just see, like, landfill?" "The American way of doing things," says a narrator over a cartoon that appears to be from the 1960s, "makes it possible for people to own their own home." The scene changes. The top half of a TikToker's face appears over an image of a small, dilapidated house. He says with pain in his voice, "this is what we can afford with a $120,000 combined income." We then go to Tommy Hilfiger's kitchen in his $50 million dollar penthouse. His wife says, "I can't say that the kitchen sees a lot of cooking action, because, after all, that's what restaurants are for." Back to the cartoon. "It must be the American way of doing things that makes you the luckiest guy in the world." Before the sentence ends, we see a massive crowd standing outside. On the screen is the caption, "5 HOUR WAIT FOR SPLASH MOUNTAIN LAST DAY!" We go to another TikTok. A man records himself stepping outside of his house. The screen reads, "i live in the united states of america / i'm going out for a walk", now, "the walk:", he shows us a 6 lane road in a residential area with no intersection in site. The sidewalk could not fit two people walking side by side. There is a bike lane; it is narrower than the handlebars of a typical bike. Then, an older woman, interviewed as she sits on her couch. She says, "it hasn't been the fantasy land that I thought it would be." We see now that the instrumental music playing over these videos is performed by the creator of the video. He sits

cross legged on a bed with a small keyboard in front of him. The music builds. That last word plays, distorted, again and again as one note among many, "be, be, be." Images begin to appear on the screen around the musician. A sea of people and colorful inflatables crowded in a wave pool, a suburban divided highway in the Southwest from the point of view of a driver, "be, be, be," a fight in a crowded Best Buy where two men have a tug of war with a large flat screen TV next to an image of an unappetizing school lunch, "be, be, be," another lunch, now a group wrestles to grab large boxes with electronics inside, another lunch. The music stops. Back to the Hilfigers' kitchen. Mrs. Hilfiger says, "although, you do make the occasional piece of toast." He smiles.

The first artistic movement to not only engage, but directly emerge from the conditions of the technological present—from inundation and desensitization—seems to be Corecore, a diffuse style of videos posted to TikTok that capture the experience of existing in the post-2020 world. Creators collage seemingly unrelated videos and images, drawing from any source—news coverage, movies, home videos, educational programming, etc. These clips are generally overlaid with somber music. Though the clips seem unrelated, they, in fact, speak to the very confluence of conditions previously mentioned; and they do so in the language spoken by a generation raised on media and stimulation.

The connections between the collaged media do not need to be explained. In fact, explaining them would only ruin the meaning of the work. At its core, Corecore says that the very source of meaning is enigmatic. It is nebulous. It is here and it is there. It is in the discrete interaction between experiences and facts and conditions and words. Particularly

in the digital age. Perhaps Corecore can inform how we engage our contemporary practice and navigate meaning at a crystalized monad of history in which our days in the studio include clear images of mass death on our phones.

In conventions of writing, the fragment is unacceptable. A sentence must contain a subject and a verb. It must be complete. This rule can be broken to great effect. Of course. In many contexts. The way we think is not ordered. The mind is of nature. It wanders and trails. It turns a corner only to turn. Right back. The fragments are left hanging.

What Corecore does more than anything is help us to better understand the way we consume information, communicate with one another, and understand the world in the digital age. To engage in the technological world today is to stand on moving ground; to be constantly unsettled but managing to remain generally comfortable. We better understand the connections between all aspects of modernity, from exorbitant rent to the crowded O'Hare Airport tunnel, from the wide streets that don't account for pedestrians to the Hilfiger's unused kitchen. And we understand them without the need for elaboration. The fragment already exists in our culture—it is a tool at our disposal.

If we are to contend with the conditions of the present in a meaningful way, it cannot be through the same logics that constructed a world on shifting fault lines. What would happen if we translated the rule breaking of the fragment to the realm of design? What if we refused to edit? Let the loose thoughts mingle or sit still, ready for interaction. Like Corecore compilations, the meaning is in the unspoken relationships. We don't need to be able to put it in a sentence to fully understand what the statement is.

Devotions

Devotions

Plywood, assorted wood veneers

16 panels, 8 x 8 x 1.5 in. each

People love chairs. People love to have favorite chairs. People love to tell people that they have favorite chairs. People especially love when people know that they love iconic mid-century chairs. People love to put posters with silhouettes of such chairs on their walls. Some people love to wear shirts with silhouettes of such chairs on their chests. People love to love design. And they love to be known for loving design.

It (design) is not that serious. Except for the design of cheap, ubiquitous objects produced in the millions or billions. That is serious. The designers of the BIC pen, BIC lighter, Solo cup, Lego, Jenga, Gatorade bottle, Scotch tape dispenser, and wall-mounted soap dispenser are geniuses. Without these products, our lives would be far more tedious, messy, and boring.

Devotions is a series of laser-cut marquetry panels depicting these icons in devoted, obsessive detail. Beginning with the style of those mid-century chair illustrations, these panels elevate their subjects even further. These are not illustrations, they are paintings made with wood veneer, capturing not only the forms and colors of the designed objects, but their worldly qualities and the way that light hits them. This is craft process pushed to an extreme, depicting miniscule detail to capture the reflective effect on chrome tubing, the soft glow of plastic, or the shifting colors of wood grain.

Devotions are objects of contemplation. With their veneered back-bevel, they float towards the viewer, emitting a soft reflective glow of color on the wall like a halo. One is rewarded by staring at the detail they might not otherwise notice

Fall into their world. Imagine the soft flow of gliding your hand across the molded plywood of Charles and Ray Eames's LCW. Caress the perfect plastic surface of Eero Saarinen's Tulip Chair. Feel the folds of leather on Le Corbusier's LC2 and fall into the shadowy depths of its seat. Wrap yourself in the plastic of Verner Panton's Panton Chair molded just for your human body. Effortlessly lift Michael Thonet's light-as-a-feather Thonet No. 14. Rest upon the perfect chrome-supported cane seat of Marcel Breuer's Cesca Chair. Dive into the enveloping coziness of Fritz Hansen's Egg Chair. Bounce into the colorful world of George Nelson's Marshmallow Sofa.

I love them I love them I love them I love them. This is my favorite chair. Whatever icon of design is the object of our reverence, let our relationship to it be devotional.

Devotions #1: Gojo

Devotions #2: LCW

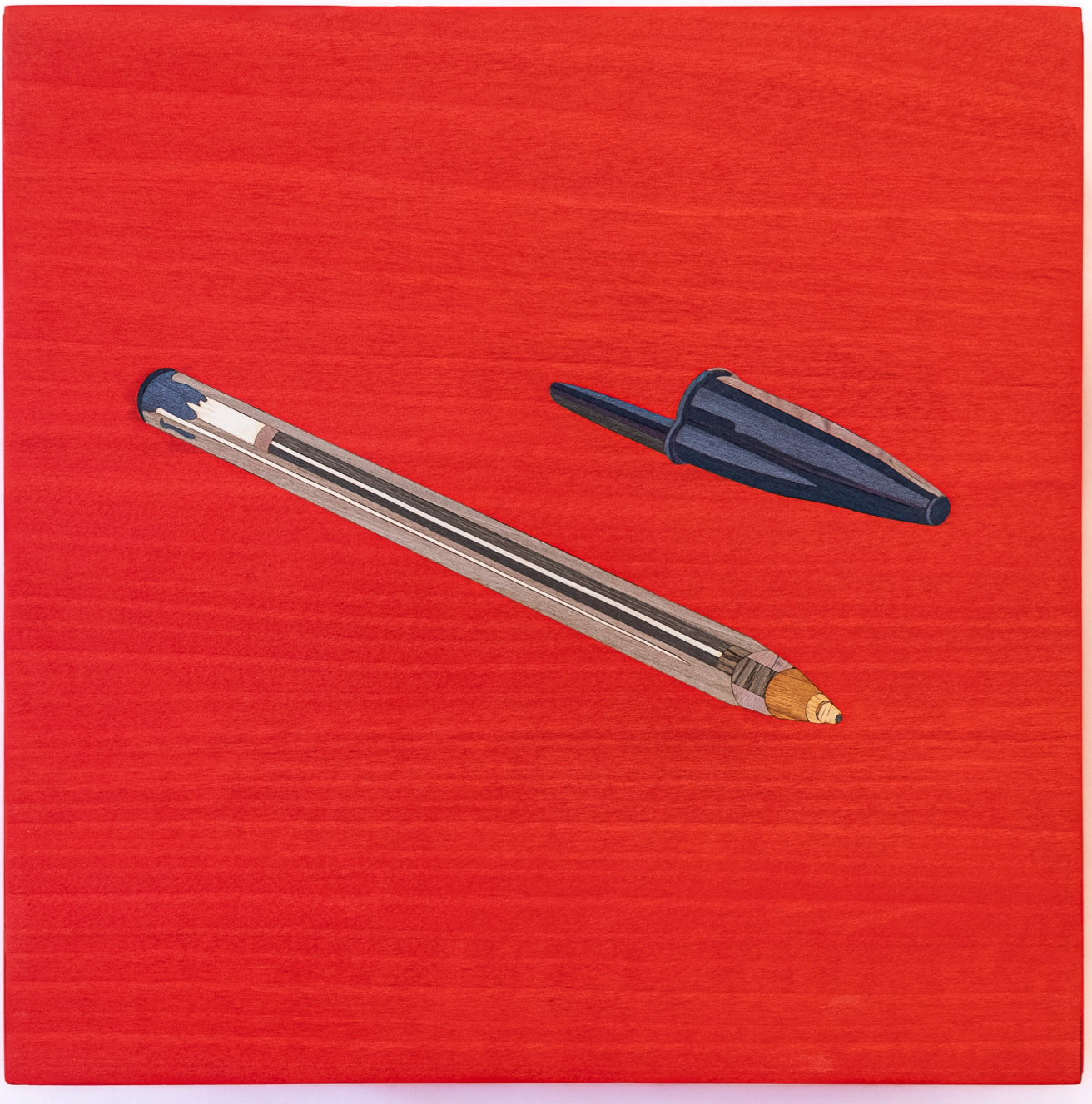
Devotions #3: Tulip

Devotions #5: Jenga

Devotions #6: Thonet

Devotions #7: Panton

Devotions #8: BIC 1



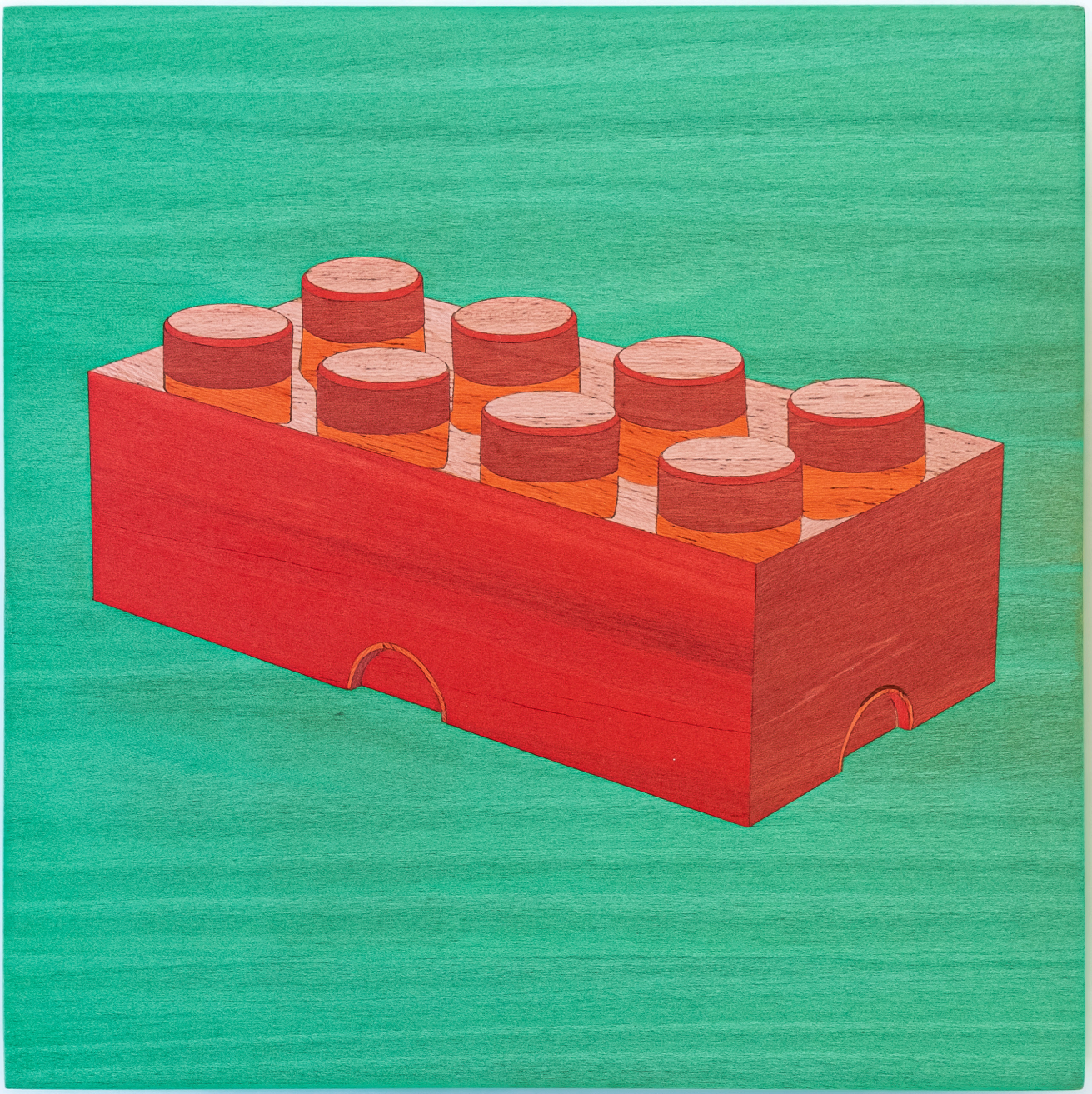
Devotions #9: Scotch

Devotions #10: Thonet

Devotions #11: Cesca

Devotions #12: BIC 2

Devotions #13: Lego



Devotions #14: Egg

Devotions #15: Marshmallow

Devotions #16: Gatorade

Chapter Three:

A New Gilded Age;

The Role of the Designer at the End of History

Materialistic historiography ... is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystalizes into a monad.

—Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"

Every few days for the last four years new images of chairs designed by an anonymous South Korean designer have been posted to the Instagram account @muddycap. These chairs are humorous and illustrative. They play with recognizable objects and forms. Recent examples, posted between March 20 and March 29, 2024, include daisy chairs (fig. 18) in which the seat

is a folded leaf and the back is a flower, a chair with a solid base in the form and appearance of flan with a Windsor-style back supported on either side by large metal spoons (fig. 19), chairs in the form of pistols with the handle on the ground and the barrel pointing upwards (fig. 20), or chairs resembling creased tubes of paint that form a seat with a squiggle of paint forming the back (fig. 21). This account holds a massive amount of unexpected and irreverent conceptual chairs.

The designer makes clever use of the Instagram profile format. Below the profile picture, where the name, type of account—typically by profession—and bio appear, reads:

> **I'm not an**
> Artist
> i just make chairs in 🇰🇷.....

The account is wildly popular, with 196,000 followers as of May 2024. The constant flow of new concept chairs shows this designer to have a massively productive and sustained creative practice.

And then you begin to wonder how this person could possibly be making so many chairs. I think of my work and the work of my colleagues. How many pieces of furniture can I make in a year? How many can my most prolific colleague make? Are they so consistently refined and well executed? As a maker, I look at just one of the chairs posted and wonder how I would make it, or actually, what material it's even made of. Is what I'm looking at even possible? The reality of @muddycap is that every image posted is a high-quality rendering. If you continue to scroll and read, you find that only one chair of

Figure 18. *Daisy Chair* by @muddycap
@muddycap. *Daisy Chair.* 2024; Posted to Instagram March 29, 2024. Screenshot taken from Instagram.

Figure 19. *Hungry Chair 3* by @muddycap
@muddycap. *Hungry Chair 3.* 2024; Posted to Instagram March 24, 2024. Screenshot taken from Instagram.

Figure 20. *Revolver Chair* by @muddycap
@muddycap. *Revolver Chair.* 2024; Posted to Instagram March 20, 2024. Screenshot taken from Instagram.

Figure 21. *Color Chair* by @muddycap
@muddycap. *Color Chair.* 2024; Posted to Instagram March 10, 2024. Screenshot taken from Instagram.

their design was ever fabricated. This chair was comparatively tame. Even so, the chair lost the visual power it had in the original rendering.

What, then, does it mean that this designer "makes chairs" that are entirely digital? Conventionally, a chair derives its meaning as a chair in that a person can sit in it. A chair is at all times relating to the body. Strictly speaking, a chair must be a tangible object to be a chair. Of course, artists and designers have been complicating, and playing with, the category of chairs for a long time. From Lucas Samaras's sculptural *Chair Transformations* series made in the late 20th century to the contemporary semi-functional chairs of Joyce Lin and Misha Kahn, artists and designers have been making conceptual chairs that are not necessarily meant to be sat upon. @muddycap's virtual chairs, then, are the next step in the dissolution of the chair and in the ever shifting meaning of furniture.

They are also not the first to use digital means to design fantastical chairs. In Fall 2023 the Vitra Design Museum acquired a *Hortensia Chair* designed by Andrès Reisinger. The chair was first conceived as a digital rendering posted to Instagram (fig. 22). The original depicted the loose form of a lounge chair but the surface was made entirely of pink hydrangea flowers pointing directly away from the chair in all directions. The rendering has an enigmatic quality. One imagines the body enveloped in a soft and delicate wrapping of flowers in bloom. The concept of visual comfort is always relevant in a chair. Beyond how comfortable it may be in reality to sit in it, how comfortable do you imagine it to feel when you look at it? The very impossibility of the digital *Hortensia Chair* sitting experience makes one feel an imaginative softness and beauty

Figure 22. *Hortensia Chair* rendering
Andrés Reisinger x Reisinger Studio. *Hortensia Chair*. 2018. Image from https://reisinger.studio/hortensiachair/

more than any imitation possibly could. And yet, after gaining widespread popularity on Instagram, Reisinger collaborated with designers and fabricators to produce a physical translation of the chair (fig. 23). The real-world version is made of thousands of soft pink fabric petals that individually stick out and flap about in all directions. Gone are the defined forms of individual flowers. Gone is the ability to imagine the feeling of thousands of delicate petals crisp in bloom contacting skin or the enveloping scent environment. Even the color of the object is flat compared to the rendering.

The work of designers and artists in the late 20th and early 21st century thoroughly challenged the idea that a chair must be sittable to have meaning as a chair. What @muddycap and the *Hortensia Chair* teach us is that the next frontier of design may very well be the design of *physical objects for digital experience*. In the unlikely event that Mark Zuckerberg's imagined future of life lived primarily in the augmented reality of the Metaverse comes to be, we can at least find comfort in the explosion of possibility to design objects that open our imaginations to experiences otherwise impossible in the physical world.

Perhaps this is one approach designers might take to address the climate crisis. It is often said in the design community that the world does not need another chair. Indeed there are likely very few objects that the world needs more of. The design of physical objects in digital spaces gives creatives the opportunity to express and share ideas without environmental harm. Or at least at first glance. In fact, the use of digital technologies is massively harmful both to the environment and to exploited people in the Global South. An article published by the World Economic Forum in 2022 discusses the high

Figure 23. *Hortensia Armchair* produced by Moooi
Andrés Reisinger and Júlia Esqué. *Hortensia Armchair.* 2018. Produced and distributed by Moooi. Image from https://www.moooi.com/us/product/hortensia-armchair

emissions and energy use of digital and virtual technologies. For example, the training of just one AI model could produce 626,000 pounds of carbon dioxide.[74] The physical production of the technologies that assist digital engagement requires heavy metals like cobalt and lithium that are mined through profoundly exploitative labor and disastrous practices for local ecosystems. The sleek technologies of digital and virtual engagement obfuscate the past lives of the materials they are made of and the ongoing consumption they require for use. By contrast, one can *feel* the natural source of wooden objects or even the ancient photosynthesis that wrought the plastic products. As discussed in the previous chapter, every action we take in the modern world is inescapably implicated in suffering, exploitation, and environmental destruction.

The contemporary context for a designer is a rapidly changing world and rapidly changing boundaries of meaning and human experience. It is, at present, terribly difficult to think about the future of design when the contemporary experience is constant change and history has collapsed. In "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Walter Benjamin discusses two ways in which historiographers give meaning to "homogenous, empty time," or the substance of all that has happened and all that there is. The universalist historiographer adds data to make meaning, while the materialist historiographer constructs a struggle that crystalizes in different moments.[75] Materialists organize the substance of history to construct a story of the present and future. I would argue that liberal narratives of progress are equally constructive. Our understanding of the past informs theorizations of the future. Following again on Benjamin, to name the future as anything at all requires not only thinking, but the

arrest of thought as well. To think of a future now is to stop thinking of the inevitable climate catastrophe. The future is over. All we have is what we have. What do we do with it?

In 2019 the *Boston Review* published an article by political economist and geographer Geoff Mann in which he outlined the tensions and contradictions facing liberalism in the face of climate catastrophe.[76] The article discusses aspects of liberal epistemology and historical narratives and how the concept of the Anthropocene, a geological era defined by human destruction, shakes the foundations of progressive teleology. Mann's challenge to liberal logics is far reaching. He argues that the very theorization of the Anthropocene complicates liberal narratives of history because it forces a rationalization of problems that liberalism is, at least in large part, responsible for. Mann offers a concept of liberalism's "reality management system," by which the unequal distributions of universal human characteristics espoused by liberalism, as described in my own first chapter, are rationalized and explained away as aberrations rather than conditions of the regime. Core to the reality management system is the necessity to demarcate conditions of crisis as a method of reframing the negative and a-progressive realities of liberalism to be "unfortunate historical mistakes," or anomalies.[77] This is similar to Lauren Berlant's theorization of conditions of crisis or what Abigail Boggs and Nick Mitchell describe as the "crisis consensus."[78,79] Mann suggests that what the Anthropocene means to liberalism is an end to the narrative of historical progress. The Anthropocene is an admission that liberalism has created the conditions of its demise. As Mann

puts it, "we have crossed the threshold of a new age, and now, we wonder, what will happen next? Or, more precisely, since we have a pretty good sense of what will happen next, what we wonder is 'when will it happen, and who will it happen to?' Who will bear the burden of necessity?"[80]

What comes after liberalism? Politically speaking, it may be that a dangerous deformation of liberalism will take its place. Mann theorizes this political future, what he calls the "Climate Leviathan," based on the fact that liberalism itself seems to cleverly turn the very acknowledgement of the Anthropocene into a moment of progress. Distorting the meaning of the Anthropocene into a form that narrowly upholds liberal teleology has two consequences according to Mann. The first is that the subject of the Anthropocene becomes a "they"-less "we." Humanity as a collective is responsible for the consequences of a miniscule minority's actions. Second, liberal governance can do what it does best in assuming the responsibility, not over the climate catastrophe, but over assigning the distribution of burdens—likely in vastly unequal ways.

Moving beyond Mann's work, the logical and epistemic afterlife of liberalism is worth thinking about, but more difficult to predict. It is indisputable that liberalism will end. The climate catastrophe almost certainly means the end of civilization as we know it, potentially even the end of humanity. As Mann argues, the only uncertainty is when, how, and to whom. Insofar as there is any possibility of responding to the conditions of catastrophe in a meaningful way, I would add, we must hasten the end of liberalism. We must move into a new political and economic structure that prioritizes humanity over capital. A popular movement is required to overcome the interests of the few.

In this regard, reformist approaches are not only ineffective, but actively harmful to any prospect of survival. Discourses and logics of liberal humanism and progress are powerful forces. When we argue for a politics of incremental progress, of personal responsibility or long term reduction in emissions, we are reifying the false belief that it is within our power to change the trajectory of climate devastation through existing political and economic means.

This anti-climate-reformism applies not only to politics but to design as well. There is an overwhelming belief that design is capable of helping to stop the climate crisis. Within the discursive regime of design, sustainability is championed. In design school, students are encouraged to prioritize sustainable manufacturing and to consider an object's lifespan. Not only is design powerless against the United States Military's devastation of the planet or the power of oil and gas companies to delay the end of fossil fuels, design is intimately entwined with the interests of capital, which prevents a true revolution in design. As one example of this contradiction, we can look to *Interior Design Magazine*'s Best of Year Awards from 2023, in which a category exists for environmental impact, at the same time that Heller, a furniture design and manufacturing company producing exclusively injection-molded plastic products, won its own award and was honored in another.[81] The politics of sustainability are subsumed into the operative discourses of design. We acknowledge the climate crisis. We honor those who attempt to do something about it. We think we're making a difference.

To contend with this crushing weight of logical and discursive faltering, I look to two moments in the history of modernity. First, I think of the present as a new Gilded Age.

The Gilded Age, a period in the United States lasting roughly from 1870-1890, was a time of major industrial and technological development, wealth and wealth inequality creation, and political instability. It was a time where the overall wealth of the nation increased dramatically, but the trajectory of the laboring class was a loss of rights and worsening of conditions. Scholars in a number of fields have been using the terms "New Gilded Age," or "Second Gilded Age," for four decades to describe a wide variety of economic and political conditions; they are often met with criticism.[82] Many theorists, historians, and economists debate whether or not we can describe the present as a new Gilded Age based on the facts of history as compared to the facts of the present. I admit that there are substantial differences between that historical moment and the present. However, the naming of that original period as the "Gilded Age" is discursively powerful, establishing a degree of falseness and posturing toward the conditions of that day. It is for this reason that referring to the present as a new Gilded Age is so enticing. The stock market may be on the rise, overall wages may be increasing, novel technologies may be advancing at incomprehensible rates, but the conditions of the majority reflect an inverted state of affairs. Inflation and cost of living are far outpacing wage increases, as they have since neoliberal economics began. The advancement of technology is not reflected in the fact that the products we buy seem to constantly cost more, contain less, last for less time, and work more poorly than before. Liberalism's reality management system comfortably explains these conditions as aberrations in an otherwise upward trend, but it is liberal governance and the interests of capital that are exploiting the present to

consolidate wealth with no plausible deniability. Modernity and the existence of industry promise advanced technologies and comfortable lives in the global imperial core. These promises are consistently fading away behind that thin gilding.

The second historical moment brings us back to the context of design. The genre of artist and designer manifestos began during the period of the Gilded Age[83] but peaked in the late 1900s and early 1910s. Though the Gilded Age refers specifically to the United States, the development of technology and industry throughout the West leading into the 20th century resulted in massive social and cultural shifts. As modernity reached more and more people and the flow of information and culture increased, the world became a smaller and smaller place. The technologies of modernity made possible brand new modalities of living and creating. For art and design even the media changed in possibility and meaning. As iron and glass replaced brick and stone as the most economical building material, and as photography made so much of painting as it historically existed appear obsolete, working in the same way as before became a referent for a different time, a time that is not now. The theoretical melding of material and time in so radical and explosive a manner brought the notion of history and its trajectory to the forefront for many artists and designers. The world around them was rapidly changing, not only culturally and politically, but on a *material* level. It is at times like these that the movement of history is felt. The genre of art and design manifestos exploded after poet and art theorist F.T. Marinetti published *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism* in 1909. The document channels the sense of possibility and freedom from history that modernity brought to culture in that

era. Many Futurist manifestos followed from different people in different parts of the world, expanding or debating the ideas of this new movement. This was in part the genre context in which Walter Gropius wrote the *Bauhaus Manifesto*. It is also in line with the context in which European artists sought to break from rigid historical traditions, as seen in the Vienna Secession movement. The art and design manifestos of a century ago speak to the contemporary moment in that we, too, need to negotiate our relationship to futurity and our narrative of history.

The Futurist's philosophy aligns with traditional liberal narratives of progress. Their contemporary moment was, as Benjamin might say, a crystalized monad pregnant with tensions.[84] They were the vanguard of a critical moment in the history of art. They were able to take on the responsibility of producing entirely new culture, completely free from anything that came before. As the eighth point of Marinetti's manifesto reads, "We stand on the last promontory of the centuries!… Why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed."[85] The opportunity of the Futurists was the end of history and the beginning of the future.

It is easy to say in hindsight that taking on that role of creating entirely new culture was arrogant and presumptuous. What we see in the philosophy of the Futurists is a lack of trans-temporal care and respect. It is understandable that as the information age began and cultural dispersion occurred more quickly than before, the sense of speed at which culture moved was warped. It is understandable that historical traditions and reference had become stale in that contemporary moment.

Like the whole of human civilization's history, individuals never hold sole responsibility. Individuals make choices that are informed by the actions of others. We are at all times in conversation with what came before and responsible for what comes after. The disposition evidenced in the avant-garde of the early 20th century might help to explain the attitude of modernism and industrial development towards futurity. Modernism strives to be the future, and as such, it is primarily concerned with development and advancement, regardless of looming devastation. Today, as history collapses and the future vanishes, our burden is to figure out how to cope with what comes next.

To acknowledge the impending doom of climate catastrophe may read as nihilistic and pessimistic. Perhaps there is an element of nihilism in it, but only in the refusal to arrest thought and ignore the reality of the situation. Pessimism, however, cannot exist without optimism. For something to be pessimistic it must reject the possibility that things might be better. In the context of climate catastrophe, there is no possibility, so there is nothing to reject. Save for a massive cross-continental popular movement there is no hope of averting climate catastrophe. A pessimistic or optimistic disposition might exist, however, in what comes after that acknowledgment: the end is coming, do we give up or do we strive to find the best modality of life for the time that we have?

To confront liberal narratives of historical progress with the reality of history's end results in a necessarily pessimistic position. We have failed to achieve the promise of history. We

have destroyed what humanity has striven towards for all its existence. But to de-conceive of time as inherently progressive and meaningful is to open a whole realm of possibilities on par with the freedom experienced by the Futurists. The wind that blows the angel of history to paradise has stopped. The wreckage at his feet is no more than where we find ourselves standing. We need not go anywhere. All we have is the past. What do we do with it? And what do we do for eachother?

This project and the projects I reference—to make design unrecognizable to itself, to end liberal governance, to de-conceive of time as inherently progressive—are inherently abolitionist in the theoretical sense of the term. Sociologists Abigail Boggs, Eli Meyerhoff, Nick Mitchell, and Zach Schwartz-Weinstein describe the meaning of an abolitionist stance in their founding document of Abolitionist University Studies as a field of study. They write, "Abolitionist thought teaches us that when an institution—whether slavery, the prison, or the university—has become attached to so many real and meaningful anxieties about politics and purpose, life and living, it has come to wield the force of necessity. [...] Such an institution resists both theory and strategy alike because of how fixedly it attaches to what we need and value in the world."[86] I wish to be careful here not to suggest a project of design abolition on par with the movement to abolish prisons. Abolitionist projects are directed towards *institutions* that are deeply entwined with broader sociality and governmentality. Design is not an institution. However, as a constitutive component of modernity, both sharing responsibility for and helpless to stop contemporary and future horrors, a new disposition towards design can learn quite a

bit from abolitionist politics and scholarship. Furthermore, this project is invested not only in design but in the broader condition of the present and possible future.

Writing in the foreword to a radical volume of the *Harvard Law Review* focused on prison abolition, theorist and activist Dylan Rodriguez describes abolition as "a dream toward futurity vested in insurgent, counter- Civilizational histories — genealogies of collective genius that perform liberation under conditions of duress."[87] What Rodriguez describes is a movement of people with no futurity organizing creatively against overwhelming social, political, and historical contexts. It is a radical and liberatory remaking of the world, not by means of individual genius, but through histories of knowledge and communities of care and life-giving. Abolitionist politics are invested in denarrating existing configurations of history. Abolitionist politics engage history as no more than that base substance which Benjamin describes as homogenous, empty time: disorganized matter that does not suggest any given future, but through which we find ways to strive for a better one. What we can learn from abolitionist politics is that stepping into the present is not well achieved by rejecting the past. We do not succeed by attempting to find within ourselves something entirely new.

Abolitionist politics entail not only action to end an institution, but to make a world in which that institution could not exist.[88] We cannot change the operative logics of design to meaningfully prioritize human needs over the needs of capital without making a world that could not prioritize capital over human needs. Put another way, this project is totalizing and beyond the scope of design. It is a common trope in abolitionist politics that we cannot plan the whole of the world that

comes after abolition. Abolitionist projects are a process that involves action and reaction. Perhaps more than anything, abolitionist politics require radical care and community to the extent of negating the compulsive power of the state over the unequal distribution of resources and life chances over different populations.[89] If we are to learn from the failure of liberal narratives of history, this care is owed contemporarily but also trans-temporally.

Given the context of the present and the lessons learned from abolitionist politics and theory, how does the designer move through homogenous, empty time? On the level of action, the individual designer should do two things. The first has nothing to do with design. They must recognize that they exist in a context of shared responsibility. To meaningfully act against totalizing neoliberal governmentality and individual sociality we must engage seriously in community building. The idea of care is obvious. Of course we should care for one another. In the modern world, care is a cliché because it is obvious and yet the vast majority of the population does not meaningfully practice care in ways that undermine neoliberalism and liberal governance. As such, designers should create communities of care, support, and aid. Designers should create communities of designers to support one another, and designers should engage in community building in broader contexts. Second, designers should produce work that helps us make sense of the past, the conditions of the present, and our lack of futurity. Meaning and reason have changed and will continue to change with the movement of information in the digital age and the collapse of liberal narratives of history. Designers can help us make sense of the world and cope with it. If, however, designers

must design with the goal of solving a problem or making life better, there is a third action to consider. Accepting that design is incapable of solving the climate catastrophe, the horrors of the present, or the problematic of design,[90] designers should narrow the scope of their practice and design for the people they know and those in their communities.

The spark of this entire project was first lit in the Spring of 2023. The content of the spring semester core studio course for the first year furniture design MFA students was a semester-long partnership with MillerKnoll. Each of us was provided by MillerKnoll lumber harvested from the property of a home designed by Charles and Ray Eames for the son of Herman Miller's founder. We were tasked with producing a piece of furniture from it that engaged the De Pree House, Herman Miller, or Charles and Ray Eames. One component of this partnership was a trip to Michigan to visit the house, MillerKnoll's facilities, and the company's archive.

Visiting the MillerKnoll facilities in Michigan felt something like a pilgrimage for the design disciple. It was a treasure trove of mid-century design history, exemplary of excellence in American design, manufacturing, and commercial furniture. Personally, I loved many of the objects on display—the materials were rich, the archives were wonderful, the show pieces were exquisite. But to see the products at the Design Within Reach outlet down the road—such poor quality versions of what we saw at the facilities—was disappointing. Watching a floor of employees assembling components produced in other countries to make "American manufactured office chairs" was

eye opening. And seeing a banner hanging above the heads of workers who spend their day cutting sheets of MDF reading, "design for the good of humankind" was deflating. I had not entered that trip a particular devotee of Herman Miller and mid-century design, so there were no grand expectations to deflate, but it all got me thinking.

At a moment like this, the meaning of enduring mid-century objects is shifting. The value of objects is inseparable from the entirety of their social, cultural, material, political, economic, and otherwise worldly contexts. Those showroom pieces are the gilding of our New Gilded Age. In a world that does not need any more chairs, in which meaning-making is changing in digital logic-contexts, and which offers little hope for a livable future, what can the designer do to help us through this moment?

Returning to the idea of design objects as a coping mechanism, on the level of cultural production, artists and designers today must take the opposite disposition of the Futurists. Making new culture is not our task. Our role is to sort the wreckage of history and design things for understanding.

Meaning making in the 21st century is perhaps best understood as relationships of illogic, wherein the liberal rationalist logics that drove the worldviews represented in media in the 20th century have collapsed, where now meaning is found in the collage of disparate conditions that add up to what we might call an enigma. The enigma is the fragments that flow through and around each other. It is the current stage of the cultural accelerationism that began at the start of the 20th century. It is the highest summit of the wreckage. It is our inescapable reality.

Figure 24. *Faux Baroque B (Circular)* by Kostas Lambridis
Kostas Lambridis, *Faux Baroque B (Circular)*, assorted materials, 2022. Represented by Carpenters Workshop Gallery. Image from https://carpentersworkshopgallery.com/works/coffee-tables/faux-baroque-b-circular/

The enigma is the Coen Brother's 2009 film *A Serious Man*. This modern telling of the story of Job, set in the 1970's suburban Minneapolis Jewish community, follows a university professor's inability to catch a break as he navigates his wife's affair, divorce, teenage children, professional troubles, money problems, and health issues. However, the film opens on a snowy winter night some centuries ago in an unnamed Eastern European shtetl. Speaking entirely in yiddish, a husband comes home from a journey telling a story of how an acquaintance helped him fix his cart on the side of the road. He invites the old man in for some soup. The wife is horrified to hear who he invited in, explaining that she heard from a friend that the man died of an illness at their house. She calls him a dybbuk (a demon or wandering soul in Jewish mythology) and challenges him about his passing. Not accepting his answer about a miraculous recovery, she stabs him in the heart. With blood soaking into his shirt, he says, "One knows when one is not wanted," and walks away into the snowy night. The husband says, "We are ruined … all is lost." "Nonsense Velvel," the wife replies, "Blessed is the Lord. Good riddance to evil." This scene has absolutely no connection to the plot of the rest of the film. It is thematically, stylistically, and contextually different from anything else that happens in *A Serious Man*. It is a fragment. It mingles with the story of the professor in ways that are not necessary to name.

We might look to the work of Kostas Lambridis as an example of the enigma in furniture design. Kostas collages references and contexts to deconstruct historical categories. His *Faux Baroque* series collages materials and technical processes in inexplicable ways (fig. 24). Sometimes a material flows into

Figure 25. *Interior Ignition Stage Chair* by Kostas Lambridis
Kostas Lambridis, *Interior Ignition Stage Chair*, various woods, 2023. Represented by Carpenters Workshop Gallery. Image from https://carpentersworkshopgallery.com/works/chairs/interior-ignition-stage/

another, at other times it clashes. It is the condition of the digital overload made material—made into the exaggerated nature of contemporary making that defined Baroque historically. His chair *Interior Ignition Stage* collages antique "readymades" and fabricated components to bring together innumerable historical styles and chair references in a similar clash and flow (fig. 25).

The role of the designer at the end of history is to use the tool of pastiche to create and work through the enigma. As it relates to art, pastiche historically describes work that imitates historical styles. It is reproduction, conscious or unconscious, for effect or for reproduction's sake. "Pastiche" is generally used negatively to describe work that lacks originality or relevance. But this insult only makes sense through logics of liberalism and production. Since we no longer strive for a progressively narrativized future, it is no longer a necessary condition of art to be producing *newness*. That old and tired insult used to describe cultural content that is not of its time should be picked up as a new modality and a badge of honor. The possibility of pastiche is not appropriation or reproduction, but informed creation and humility. Pastiche is sorting through the wreckage of history and learning from those who came before us. Pastiche is trans-temporal care.

Pastiche allows us to return to useful fragments of history without the baggage of their reference. If *ornamentation* was a given in a time before production because it made life more pleasant, then we can pick ornament back up. Hell, we can pick up whatever we want. Pick up. Subsume. Augment. All technology is assistive technology, so we learn from disability theory. Since the first tools were made—and we can say those tools were not the masculine fantasy of arrowheads or other tools for killing and destruction, but more likely baskets or tools to hold more than what fits in two hands so that we might provide for others—humans have been augmented by the technology we produce. All technology extends the capabilities of what our bodies can do. We have always been cyborgs. We are changing. Our world is changing.

Log on to learn more...

Riveted Spectacles

Riveted Spectacles

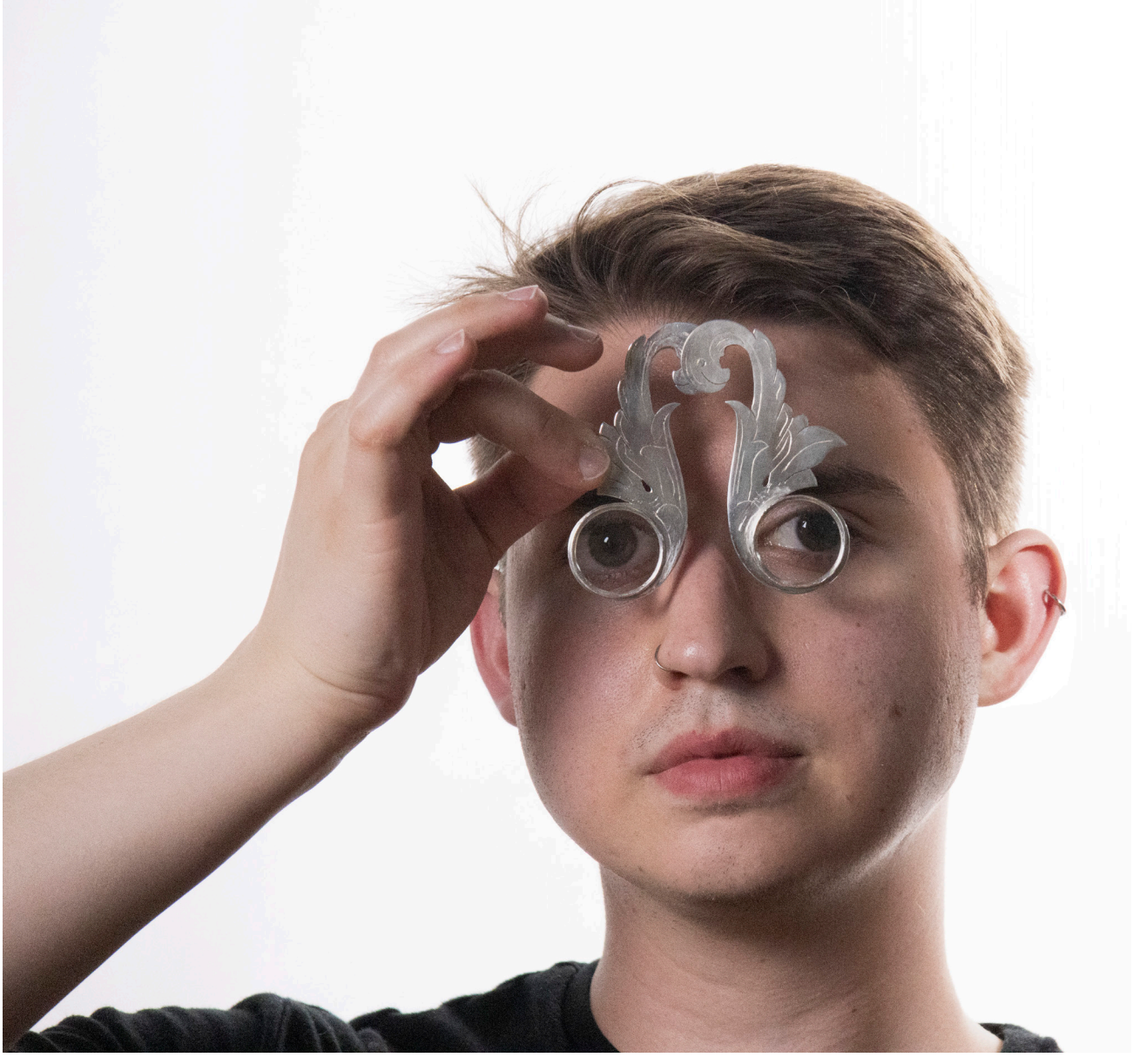
Sterling silver, glass lens

3.5 x 4 x 0.1 in.

These screen-agers are going to go blind by 30 staring at those damn devices all day. That's never gonna change. They're ADDICTED. Trying to get them to stop scrolling and swiping is a fool's -errand. Oh, but what will they do when they can't see what's right in front of them anymore? How will they read when it comes to that? More technology won't fix this problem. We've gotta go back in time for this one.

The earliest known form of eyeglasses—riveted spectacles—dates to medieval times. They consisted of two simple circular frames with handles riveted together at their ends. These frames were made primarily of metal or wood and held magnifying glasses. The user would open the frames to cover both eyes, and hold the spectacles to their face by one handle.

Oh it would be so lovely, two magnifying glasses held in sterling silver acanthus leaf frames. Get off your phone and read a book.



Claw-and-Ball Spoon

Claw-and-Ball Spoon

copper

2 x 9 x 1.25 in.

Sometimes ornamentation is just strange. Sure, furniture has historically been anthropomorphised in form and terminology. We talk of feet, legs, aprons, skirts, chests, shoulders, fingers … But what compelled the cabinetmakers of the West to actually carve realistic claws on the feet of furniture? As the story goes, claw-and-ball feet were first produced by the Dutch, inspired by Chinese depictions of dragon talons clutching pearls or precious stones on imported goods. 18th-century English cabinetmakers, enamored by the Dutch contribution, developed the idea into the form of a bird's talons gripping a smooth sphere. [91]

Claw-and-Ball Spoon translates the convention into a handheld utensil that brings ornament and decoration into acts of sustenance. The talon protectively grips the bowl of the spoon, cradling precious food into your mouth.

Photograph by Mark Johnston

Corbel Ring

Corbel Ring

bronze, sterling silver

4 x 0.75 x 1.25 in.

Corbel's are architectural details: a type of bracket of solid wood or metal jutting out from a wall to support the weight of an overhanging component. The exterior corbels of Providence contain a profound amount of acanthus leaves. Though there are several styles, many depict a flat acanthus leaf that flows along the curve of the corbel.

A synthesis of the many acanthus corbels of Providence, the ring takes the circular ends of the corbel's curve as the rings for the pointer and pinky fingers. The flat silver leaf of the ring, along with the diagonal curve, make room for the middle and ring fingers.

This object decorates that part of us which holds. *Corbel Ring* amplifies the strength of the hand. What makes us human very well may be our ability to manipulate the world around us—to hold our tools. This ring, then, is our bracket of support. Or perhaps, in a pinch, it's just an overdecorated set of brass knuckles.

Theses on the Philosophy of Design at the End of History:

An Anti-Manifesto

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight.

—Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"

1. The future is over. All we have is the past. We must make sense of it.

2. Modernist art, design, and culture-at-large of the early 20th century believed in the avant-garde, in the need for new styles and references that did not rely on the past. This was a necessary attitude to contend with the stagnation of cultural production—or at least the perception of it in the earliest days of the information age, when heightened exposure to the contents of the world had already begun to erode perception of that very content and the flow of culture. This attitude was, in hindsight, unbearably hubristic and naive. How could it not produce a slew of negative consequences? To strive for a culture that is absolutely new is to create in the dark.

3. Design is a specific historical and institutional phenomenon that originated in the 19th century. Today we can retroactively name nearly all of human activity from the dawn of our species as design, but it is anachronistic to do so. Obfuscating the specificity of design weakens our ability to understand its agency and impact.

4. An ontological understanding of design offers new frontiers for resisting the dominant logics of the discipline (and beyond), but it should be done self-consciously. That is to say, engaging in ontological design theorization should expand, acknowledge and work against the discipline of design and its logics.

5. The future is over. Narratives of progress have proven time and again to be unfounded and illogical. At best, these narratives create an augmented reality in which the citizens of the global imperial core reside. They are passified. They are unaware that the horrors of the past are the horrors of today.

6. Every day fewer people are unaware of the horrors of modernity as we travel further and deeper into the digital age which is marked by inundation and juxtaposition. The younger generations spend hours every day consuming an unfathomably broad range of content in a scrambled shuffle. They are entertained. They are amused. They are exposed to vast suffering. They are aware of the crimes of their governments. They know they have no future. They are numb. They laugh.

7. We must not submit to conservative and essentialist understandings of the human. The human is always changing. The human has always changed with the technology it produces. We have always been cyborgs. The integration of new technologies into the category of the human is not a negative state of affairs. We understand smartphones and social media to be bad for us because we have not acclimated to the change yet. Do not scorn the change; understand it.

8. The United States military is perhaps the largest polluting entity in the world, with more annual emissions than most countries. The billionaire class emits more CO2 on private jets in a year than most countries annual emissions. The mainstream assumption that designers can solve the climate crisis in any meaningful way is nonsensical. It is akin to the oil and gas industry's public relations campaigns that created the narrative of personal responsibility. Climate change does not happen because of the average citizen's furnishings or habits. It happens because of capitalist greed and the disregard of empire for land and people.

9. Not only is sustainability design ineffective, it anesthetizes the only possible solution to the climate crisis: a popular movement to end greed, logics of production and growth, and practices that favor profit over people. To this end, the assumption that we can design a sustainable world within the existing political-economic structure is not only an illusion, but a tool to obfuscate our awareness of reality.

10. We designers should narrow our scope of impact. Design has been instrumental in creating an unsustainable world by operating with the goal of solving the world's problems. It is time that we do away with designing with the goal of solving the world's problems. It is time that we design to make our lives and the lives of those near us better.

11. The individual designer should do two things:

i) Create and sustain communities of care, support, and aid

ii) Design things that help us make sense of the contemporary world. And cope with it.

12. When the world was colder in temperature and warmer in human experience, ornamentation was a given because it made more pleasant the lives of the people who saw it.

13. Pastiche is a gift. Pastiche is context and reality. Pastiche is creating in a room full of light.

14. Embrace the enigma. Be the cyborg.

15. The future is over. All we have is what we have.

The Future Is Over


GENTLY TOUCH ME
AND THE TEXTILES
IN THIS ROOM


he Future Is Over


The Future Is Over


Dotan Appelbaum
MFA Furniture Design 2024
Acanthus Paperweights
Polished bronze, 18k gold plate, chrome plate


uture Is Over


IS ROOM


Dotan Appelbaum
MFA Furniture Design 2024
Corbel Ring
Bronze, sterling silver


The Futurist
An Anti-Manifesto
PLEASE TAKE A POSTCARD AND BOOKLET
Dotan Appelbaum
MFA Furniture Design 2024
Acanthus Paperweights
Polished bronze, 18k gold plate, chrome plate

Endnotes

Introduction

1. John A. Walker, *Design History and the History of Design* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 1989), viii.
2. Michel Foucault, T*he History of Sexuality* (London, UK: Penguin, 1990), 11.
3. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," essay, in *Language Counter-Memory Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139–64.
4. Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 3.

Chapter One: A Brief Genealogy of Design

5. Anne-Marie Willis, "Ontological Designing," *Design Philosophy Papers* 4, no. 2 (June 2006): 69–92, 81.
6. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (London, UK: Penguin, 1990), 11.
7. Uday S. Mehta, "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion," essay, in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 59–86, 63.
8. Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment? (1784)*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1992).
9. John Ruskin, "The Nature of Gothic," essay, in *The Stones of Venice* (London and Orpington, UK: Kelmscott Press, 1892), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_nature_of_Gothic_-_a_chapter_of_The_stones_of_Venice_(IA_natureofgothicch00rusk).pdf, 11.
10. John A. Walker, *Design History and the History of Design* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 1989), 29.
11. Ibid., 30.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 31.
14. Ibid., ix.
15. . Charlotte Fiell and Peter Fiell, *The Story of Design: From the Paleolithic to the Present* (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016), 7.
16. Ibid., 9.
17. . Domitilla Dardi and Vanni Pasca, *Design History Handbook* (Milan, Italy: Silvana Editoriale, 2019), 4.
18. Ibid., 9.
19. Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley, *Are We Human?*: Notes on an Archaeology of Design (Zürich, Switzerland: Lars Müller Publishers, 2022), 77-78.
20. Dardi and Pasca, 14
21. Ibid., 12.
22. John Ruskin, *The Opening of the Crystal Palace.: Considered in Some of Its Relations to the Prospects of Art* (London, UK: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1854).
23. Colomina and Wigley, 76.
24. Ibid., 78.

25. Walker, 23.

26. Fiell and Fiell, 9.

27. Glenn Adamson, *The Invention of Craft* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021), xvii.

28. Karl Marx, *Capital*, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, vol. One, 1887, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf, 505-507.

29. Colomina and Wigley, 78.

30. Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 17-18.

31. James Taylor-Foster, "The Long(Ish) Read: 'Ornament and Crime' by Adolf Loos," *Arch Daily*, November 2, 2016, https://www.archdaily.com/798529/the-longish-read-ornament-and-crime-adolf-loos.

32. Mehta, 63.

33. Adolf Loos, "Ornament and Crime," DesignManifestos.org, May 15, 2020, https://designmanifestos.org/adolf-loos-ornament-and-crime/.

34. Jimena Canales and Andrew Herscher, "Criminal Skins: Tattoos and Modern Architecture in the Work of Adolf Loos," *Architectural History* 48 (2005): 235–56, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0066622x00003798, 242.

35. Ibid., 246.

36. Ibid.

37. Christina Cogdell, *Eugenic Design: Streamlining America in the 1930s* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 13-14.

38. Loos.

39. Marion Von Osten and Grant Watson, "Chapter One: Corresponding With," essay, in *Bauhaus Imaginista* (London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 2019), 16.

40. Magdalena Droste, "Walter Gropius's Bauhaus Manifesto," essay, in *Bauhaus Imaginista*, ed. Marion Von Osten and Grant Watson (London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 2019), 28.

41. Fabienne Eggelhöfer, "Paul Klee's Pictures of Architectural Tapestries," essay, in *Bauhaus Imaginista*, ed. Marion Von Osten and Grant Watson (London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 2019), 92–105, 92.

42. 1. Susanne Leeb, "Books on World Art from the 1920s: On the Ambivalence of a Discursive Awakening," essay, in *Bauhaus Imaginista*, ed. Marion Von Osten and Grant Watson (London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 2019), 106–11, 109.

43. Mabel O. Wilson, "White By Design," essay, in *Among Others: Blackness at MOMA*, ed. Charlotte Barat and Darby English (New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art, 2019), 100–109, 103.

44. Ibid.

45. Lutz Schöbe, "Carpentry Woerkshop (Joinery1. Lutz Schöbe et al., "Carpentry Workshop (Joinery)," essay, in *Bauhaus Dessau: The Collection*, trans. James Bell et al. (Bielefeld, Germany: Kerber Verlag, 2019), 149–51. from Bauhaus Dessau; The Collection, 149.

46. Christian Wolsdorff et al., "Cabinet-Making Workshop," essay, in *The Bauhaus Collection: Bauhaus Archive Berlin; Museum of Design*, trans. Helen Adkins (Berlin, Germany: GmbH & Co., 2010), 94–105.

47. Dianne Harris, "Clean and Bright and Everyone White: Seeing the Postwar Domestic Environment in the United States," essay, in *Sites Unseen: Landscape and Vision*, ed. Dianne Harris and D. Fairchild Ruggles (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), 241–62, 242.

48. Pat Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames: Designers of the 20th Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 6-7.

49. Ibid, 5.

50. Susan E. Reid, "'Our Kitchen is Just as Good'; Soviet 1. Susan E. Reid, "'Our Kitchen Is Just as Good': Soviet Responses to the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959," essay, in *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970*, ed. David Crowley and Janve Pavitt (London, UK: V&A Publishing, 2008), 154–62, 156. to the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959", Cold War Modern, 156.

51. Kirkham, 5.

52. Benjamin, 261.

Chapter Two: Meeting Contemporary Horrors as a Designer

53. Salman Aslam, "Tiktok by the Numbers (2024): Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts," Omnicore Agency, January 12, 2024, https://www.omnicoreagency.com/tiktok-statistics/.

54. "Celebrating Our Thriving Community of 150 Million Americans | Tiktok Newsroom," TikTok Newsroom, March 21, 2023, https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/150-m-us-users.

55. Jason Read, "A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity," *Foucault Studies* 6 (February 1, 2009): 25–36, https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v0i0.2465, 28-29.

56. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, ed. Michel Senellart and Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Graham Burchell (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 226.

57. Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 4 (June 2007): 754–80, https://doi.org/10.1086/521568, 754.

58. Ibid, 756-7.

59. Ibid, 758.

60. Jason Read.

61. Colomina and Wigley, 77.

62. Lorraine Wild and David Karwan, "Agency and Urgency: The Medium and Its Message," essay, in *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*, ed. Andrew Blauvelt (New York, NY: Distributed Art Publishers, 2015), 44–57, 46.

63. Alison J. Clarke, "Buckminster Fuller's Reindeer Abattoir and Other Designs for the Real World," essay, in *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*, ed. Andrew Blauvelt (New York, NY: Distributed Art Publishers, 2015), 68–75, 70.

64. Catharine Rossi, "From East to West and Back Again: Utopianism in Italian Radical Design," essay, in *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*, ed. Andrew Blauvelt (New York, NY: Distributed Art Publishers, 2015), 58–67, 63.

65. Andrew Blauvelt, "The Barricade and the Dance Floor: Aesthetic Radicalism and the Counterculture," essay, in *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*, ed. Andrew Blauvelt (New York, NY: Distributed Art Publishers, 2015), 15–30, 24.

66. Abigail Boggs and Nick Mitchell, "Critical University Studies and the Crisis Consensus," *Feminist Studies* 44, no. 2 (2018): 432–63, https://doi.org/10.1353/fem.2018.0028, 434.

67. Benjamin, 257.

68. I wish to be careful in referring to something as common knowledge without elaborating on my understanding of the term. 'Common knowledge' is a fraught term that should be problematized—and indeed has been by many scholars. Common knowledge does not refer to something being so truthful it is obvious to all. Rather, it refers to discursive fragments that are generally accepted throughout society. In this case, I refer to the changed ways in which we consume information and understand the world as common knowledge not because I think it is true—though I do—but because it is ubiquitously discussed and accepted. This discursive fragment is so widely disseminated that it is a shared framework in which we understand the realities of the technological present.

69. Berlant.

70. Referring to Jodi Melamed's use of the term in "Racial Capitalism" (2015), first coined by Karl Marx.

71. A configuration of Foucault's theorization of biopower wherein modern sovereignty exists through networks of power that either make life or let die the subject. Taken from Berlant, 755.

72. Rossi, 63.

73. Although they did ultimately develop the iconic grid of this project into a line of furniture that was sold as a commodity.

Chapter Three: A New Gilded Age; The Role of the Designer at the End of History

74. Lizzy Rosenberg, "Even Though It's Virtual, the Metaverse Does Actually Impact the Environment," World Economic Forum, February 16, 2022, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/02/how-metaverse-actually-impacts-the-environment/.

75. Benjamin, 262.

76. Geoff Mann, "It Was Not Supposed to End This Way," *Boston Review*, August 13, 2019, https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/geoff-mann-it-was-not-supposed-end-way/.

77. Ibid.

78. Berlant, 760.

79. Boggs and Mitchel, 434.

80. Mann.

81. "2023 Best of Year Award Winners," Interior Design, December 13, 2023, https://interiordesign.net/awards/best-of-year/.

82. David Huyssen, "We Won't Get out of the Second Gilded Age the Way We Got out of the First," *Vox*, April 1, 2019, https://www.vox.com/first-person/2019/4/1/18286084/gilded-age-income-inequality-robber-baron.

83. It is important to note that the Gilded Age refers to a period in American History and how the conditions of that period in the United States differed from the conditions in Europe. Art and design manifestos were most popular and common in Europe. I do not mean to draw a connection between the two through any historical methodology.

84. Benjamin, 262.

85. F. T. Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," Italian Futurism, accessed May 2024, https://www.italianfuturism.org/manifestos/foundingmanifesto/.

86. 1. Abigail Boggs et al., "Abolitionist University Studies: An Invitation," Abolition University, September 29, 2019, https://abolition.university/invitation/.

87. Dylan Rodríguez, "Abolition as Praxis of Human Being: A Foreword," *Harvard Law Review* 132, no. 6 (April 2019): 1575–1612, 1575.

88. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe, UK: Minor Compositions, 2013), 42.

89. Referring to Ruth Wilson Gilmore's definition of racism in *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 247.

90. Tony Fry and Adam Nocek, "Design In Crisis, Introducing a Problematic," essay, in *Design In Crisis: New Worlds, Philosophies and Practices* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), 1–15.

Claw-and-Ball Spoon

91. Charles Sutton, "Furniture Design: Ball & Claw Motif," Bienenstock Furniture Library, October 4, 2017, https://www.furniturelibrary.com/use-of-the-ball-claw-design-motif/.

Bibliography

"2023 Best of Year Award Winners." Interior Design, December 13, 2023. https://interiordesign.net/awards/best-of-year/.

Adamson, Glenn. *The Invention of Craft*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021.

Aslam, Salman. "Tiktok by the Numbers (2024): Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts." Omnicore Agency, January 12, 2024. https://www.omnicoreagency.com/tiktok-statistics/.

Berlant, Lauren. "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)." *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 4 (June 2007): 754–80. https://doi.org/10.1086/521568.

Blauvelt, Andrew. "The Barricade and the Dance Floor: Aesthetic Radicalism and the Counterculture." Essay. In *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*, edited by Andrew Blauvelt, 15–30. New York, NY: Distributed Art Publishers, 2015.

Boggs, Abigail, and Nick Mitchell. "Critical University Studies and the Crisis Consensus." *Feminist Studies* 44, no. 2 (2018): 432–63. https://doi.org/10.1353/fem.2018.0028.

Boggs, Abigail, Eli Meyerhoff, Nick Mitchell, and Zach Schwartz-Weinstein. "Abolitionist University Studies: An Invitation." Abolition University, September 29, 2019. https://abolition.university/invitation/.

Canales, Jimena, and Andrew Herscher. "Criminal Skins: Tattoos and Modern Architecture in the Work of Adolf Loos." *Architectural History* 48 (2005): 235–56. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0066622x00003798.

"Celebrating Our Thriving Community of 150 Million Americans | Tiktok Newsroom." TikTok Newsroom, March 21, 2023. https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/150-m-us-users.

Clarke, Alison J. "Buckminster Fuller's Reindeer Abattoir and Other Designs for the Real World." Essay. In *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*, edited by Andrew Blauvelt, 68–75. New York, NY: Distributed Art Publishers, 2015.

Cogdell, Christina. *Eugenic Design: Streamlining America in the 1930s*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

Colomina, Beatriz, and Mark Wigley. *Are We Human?: Notes on an Archaeology of Design*. Zürich, Switzerland: Lars Müller Publishers, 2022.

Dardi, Domitilla, and Vanni Pasca. *Design History Handbook*. Milan, Italy: Silvana Editoriale, 2019.

Droste, Magdalena. "Walter Gropius's Bauhaus Manifesto." Essay. In *Bauhaus Imaginista*, edited by Marion Von Osten and Grant Watson, 26–28. London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 2019.

Eggelhöfer, Fabienne. "Paul Klee's Pictures of Architectural Tapestries." Essay. In *Bauhaus Imaginista*, edited by Marion Von Osten and Grant Watson, 92–105. London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 2019.

Fiell, Charlotte, and Peter Fiell. *The Story of Design: From the Paleolithic to the Present*. New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2016.

Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." Essay. In *Language Counter-Memory Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited by Donald F. Bouchard, 139–64. Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977.

Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France*, 1978-1979. Edited by Michel Senellart and Arnold I. Davidson. Translated by Graham Burchell. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. London, UK: Penguin, 1990.

Fry, Tony, and Adam Nocek. "Design In Crisis, Introducing a Problematic." Essay. In *Design In Crisis: New Worlds, Philosophies and Practices*, 1–15. London and New York: Routledge, 2021.

Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007.

Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. Wivenhoe, UK: Minor Compositions, 2013.

Harris, Dianne. "Clean and Bright and Everyone White: Seeing the Postwar Domestic Environment in the United States." Essay. In *Sites Unseen: Landscape and Vision*, edited by Dianne Harris and D. Fairchild Ruggles, 241–62. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007.

Hendren, Sara. *What Can a Body Do?: How We Meet the Built World*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2020.

Huyssen, David. "We Won't Get out of the Second Gilded Age the Way We Got out of the First." *Vox*, April 1, 2019. https://www.vox.com/first-person/2019/4/1/18286084/gilded-age-income-inequality-robber-baron.

Kant, Immanuel. *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? (1784)*. Translated by Ted Humphrey. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1992.

Kirkham, Pat. *Charles and Ray Eames: Designers of the 20th Century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995.

Leeb, Susanne. "Books on World Art from the 1920s: On the Ambivalence of a Discursive Awakening." Essay. In *Bauhaus Imaginista*, edited by Marion Von Osten and Grant Watson, 106–11. London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 2019.

Loos, Adolf. "Ornament and Crime." DesignManifestos.org, May 15, 2020. https://designmanifestos.org/adolf-loos-ornament-and-crime/.

Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015.

Mann, Geoff. "It Was Not Supposed to End This Way." *Boston Review*, August 13, 2019. https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/geoff-mann-it-was-not-supposed-end-way/.

Marinetti, F. T. "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism." Italian Futurism. Accessed May 2024. https://www.italianfuturism.org/manifestos/foundingmanifesto/.

Marx, Karl. *Capital*. Edited by Frederick Engels. Translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. Vol. One, 1887. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf.

Mehta, Uday S. "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion." Essay. In *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, edited by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, 59–86. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997.

Melamed, Jodi. "Racial Capitalism." *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 76–85. https://doi.org/10.5749/jcritethnstud.1.1.0076.

Read, Jason. "A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity." *Foucault Studies* 6 (February 1, 2009): 25–36. https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v0i0.2465.

Reid, Susan E. "'Our Kitchen Is Just as Good': Soviet Responses to the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959." Essay. In *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970*, edited by David Crowley and Janve Pavitt, 154–62. London, UK: V&A Publishing, 2008.

Rodríguez, Dylan. "Abolition as Praxis of Human Being: A Foreword." *Harvard Law Review* 132, no. 6 (April 2019): 1575–1612.

Rosenberg, Lizzy. "Even Though It's Virtual, the Metaverse Does Actually Impact the Environment." World Economic Forum, February 16, 2022. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/02/how-metaverse-actually-impacts-the-environment/.

Rossi, Catharine. "From East to West and Back Again: Utopianism in Italian Radical Design." Essay. In *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*, edited by Andrew Blauvelt, 58–67. New York, NY: Distributed Art Publishers, 2015.

Ruskin, John. "The Nature of Gothic." Essay. In T*he Stones of Venice*. London and Orpington, UK: Kelmscott Press, 1892. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_nature_of_Gothic_-_a_chapter_of_The_stones_of_Venice_(IA_natureofgothicch00rusk).pdf.

Ruskin, John. *The Opening of the Crystal Palace.: Considered in Some of its Relations to the Prospects of Art*. London, UK: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1854.

Schöbe, Lutz, Lutz Schöbe, Wolfgang Thöner, and Claudia Perren. "Carpentry Workshop (Joinery)." Essay. In *Bauhaus Dessau: The Collection*, translated by James Bell, Cressida Joyce, Amy Klement, Wendy Wallis, and Rebecca Michelle Williams, 149–51. Bielefeld, Germany: Kerber Verlag, 2019.

Sutton, Charles. "Furniture Design: Ball & Claw Motif." Bienenstock Furniture Library, October 4, 2017. https://www.furniturelibrary.com/use-of-the-ball-claw-design-motif/.

Taylor-Foster, James. "The Long(Ish) Read: 'Ornament and Crime' by Adolf Loos." *Arch Daily*, November 2, 2016. https://www.archdaily.com/798529/the-longish-read-ornament-and-crime-adolf-loos.

Von Osten, Marion, and Grant Watson. "Chapter One: Corresponding With." Essay. In *Bauhaus Imaginista*, 14–17. London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 2019.

Walker, John A. *Design History and the History of Design*. London, UK: Pluto Press, 1989.

Wild, Lorraine, and David Karwan. "Agency and Urgency: The Medium and Its Message." Essay. In *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*, edited by Andrew Blauvelt, 44–57. New York, NY: Distributed Art Publishers, 2015.

Willis, Anne-Marie. "Ontological Designing." *Design Philosophy Papers* 4, no. 2 (June 2006): 69–92. https://doi.org/10.2752/144871306x13966268131514.

Wilson, Mabel O. "White By Design." Essay. In *Among Others: Blackness at MOMA*, edited by Charlotte Barat and Darby English, 100–109. New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art, 2019.

Wolsdorff, Christian, Magdalena Droste, Peter Hahn, Karsten Hintz, Annemarie Jaeggi, Klaus Weber, and Christian Wolsdorff. "Cabinet-Making Workshop." Essay. In *The Bauhaus Collection: Bauhaus Archive Berlin; Museum of Design*, translated by Helen Adkins, 94–105. Berlin, Germany: GmbH & Co., 2010.