

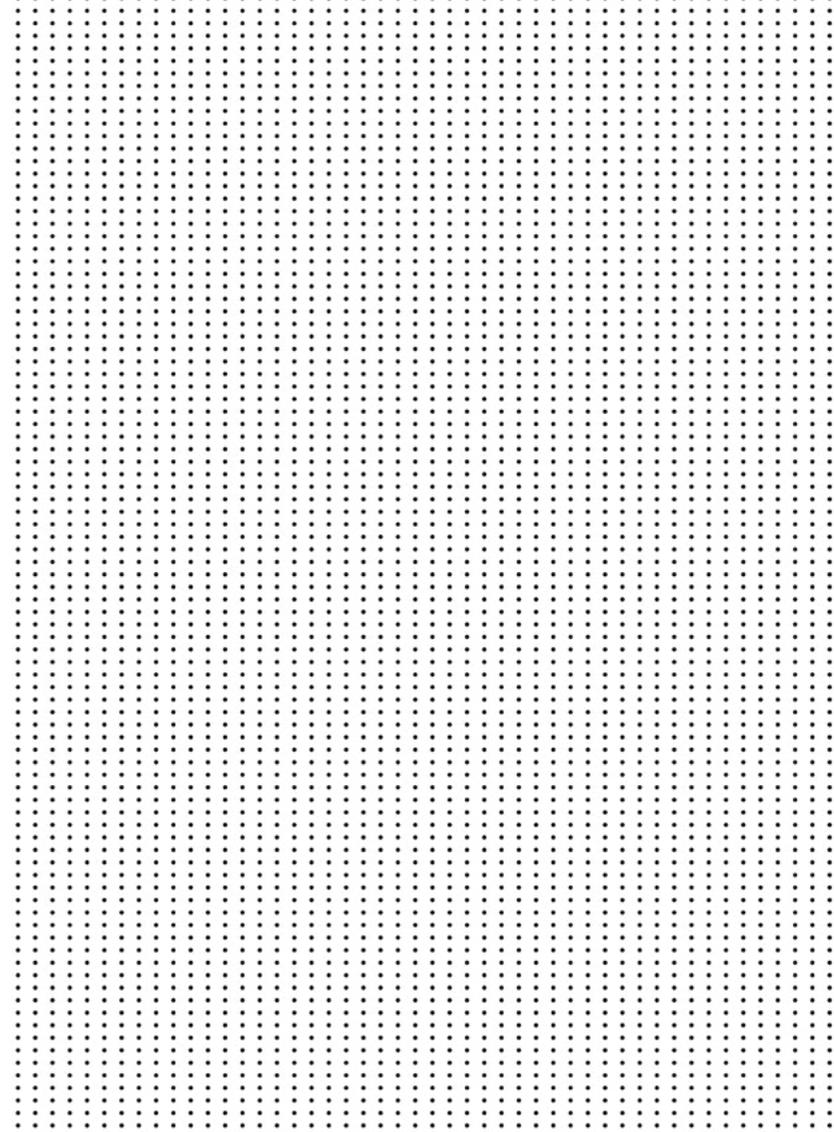
The Girl in the Grid

THE MARGINALIZATION OF
INTUITION IN DESIGN

By Jessi Blackham

The Girl in the Grid:

The Marginalization
of Intuition in Design



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The Marginalization of Intuition in Design

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design in the Graphic Design program at Vermont College of Fine Arts, Montpelier, Vermont.

By Jessi Blackham, 2022
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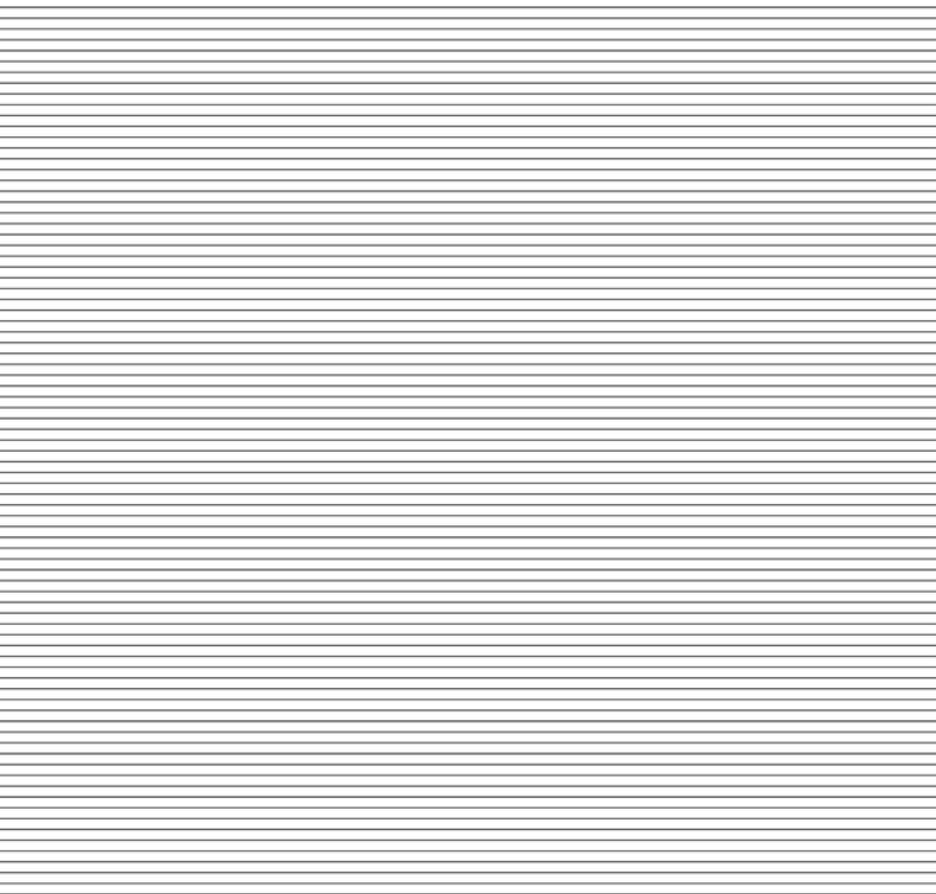
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Introduction



I—like many of you probably reading this—am an introverted visual learner. I also struggle with social anxiety. It's taken me years to figure out that I am drawn to design because it teaches me to bridge the communication chasm between myself and another person.⁽¹⁾ I've found myself magnetically pulled to specific design areas as I've chased this goal. Some of these—comics and graphic novels specifically—fall into categories that do not align with the accepted practice of modernist design I was pointed towards early on. This document is my effort to understand the forces influencing my perception of how I should work. Through this exploration I've discovered the beautiful opportunity we have to pull our humanity into our work through reclaiming intuition as a viable design methodology. I believe this is the opening our field needs for the designer to remain relevant to society in an increasingly automated digital world.

I grew up a suburban White kid in a conservative religious community and my introduction to design came through my undergrad studies at a conservative religious school. The European design cannon loomed large in my paradigm, diversity among my classmates and professors was limited, and my exposure to design thinking outside of Swiss modernism was minimal (pun intended). While my education opened the door to more varied experiences later, I came away as a young designer thinking there is a right way to design, and that it is European modernism. Subsequently, as I unpack this in the following pages, we will spend a lot of time talking about the Eurocentric design cannon because those are the guys I am struggling with as I suss out where I fit as a designer.

1) Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 194–198. Scott McCloud points out that individuals can never fully understand another person's experience because we can never perfectly share what's going on inside ourselves.

2) I say this here in reference to those who have used this kind of language to mean correct, logical, modern design. There are too many instances of this to name. Go look up anything written about advertising design in the 1960's in America. Or try George Nelson, "Good Design: What is it for?" in *Design and Art*, ed. Alex Coles, (Cambridge, Ma: Mit Press, 2007), 19.

3) C G Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine*, trans. (R.F.G. Hull, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

The most rewarding experience I've found is when my design communication also carries emotional resonance. In this way, design becomes a personal method for overcoming my own anxiety about connecting with other humans. It also means that emotion plays a central role in why I do what I do. I've found this goal of emotional connection at odds with the narrow structure of modernist graphic design. The result is internal dissonance between my personal design objectives and the goals of "good design."⁽²⁾ As I've sought to understand and validate my motivations, I've come across the long, sordid history of emotion in society and the discovery that it has been marginalized as a feminine space in design.

This social dynamic is a result of power structures that create division along stereotyped gender roles. It is a reflection of the internal conflict between the intuitive and logical tendencies that coexist inside every individual. Jung called these the "Anima" and "Animus" and viewed them as gendered aspects of our consciousness.⁽³⁾ This tension between this mythical masculine and mythical feminine not only exists in each of us, but is projected through modes of cultural production including design in general.

As I write this I find myself using terms like "feminine" and "masculine" to try and characterize the influential forces in this discussion. They are deep, complex dynamics and sometimes the words feel wrong because what I want to talk about here is not women vs. men.⁽⁴⁾ I'm using these terms in the Jungian sense, to reflect facets of personality and describe the tension we all experience between the dominant and passive parts of our internal selves.

Jung believed both of these aspects existed inside every person. These traits have become historically tied with gender dynamics and societal power, and so, the gender divide enters the discussion.

It seems that, despite my gravitation towards emotion based methodologies, the masculine/logical/systematic side is dominant when it comes to the accepted design canon. Gender dynamics have resulted in the marginalization not only of emotive communication, but of intuition as a valid methodology. The result is less empathy present in our collective practice. I believe the future of design requires us to reclaim this. In a world of technology facilitated by machine learning, designers have the unique responsibility to push back against the forces that tell us our humanity is weakness.

4) In fact the last thing I want to do is further reinforce the stereotypes that have created the issues I hope to discuss in this paper. It seemed overly difficult to use Jung's Anima and Animus though—I can't remember which is which 90% of the time.

Chapter 1

Power dynamics and where this all started

“Design is a construct of European modernism and European modernism is colonial.”⁽⁵⁾

What is it that motivates the perceived value of one set of societal traits over another? The answer surprises no one—it’s the need for one group to consolidate and retain dominance.

In *Ecofeminism*, Maria Mies and Shiva Vandana broadly explain marginalization—through gender, race, socioeconomics, or location—as a function of power dynamics. After all, a group in control needs something to have power over. White European men require a population of women, children, and minorities to support their lifestyle with housekeeping, cheap labor, and a consuming public for their industry to profit from. Gender stereotyping is an important tool to divide women and men into separate classes. During the industrial revolution men validated their authority by elevating logic, reason, and industry—stereotypes traditionally associated with masculinity—as vital to progress.

5) Natalia Ilyin, VCFA Advisor meeting, November 16, 2021. Natalia protested my including this quote but it can’t be said more succinctly.

“Modern science is projected as a universal, value-free system of knowledge, which by the logic of its method claims to arrive at objective conclusions about life, the universe and almost everything. This dominant stream of modern science, the reductionist or mechanical paradigm, is a specific projection of Western man that originated during the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries as the much acclaimed Scientific Revolution. Recently, however, Third World and feminist scholarship has begun to recognize that this dominant system emerged as a liberating force not for humanity as a whole (though it legitimized itself in terms of universal benefit for all), but as a Western, male-oriented and patriarchal projection which necessarily entailed the subjugation of both nature and women.” (6)

Realms traditionally associated with women were placed at a disadvantage in order to support this construct. Mies characterizes the female archetype as “...the mother, the embodiment of feeling, caring, humane-ness. This image of womanhood was constructed as the counter-image to the new, modern rational man which had to compete with other such men in the world of economics and politics.” She provided the sanctuary of the home for the man to reconnect with humanity after engaging in the logical brutality of capitalism.⁽⁷⁾

Women were cemented in this role. Their identification with nature and humanity is strengthened by the tie between the intuitive act of childbirth and the innate ability of biology to regenerate. Nature, in general, is a historical theme associated with feminized spaces and set at odds with technology.⁽⁸⁾

In "White Man's Dilemma: His Search for What He Has Destroyed," Maria Mies points out the inescapable value of nature. The love of it is set at odds with progress. Urban city dwellers—arguably at the forefront of progress—flee en masse to nature. “Those who apparently consider urban culture and lifestyle as the pinnacle of progress and modernity, for whom the cities are centers of ‘Life’, of freedom, of culture, rush away from these very cities whenever they can.”⁽⁹⁾

This was a phenomenon that was apparent among my friends and coworkers in New York. We would escape to the Catskills, or Dia Beacon whenever possible, even though we all extolled the virtues of living in the cultural center that was Manhattan. It's fascinating to examine in retrospect how my perception of modernity was tied to urban life and the void that I still felt within that lifestyle. I found living in the city soul-crushing. I hated being surrounded by concrete constantly. I missed seeing the sky

6) Maria Mies, and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*. (London: Zed Books, 2014.), 22.

7) Mies and Shiva. *Ecofeminism*, 146.

8) The impacts of these stereotypes are immediately apparent to any woman working in a STEM field, of which there are far fewer than there should be.

9) Mies and Shiva. *Ecofeminism*, 132.

10) This feeling, in fact, is beautifully preserved in the 2007 song "New York I Love You but You're Bringing Me Down" by LCD Soundsystem. This is now stuck on loop as I write. Do yourself a favor and go watch the Miles Davis improvised YouTube duet.

11) Granted my sample was affluent and privileged. Whether this need is shared across socioeconomic groups regardless of access is something I'd love to research more about.

12) Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Noonday Press, 1996), 7.

and the mountains and the ocean that I had grown up near. This sentiment ⁽¹⁰⁾ in my observation, was not drawn along gender lines but was a common need of humans ⁽¹¹⁾ living in cities. The act of returning back to mother nature had the quality of reconnecting with something illogical, but vital, inside of us.

Women associated with nature were literally demonized and burned as witches not too long ago. Mies calls the witch a "bad woman" who must be eliminated so the image of the "good woman," one that was stripped of her own power and dependent on a male breadwinner, could emerge. Ann Douglas explains the subsequent rise of one of the most prominent contributing figures to the subjugated female stereotype in her book *Terrible Honesty*.

The Victorian woman became the defining symbol of her era. Called the "Titaness," "Matriarch," and even "Fury," she became a fearsome, mythical force. She represented morality and truth, deriving her authority from her innate godlike creative powers. Despite being defined as the soft, emotional counterpoint to the male dominated forces of progress, women took what little space they were granted and ran with it until their influence was indisputable.

These women, shut out from politics, turned elsewhere to establish influence: the church, the school, and the literary world. The "Victorian matriarch" became a symbol of strict morality as well as strict racial exclusivity. She represented a vision for the future of a female-led society and achieved enough social influence in the pursuit of these ideals to emerge as an opponent to progress. In the true pattern of trends, the new generation eventually sought to overthrow her.

Despite the many flaws in this ideal—I'm not super pumped to live in her society, personally—I can't help but agree with Douglas's assessment that the Victorian matriarch became vilified because of her challenge to patriarchal society, her thin-lipped idealism only serving to make her an easier target.

"The moderns were fiercely astute about her failings, but many of these failings can be attributed to her lack of real political and economic power, to her efforts to compensate in terms of moral and cultural influence for the responsibilities and rights she was denied in the economic and political realm. One might argue that the apparent ascendancy of the matriarch in the high Victorian period and her subsequent demolition in the early twentieth century constitute nothing but a crisis in a firmly patriarchal or male-dominated culture; women getting a little power in a society that preferred them to have none were perceived as monstrous usurpers and punished within an inch of their lives."⁽¹²⁾

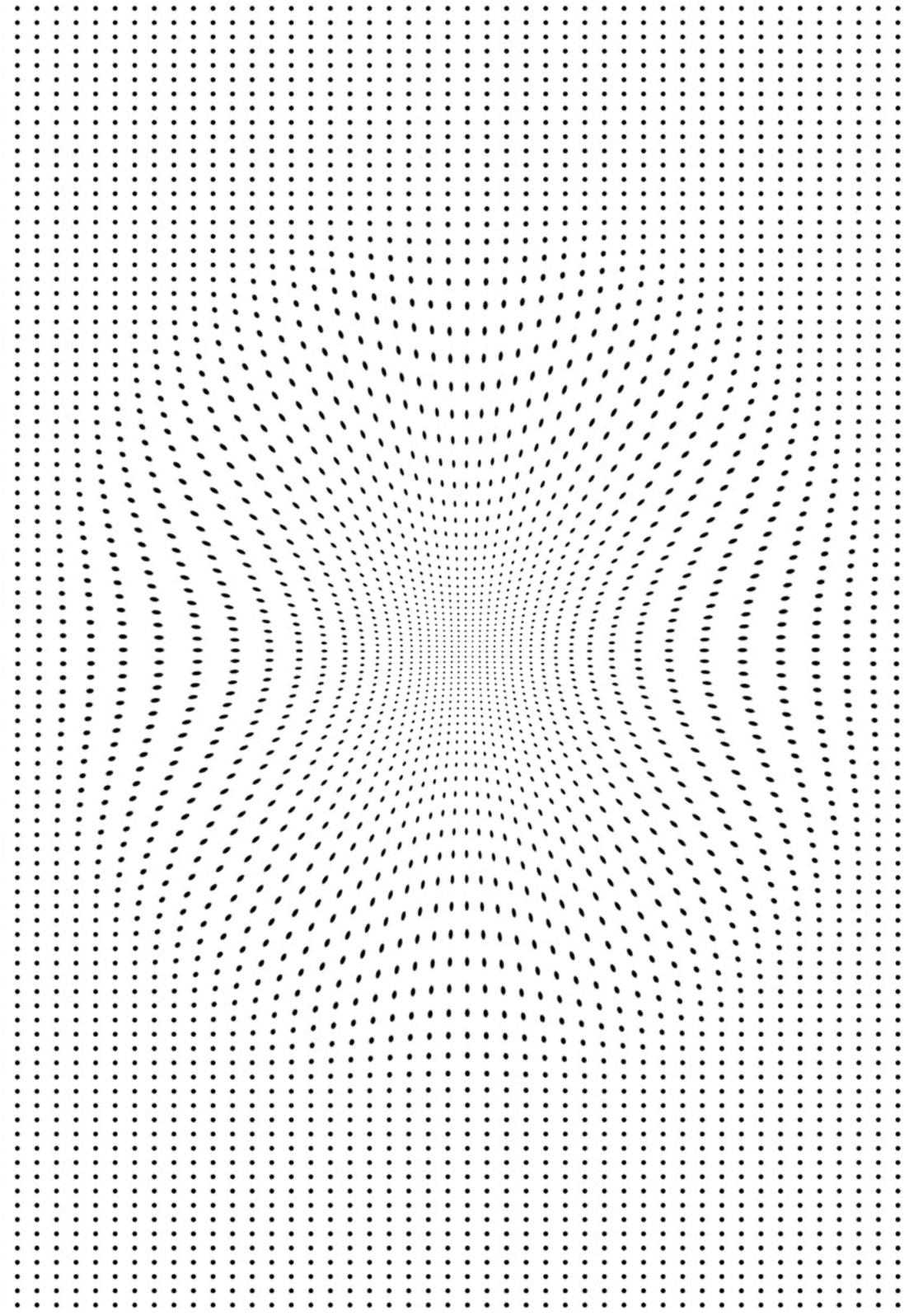
13) At the risk of being hypocritical—HE'S SUCH A DUDE.

14) Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine*, 166.

Jung undercut the success of Victorian women as cultural influences by attributing it to sexual frustration.⁽¹³⁾

"...this intense 'prudery' came from dissatisfied women, who had been given cultural control instead of the sexual fulfillment they craved."⁽¹⁴⁾ Because women who are sexually satisfied sit down and shut up—obviously.

Modernism took root as part of this wave of backlash against sentimental, feminized, Victorian culture. Instead, grounded in notions of masculinity, modernism railed against the matriarch's old fashioned, moralizing, euphemistic ways by declaring the virtue of the truth, however unbecoming it might be. Anne Douglas calls this "Terrible Honesty"; an attitude that was ushered into the mainstream by the brutal reality of world war.



Chapter 2

Modernism prefers masculinity

Modernism rushed into culture at large as a result of a crisis. It came at a time when the brutal realities of horrific world-wide conflict primed the European populace to break free of the Victorian era with its euphemism for anything distasteful. Douglas effectively conveys the vehemence of the modern movements' disavowal of Victorian thought. They acknowledged the happy veneer of Victorian life but were more concerned it was "hypocritical; 'flat'; 'superficial'; and, worst of all, 'safe.' Thanks to the war, however, life was becoming 'significant' and 'interesting again'; 'risk' and 'battle' and 'conflict' were, after all, 'the essential content of life...'"⁽¹⁵⁾

Gertrude Stein asserted that the war had the hastening effect of forcing the masses to adopt progressive views in record time. A global crisis suddenly eliminated the lag usually found as new ideas circulate through society. It "established instant assimilation as a self-protective necessity, and made the avant-garde, whether in the arts or technology, the mainstream."⁽¹⁶⁾ This reactionary instinct solidified popular opinion in turning away from the matriarchal construct of Victorianism as society put its trust in logic.⁽¹⁷⁾

Modernism gained traction among a population who saw the Victorian way as hiding reality behind frills and sentiment. They embraced linear logic, structure, and rational scientific methodology as part of this search for unembellished truth. While this makes sense in terms of the pendulum swing of cultural movements, what we don't discuss often enough is the way that this effort was aligned with a desire to re-masculinize popular culture. The success of modernism is due, in part, to the fact that it offered an avenue for male-dominated power structures to dismantle a threat to their authority. The Victorian matriarch had become the major influence of western culture⁽¹⁸⁾ and the patriarchy was beginning to fear her.

Her resulting take-down was vehement and complete—it was Jungian matricide against an immortal foe:

15) Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*, 158.

16) Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*, 180-181.

17) Natalia Ilyin, VCFA Advisor meeting, November 16, 2021. Natalia characterizes this reaction as "...we can't go through this again, we cannot lean on intuition, we must prevent this through structure."

18) *America in struggle with itself is an overarching theme that shows up in western design's internal dissonance. These two parts are reflections of the internal battle Jung saw in all of us.*

“...if the Victorian woman was indeed a Titaness, that meant she was immortal, whether god or demon. In this reading, the Titaness, like the monster in a horror film, always has one last gasp of violent life left in her even after she has been riddled with bullets, a gasp that may cost anyone insufficiently wary his life; the modern’s world is one in which it is never safe to deal with the enemy, even when that enemy is on her deathbed, even when she is in her grave.” (19)

19) Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*, 243.

20) These qualities were already associated with the success of the industrial revolution and reflect the same patriarchal constructs that had become widely accepted as part of this history. More on that later.

With the establishment of western modernism, emotion, and sentiment were firmly re-marginalized. The moderns presented a new stereotypically masculine pattern for society as a counter to the matriarchy's efforts. Progress, structure, and logic promised a new utopian future.⁽²⁰⁾ Modernism owes some of its staying power to this utopian ideal. It's hard to argue with a logical methodology for perfecting society, even today. This effort manifested itself on different timelines and in different ways across the fields of cultural production, economics, and politics. This is a much broader definition than I was taught as an undergrad student where we focused on “graphic design history”—it is modernism as an overarching theme that has repeatedly arisen across societal movements, unified by the simple but elusive desire to create an equitable world.

Back to graphic design though. This idea of a utopian pursuit is fascinating given my first, narrow definition of modernism. I was taught it essentially began with the Bauhaus. It was there that modernist composition and typography were taught alongside industrial design, and architecture. These theories were then disseminated to the US via the handful of teachers and students that fled the war.⁽²¹⁾ American modernism—in graphic design, specifically—was embraced by an industry concerned with democratization and driven by capitalism's ever growing need to create “newness.” There's a word. I love that there exists such a cringey term for the manufacture of perceived need. A fake, made-up word for a fake, made-up reason to buy something.

Modernists sought to develop design for a new “Modern Age” through the principles of abstraction and universalism.⁽²²⁾ The international style that grew out of the explorations of the Bauhaus enshrined modernism in advertising as a noble effort concerned with clarity, accessibility, and rationale; unencumbered by the baggage of the past. I find this ironic given that the international style emerged during the cementing of the relationship between the forces of capitalism and design.⁽²³⁾ The pure logic of the grid gives it a perceived higher moral ground which has allowed it to survive and flourish as an ideal despite its obvious subjection to individual gain when applied over and over again to marketing.

21) This canonized Eurocentric narrative neglects the many marginalized contributors to these ideas that have come to light through the activist efforts of design researchers in recent years.

22) Ellen Lupton, and J. Abbott Miller, *Design Writing Research: Writing on Graphic Design* (Reprinted. London: Phaidon, 2008), 42-43.

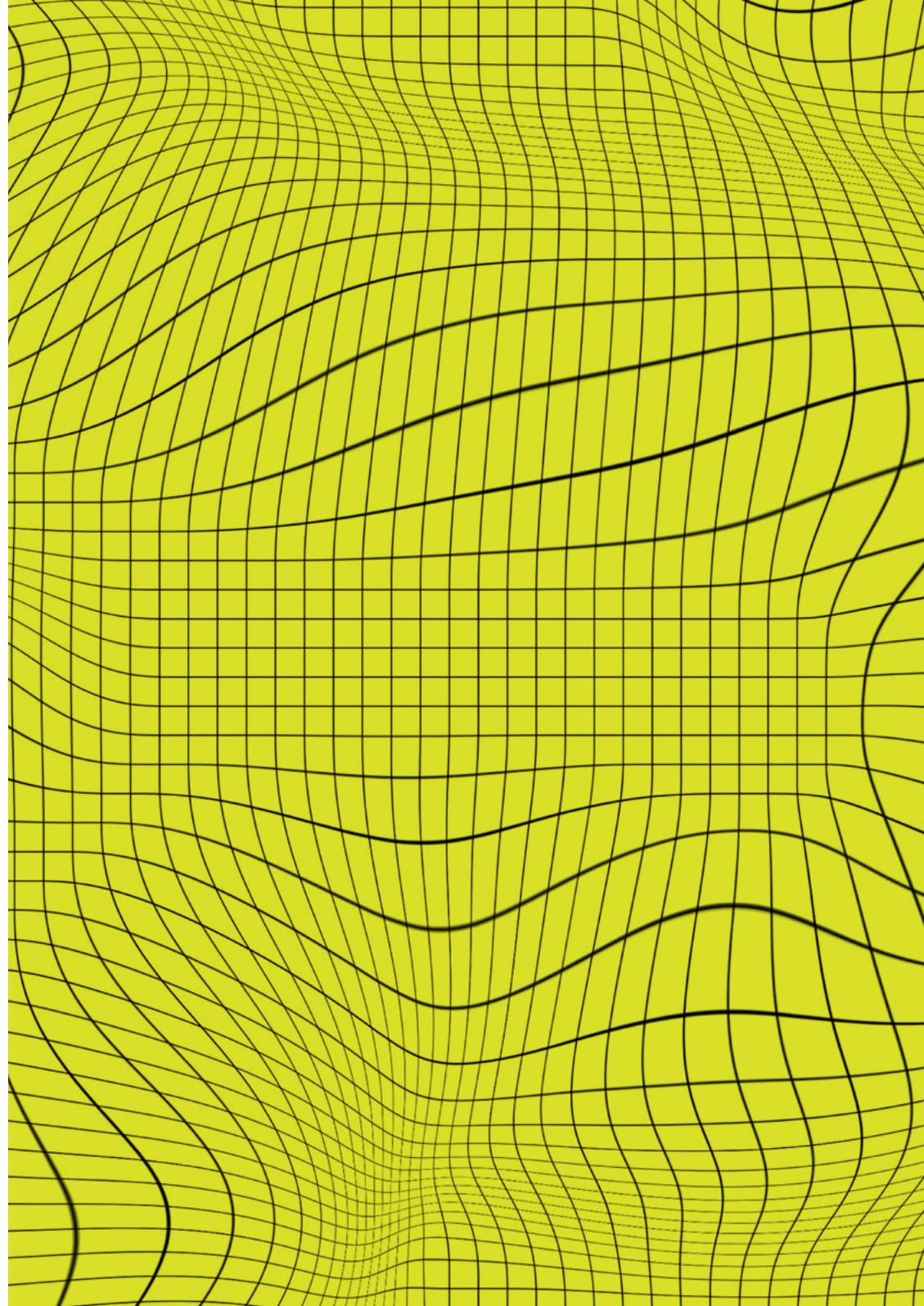
23) I mention this in passing but the very intertwined relationship between design and capitalism is explored in Ruben Pater's book *Caps Lock*. In this interview he explains how readily this is recognized by many working designers, even those in corporate spaces, who are looking for ways to disentangle the two in their practices—which is a hopeful thought. Ruben, Pater. "The Daily Heller: Not Such Strange Bedfellows." interview by Stephen Heller, *Print Magazine*, 3 Dec. 2021, www.printmag.com/daily-heller/the-daily-heller-not-so-strange-bedfellows/

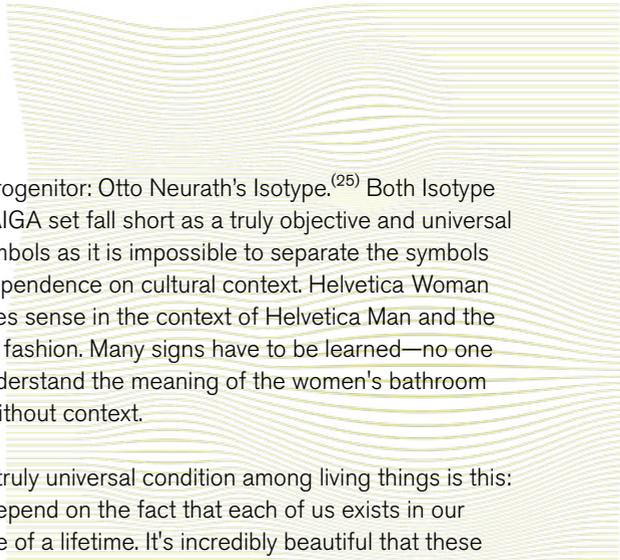
24) Lupton and Miller, *Design Writing Research: Writing on Graphic Design*, 19.

This was the modernism that was handed down to me in my undergrad education. I emphasize down. It was a very hierarchical experience that aligns with the dynamics I experienced as a woman in a male-dominated field. I learned how to apply left aligned, sans-serif typography paired with geometric abstraction with precision. I developed grid systems that dictated rational layout. Paul Rand's IBM identity was the shining example of what I was taught to go out into the world and do. I made peace with this as a young designer—a clear systematic approach is a simple goal. And if I was ever skeptical, there was always that underlying idealistic vision to fall back on.

Essentialism is central to modernism as it seeks to pare down aesthetics to a standardized minimum, prioritizing efficiency. This requires belief in logic's ability to speak through a universal visual language that exists outside of cultural context. It focuses exclusively on perception in an effort to democratize communication. Ellen Lupton and J. Abbot Miller attribute the idea that writing is a lesser form of communication to this perception oriented approach. When seeking pure visual communication through abstraction, language is a crutch. The written word, confined to a single spoken language, is less efficient than a visual symbol that transcends those barriers. The modernists removed language wherever possible, believing in the purity of abstract form. I recently wondered why I wasn't really taught about Herb Lubalin in school and here's the answer Lupton and Miller hold up Lubalin and the associates that created work in his name, as an example of successfully harnessing the power of abstraction in combination with the historical and social context of language.⁽²⁴⁾ He reached outside of pure logic to inform his design and was therefore not a modernist.

The myth of the universal system is illustrated in the many attempts that have been made to create a truly universal set of symbols that have the power to transcend different languages and contexts. Lupton and Miller analyzed this when they compared the 1974 AIGA standard symbol set





25) Lupton and Miller, *Design Writing Research: Writing on Graphic Design*, 42-43.

26) Yes, I'm here because I've always loved science fiction—I grew up on *The Neverending Story* and *Star Wars*. I could talk about this all day but I'll try to contain my enthusiasm.

27) This is documented in a face melting way by Noessel and Shedroff in their book *Make It so: Interaction Design Lessons from Science Fiction*.

with its progenitor: Otto Neurath's Isotype.⁽²⁵⁾ Both Isotype and the AIGA set fall short as a truly objective and universal set of symbols as it is impossible to separate the symbols from a dependence on cultural context. Helvetica Woman only makes sense in the context of Helvetica Man and the history of fashion. Many signs have to be learned—no one would understand the meaning of the women's bathroom symbol without context.

The only truly universal condition among living things is this: we can depend on the fact that each of us exists in our small slice of a lifetime. It's incredibly beautiful that these short little time spans have built on each other and interwoven to create this rich history we call culture. Attempts at reducing humanity to universals ignore how the meaning of forms shift in the context of history geography, and society. All of these systems of signs, linguistics, and writing mean nothing if they disregard the humans trying to communicate at the center of them.

The idea that progress and cold logic go together removes emotion, intuition, and nature from the equation. It is a self defeating effort to separate humanity from the thing they have produced. While systems based logical production is efficient, it also eschews everything that makes us human. Removing value from those things that make us different from machines could have far reaching effects. Contrary to the perfect society sought by utopian modernists, contemporary imagined futures frequently portray dehumanization leading to dystopia.

In considering how culture thinks about the future, science fiction—the genre that most often portrays what is to come, is worth examination.⁽²⁶⁾ Sci-fi is a documented self-fulfilling

indicator of the future through the way it creates and manifests expectations of what is to come.⁽²⁷⁾ Perhaps it's cynical to bring this in but I can't ignore how our collective cultural exploration of what the future brings is at odds with the view of a perfect future society. As an adult, my favorite films tend to extrapolate and expand upon current world crises such as global warming, overcrowding, and digital lives supplanting physical ones.⁽²⁸⁾ Up until a few years ago, I loved a good pandemic story as well. Unfortunately this scenario has lost it's romance in light of recent events.⁽²⁹⁾

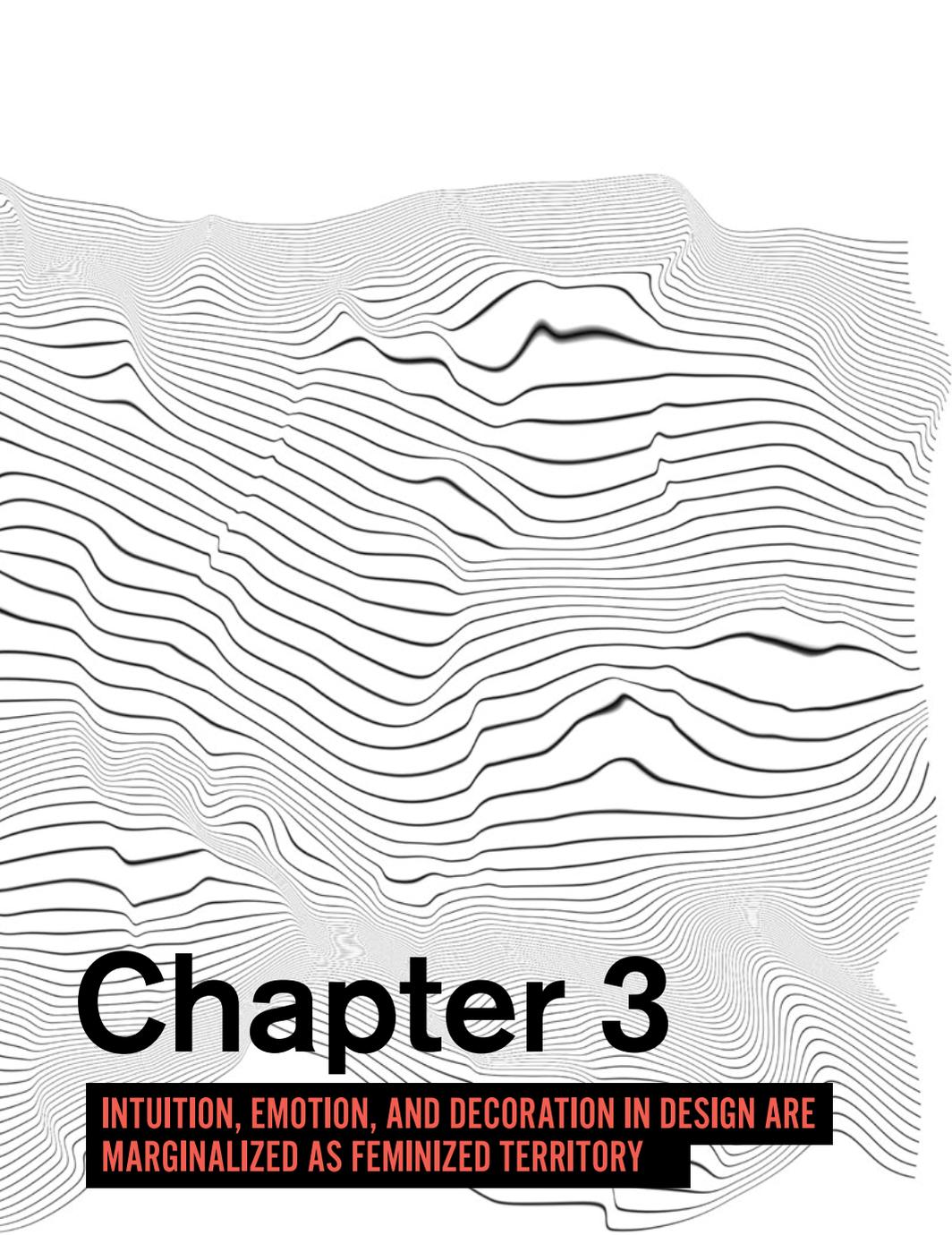
The one outcome that modernist utopia and sci-fi dystopia align around is the ultimate dehumanizing of the individual in future society. Modernism strips away personal preference and the humanity of the individual designer's voice through its strict prioritization of logical efficiency. Dystopian societies as seen in films like *Blade Runner* and *Soylent Green* depict the individual as part of a nameless mass, swallowed up in overrun cities, monolithic architecture, and massive catastrophe. Modernism's utopia has not come to pass but we can still hope that the very grim future of dystopian sci-fi might be avoided as well. Perhaps the way we live in an attainably better future lies in rediscovering the value of emotion, intuition, and indeed, humanity.

bell hooks wrote about the importance of acknowledging each of us as unique individuals. "As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence."⁽³⁰⁾ I believe the same applies to our work as designers. Rather than undermining the system, an energized field is the result of recognizing individuality and diversity among the participants in design.

28) See *Blade Runner* (1982), *Soylent Green* (1973), and *Her* (2013) respectively.

29) I say this despite being suddenly overcome with the desire to watch *Andromeda Strain* again.

30) bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*. (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 1994), 8.



Chapter 3

INTUITION, EMOTION, AND DECORATION IN DESIGN ARE MARGINALIZED AS FEMINIZED TERRITORY

Standardization that forces individual perspectives into a homogenized system robs us of the vital experience of seeing and connecting with each other.

My own individual journey as a designer has been characterized by the dissonance I feel between the modes of communication I connect with and the sort of work that is praiseworthy in the modernist tradition. Graphic novels have provided an opportunity for me to reclaim intuition in my work. I've been on both sides as an avid consumer and creator in this space. The field of sequential art is dismissed as juvenile by both the serious art and design worlds. Despite this, or maybe because of it, graphic novels are a rich playground in which I can synthesize all the semiotic tools designers have available—text, image,

symbolism, and pacing—in an effort to connect with my audience on an emotional level. It's taken time and exploration for me to consider sequential art something I can value professionally though. I've been struggling against the feeling I should embrace modernism and its impersonal aspects ever since I was introduced to it. My first job out of college was as Assistant Art Director for Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia. It was a really good job and everyone that heard what I did oohed and awed. I didn't feel the same way. I was a repressed punk kid who just wanted to make loud, emotive, concert posters and instead, was trapped in a world of minimal pastels and Hoefler type. I spent the next decade trying to consolidate my personal desire for expression with the single-minded call for clarity dictated by modernism.

Design methodologies based on emotion and intuition still struggle for legitimacy despite the many years that have passed since modernism was the single dominant movement in design. Its rise at the beginning of the mechanized age firmly tied European modernism to progress and the future in a way that persists today.

In *The Substance of Style*, Virginia Postrel describes how this relationship began. Systems, automation, and efficiency drove the industrial revolution. These concerns were prioritized by the same male-dominated social dynamic that would come to characterize the modernist overthrow of Victorianism in the coming decades. This led to a wider variety of better quality, cheaper goods than ever before. This populist effort enabled wider distribution and more equitable access to dependable items. There were some trade-offs, however, as goods were no longer lovingly handcrafted with beauty in mind. Automated production

made identical, utilitarian things, but at least the quality was predictable and the price was low. This model sacrifices aesthetics in order to provide the non-wealthy with access to things that would have been cost prohibitive otherwise.

Modernism sought to apply this same logic to visual communication when it arose years later. Left justified, sans-serif typography and grid systems allowed for consistency and clarity. The result was a prescriptive system that could be applied to efficiently raise aesthetic standards in design the same way quality across production had been standardized. This was progress that opened access; an activist effort against aesthetics being something that only the rich enjoyed.⁽³¹⁾ The resulting methodology—called the “International Style” in an attempt to brand it as transcending culture—became an influential and dominant mode in the field of graphic design and its related concerns: branding and advertising.

31) Virginia Postrel, *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness* (New York: Perennial, 2004), 34–50.

32) Adolf Loos and Joseph Masheck, *Ornament and Crime: Thoughts on Design and Materials*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (Penguin Classics. London UK: Penguin Books, 2019).

Early proponents of modernism were so single minded in this mission that they literally classified ornament as crime. Adolf Loos' infamous essay by that title was so vehement and deadpan that, at first, I couldn't figure out how much of it was tongue-in-cheek. His dogged insistence that “modern man” always prefers unadorned forms was baffling.

“Modern men who revere ornament as a sign of the artistic expression of earlier generations, will immediately recognize the painfully labored and sickly ornament of today. No-one can create ornament now who lives on our level of culture. It is different for people and nations who have not yet attained this level.”⁽³²⁾

I'm sure it would not be hard to produce contemporaries that had quite opposite opinions. Some of these may have even fallen into the only group who he seems to value; “the aristocrats; I mean, to the people in the forefront of humanity.” In fact the Vienna Secession—still one of my personal favorite movements—was actively covering posters in Art Nouveau scroll work when this essay was published.

Regardless of how ridiculous this piece of writing seems today, it accurately characterizes modernism's disdain for the emotional embellishment of the Victorian age. Modernism and patriarchal social constructs born of the industrial revolution and then validated by a society at war worked together. They marginalized emotional expression in design and banished it along with the sentimental, the ornamental, and the matriarchal.

GIRLS = EMOTIONAL ≠ LOGICAL = USELESS.⁽³³⁾

33) Unsigned. "Riot Grrrl is...," *Bikini Kill*, no. 2 (1991). The Riot Grrrl manifesto takes this a step broader "BECAUSE we are angry at a society that tells us Girl=Dumb, Girl=Bad, Girl=Weak."

34) The term hysterical comes "...from the Latin hystericus ("of the womb"). This was a condition thought to be exclusive to women—sending them uncontrollably and neurotically insane owing to a dysfunction of the uterus..." Gary Nunn, "The Feminisation of Madness Is Crazy | Mind Your Language," *The Guardian*, 8 Mar. 2012, www.theguardian.com/media/mind-your-language/2012/mar/08/mind-your-language-feminisation-madness

Victorianism and Modernism had become positioned as the stylistic expression of Jung's mythic masculine and feminine aspects. This seems a healthy tug-of-war until you locate the struggle inside a male-dominated power dynamic that favors the logical/masculine in an effort to consolidate its position. If the etymology of the term "hysteria" has shown us anything, it's that irrational females are so problematic that they must be medicated against their nature or perhaps just removed.⁽³⁴⁾ In this way there has been a hysterectomy of design. The influence of emotion has been excised. Postmodernists working across the last few decades have sought to reclaim the things modernism forbid, but the overwhelming influence of logic as a foundation for design persisted despite these efforts and left the postmodernists struggling for recognition in the history books. They were largely dismissed as over-emotional rebellion, as well.

The transition into motherhood brought a new perspective on this tension for me. The challenges of balancing a changing body and impending life transition with a professional life were heavy. I felt intense pressure to prove to my employer and society in general that my life circumstances were wholly separate from my ability to work just as hard and long as anyone else. I leaned into the firm division of my role as a mother from my career persona. I felt this was necessary in a work environment where women were in the minority and my company had never dealt with an employee taking maternity leave. In retrospect, I largely put this pressure on myself; I was incredibly lucky to have supportive colleagues that genuinely cared about my life outside of the office and didn't have to be convinced of my capability. Even then, my socialization had firmly instilled the subconscious belief that I had to prove that I was as capable as a man, and that my pregnancy was not a professional liability.

Modernism's emphasis of logic and rationale, which I equated with a successful career, left me no preparation for

the raw experience of birth, in which intuition and instinct were suddenly viable tools. As I began maternity leave, I entered a world where the rules were different and I struggled to care for my child and myself. I couldn't design a system to solve every new challenge—the authority of physicians routinely contradicted what I was seeing as a mother day to day. I became part of a community that looked to the common knowledge of women to solve the problems of surviving with a newborn.

Learning how to trust my intuition in this experience opened my eyes to the fact I could also access this in my creative practice. Despite holding firmly to modernism in my design work, it's interesting to recognize how much intuition has been a vital tool in the space of art direction. I've been on and off sets throughout my career and learned how to concept and direct shoots on the job. This wasn't something we really learned about in my college classes—art direction is somewhat graphic design adjacent; perhaps why this is where I've successfully learned intuitive decision making. When it comes to creating mood boards, curating a cohesive look is dependent on gut feel. Sure there is color theory and repetition and other logical design strategies that are interwoven in the decision making, but the most successful shoots in my experience come from finding an image or color or composition that spurs excitement around a new way to communicate my message. I've had to learn to trust these initial feelings and I've seen success as I then build out rationale that speaks to why this particular look is a good fit for the objective of the shoot. The emotional reaction comes first and the systematic thought is built out in response.

I've since tried to weave this method into other design work. Creating color palettes in particular seems to meet similar success when I assemble color inspiration that I get excited about and then craft a story about how these colors communicate for a brand. I'm currently working on leaning into my instincts when it comes to composition and layout

as well in a quest to untether myself from strict grids. In doing so I've allowed things into my work that my modernist background eschews—a little bit of jitter, mess, and lines that are not perfectly straight. I find myself responding to the sense of humanity that these imperfections allow in.

At first, trusting my gut reaction like this felt like cheating. I had the sense that I was doing it wrong and then reverse engineering my justification for the aesthetic choices I wanted to make. What I realize now is that this sense came from a modernist mindset that made me skeptical of emotion-led methodologies in any capacity.

Intuition has historically been associated with women and makes up part of Jung's definition of the Anima. As such it has been framed in opposition to the rational systems valued by the patriarchy. My learned behavior of separating feminized territory from my career is not unique in the experience of parents, including other mothers working in creative fields.

The idea that anything I want to contribute to the world is secondary to my role caring for my child and spouse is an ingrained belief I am not alone in carrying. Ursula Le Guin in her essay "The Fisherwoman's Daughter" describes her own feelings of juggling these two aspects of her persona in her search for relatable images of women writing to look toward. She describes the few, but significant examples of women writers that have shaped her career and helped her understand that she doesn't have to choose between her art and motherhood. She writes at length about Jo March and the way Luisa May Alcott told of her making as a heroic act while managing to normalize the idea of a young woman writing. Le Guin blasts against the pressure these women must have faced to focus on their family rather than their art by a society that did not associate significant work with femaleness. The fact that she must trot out her handful of examples is an indication of how ingrained the social pressure against such creative practices is for women.

35) Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Fisherwoman's Daughter." In *Mother Reader: Essential Writings on Motherhood*, ed. Moyra Davey (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001), 183–184.

"...When the child speaks again she speaks softly. 'Tell me, Auntie. What is the one thing a writer has to have?'

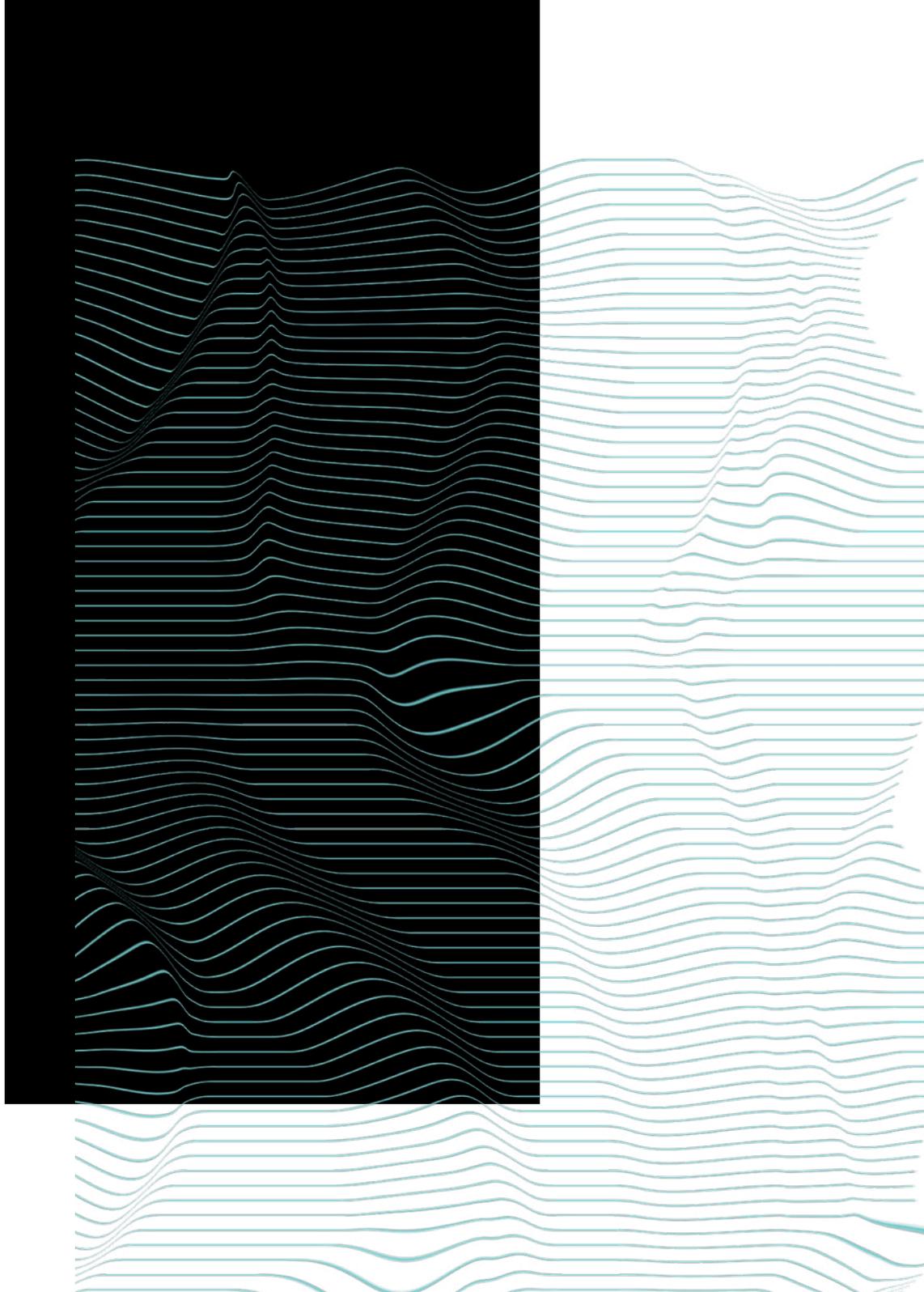
'I'll tell you,' says the imagination. 'The one thing a writer has to have is not balls. Nor is it a child-free space. Nor is it even, speaking strictly on the evidence, a room of her own, though that is an amazing help, as is the goodwill and cooperation of the opposite sex, or at least the local, in house representative of it. But she doesn't have to have that. The one thing a writer has to have is a pencil and some paper. That's enough, so long as she knows that she and she alone is in charge of that pencil, and responsible, she and she alone, for what it writes on the paper. In other words, that she's free. Not wholly free. Never wholly free. Maybe partially. Maybe only in this one act, the sitting for a snatched moment being a woman writing, fishing in the mind's lake. But in this, responsible; in this, autonomous; in this, free.'

'Auntie,' says this little girl, 'can I go fishing with you now?'" (35)

I found a sisterhood in reading these experiences. My mothering has always been separated from my making by a general feeling that acknowledging my children lessens the intellect of my work. This seems so backward when brought to the surface. In *Mother Reader: Essential Writings on Motherhood* edited by Moyra Davey, the most impactful sections spoke to the vitality of the motherhood experience; the centrality of childbirth to humanness. How, though society would have women believe these events exclude them from “serious work,” these vital intuitive experiences can uniquely qualify mothers to represent the human condition. The demands and interruptions of children can focus their productive time.⁽³⁶⁾ Their work has the opportunity to become more vital when life is no longer held apart from it.

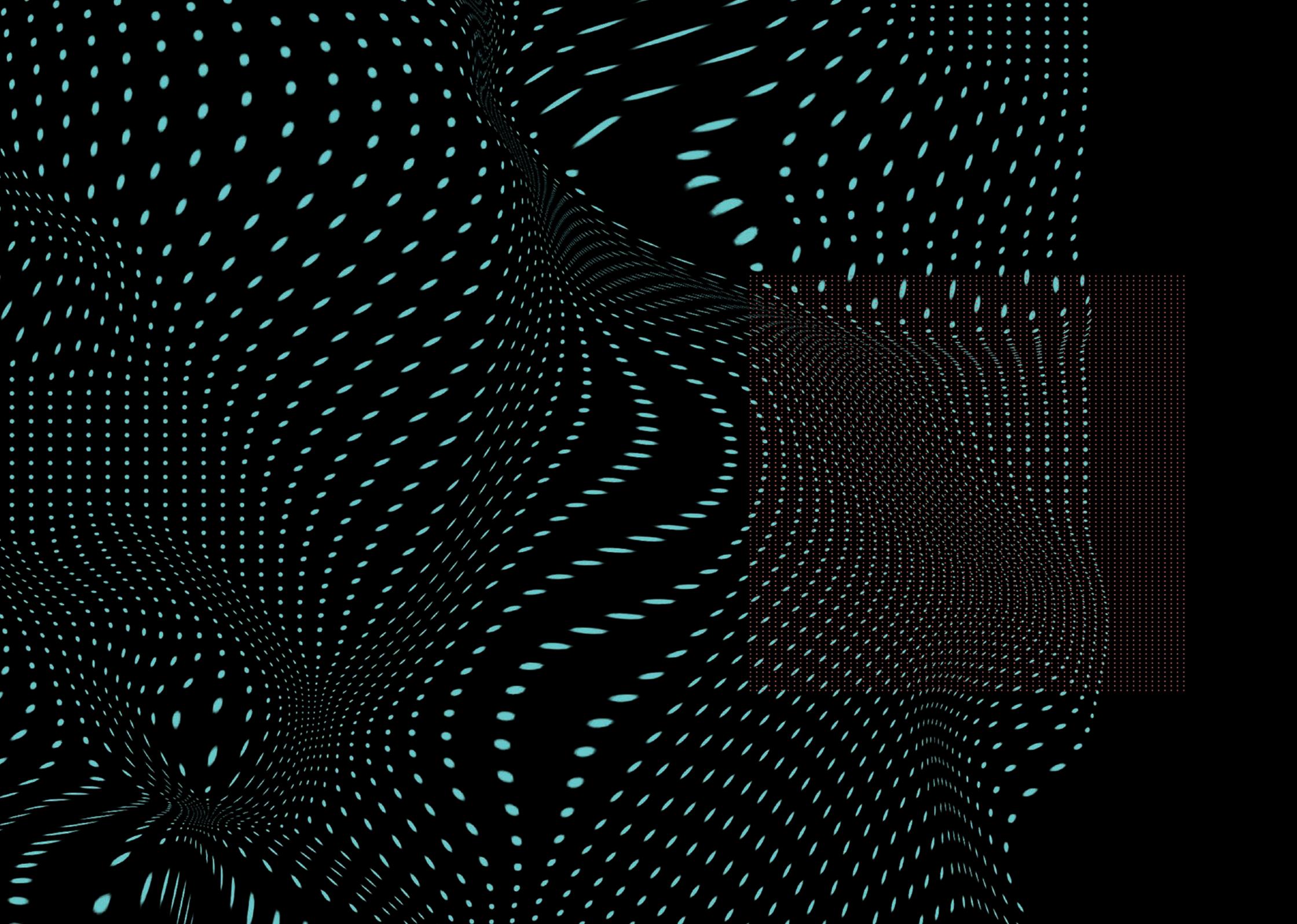
An opportunity lies in becoming aware of how we got here so that we can break the tug-of-war between two polarities fighting for dominance. Ornament is not inherently feminine. Emotions

are important and present in all beings of a range of genders. We are dismissing a group of valuable design approaches because of design’s history and how it is interwoven with a European imperialist idea of progress. Perhaps a holistic approach balances these facets the same way that Jung theorizes the Anima and Animus should interact in every individual.⁽³⁷⁾ The interplay between the two is an important part of understanding our identity. It can provide dimension when understood or, be a cause for dissonance and disorder when one identity is suppressed or feared. I believe the field of design suffers from an imbalance and manifests a disorder born from suppressing parts of itself. Just as individuals become more interesting and multifaceted through acknowledging their individual nuances, design needs to get in touch with its different sides to gain depth.



36) Laura Rossi Garcia, another mother and maker navigating these same feelings pointed out that an emphasis on production and efficiency is further intertwined with capitalism and its patriarchal values. I can't escape how it shapes my perceptions even as I try and validate its margins.

37) C G Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine*, trans. (R.F.G. Hull, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).



CHAPTER FOUR

Intuition is a vibrant cultural force; graphic design needs to get on board

My years working as a designer both in agencies and in-house continued to be steeped in minimal abstraction, creating grid systems, and defending rationale. I was praised for this professionally but it meant working daily in a learned mode that disregarded my personal taste and, I'm realizing through this discussion, taught me to mistrust my intuition because of my identity as a woman. I didn't realize until later how much this undermined my sense of self worth. I found success under the assumption that the things I naturally gravitated toward were in bad taste.

This is when I found James Victore's vlog. His profane mix of pep talk and philosophy centered around how to love what you do and subsequently love yourself. James took questions from designers that were always some flavor of, "I hate what I do every day, how can I not?" The answer he gave was shocking in its simplicity, but resonated deeply with me. He spoke about following that thing that excites you and promised the resonance you feel is inherently valuable. He affirmed that doing work you feel passionately about has the power to draw others to it. He was also telling me I was valuable as well, and I'll love him forever for it.⁽³⁸⁾

Intuition—one of the qualities dismissed by masculinized modernism—is our internal meter that helps us detect value. This is something I had heard a lot about in yoga class⁽³⁹⁾ but Victore was the first voice from my field that championed intuition as a guiding force above grids and guides. I've been trying to figure out what this means in terms of how I practice as a designer ever since. He was the reason I felt permission to start drawing graphic novels

38) See "James Victore, *Your Work Is A Gift*" on YouTube.

39) I'm only getting this from non-western thought it seems. That tracks.

40) Which makes sense given the primary development of visual perception from birth.

41) Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin, Germany: Sternberg Press, 2012), 31–45.

42) Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, 41.

even though they fell outside my definition of serious design work. You are here reading this thesis because of the resonance I felt with his words and the journey I've taken to try and learn how to trust that intuition.

Outside of design, intuition and its siblings style and taste, are a vibrant force. Contemporary culture is increasingly visual⁽⁴⁰⁾ and guided primarily by gut reactions for or against how something is initially perceived. Visual style has become even more prominent in this dynamic as technology proliferates access to images. Culture is created as images circulate through digitally connected groups. Fandoms, memes, and threads change and evolve as they are shared, remixed, and reposted by individuals who feel connected to the content. Hito Steyerl calls these 'bad images' in her essay "In Defense of the Poor Image." She explores how we generate these visuals and circulate them through society. They are repeatedly downloaded, loaded with artifacts, combined with other imagery, and reuploaded. Copies are unlimited creating a detritus of rezzy forms that obscure whatever relationship the original had to reality.⁽⁴¹⁾ The spontaneous life of these images is appealingly organic when I've spent so much of my career scrupulously checking resolutions and meticulously aligning things to a grid. Grids represent a perfect, unattainable world which none of us are fit to live in. The poor image reflects the messiness of real life and the only people that seem hung up on artifacting are us designers.

“Poor images are thus popular images—images that can be made and seen by the many. They express all the contradictions of the contemporary crowd: its opportunism, narcissism, desire for autonomy and creation, its inability to focus or make up its mind, its constant readiness for transgression and simultaneous submission. Altogether, poor images present a snapshot of the affective condition of the crowd, its neurosis, paranoia, and fear, as well as its craving for intensity, fun, and distraction. The condition of the images speaks not only of countless transfers and reformattings, but also of the countless people who cared enough about them to convert them over and over again, to add subtitles, reedit, or upload them.”⁽⁴²⁾

43) From the Aesthetics Wiki, aesthetics.fandom.com, accessed 6 Nov. 2021. One of my favorite parts of this site is the curated playlists offered for some entries. Currently listening to "AESTHETIC: chaotic academia." It seems appropriate for frustrated thesis writing.

44) "Weirdcore" as seen on aesthetics.fandom.com/wiki/Weirdcore features intentionally bizarre imagery that is unsettling, usually low-fi, distorted, and confusing. Imagery is often nostalgic and features toys and paraphernalia from the 90's and 00's.

The role of intuition in defining taste is well illustrated in the visual style subcultures that have found hubs online. These movements each have a unique style established through user generated content. They are known en masse as "aesthetics" and are composed of Tumblr feeds, Pinterest boards, TikToks, fanarts, and sartorial applications. You can find documentation of many of these in the Aesthetics Wiki, a volunteer-edited compendium that documents and defines these "visual schemata."⁽⁴³⁾ Entries are named things like Weirdcore,⁽⁴⁴⁾ Liminal Space,⁽⁴⁵⁾ Dark Academia,⁽⁴⁶⁾ (and my personal favorite) Voidpunk.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Participants are often drawn to a movement because of a particular feeling it evokes through some application of visual elements. Sometimes there is a conceptual rationale behind the aesthetic but often it is a curated collection of things that just look a certain way together. It is anti-modern; exclusively based on look and feel with no rationale to guide application. In fact, the lack of a defined standard is a central pillar of aesthetics that reject the normative. The resonance aesthetics find with their following is self-evident. They are proof that emotion as a basis for curation and design has meaning to contemporary audiences. They are style for the sake of style; an expression of intuitive choice.

Creative modes that arise through the self-motivated contribution of the "Populuxe"—as Virginia Postrel termed it—are found in many areas of popular culture. I've been impressed by the whole-hearted embrace of style present in the manga and anime communities. The unique visual elements of manga are so central to the genre that they create a dedicated semiotic language⁽⁴⁸⁾ spoken by participants.⁽⁴⁹⁾ These communities are highly collaborative

45) "Liminal Space" as seen on aesthetics.fandom.com/wiki/Liminal_Space is an aesthetic formed by images that portray abandoned transitional spaces such as schools, airports, or bus stations. These are often photographed in off hours and possess an unsettling quality when unoccupied. Images that evoke feelings of nostalgia or apprehension are common as locations are often not an origin or destination but represent transition.

46) "Dark Academia" as seen on aesthetics.fandom.com/wiki/Dark_Academia is a romantic reliving of education via American or European Prep references combined with mystery, danger, criminality, and decadence. Lord Byron and the Shelleys are considered influential figures in this aesthetic.

47) "Voidpunk" as seen on aesthetics.fandom.com/wiki/Voidpunk is concerned with representing otherness, rejection, or dissociation from humanity. Participants in this subculture are often those that identify as non-binary, asexual, or otherwise neurodivergent. Robotics, technology, glitch, and creatures are common subject matter. The aesthetic is characterized by rejecting the normative and therefore there is no one right way to identify with it.

48) Niel Cohn, "Japanese Visual Language: The Structure of Manga." in *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Toni Johnson-Woods, 187.

49) For example the anger emoji comes from the stylized protruding veins often portrayed on manga characters heads when they are angry. It's so ubiquitous it has become a stand-alone symbol. Emojipedia.org for the citation. Yes, that's a thing.

50) Ian Condry, *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story*. (Experimental Futures. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.)

and participatory. In some cases the actual storylines of a work are not as important as the characters, worlds, and premises that allow for riffing. Ian Condry theorizes that these three things form a framework in which fans and creators collaborate across media forms to populate a space. This community creates fan art, fan fiction, cosplay, mashups, and memes, all of which are motivated purely by love of the content and the style. Fans hold a yearly convention dedicated to remixed "anime music videos" where participants show recut footage along with popular music. The society that consumes anime and manga is vibrant with titles and characters taking on new life through the fandom's exploration. Manga becomes a "generative platform"⁽⁵⁰⁾ that exists because of the emotional connection the fans forge with imagined universes.

Intuition is alive and well as a method of cultural production. Taste is the word we use most often to reference our intuitive draw to style. It implies a sense of subjective emotion unique to an individual or group—no doubt why my modernist shoulder demon rejects personal taste as a valid justification for design decisions. Taste should be dismissed in this opinion since it is only guided by personal emotion and not by logic. Postrel summarizes this succinctly:

“The design establishment, secure in the high-modernist conviction that ornament was a crime, scorned the Populuxe styles that the public embraced. Social critics denounced ‘styling’ as a form without content, not a source of value but a tool of deception and manipulation. Cultural authorities considered adornment at best a frivolous, feminine concern, inferior to the real stuff of material progress. In the technocratic era of the one best way, correct taste was a matter of rational expertise (‘this is good design’) not personal pleasure (‘I like this’).”⁽⁵¹⁾

In throwing out taste, however, we give up a powerful communication device. Taste has meaning that goes beyond just what you like; it has the power to shape and communicate identity. Carl Wilson talks about this relationship in the context of musical subcultures in his book *Let's Talk about Love : A Journey to the End of Taste*: “Musical subcultures exist because our guts tell us certain kinds of music are for certain kinds of people. The codes are not always transparent.. But it's hard not to notice how those processes reflect and contribute to self definition, how often personal and musical taste happen to jibe.”

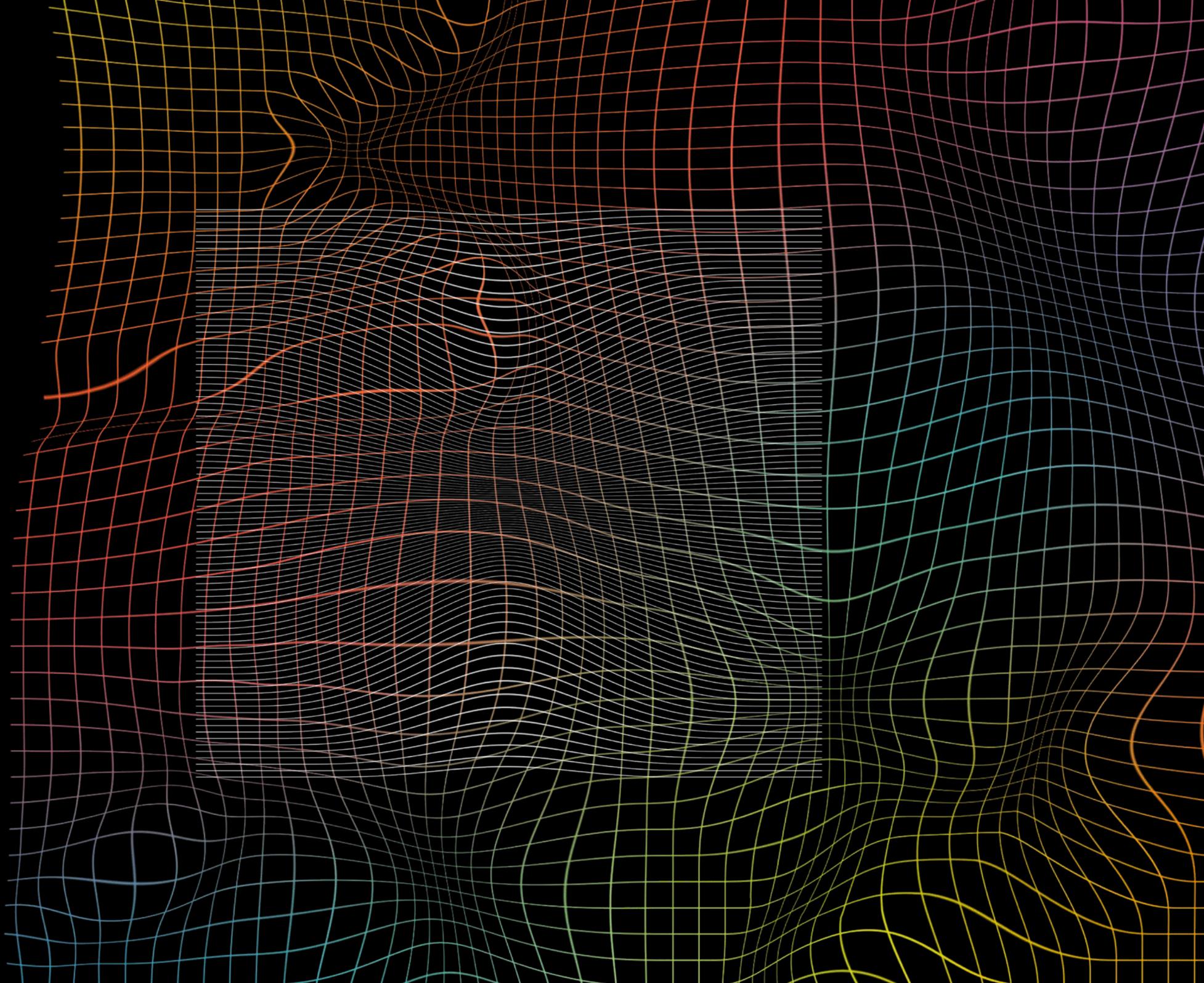
Taste is a tool that we use to increase our sense of belonging to the groups we want to be a part of and to distance ourselves from those we don't.⁽⁵²⁾ It is used to create social strata, convey political opinion, and identify like-minded individuals. This all comes through the expression of style and is not always a wholly conscious decision on the part of practitioners.

They just like how it sounds, or how it looks, or who else is wearing it. While social divisions come with their own loaded stereotypes and issues, these groups validate how intuition and decision making based on emotion are powerful forces for communication where accepted, without question as a tool to guide judgment.

This culture that we all exist in is an amalgamation of preferences and power dynamics. It contains the tension between what we are told we should be and what we are, what we prefer, and what we hope for in the future. Taste and style have been an important, affirming part of my identity and a source of pleasure; something that makes life worth living. I've felt the most at home as part of the punk and emo music scene—something I found after I left my very strict conservative upbringing as an adult. As a woman who never felt acceptable when measured against the specific beauty standards I perceived, punk culture is an environment where I feel I can be accepted as is. I am allowed to be severe and strong and unapologetic—it's celebrated in fact. I am drawn toward visual expression that includes references to subculture and rebellion. Including this in my work is a unique expression of my specific experience. Individual taste as an outgrowth of this search for resonance and social acceptance is a unique possession of each individual; it's uniquely human. Rather than a fault to be avoided, this intuitively-driven personal taste is the specialized contribution designers, as curators of aesthetics, can bring to the future of design.

⁵¹⁾ Postrel, *The Substance of Style*, 37.

⁵²⁾ Carl Wilson, *Let's Talk About Love: A Journey to the End of Taste* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 17.



CONCLUSION-

SION

Embracing the rhizome

What is the purpose of all this zipping back and forth from the Industrial Revolution to projected future dystopias? It's in an effort to locate how we got to a point where I have to make an argument that emotion—a fundamental experience of living humans—has value in our work as designers. This dilemma is a result of long held gender stereotypes that have pitted traits historically associated with masculinity against those associated with stereotypical femininity. World Wars, the Industrial Revolution, patriarchal modernism, and the Victorian matriarchy set the stage for an imbalance in the type of design methodologies dominant in our field today.

53) Jeffery Keedy, "Style is Not a Four Letter Word" ed. Michael Beirut, William Drenttel, Steven Heller, (New York: Allworth Press, 2006), 102.

Allowing intuition back into our concept of design is allowing our humanity a chance to reenter as well. It's easy to follow the rules and systems of the International Style. It's programmable; a binary system can be quickly applied by machines that speak the language of zeros and ones. As Jeffery Keedy mentions in his essay "Style Is Not A Four Letter Word," a designer's unique synthesis of influences and opinion is perhaps the most important thing we can contribute to a future where algorithms can apply the rules of the grid faster than humans can. The thing that designers can offer in a future of AI driven design are those qualities that come from our humanity, not our execution of structure.

Emotion is not just female, it's human. Swiss design applications do not allow space to put my whole self in my work. So what does a practice driven by this realization look like? I'm not sure yet. I've begun by silencing the internal voices that discount my instinctual draw towards colors, qualities, or modes of creating. When I am communicating my own ideas I want the ability to make them vibrant and high contrast. I like imperfection and mess because it feels like real life. Mr. Keedy elegantly outlines his idea of a style-permissive practice as follows:

██████████

“...My answer is a style that continues to develop and deploy the critical, pluralistic, decentered, postmodern... A style that celebrates the aesthetic pleasure of the unique, idiosyncratic individual through ornamentation, pattern, and decoration, as well as celebrating community and social responsibility through historical continuity. A style that resists easy codification and assimilation with strategic and formal complexity.” ⁽⁵³⁾

We need to be brave enough to allow our “unique, idiosyncratic individual” to shine through in our work and I believe greater opportunities for connection will follow.

There are many designers and makers out there exploring how to bring more personal expression to their work. Typographers such as Aasawari Kulkarni⁽⁵⁴⁾ and Tré Seals⁽⁵⁵⁾ are creating politically revealing forms that conceptually break with standard type systems. Their work is grounded in typography, a fundamental structural element of graphic design, but this doesn't stop them from finding expressive ways to represent their unique personal narratives through the styling and relationships of letterforms.

This is vividly apparent in the world of graphic novels as well. It is a space less central to canonized graphic design and perhaps more flexible in its ability to let in personal emotive expression. The creators of graphic novels have often used storytelling as a therapeutic device in working through personal trauma. These efforts are highly introspective responses to events unique to the author. Despite this they find resonance with audiences at large. Neil Geiman proposed that beyond connecting with an audience, we as artists should use our craft when it comes to dealing with hardships. He invites us to respond to life's struggles through authorship.

“Sometimes life is hard. Things go wrong, in life and in love and in business and in friendship and in health and in all the other ways that life can go wrong. And when things get tough, this is what you should do: make good art. I'm serious. Husband runs off with a politician? Make good art. Leg crushed and then eaten by mutated boa constrictor? Make good art. IRS on your trail? Make good art. Cat exploded? Make good art. Someone on the Internet thinks what you're doing is stupid or evil or it's all been done before? Make good art.”⁽⁵⁶⁾

54) Kulkarni's Nari typeface, created for her Maryland Institute College of Art MFA thesis expresses the feminist qualities of “voice,” “mindset,” and “fight” through different variations in letterform and width. <https://aasawarikulkarni.com/Nari-Variable>

55) Tré Seals attributes the monotony of form and style in contemporary design directly to lack of cultural diversity and seeks to “...introduce a non-stereotypical piece of minority culture into the design itself, starting with the basis of any good design— typography.” <https://www.vocaltypography.com/story-of>

This is literally illustrated in Lyda Barry's *Making Comics*.⁽⁵⁷⁾ In this instructional manual Barry seeks to develop drawing and writing in tandem because of "the mysterious things they conjure when practiced together." What's surprising is the personal connection she forges through her willingness to demonstrate her methods while interrogating her personal trauma.

She demonstrates this in a small section of the book where she describes an exercise called "scribble monsters." The story begins with her half-uncle who was born in the Philippines during the Japanese occupation. He struggled with some form of neurodivergence and drew constantly. Barry thinks her love of watching others draw comes from her early experiences with him. She fills the pages with spontaneous monsters while she writes about the power of this exercise, but memories and questions about her uncle keep bubbling up in her prose. It's like she's writing about two things at the same time. The last page caught me off guard as her description of monsters fuses with her uncle's story and you find out that he eventually died in a halfway house ten minutes away from her home without her knowledge. I wonder if she knew where this piece was going when she started it. Her attempt to contextualize her love of watching others draw becomes a vulnerable moment processing her uncle's life and death. The empathy I felt for her through this narrative was profound.

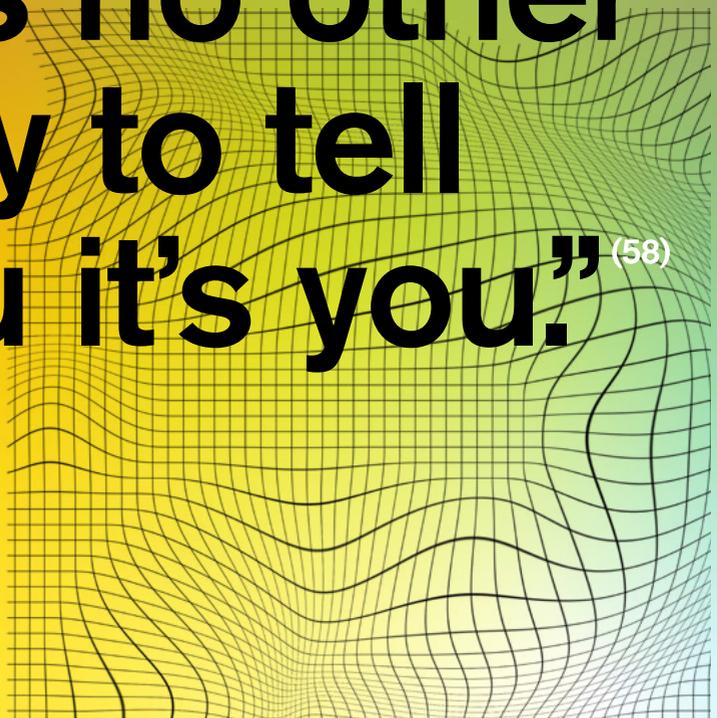
I've found the graphic novel to be a uniquely powerful medium as I develop a practice centered around my humanity and guided by a combination of my style, intuition, and formal training. Graphic design as a study of visual communication is unique in that it deals with combining written words and visual imagery. It's like a super power to be able to pick and choose from the range of semiotic tools offered by design. If anything could provide me with the opportunity to bridge the gap between my isolated human brain and any of yours, it's the graphic novel.

56) Gaiman, Neil.
"Neil Gaiman
- Inspirational
Commencement
Speech at the
University of the
Arts 2012," posted
May 23, 2012,
YouTube video,
[https://www.
youtube.com/
watch?v=ikAb-
NYksei](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikAb-NYksei)

57) Lynda Barry,
Making Comics.
(Montréal, Québec,
Canada: Drawn &
Quarterly, 2019).

**58) Barry, *Making
Comics*, 101.**

**“Have mercy
on the
unspeakable
monster who
has no other
way to tell
you it’s you.”** (58)



59) Anime as a genre represents something I was drawn to as a teenager and then felt I was forced to abandon in school to be taken seriously as an artist. It brings me great satisfaction to invoke it repeatedly here in my MFA thesis. It's coming full circle.

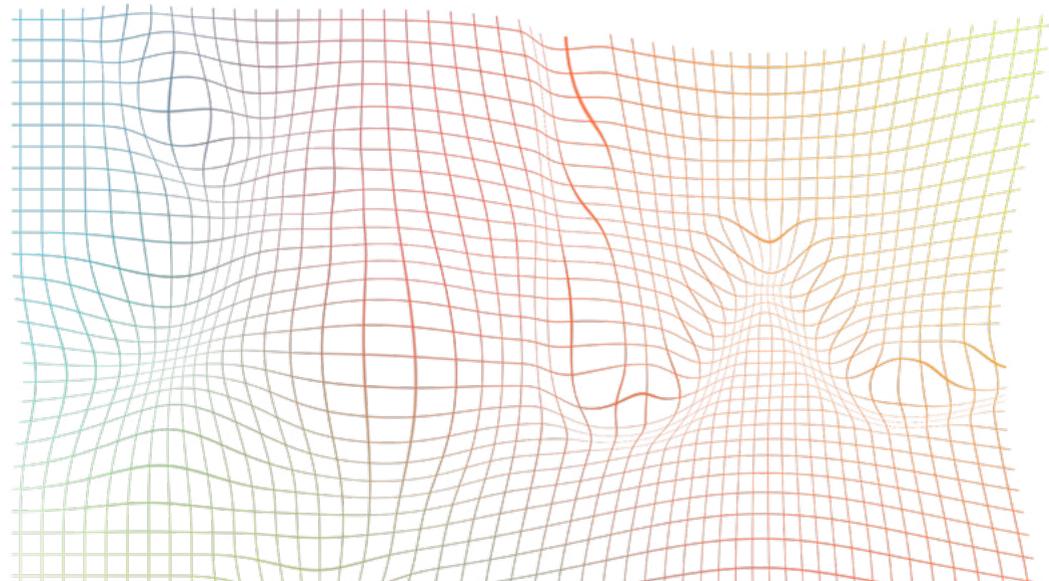
60) I'm picturing Shiniji, Asuka, and Rei from the 1995 *Neon Genesis Evangelion* as well as Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Nausicaä* as I write this.

As I explore how to give myself permission to be human through this medium, I am reminded of the lessons of some of my favorite anime.⁽⁵⁹⁾ These stories explore the balance between the mythic masculine and mythic feminine. These aspects are often represented by the relationship between biology and technology in (what else!?) giant robots. They feature protagonists with classically feminine traits bridging the gap between the natural world and technological progress.⁽⁶⁰⁾ They hint that a better future may be possible after all if we can avoid losing who we are against the push and pull of these tidal forces.

Early on, I wanted to end this by saying the future of design is femme like these beloved characters, but my exploration has made it clear we need something broader than that. The future of design means creating space for both the mythic masculine and the mythic feminine. It abandons the fear dynamics that seek to elevate one methodology at the expense of another, and allow us to harness the strengths of whatever tools we need to continue toward better communication and freer exchange of ideas that resonate.

At the end of the day what we need in the future—of design or otherwise—is a reintroduction of humanity. This thing that makes us different from algorithms is the fact that we are each composed of complex, sometimes contradictory facets that cannot be reduced to binary code. Design practices that will retain value into an increasingly connected future must harness the whole of this human element, allowing the friction to bring vibrancy to our contribution.

Studying the controversial role of intuition in design has helped me gain a greater understanding of the range of approaches available to me as a woman who makes. These strategies include embracing my personal style and unique taste as valuable tools in my design work; ones that are already alive and well in other vibrant areas of cultural production. These intuition-based methods are rhizomatic rather than rational. They appear in an organic outgrowth of emotional resonance that is beautiful in its unpredictability. This form is reflective of our interconnected society with the internet—the ultimate rhizome—at its core. Our theory of design needs to evolve outside linear, closed methodologies to stay relevant in our highly referential contemporary culture. Making space in design for intuition and emotional resonance is how we restore balance between the anima and animus of our field and carry ourselves into a future where we avoid losing our humanity.



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Colophon:

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