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Nadia Jenner
2022

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Design,
Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

Fun and Function

CAMP AS GUIDING SPIRIT
IN DESIGN WORKFLOW





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I'd of course like to send my infinite and everlasting love to my partner Richard and my family. I am forever grateful for their support.

To everyone else, I extend a respectful handshake (WITH eye contact). Thank you Lee Jensen. Thank you Kerry Ann Lee. Thank you Deb Cumming. Thank you Craig Cherrie. Thank you for sharing your wisdom with me.

Abstract

The capitalist framework gives rise to conditions that prompt labourers – in this case, designers of artefacts and images – to adopt efficient occupational formulae in order to rapidly produce design as a decontextualised commodity. This pre-existing drive for workplace efficiency has been exacerbated by a wider economic shift into competitive, fragmented work structures. Through the pursuit of acceptable design which is not 'in bad taste' (read; gaudy, garish, controversial), a new aesthetic sensibility emerges; one which prioritises safe digestibility in order to garner commercially advantageous universal appeal. This homogenisation of design output is a visible symptom, but the core issue stemming from these conditions is the alienation and isolation between designers, artefacts, and clients, as a result of accelerated efficient design practices.

The preliminary research uses a postmodernist lens to establish the framing of the visual outcomes of efficient design workflows as kitsch. By transcending the obsolete binaries of 'high' and 'low' art, kitsch can be harnessed as a value neutral way of framing of visual communication design. It is through a renewed understanding of kitsch, that camp – a related but distinct concept – is revealed as a possible means of intervention. This unites a core concept – kitsch – with a mode of critique which aligns with my primary aim for this project – prioritising the heart and joy in design practice. Through this project I have honed a design philosophy which responds to these conditions, and provides designers who have efficient design workflows with an opportunity for reflection and connection, encouraging their personal reshaping and reimagining of their own design workflow.

Camp is a culturally rich concept which can operate as both an alternate mode of seeing, and a form of cultural critique. Here, camp is employed as a form of immanent critique, utilising devices such as stylistic exaggeration, theatricality, and ironic juxtaposition in order to illuminate possibilities for radical intervention in design workflows. Efficient design workflows are held as a focal point, forming a grounded basis of immanent critique. This exploration culminates in an evaluation of how its resultant design philosophy may act as an intervention in efficient design practices, with consideration given to its viability within the context of the workplace.

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Background

Preface

This project can be roughly separated into two components, which contain two flavours of truth. I wish to designate the exegesis area of this project as a place to discuss the *theoretical truth* and critical concepts which underpin the design exploration. It will hold the comprehensible outcomes and revelations uncovered during this exploration.

The second area – the designed artefact – holds the *emotional truth* of this project. The visual outcomes of design experiments will be accompanied by reflective text fragments, showcasing the direct results of this process of immanent critique.

In literature, an author may use the literal to express unsaid ideas to the reader. The *emotional truth* refers to instances when the unsaid implications pertain to the author's state of mind, rather than their values, predispositions, or worldviews. This is distinct from political allegory, metaphor, or inter-textual reference. While we know Franz Kafka may not have been literally turned into an insect, his fictional account of this event may non-explicitly express the author's own feelings of helplessness and alienation. This idea is likely known by another name that I am not yet aware of, so here it is dubbed the emotional truth as a placeholder.

'Art is a lie that makes us realise truth.' (Picasso 315)

'Fiction is the lie through which we tell the truth.' (Camus 14)¹

'Fiction is the truth inside the lie.' (King 3)

'Camp is a lie which tells the truth.' (Core 7)

Although the two components are intrinsically linked, it is through their separation that they are strengthened. Their conscious division accentuates their strengths. Where the designed artefact questions, contests, and shape shifts, the exegesis component clarifies, corroborates, and answers.

Gig-economy fuelled efficient design

I cast a wide net in my undergraduate studies. I focused largely on service design, with typography, illustration, and data visualisation as supplementary tools to support this. For the duration of these studies, I worked part time at a small design/web/print firm. In my experience here, I was exposed to the world of efficient design. My workflow involved recycling work from pre-existing clients, plundering online resources, using trendy colours, and relying on templates. Guy Julier chronicles accounts of similar corner cutting design techniques through first hand interviews (Julier 105). Similar practices have been common across journalism, musicians, programmers, playwrights, and novelists (Negus 510; Adorno 226). When corroborated against these accounts, my experience gains more significance than it held as an isolated incident. The time allocated for each client was intentionally just enough to turn around the deliverables required. For example, if the brief was set at half an hour for four business cards, then that would be the only time billable. This also minimises uncertainty, and time allowed for repeated iteration, both of which are widely recognised as intrinsic to design (Ball 3; Schaathun 9; R. Adams 2).

The intention of this setup was to reflect the demands of our clientele, which are unable or unwilling to commission time for market research, iterative development, or account for the occasional failures that come with conceptualisation. Our competition were websites such as Fiverr. Fiverr, 99Designs, and Hatchwise, emerged as a web-2-design solution situated within the burgeoning ‘gig-economy’. In Oli Mould’s *Against Creativity*, the author identifies the pervasiveness of fragmented, precarious work structure in design spheres as a result of the ‘creative’ industries adapting to competitive neoliberal labour norms (Mould ch. 1.4). At time of writing (2021), labourers in the gig economy are not widely considered to be employees. These roles are defined as contractors, which erodes workers’ rights while cornering them into precarious work (‘The Future of Work’ 10).

The accelerated drive for efficiency is fuelled by competition with online services, and the looming threat of falling into this exact type of precarious, fragmented online work. Any intervention in this space needs to be conscious of this economic and cultural climate. In light of the surge of novel coronavirus, many brick-and-mortar design studios have shifted from in person service to online communication, which calls into question the need for the client management strategy that accompanies the studio environment. Although the effects of the pandemic are impossible to ignore, I choose to acknowledge their influence, and move on to focus on their effects, rather than their cause.

Heavy is the head that wears many hats

The non-specialised nature of a one-size-fits all design/print/web house appealed to me. Our clients ranged from Nestle subsidiaries to one-man-bands. For years I drank in new knowledge of customer service, machine operation, and design tricks. I jumped at the chance to wear the many hats required in the small design world, switching roles and skill sets as needed. This compartmentalisation made multitasking manageable, but this fracturing-of-self also made working with questionable clients manageable. The commercial motives of the design workplace complicate any relationship a designer has with the truth (Barringer 39).

The same attitude that erected barriers between complex tasks, to break them down into manageable pieces also erected barriers between myself, clients, and the people around me. In my own case, the expectations regarding turnaround primed me for abjection to the wider repercussions of my actions. I found myself adapting the thought processes related to workplace efficiency to the compartmentalisation and decontextualisation the designs themselves. Value neutral actions are impossible in the space of visual communication because the work is directly involved with the framing of information.

When personal values and actions are in contradiction, those on the receiving end of the action’s consequences are indifferent to intent. One may choose to ignore this, but even this is a choice which must be taken responsibility for. This fragmentation of self sparked a personal drive for richness in both character and design.

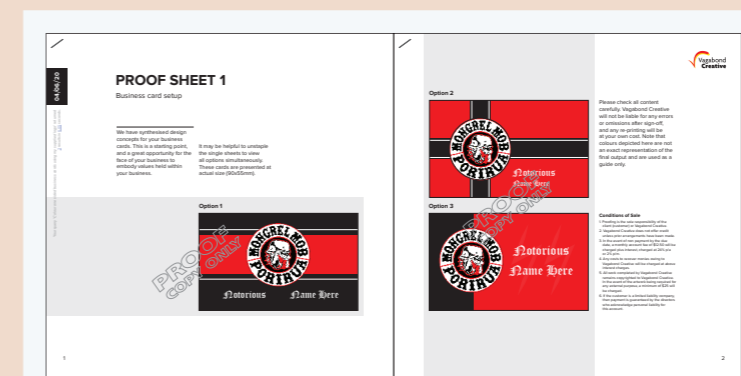


Fig. 1: Fun and Function booklet spread screenshot supplied by author, 20 Sept. 2021.

Example proof sheet, reconstructed as part of immersive design process.



I was born this morning and now I'm here. Every (week) day I die and am born again. These things happen.

I am extracted from my vat. I glide beneath the sunrise. I reach my destination before my coworkers. I leave last. I live here. What did I get up to on the weekend? I pause is all.

My communications course through wires of growing distance. This fog of supreme focus forms a buffer of isolation. An otherworldly numbing washes over my processing units, static phases me out of this plane. Is this the cloud? Am I 'in the zone'? Or something more human, though equally immaterial... Haunted.

Fig. 2: Fun and Function spread 3, screenshot of design supplied by author, 21 June 2021.

Upon graduation in 2019, I was offered an available full-time role of department manager for the art section. My role as department manager at times involved coordinating the outsourcing of jobs, and taking in jobs from other associate-companies which lacked the facilities to carry out certain operations. It was only through communication with signage companies, screen printers, and content writers that I understood that the extent of efficient design practices went beyond my part-time experiences. Corner cutting was not just present at my own workplace, but was widespread, and took on many forms and incarnations. If efficient design workflows are widespread, then is the accompanying alienating grey neutrality of the fractured – and otherwise conflicted – labourer also widespread?

Clarifying focus

By following the risk-adverse path-of-least-resistance to efficiently and reliably produce design that is not 'in bad taste' (read; gaudy, garish, controversial), a trend of homogeneity emerges in the design output. By prioritising safe digestibility in the name of universal appeal and proliferation, the design output becomes a replication of itself, an infinite mirror of the previously successful.

In an ironic twist, this is not only mundane for designers, but often comes across as mundane for the clients commissioning the work. In terms of product design, novelty in display has proven to be markedly better received by grocery store consumers (Keh 110).

'Clients do want designers to transcend the obvious and the mundane and to produce proposals which are exciting and stimulating, as well as merely practical [...] rather than to return with yet another example of the already familiar' (Cross 5).

Initially the homogenisation of the visual design output was the focus of my approach. Although this work touches on many facets of efficient design workflows, I recognise the underlying disconnection between designer, artefact, and viewer as the core problem.



Fig. 3: Katharina Brenner, Illustration in the Corporate Memphis style, 21 Aug. 2019, Wikimedia Commons, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Corporate_Memphis_(2019).jpg

The originators of Facebook's customisable image library Alegria, state on their website that the non-representational skin tones have a 'universal appeal', and provides an 'image softening effect' for tech companies ('Facebook Alegria').

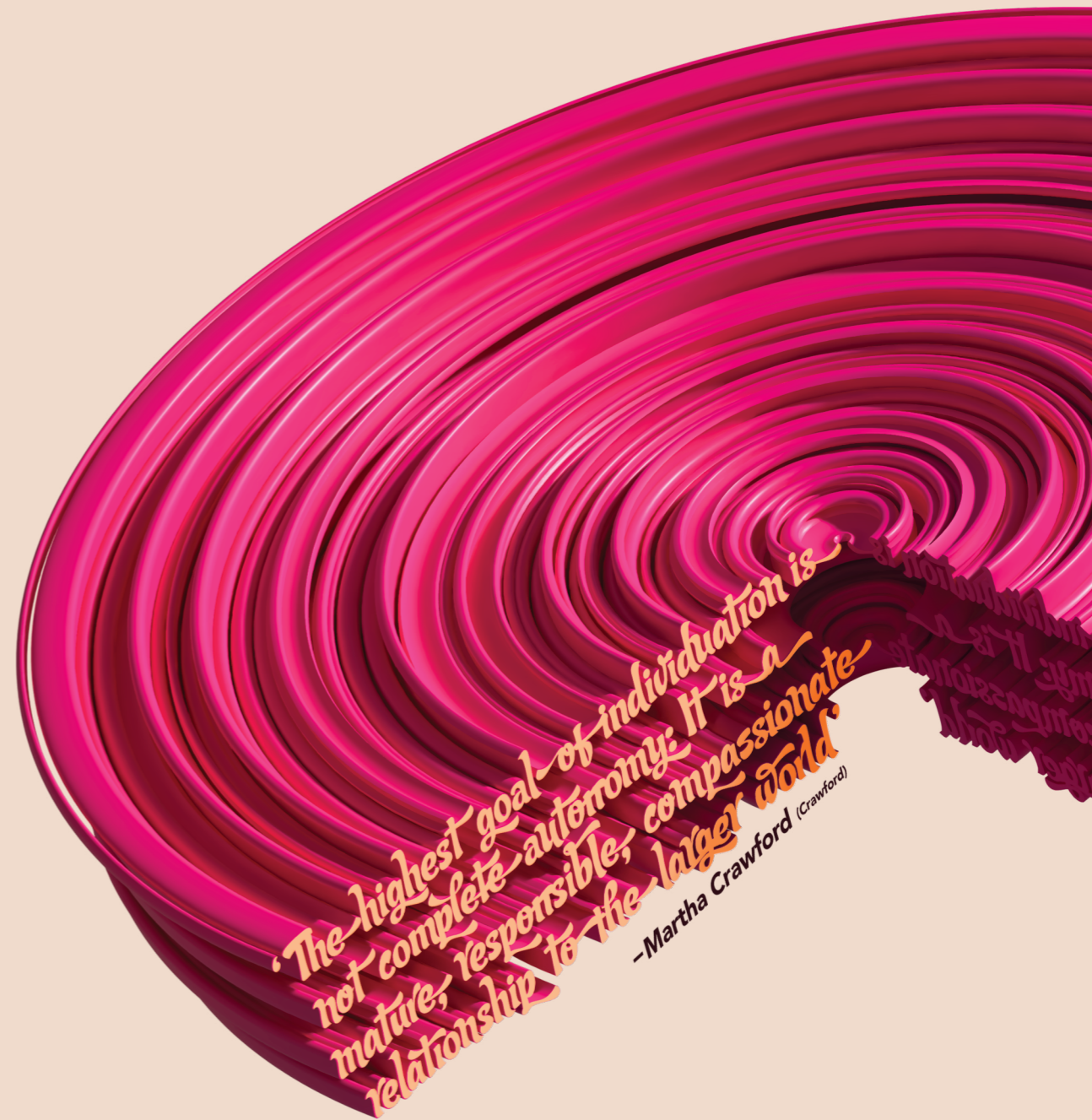
Audience

This project operates on three levels. The first level of this project acts as a reflective practice, drawing on personal experience and discussing efficient design practices on a micro-scale, as related to the experience of the individual.

The next level is how the project relates to other designers. In order to contribute meaningfully to design as an industry, this project aims to emotionally connect to designers using efficient design workflows. By making room for playful, spontaneous, engaging communication of this philosophy (in line with the spirit of camp), designers in efficient studio environments may be provided with an opportunity for reflection and connection, which encourages their own reshaping and reimagining of their modes of design. Any resultant philosophy needs to operate within workplace conditions to be viable.

Without casting too broad of a stroke, the outer level pertains to how the designed artefact may relate to labourers outside of efficient design studios. Throughout this research I have talked with fashion designers, line cooks, and Uber drivers which have experienced a variation of alienation and isolation. This is related to the imposition of profit motive via the capitalist framework in which we conduct ourselves. In this economic climate, all labourers must operate within a version of these conditions. While this project focuses on a specific subset of designers, the prevalence of capitalism makes aspects of the project relatable across a diverse range of workplace experiences.

These levels are bridged through individuation, which is a way of conceiving oneself conceptualised by Carl Jung. Individuation is described as embarkment on a lifelong process of self-recognition, with the aims of uncovering what one has to offer wider society (Jung 124). This bridges the personal and interpersonal levels of the work.



Aim

In response to the mechanical nature of efficient occupational formulae, I aim to prioritise the heart and joy of design through spontaneity. This spontaneity does not just relate to the whims of the designer, but the experience of the viewer. In response to the viewer-designer disconnect, I intend to highlight the evidence of labour in visual communication design and encourage participation in the viewer. The goal of achieving connection between viewer and the designer will be realised through recognition of the designed artefact as a site of communication.

Through the research of aesthetic taste as it relates to design, I have identified opportunities for intervention in efficient design practices. Through a process of camp as immanent critique, I will develop a personal design philosophy in order to inform an alternate mode of designing within the workflow expectations of efficient design environments. This exploration will culminate in an evaluation of the resultant design philosophy as an intervention in efficient design practices, with consideration given to its viability within the context of the workplace.



Precedents

Designing for and with joy today

Your Ship Has Landed offers to spark a reinterpretation of the world as a fun, creative discovery. The artist maintains, 'while with a bit of thought you can trace the concepts behind my work, my work now is just about the gut reaction' (Chan).

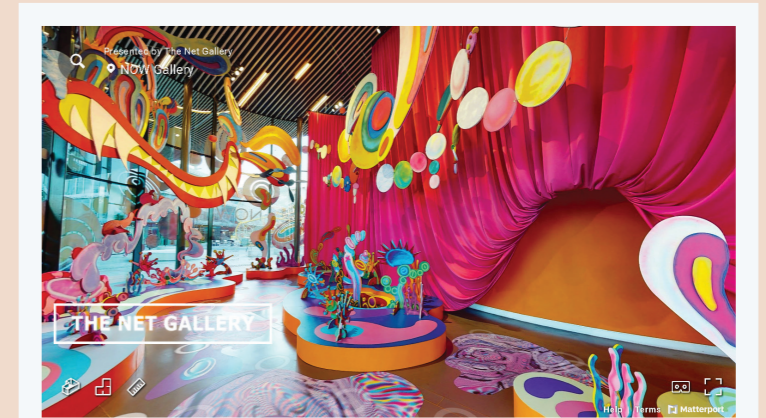


Fig. 4: Screenshot of Lydia Chan's *Your Ship has Landed*, 12 Dec. 2021, art installation, Now Gallery. nowgallery.co.uk, nowgallery.co.uk/exhibitions/your-ship-has-landed.

Lydia Chan transforms a blank slate at NOW gallery into a sci-fi wonderland in order to reawaken the viewer's inner explorer.



Fig. 5: Camille Walala, Adams Plaza Bridge in Canary Wharf, 10 Nov. 2020, art installation, Flickr Commons, [flic.kr/p/2kXLH1t](https://www.flickr.com/photos/2kXLH1t/).

Camille Walala boldly uses their talents to create enjoyable places of gathering and transition, to encourage people to have a heightened appreciation of their surroundings.

To Camille Walala, surprise and contrast against the surroundings environment are key. The bold repetitive colours of their work are most effective against the repetitive greys of the London cityscape. These stylings are chosen in part because they transcend common expectations and conventions for architecture (Walala, 'Taking Joy Seriously' 89). 'I love the idea of bringing an element of fun to the street, weaving colour and joy into a city which is sometimes lacking in both' (Walala, 'Walala Lounge').

These artists show a respect for their own whimsical desires through a multi-media approach. It is worth noting that these artists both express this through vibrant colours and bold shapes. This may be because the viewer could easily interpret bright-and-bold as representing these values. While carefully crafted, the creators of these works share a straightforward immediacy. Authorial semantic intricacies are deprioritised in order to focus on using physical space to incite a base reaction in the viewer. In some ways other mediums – such as books – are alike to physical space. Static text and image become a shared vision, an early prototype of altered reality, an intersection of the concrete and intangible. These properties offer similar opportunities to focus on immediacy and the joy of the viewer as physical space offers the artists referenced here.

Adaption to shifting economic landscape

IDEO is a product design firm which grew out of Stanford's engineering school (Auernhammer 624). They are now known for popularising *Design Thinking*, which is a term for a problem-solving framework which is able to be applied across many fields. This can be better understood by examining the economic developments IDEO was adapting to at the time of the Design Thinking's inception. In order to compete economically, those who provide design services in the US adapted to provide 'transformative value' in the vein of business consultancy when service-based labour began to follow suit (Irani 5). Technologically advanced, unevenly distributed economies are shifting toward new forms of labour, and the increased dematerialisation of design (present in Design Thinking) is consistent with this overarching shift (Stern 268). Additionally, IDEO's shift into Design Thinking acts to grant a sense of authority to their company. By aligning with business consultancy and adopting the terminology of the sciences, design work in this vein is framed as logical, pragmatic, and most importantly, legitimate. This intersection of design, market competition, and 'progress' is epitomised and expressed through their use of the term 'innovation'.

The dematerialisation of design at the behest of market forces is poetically aligned with my own experience using efficient design workflows. While the wider emergence of service design moves design out of the tangible and into the conceptual, efficient design workflows move design out of the body and into the digital. This personal dematerialisation is discussed further in the design explorations. **In response to the dematerialisation of design, I will rematerialise.**

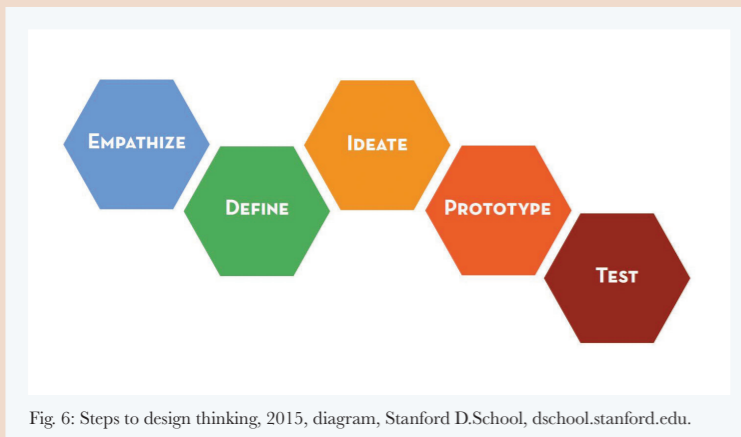


Fig. 6: Steps to design thinking, 2015, diagram, Stanford D.School, dschool.stanford.edu.



Fig. 7: Fun and Function spread 51, screenshot of design supplied by author, 22 Dec. 2021.

IDEO's claim that 'Anyone can approach the world like a designer' ('Design Thinking Defined') has an impetus on potential. This simultaneously mythologises the role of the designer and holds a promise of realising potential through the transformation of the consumer. Rather than recognising that everyone is a designer, it is covertly suggesting: Anyone can unlock the secrets of the design-mind by buying our training modules (\$599USD) ('Insights for Innovation'). There is no doubt that there is value in packaging these actions as a five-step Design Thinking procedure, but this tends to overlook that the packaging of this concept is a result of a market-race in specific global economic conditions. Framing Design Thinking as an aspirational product of personal transformation suggests that Design Thinking is *the* way of designing, rather than *a* way of designing. Shrouding Design Thinking in terms such as 'innovation', 'problem-solving', and 'universality' ('What is Design Thinking'; Brown 3), underhandedly frames other modes of designing as outmoded, ineffective, or alternate.

People have always been conducting forms of empathising, defining, ideating, prototyping, and testing (Sparks). Re-centering design as something that everyone *currently does*, recognises and elevates diverse forms of information and experience. This flattens the divide between models of design considered to be 'alternate' or 'innovative'. Accompanying this with a conscientious undressing of the causes and motivations of the surrounding attitudes better informs the context of the work. By shedding the infamously amorphous moniker of 'service designer', **I am free to be down to earth** at times, or arcane at times without pressure to cultivate the authority lent by the serious spheres of business and science. In response to the mythologisation of the designer, **I will approach this not as a designer, but as a human who designs.**



Fig. 8: George Muche, Haus am Horn, 1923, building, Wikimedia Commons, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Haus_Am_Horn_Weimar_(22).jpg.

The Haus am Horn was a design prototype intended to be economical and durable, reflecting the idea held by the student body that housing should be afforded to everyone.

Contradictions reconciled through the written document

If 20th century art movements could be embodied by a single concept, it would be the manifesto. A manifesto is more than a persuasive leaflet, it is the stamp of immutable permanence and determination of the movement behind it. By the 20th century, industrialisation allowed arts and culture to move faster than ever (Alloway 31). In place of large movements gradually easing in and out of style, art movements became punchy, formed by relatively small groups of proponents. To this, the manifesto was the perfect accompaniment. Although similar documents have been published beforehand, Marinetti's 1909 *Manifesto of Futurism* captured the optimistic tone driven by technological progress and a rapidly changing global culture (Berardi 14; Marinetti). After Marinetti, art movements often used manifestos to make their intentions explicit. A manifesto is characterised by the modes of its distribution: the pamphlet, the leaflet, the poster. The ready availability of these affords wide distribution to persuasive assertion.

A manifesto reinforces the view of the Bauhaus as a unified beacon of rationality, repaving a tumultuous past into a clear, understandable future. This simplifies a more complicated truth. There were competing perspectives within the school, on such topics as the embrace of industrial production, the value of the bespoke, and the role of theatre in society (Davis). There were conflicts surrounding funding; the school was at times state-funded by the Weimar republic, but also depended on the patronage of industry. This meant justifying its subsidies to the public and securing private sources of revenue (Dearstyne 74), while reconciling this strategy with the political values of the student body. In addition, much of the early Bauhaus was imbued with a popular-at-the-time mysticism which complicates the view of the Bauhaus-as-technological-powerhouse (Cimino 40).

The growing lean toward the production of marketable household objects appears to conflict with the popular vision of the communist-sympathising students of the Bauhaus. To the students, the necessary commodification of their products was not always seen as antithetical to their utopian aspirations, but rather, a vehicle to express their political vision (G. Adams 26:30–27:30).

The Bauhaus stands as a testament of our ability to navigate complex social and economic conditions. *The Bauhaus Manifesto* stands to smooth over these intricacies, providing a foundation of values for those within the Bauhaus. In addition, the manifesto acts to focus these complexities through the projection of clear-headed confidence to onlookers. A manifesto or similar document could be instrumental in reconciling the contradictions within the tumultuous waters of this project, providing an opportunity to work within the situation, mediating it as if it were a conversation.

Content mapping

The **context review** traces my research journey through the intersection of taste and culture. This section outlines how these influences impact the way images and artefacts have been perceived. This untangling explores how kitsch may be employed as a device which reframes how I understand the artefacts and images within my own designs.

The fundamental shift in perspective to efficient-design-as-kitsch revealed camp as an opportunity for disruption in efficient design workflows. This is further unpacked in the **methods** section. Camp's rich history in politics and communication entranced me. Camp is not merely an aesthetic sensibility, but an inversion of taste in favour of the oppressed (Horn 5). Camp's firm roots in LGBT history inform the choice of devices frequently used in camp. Although these tools at times escape into territories that are seemingly not related to gender or sex, a more complete understanding can be gained by having an awareness of the cultural significance camp holds. As an ally, I live external to this experience. Camp does not belong to me, but there is a version of it that does – as a guiding spirit.

The **evaluation** outlines the methodology informing the project and its evaluation – immanent critique. This is a method of analysis strongly associated with the writings of Marx, and later Adorno. Immanent critique – critique from within – tests cultural structures against their own rules through exaggeration and self-juxtaposition (Antonio 332). In this section I explain how camp can act as immanent critique, and the way this operated throughout the creative exploration. I then pivot into summarising the design research outcomes forged through this process.

Context review

The history of aesthetic taste and kitsch

Taste

‘There’s no accounting for taste’ not only implies that aesthetic taste is unpredictable and diverse, but that there is a right type of taste and a wrong type of taste. The notion of taste has not always had these connotations; however, taste has been related to the judgement and appreciation of beauty since its inception (Zangwill). Although there are similar concepts across cultures, the term *taste* does not refer to all beauty or all cultural tradition, but rather, taste is a western European concept with a distinct twist. Taste’s function primarily relates to upholding class structure, rather than universal truths about beauty or cultural traditions (Bourdieu 57, 175). For example, stays and corsets were, for a time, a common cultural tradition in certain parts of the world, however wearing a satin-ribboned V stay to Versailles court – was a display of taste. This application differs from contemporary uses of taste because at the time only the dominant class had the economic power to make consumer choices (Bayley 32).

As industrialisation increased in Europe, the production and availability of consumer goods increased accordingly. With increased accessibility of consumer choice, the concept of *good* and *bad* taste emerged in order to differentiate between the types of material choices being made. These descriptors transformed taste into a morally charged concept. Increased commodification of art accompanied these changes in production. The proliferation of art replicas placed increased importance on the ability to distinguish between original and fake. The high social regard of the connoisseur is predicated on the ability to identify types of goods that are original, rare, or of high-quality materials. By associating oneself with such goods, one differentiates themselves from inauthentic, common, low-quality people. Similarly, by personally aligning with what is perceived as ‘good taste’, one is culturally positioned in opposition to those aligned with bad taste (Bourdieu 260). This position is reaffirmed with displays of opulent class expressionism, which act to simultaneously justify their cultural status as the dominant class, and gatekeep against it. Sociologist Jan Fredrik Hovden refers to these exercises in class expressionism as *tastekeeping*, combining the terms ‘tastemaker’ and ‘gatekeeper’ (Hovden 56).



Fig. 9: Trojan Archer W-XI Temple of Aphaia, 490-480 B.C., sculpture, Wikimedia Commons, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aphaia_pediment_Paris_W-XI_Glyptothek_Munich_81.jpg

Fig. 10: Vinzenz Brinkmann, Experimental Colour Reconstruction of an Archer, 25 Feb. 2007, sculpture, Wikimedia Commons, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NAMABG-Aphaia_Trojan_Archer_1.jpg

Mechanical reproduction seals the connection between class status, taste, and authenticity. The aesthetic properties of good taste are secondary to the high-class context of their origin, as these visual qualifiers of good taste are in flux. This is evidenced by the marble statues of the Roman Classical era. If we grant that ‘restraint’ and ‘refinement’ are current traits of good taste, then the pure white statues of antiquity would exemplify good taste to a contemporary audience. However, the culture in which these statues were originally crafted valued different visual attributes, resulting in brightly coloured statues that may be considered gaudy (bad taste) by contemporary standards of good taste.

This dependence on context rather than visual properties is relevant to the contemporary application of kitsch. Like good taste, kitsch emerged as a negative definition when art was being redefined through mechanical reproduction. A negative definition is defined by opposition, or an absence of certain qualities.

Kitsch rises

Kitsch is sometimes referred to as a class of objects, a category of production, or simply a theoretical construct (Kjellman-Chapin XV). Formalist art critics described kitsch as decorative, shallowly sentimental, and even evil (Dorfles 15–16; Greenberg, *Avant-Grade* 6; Broch 37), but aside from these accusations, the true attributes of kitsch rest on the underlying increase in mechanical reproduction. At the core of kitsch are interconnected notions of reliance on commodification (with the aim of accruing surplus value), desire for universal appeal (means of engendering commodification), and inauthenticity (the result of this procedure). Although there are many (sometimes conflicting) ideas surrounding kitsch, these tenets reoccur throughout this discussion.

To understand kitsch better, we can examine its original conception by modernist formalists. The artistic practitioners of modernism and those that endorsed it were shy to frame modern art as an approach that could co-exist with other art practices (Brzyski 7). The aim was to achieve utopia through internationality, and purity. It supplants ‘traditional’ (that is, indigenous styles, folk, craft (Thyne 53; Hauser 290–291; Smith 20)) approaches to art making with a uniquely European breed of abstraction (Frampton 7). This is especially evident within abstract painting during the early modernist period. Greenberg posits that abstract painting is a crusade for essentialism, which is the search for pure form through self-reflexive painting, with the aim of this self-criticism being to eliminate unoriginality (Greenberg, *Modernist Painting* 6). Striving for purity was equated to the platonic notion of immaterial transcendence (Cheetham 142–143).

Where abstract art placed *Plato’s* forms over function, kitsch places immediate *decorative* form over function. Greenberg conceptualised kitsch as standing in opposition to the Platonic artistic ideal. Kitsch was identified by early modernists as a threat to true, intellectual art (Greenberg, *Avant-Garde* 5). Anxiety underscores both modern and contemporary understandings of kitsch, as evidenced in the term ‘mass culture’ that kitsch often runs alongside. Kitsch in this context was a concept used to patrol the borders of what is defined as art (Jones 30). The avant-garde and kitsch were diverging responses to the mechanical reproduction of art. Where kitsch was prolific, formulaic, with universal appeal, the avant-garde were thought to be unique, spontaneous, and at times obtuse to the layperson. In academic circles of the time, the avant-garde was presented as utopian, whereas kitsch was denounced as a capitalist threat to the future of art and an embodiment of ‘Western industrialism’ (Greenberg, *Avant-Garde* 7). Although the values of originality and purity have been thoroughly questioned by postmodernism, a strain of the modern persists, keeping the negative perception of kitsch alive. Tracing the roots of kitsch’s inception unmasks the cultural motives behind formalist critics and their contemporary reincarnations.



Fig. 11: Thomas Kinkade, A Quiet Evening, 2 Oct. 2013, painting reproduction on jigsaw, Flickr Commons, [flic.kr/p/gkUTrj](https://www.flickr.com/photos/gkUTrj/).

'Kinkade, like Bush, peddled a falsely simplified image of the world' (Miller).

Contemporary kitsch

The adversarial nature of modernism provides a template for the way that kitsch is thought of as threatening today. In the US, notions of 'mid-west thoughtlessness' were grafted onto existing perceptions of kitsch-as-unintellectual-commodity. While the art of Kinkade fits the description of kitsch as sentimental, commercially successful (Berg), and unoriginal (Saltz), the contempt held for this form of kitsch lies in its extended symbolic value. Similar symbolic value is imbued in the class expression of McMansions.



Fig. 12: User 193584, [Brick architecture building], 20 May 2014, photograph, Pixabay, pixabay.com/photos/brick-architecture-building-city-290364.

McMansions (or Hummer houses) are considered to be an 'assertion of the American sense of identity' (Filter) through ostentatious, yet cheaply cobbled together housing. It is worth noting that this is likely affected by wider factors, such as the prevalence of loose lending practices and an environment of post 9/11 morale-spending. There is more to be said about housing becoming the primary vehicle for class expression during this time.



Fig. 13: User Buckleybuilds, Who says Crown Molding is Overdone? 26 Oct. 2020, photograph, Reddit, www.reddit.com/r/ATBGE/comments/jhv6ld/who_says_crown_molding_is_overdone.

This manner of contemporary kitsch is regarded as the embodiment of a political philosophy that places the desires of the individual as the primary factor in decision making. Outside of individualism in politics, I posit that there is something egalitarian surrounding the notion that the desires of the housing dweller could supersede those of the architect. Why shouldn't the consumer demand sixteen layers of crown moulding? Why shouldn't the home be an eclectic composition of mis-matched turrets, oriels, and awnings, divorced from the context of their time?

In *Taste: The secret meaning of things*, the author posits that kitsch's inauthenticity manifests in an inappropriate adaptation between mediums (Bayley 93). Examples of this could be 'rustic' typography on a pristine sign, a canvas print of a famous fresco, or a 'classic' facade of faux columns lining the bedroom. This naiveté toward, or disregard for context could be considered to be a careless indicator of rushed production or cheap materials. Alternatively, if one reads such decisions as intentional, the juxtaposition could be considered ironic. I find kitsch's indifferent, eclectic approach to media and unapologetic medium juxtaposition to be a complicated mix of amusing, charming, and uncomfortable.

Bending the rules

Functions of kitsch

If kitsch's first modality is to lurk as a threat on the outskirts of a newly contested cultural economy, a secondary modality is to minimise and domesticate controversial values held by the dominant culture (Jones 30–31). In practice, this means that artefacts or images espousing racist, sexist, or otherwise harmful ideas may be dismissed as light-hearted or irrelevant (Boylan 133). Kitsch's viability is dependent on popularity; the scale of this appeal evidences the relevance of the values surrounding the kitsch object, despite any dismissal of the object itself being 'just kitsch'. This allows kitsch to simultaneously embody these values while disavowing them, disingenuously dismissing the objections of the people it harms through an ostensibly value neutral stance. This framing of kitsch brings to mind the harm-dismissing mindset outlined in other areas of this research.

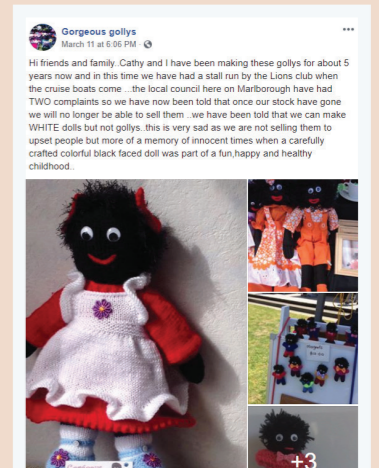


Fig. 14: Screenshot from Gorgeous Gollys, 13 Mar. 2019, Facebook post, Facebook, www.atlantablackstar.com/2019/03/13/new-zealand-doll-makers-whine-about-having-to-stop-making-golliwog-toys-after-complaints-from-u-s-tourists.

The doll-makers claimed offending people wasn't their intent, but they hoped to recreate memories 'of innocent times when a carefully crafted colourful black faced doll was part of a fun, happy and healthy childhood'.



Fig. 15: User Ronile, Handmade Art Glass Bird Blue, 22 Feb. 2021, sculpture, Pixabay, www.pixabay.com/photos/handwork-art-glass-bird-blue-6036968.

Inauthenticity is a consistent thread in kitsch, commonly cropping up in discussions of kitsch's relationship to material, memory, and emotion. Kitsch's simplicity is said to inspire only false or superficial emotion in the beholder (Dorfles 29, 35). A contemporary application of this presumption can be seen in Netflix's acclaimed glass blowing competition show *Blown Away*. Here, the most damning criticism a judge can give is that the piece is 'gift shop art' – which acts within the show as shorthand to imply that the work is obvious and self-evident. Kitsch is said to lack complexities for the viewer to contemplate at a critical distance (Harries 79). In order to inspire wide appeal, the sentimental appreciation of the object needs to be universal (Kundera 93).

The artefact's reliance on universal sentimentality can be *perceived* as inauthentic and artificial, but that does not devalue these concepts.



Fig. 16: Lance Johnson, Hummel Village, 24 Dec. 2005, photograph, Flickr Commons, [flic.kr/p/81fzk](https://www.flickr.com/photos/81fzk/).

Universal sentimentality and inauthenticity converge in discussions of nostalgic kitsch. Celeste Olalquiaga describes nostalgic kitsch as the selection and curation of an idealised memory, solidified as a cultural fossil (Olalquiaga 70). The type of kitsch referred to in Greenberg's essay *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, is 'mechanical, and operates by formulae' (Greenberg 6), however the inauthentic properties of kitsch do not just pertain to the mechanically reproduced object. Crafted objects are considered by some to be kitsch, despite their handmade nature. This is because the object is sometimes framed as harkening back to an idealised pre-industrial past (Walker 39; Stewart 143) that possibly never existed.

These artefacts operate as nostalgic kitsch, forgoing the actual memory of experience for a totem of curated experience (Olalquiaga 296). While this appears to contradict the idea of kitsch being determined by way of its production (that being handmade or mechanical), the classification of the commodified craft object as kitsch underscores kitsch's crucial ties to commodification.

Efficient design as kitsch

Pop artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein were known to toy with notions of duplication, repetition, and commodification. The ambitious ideals of modernists were deflated for a time by a sharp postmodern irony. Universal modernism was proven to be incompatible in a cultural environment which encouraged the coexistence of multiple interweaving schools of thought and art, all competing for dominance and receding in turn.

Regardless of the validity of the categories of high art, and low art, artists were quick to transgress these theoretical boundaries and co-opt kitsch for their own examination. Repetition could be employed by anyone, certain visual attributes associated with high art could be mechanically reproduced, mundane artefacts could be reclaimed and recontextualised in a museum. **Camp** artists often adopt art deemed culturally obsolete, with the goal of 'recreating value from forgotten forms of labour' (Ross 151).

Although kitsch remains a loaded term, transcending the modernist concept of high and low art allows kitsch to be applied as a value-neutral identifier in art and design. This reframing shifts the focus of this project from an intervention in homogenised visual output to a critique of the processes underlying the visual. Celeste Olalquiaga proposes an alternate view of kitsch artefacts, which entails a 'whole reading' of the object. This favours the **experiential immediacy** inspired by the object over its curated symbolic value (Olalquiaga 294). The artefact becomes a locus for **honest reflection**. The direct experience of the object itself is deprived of abstraction. This parallels the aforementioned immediacy sought by Walala and Chan.

Mechanical reproduction was thought by some to widen the divide between high and low culture, while others believed mechanical reproduction to be a key factor in the dissolution of 'mass culture' altogether. What Adorno called 'the culture industry' (Adorno and Horkheimer 94) is merely a broadcaster to an increasingly diverse population, consisting not just of cultures fractured into demographic subset groups, but groups separated into individuals (Alloway 32) who nimbly navigate the many permutations of consumer choices now available. This understanding of consumer culture as diverse and intelligent **opens opportunities for interpersonal relations via kitsch**. **We communicate the meanings of these artefacts as they are distilled in our minds, refashioning them into complex totems of reflective memory, emotional immediacy, and personal speculation.**

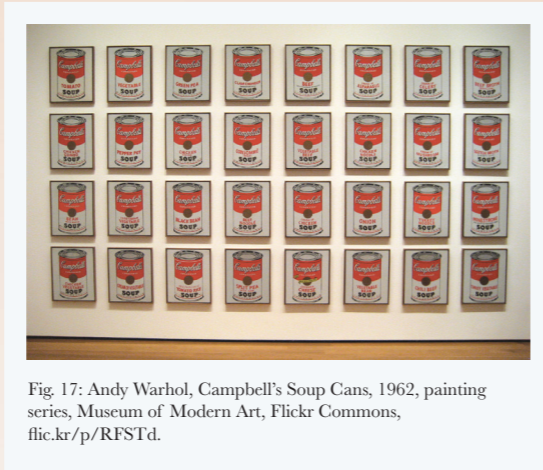


Fig. 17: Andy Warhol, Campbell's Soup Cans, 1962, painting series, Museum of Modern Art, Flickr Commons, [flic.kr/p/RFSTd](https://www.flickr.com/photos/museumofmodernart/).

The shift between modernism and postmodernism renders kitsch unidentifiable by its material visual properties. This scrambling undermines former expectations surrounding value cast by the long shadow of taste. When shirked of their surface visual properties, images/artefacts are considered kitsch by nature of their desire for universal appeal, commercial reliance, and inauthenticity as result of mass production (or in the case at hand, efficient design production). The postmodern remoulding of kitsch renders David Caronesque layouts and Squarespace minimalism equally kitsch depending on the nature of their production. Design's interconnected relationship to capitalism means visual communication design is often read as a product first and peer communication second. Through the nature of their production, signs which were once potent (sub)cultural signifiers are at times diluted by commercial modes of distribution,

or obfuscated by overlapping iconographic meaning (Zito 89). This senselessness renders the meanings of commercially produced artefacts and images ripe for conscious reclamation in the mind of the viewer. Framing efficient design output as a form of kitsch situates the design in a set of rich historical conventions and readable signifiers. This creates exciting opportunities for kitsch to be explored as subversive framing device.

Kitsch as tool to reframe design

- The dissolution of the formalist/modernist notions of high and low art renders kitsch unidentifiable by its surface visual properties, and allows works to be classified as kitsch without a value judgement being placed on the visual attributes of the art.
- Shirked of their visual properties, images/artefacts are considered kitsch by nature of their desire for universal appeal, commercial reliance, and perceived inauthenticity – in the case at hand this is a result of efficient production.
- This creates space for kitsch to be employed as a subversive framing device while exploring systems of art and design production under the workflow restrictions imposed by contemporary capitalism.
- Kitsch concepts explored further in this design research are honest reflection, sentimentality, superficiality, the blending and contrasting of artificiality and reality, eclectic use of media, and sensual immediacy.

Method

Contemporary camp communication (internal and external)

I have identified two common ways in which camp is discussed: Internal camp, and external camp. By dividing camp into two main applications, an otherwise murky and widely applied term can be tamed. Camp can be understood as a way of perceiving and interpreting. This is referred to in discussion as camping – a term used similarly to queering. This is camp pointed inward within the mind of the beholder as a way of seeing and taking ownership, or subverting that which is seen (Lowder, 'Joan Crawford's Cream Pantsuit'). I refer to this application as internal camp.



Fig. 18: User Dman41689, Mormon Tabernacle Choir, 18 Dec. 2014, photograph, Wikimedia Commons, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mormon_Tabernacle_Choir_2014.jpg

An example of internal camp is Bryan J Lowder's account of watching the Mormon Christmas special. This involves a re-framing of the performance as an over-the-top camp extravaganza, in order to neutralise the shards of pain lobbed specifically to gay men by the Mormon Church (Lowder, 'Is Camp Mean?').

Camp connects the viewer to those with similar understandings of the viewed (Drushel 115). This mutual-seeing echoes the past 'uses of camp', where linguistic stylings and manner of dress acted as code – however it is important to note that covert queer communication is still an important survival tactic in the present (Luu).



Fig. 19: Kate Gardiner, Drag Queen—Chicago Pride, 24 May 2007, photograph, Flickr Commons, [flic.kr/p/3uXVaz](https://www.flickr.com/photos/3uXVaz/).

Not all drag is parody, or pointed acute critique. Many people of all gender and sexual persuasions perform drag to simply have fun.

A second operation of camp is an act of being, pointed outward. This is at times an intentional, pointed critique, which I refer to as external camp. An example of external camp is drag as a critical examination of gender performance (Flinn 60). Stylistic exaggeration is used to draw attention to constructs deemed ‘natural’ and question their legitimacy through juxtaposition with ‘artifice’.

In an interview for her 1994 book tour Fran Lebowitz declared camp to be dead, having become so mainstream that it has lost its subversive edge (qtd. in Flinn 53). I believe that this ubiquity cements camp as one of the most valuable approaches available, even 20 years on. What I call external camp is so embedded in LGBT activism that it becomes invisible – hardly recognised as camp. This is not to dismissively imply that all queer aesthetic expression is a form of camp. Camp thrives on rejecting the logic of repressive tolerance, so as long as this logic stands, camp is not only necessary, but an essential ironic deflection (Horn 28).

Camp within this project

In order to gather a baseline understanding of camp, it was useful to research, assess, and taxonomise. However, camp does not exist solely in the domain of the academic, and its existence does not rely on a precise list of qualifying attributes. I believe that there is an element to camp which is humble in its simplicity, allowing that which is viewed to take ownership of its own nature without being held to the trappings of categorisation. An example being the popular film *Moulin Rouge* (2001), which draws on elements of cabaret culture to tell an uncomplicated love story.

Upon viewing, one can easily identify the film as a straightforward camp romp without consulting a formal list of qualifying attributes. Underneath the discourse which can so eloquently pinpoint the attributes of camp, there is a joyous magic that refuses to be categorised, dissected, and explained. So, while I put forth that there are tools implemented consistently (such as stylistic exaggeration, irony, and artifice), it is not the use of any of these specific devices that can determine the camp value of an artefact or image.

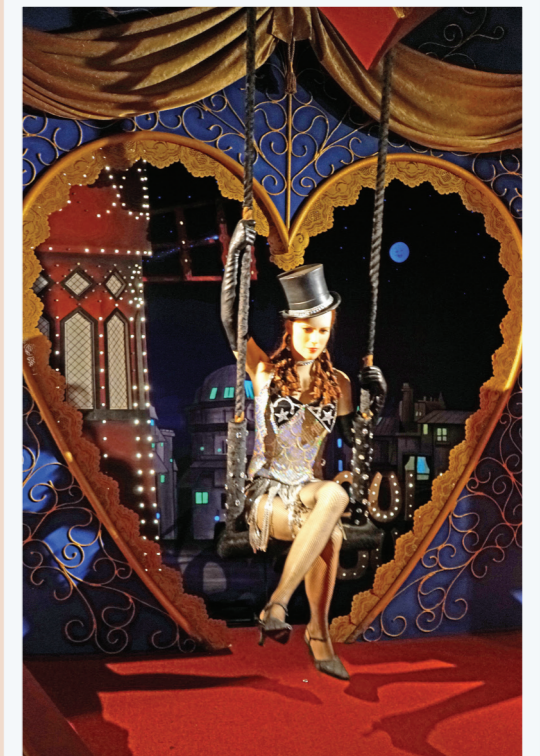


Fig. 20: Dennis Jarvis, Nicole Kidman, 22 Aug. 2017, photograph, Flickr Commons, [flic.kr/p/YuK3Sn](https://www.flickr.com/photos/YuK3Sn/). Photograph of Nicole Kidman wax figure in the style of *Moulin Rouge*.

Camp relies on what I have described as the internal and the external, immanence and transcendence, being and perceiving, the involvement and reciprocation of the viewer. For the purposes of this project, camp is a guiding spirit which touches both the aims and the values of the working space. On the side of the designer, I aim to prioritise **fun and whimsy** rather than disregarding it as superfluous.

Camp uses irony to deflect attacks on something which is sincere and dear to heart (Isherwood 51), or as Phillip core concisely put it 'camp is the lie that tells the truth' (Core 7). The **sincerity that lies underneath the artifice** is instrumental in re-establishing viewer-designer connection.

Camp is **participatory** communication which involves a shared nod. On the viewer side, I aim to incorporate participation through touch and texture, discovery and interaction with the designed artefact. Participation also refers to the reciprocal reflection of the viewer, the dialogue between object and person, idea, and experience.

Related to discovery is the concept of the **reveal**. This borrows from the performance language of drag, where acts of revealing and transformation are used to heighten a performance. For the purposes of this project, spontaneity relates not only to the whims of the designer, the surprise and delight of the viewer.

'CAMP IS SERIOUS ABOUT MAINTAINING THE FREEDOM TO PLAY, WHICH IS A WAY OF SAYING THE FREEDOM TO LIVE'

— J. Bryan Louder (*Louder, Can Camp be Taken Seriously?*)

Camp as guiding spirit

- Camp can be understood as internal camp; a way of seeing and interpreting (camping).
- Camp can function as external camp; intentional critique which employs devices such as stylistic exaggeration, irony, and artifice.
- Throughout the design explorations, camp's light-heartedness manifests as a prioritisation of the designer's own whimsy/fun.
- The viewer/holder is invited into the artefact as a site of participation and communication.
- Camp encourages the pursuit of moments of reveal.
- Camp inspires me to remain emotionally sincere while maintaining an environment of stylistic artifice.

To recap:

Kitsch as tool to reframe design

- The dissolution of the formalist/modernist notions of high and low art renders kitsch unidentifiable by its surface visual properties, and allows works to be classified as kitsch without a value judgement being placed on the visual attributes of the art.
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Rematerialisation: Business card as corporeal locus of experimentation

The business card was chosen as a locus for these explorations because the form acts as a parallel to the bread and butter of some efficient design workplaces. The pre-established set of conventions associated with the business card allows for the drawing of contrast between the norms of the medium and these design explorations. Its compact nature allows for rapid ideation. The choice of form riffs off of temporality and permanence; a business card is meant to be an almost disposable representation of self. Within this fleeting gesture there is also potential to begin a relationship that outlasts the card. Within these busy commercial spheres, there lies the personal, undeniable.

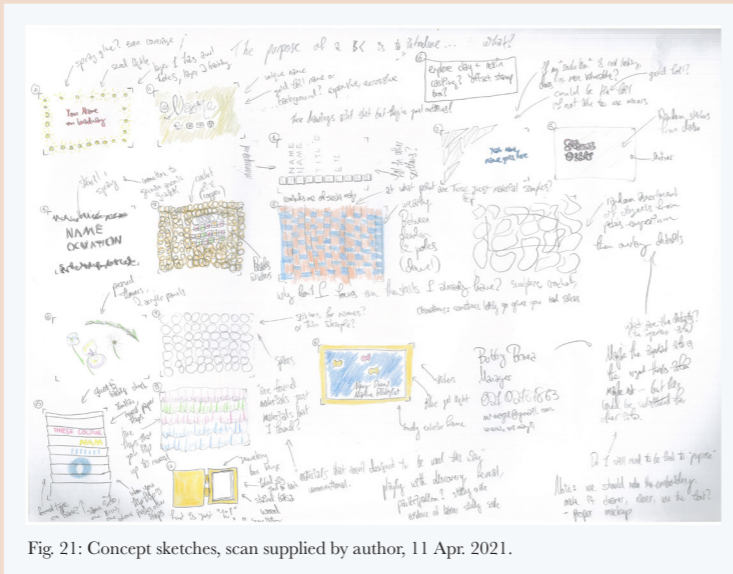


Fig. 21: Concept sketches, scan supplied by author, 11 Apr. 2021.



Fig. 22: Business card audience test, photo supplied by author, 1 Dec. 2021.

Narrative plays a role in the presentation of the artefact. Keeping the viewer at the forefront of the designed artefact allowed me to tap deeper into personal experience, isolating the causes of my feelings within the circumstances. The artists' book was chosen as a container for experimentation because the solitude of a book has a certain intimacy to it. Although language, design, and context impart their mark along the way, when taken together, the book connects the reader to the writer almost directly. We are together in the room we've both constructed. The intimacy of narrative is used to communicate an exaggerated version of the circumstances that facilitate efficient design workflows. I found that AI had potential to act as a poetic device, by way of depicting the designer-as-machine. The narration present later in the artefact blends from a robotic-response-email into something more alive and upbeat, aligning with the visual contrast being drawn.

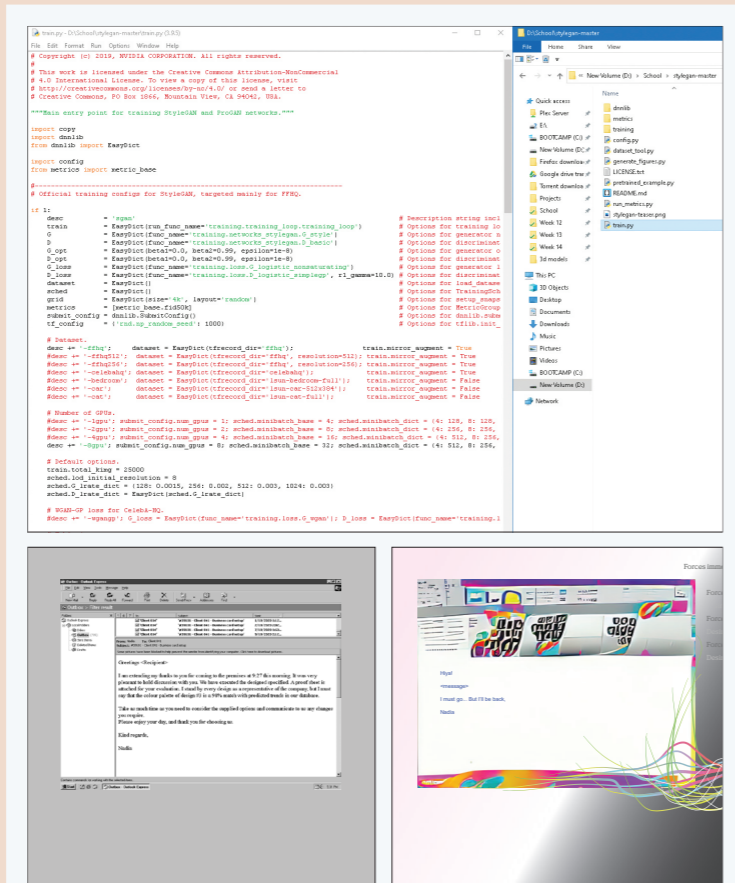


Fig. 23: Stylegan AI image manipulation, screenshot montage supplied by author, 13 Apr. 2021.

Before and after using Stylegan (text and vine-like embellishments not part of augmentation)



Fig. 24: Asger Jorn, Fin de Copenhague, 1957, artists' book, Flickr Commons, [flic.kr/p/PfXAhX](https://www.flickr.com/photos/p/PfXAhX/).

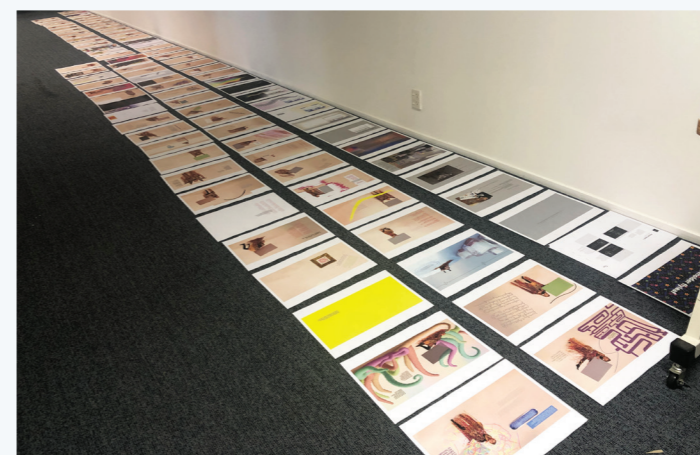


Fig. 25: Draft spreads, photo supplied by author, 22 Feb. 2022.

Draft spreads of the Fun and Function artists' book.

Artists' books have a multifaceted history, with a tendency to test medium and break form. They share a connection with zines, which provide democratic communication with a predisposition toward authenticity. Artists' books are related to the artist's monograph, which has its roots in societies of the 'high arts', which impart a different flavour of authenticity – the exclusivity of the bespoke (Taraba 86). Many artists' books have a personal, meta quality to them. Some famous examples question the role of art itself, comment on the life of the artist, and speculate on the future of art.

The unwavering permanence accompanying the committal to paper has a more pronounced bite in the 21st century. The artists' book is an uneditable snapshot. Although the continued development of this project is in flux, this island of the concrete belongs to the reader absolutely. The interaction is unmitigated by live updates – in the concrete there is no threat of temporality. In this way, participation is filtered and paced. The stage is set for us to play off of the strengths of the corporeal: texture, permanence, and the intimate reflection of solitude within the echoes of this inner world.

Evaluation

Methodology underpinning project and evaluation

Immanent critique can produce viable alternatives to existing systems because the critique is grounded within the constraints of the system that it is examining. The cultural structure in question is tested against its own rules through exaggeration and self-juxtaposition, which illuminates contradictions within the values of the structure (Antonio 332). An example of immanent critique in practice is dialectical materialism. This is a philosophy based on the works of Marx and Engels which uses immanent critique as its basis. It describes a process of contradictions and resolutions, brought about by the examining of social forces. Within the context of dialectical materialism, immanent critique is used to reveal and emphasise contradictions between real-world, material conditions faced by the people, and the ideal conditions supposedly upheld by the cultural structure in its current state (Cornforth 15–16).

Camp often incorporates devices such as ironic juxtaposition and stylistic exaggeration in pointed external critique to reveal new ways of seeing. These choices of device are similar to the methods of immanent critique. In this project camp acts as its own form of immanent critique, which aligns with my primary aim for this project – prioritising the heart and joy in the design process.

Outcome document

The 20th century optimism of a manifesto was influential to the presentation of these ideas. The manifesto was distributed widely via flyer, whereas the form chosen for this project is a one-off artefact of personal communication. This influenced my choice to pivot the manifesto's assertive tone of voice into a personal pledge. A pledge carries an implication of individual responsibility, while keeping consistent with the conversational qualities of this designed artefact. Pledges are characterised by choice – I opt into this bond because it is characterised by my own experience.

The pledge encapsulates the most essential ideas investigated through the design research and creative output. In line with immanent critique, they have been bent and forged into robust tenets in order to be compatible with efficient design workflows. This baseline snapshot will evolve as I continue in my working life. The statements are informed by four camp values: participation, spontaneity, sincerity, and fun. They are ordered in sections relating to:

- Declaring my own manner of approach.
- Framing the tangible inevitabilities of the design workflow and output (kitsch).
- Navigating the inevitable ethical conflicts as the spheres of personal and professional clash.
- Making renewed assertions on the viewing and producing of design.

These points were born out of a clash and grind with the ethical dilemmas present within the restrictions of efficient design workflows. They do not optimistically belong to the domain of wishes and hopes. Not only are these points cognisant of their restrictions; they lose their meaning when divorced from this context. Breaking down the conditions into a list of specific moments in which ethical decisions are made allows the ramifications of these moments to be more clearly assessed. The sense of learned helplessness is combated by revealing these opportunities for decision making, and providing solid guidance for action which is in tune with personal values.

A Personal Pledge

Designers, like all humans, are the dwellers at the gates of silent memory,
guardians of tender delights. It is our duty to sow pockets of joy.*

*I am one who dreams of a form of labour that is helpful, social, and
internally rewarding.*

There is a time for dense, arcane work, and a time for laid-back simplicity.

*Efficient design workflows are fundamentally hostile to paths meandering
and forms meditative. Life is more than labour; there is room for this in
my life at large. There can be give and take; balance without a
fracturing of the self.*

Regarding the resourceful recycling of design concepts: Nothing is ever lost.

*What may seem like a mistake is a trial run for material which can be
rearranged and reapplied. A desired outcome may come when the time is right.*

*Repetition in efficient design workflows is unavoidable. It is best to think it
kaleidoscopic, and embrace the infinite, swirling variations of the same.
A Shatterstroke simulacra.*

The replication of free or stock materials is necessary for efficient design.

*I will place value in the designer's freedom to decide how to exhibit these
materials as a non-neutral statement. I reframe these constraints as a type
of bricolage, found images, adopted, and repurposed lovingly.*

*I will respect kitsch conventions. A wedding invite, for instance, has certain
interpretable signs and signifiers which the viewer comes to expect.*

*Design is something we have always done for each other, but I will no longer
do it for just anyone. I will design for people I respect and believe in.*

*I will not contribute to the platforming of disinformation, or tacitly endorse
predatory behaviours through a non-discriminatory, apolitical approach under
the guise of free-market even-handedness.*

*Design is information oriented, but not all information is received with equal respect.
I will elevate, rather than dilute sensory information, emotional information, and cultural
information. I will approach not as the exalted Designer, but a human who designs.*

*When the venomous fear of not being taken seriously arises, camp's light-hearted sincerity
provides antidote. Prevention arrives in the form of my own perseverance and critique.*

I recognise the value in visual pleasure which goes beyond superficial.

*The 'superficial' itself has value without the need to 'go beyond'. The superficial has
value without need. There is value in that which complicates our vision in place of
solving our problems.*

*It is possible to adopt functionalist, aestheticist, formalist, expressionist, or process
focused perspectives interchangeably, or simultaneously. This is a flexible, pluralist
approach. The means and measures are secondary to the fruits – secondary to fun.*

*Although workplace constraints are framed as unmitigable, we must permit ourselves
to imagine alternatives in the face of capitalist realism.*

*We must actively make space for joy, without blinding ourselves to the conditions of
reality. The space in which I work is a playground, a sandbox, a temple of ecstasy.*

Conclusion

This research began in response to the homogenisation of the visual output of efficient design workflows. The early strategy to overcome this aimed to promote creative risk taking in design. Some limitations of efficient studio environments are born out of a market area which is unable or unwilling to commission time for market research or iterative development. In this context, efficient occupational formulae are an economic necessity in order to compete in this contemporary design market. The pre-existing drive for workplace efficiency has been exacerbated by a wider economic shift into a competitive, fragmented work structure colloquially known as the gig economy. In this space there is heightened competition with online services, and there is a looming threat of falling into this exact type of precarious online work.

As the background research further elucidated this outer context, I began to recognise my initial strategy was concentrated on the surface level of a wider underlying problem; that being the dissatisfaction, alienation, and disconnection of the designer to their work and the people around them. This shift enabled me to closely confront the source on a personal level, through further exploration in the designed work.

An aim of this project became to prioritise heart and joy within efficient design workflows. In response to the viewer-designer disconnect, I intended to highlight the evidence of labour in design, and encourage participation in the viewer. The goal of achieving connection between viewer and the designer was realised through recognition of the designed artefact as a site of communication.

This project operates on three levels. The first level of this project acts as a reflective practice, drawing on personal experience and discussing efficient design practices on a micro-scale, as related to the experience of the individual. The next level pertains to how the project relates to other designers. The design philosophy is presented as a personal pledge, acting as a pronouncement of a clear way forward. The viewer bore witness to the way in which personal experience shaped these concluding statements. As a passenger on the journey, there is an understanding that the results are extremely conditional. However, if successful, this work provides a guide that could be applied to their own situation. The last level is more universal: on some level every labourer can place themselves somewhere within these concentric folds of relevance.

The renewed tenets outlined in the pledge constitute my design philosophy for navigating efficient design workflows. This exploration encompasses more than the aims stated above, due to design's economic, cultural, and social roles. I feel that this has established a baseline for responding to adjacent topics such as superficiality, insecurity, information density, pleasure, pluralism, and praxis. The development of the philosophy is mapped out in the artefact for the viewer's reflection. By referencing specific actions in the artists' book (and the resulting pledge), abstract values are united with the material world. The fragmented self depicted at the outset is reassembled, and situated in unity with the bigger picture. When encountering challenges which lie outside of the bounds of that which is considered here, I am reassured that I am capable of facing these problems without looking away. This has been my attempt to enchant you by presenting an artefact imbued with both the concrete qualities of physical reality, and the transitory, liquid qualities of life.

Notes:

1. Camus was never proven to have said this. The popular quote first appeared in the Los Angeles Times in 1995 and has since spread from there. It is ironic that this quote in particular leverages Camus' image to give profound weight to a lie.

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