

Graphic Design, AI, and Feminism

*“Most AI output has a bland sameness,
but that also sounds like a lot of
contemporary graphic design.
AI is a chance to break free.”*

Jarrett Fuller, 2025

Hello

Your name/nick name, pronouns, a little bit of background (optional), and what you are hoping to get out of this workshop.

My name is Beth (she/her). I worked as a full-time graphic designer for seven years, and I'm now a *Narrative Futures* student and zine-maker. I want to know how can the co-creation process enact and explore alternative ways of doing graphic design.

2023



2026



About this workshop

This is a more of a discussion than a lecture. At the end of each section we have time for a little chat.

After the workshop you will be encouraged to submit something for a collective zine, and your submission will be exhibited at SaltSpace gallery (next door to GZL). We will talk about this later.

Welcome:	10 minutes
Introduction:	20 minutes
Discussion and Activity 1:	20 minutes

Short Break

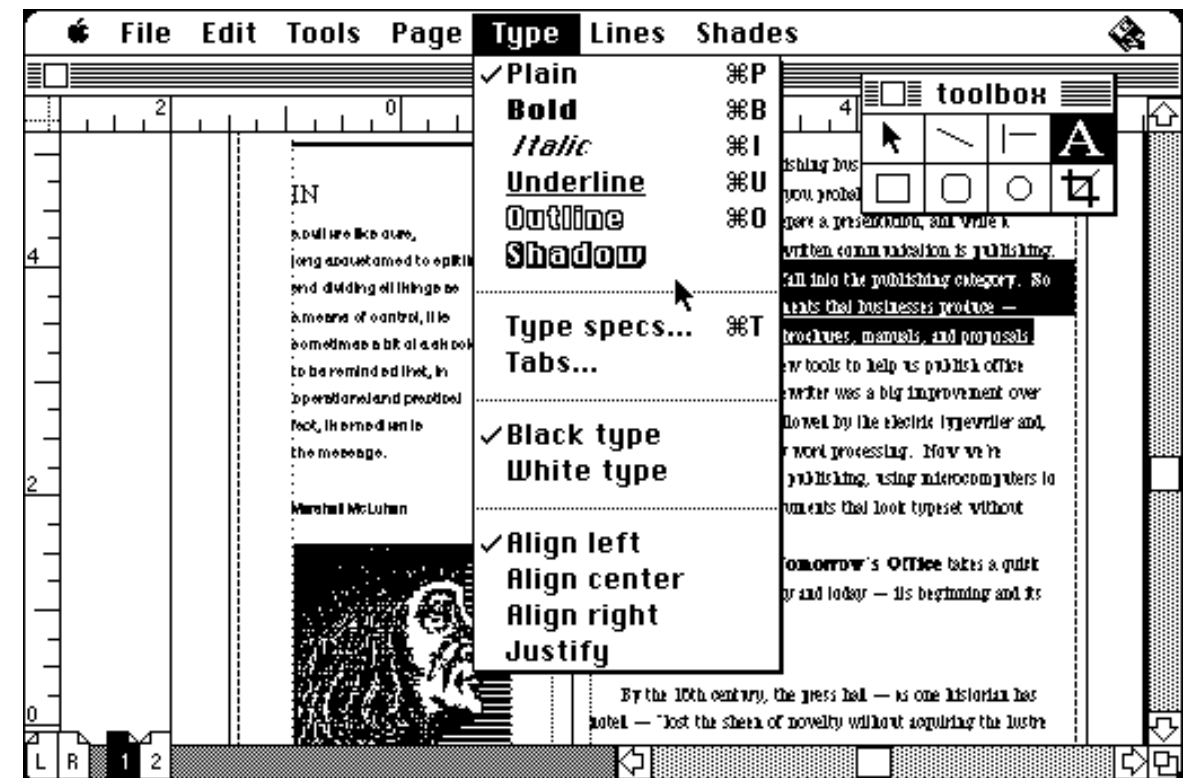
Introduction:	20minutes
Discussion and Activity 2&3:	40 minutes
Conclusion and task:	10 minutes

Graphic Design

Graphic Design as a profession

Multidisciplinary process that presents concepts, text, and images in a visually engaging way (Ambrose et al., 2020).

Became a profession in the 1950s, shaped by Modernism and industrialisation (Armstrong, 2009), and became an easy-to-enter profession with the advent of desktop publishing (Lorusso, 2023).



Armstrong, H. (2009). Introduction [Introduction to Section Two: Building on success]. In H. Armstrong (Ed.), *Graphic design theory : Readings from the field* (1st ed., p.57). Princeton Architectural Press.

Ambrose, G., Harris, P., & Ball, N. (2021). *The fundamentals of graphic design*. (Second edition / Gavin Ambrose, Paul Harris&Nigel Ball.). Bloomsbury Visual Arts.

Lorusso, S. (2023). *What design can't do: Essays on design and disillusion*. Set Margins'.

Graphic Design now

Similarities among the workers
in the UK:

Most graphic designers are in their
20s, only 13% are over 40 years old
(Roberts et al., 2015)

88% have at least an undergraduate
degree (Roberts et al., 2015)

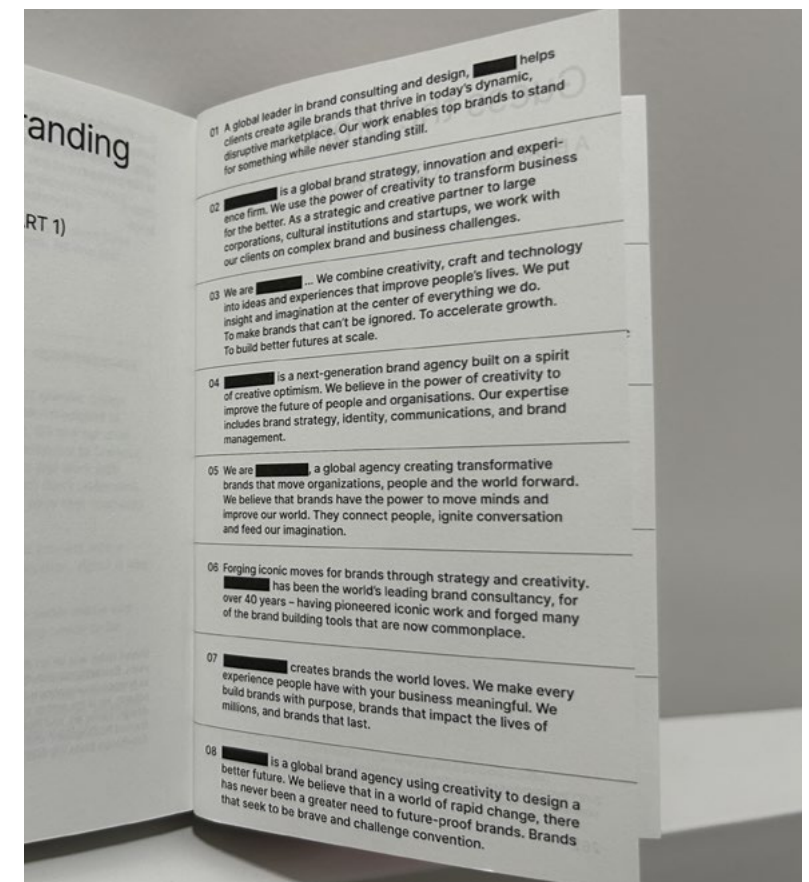
88% are white, similar to UK general
population (Roberts et al., 2015)

74% graphic design students are
women, yet only 47% working
designers are women (Gitnux, 2026)

Gitnux (2026) Graphic Design Gender Statistics
<https://gitnux.org/graphic-design-gender-statistics/>

Roberts, L., Wright, R., & Price, J. (Eds.). (2015).
Graphic designers surveyed. GraphicDesign&.

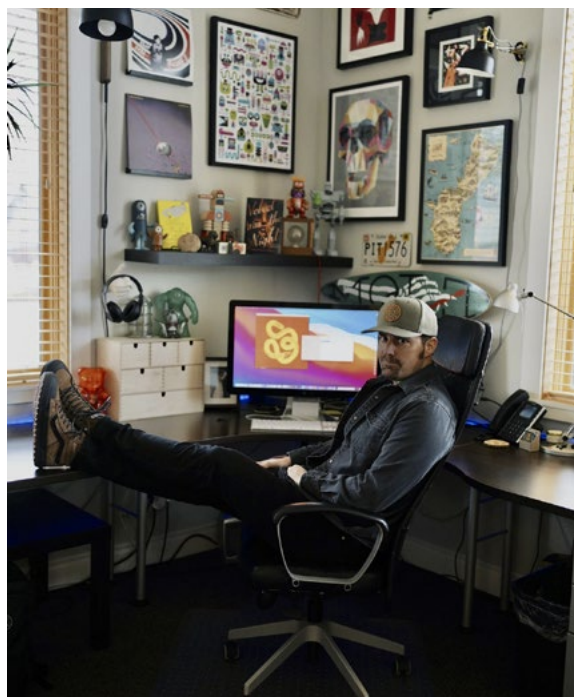
*Similar people > > >
similar taste &
similar biases*



Spread on *What is Post-Branding?* Showing how design agencies use the same language to talk about their point of difference.

Graphic Design now

Standard cool vibes

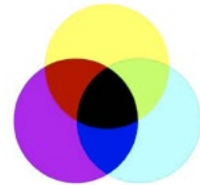


Graphic Design now

Standardised tools



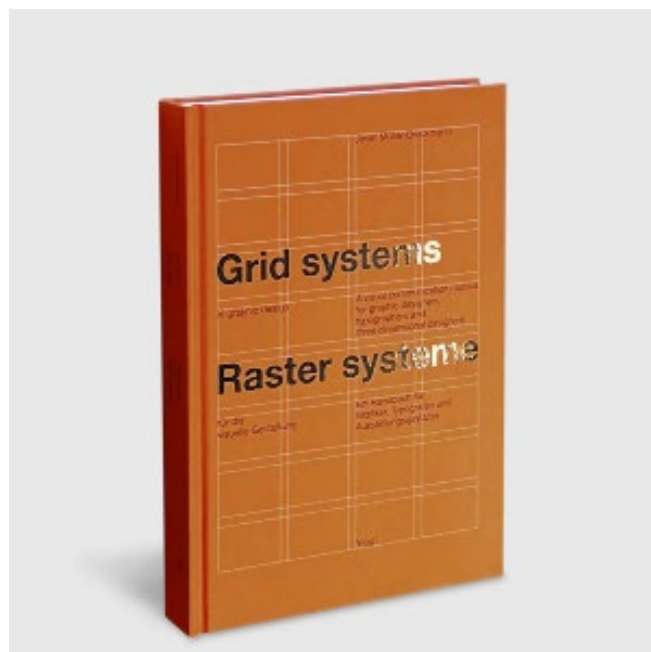
CMYK



RGB



DEATH TO STOCK®



we

MyFonts



Bē

shutterstock™



Ai

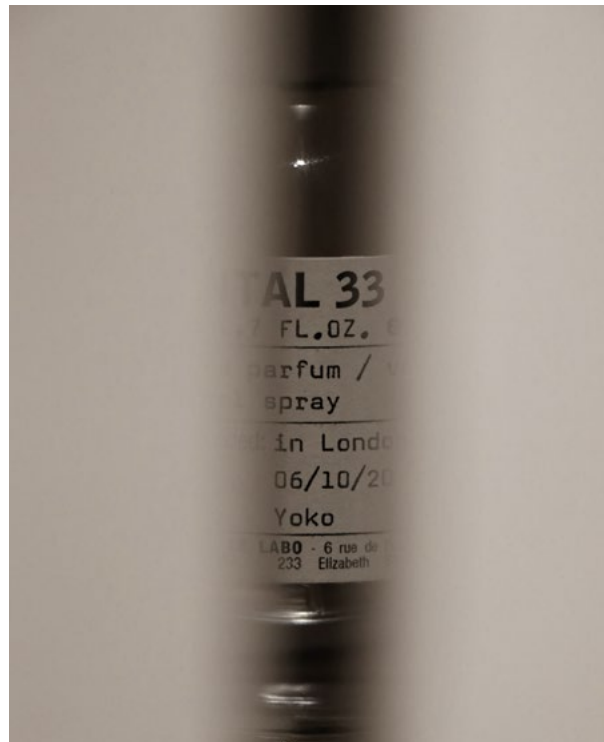
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Graphic Design now

Sameness in outcomes



GenAI

GenAI uses in graphic design

copywriting

brainstorm

mock-ups

image editing



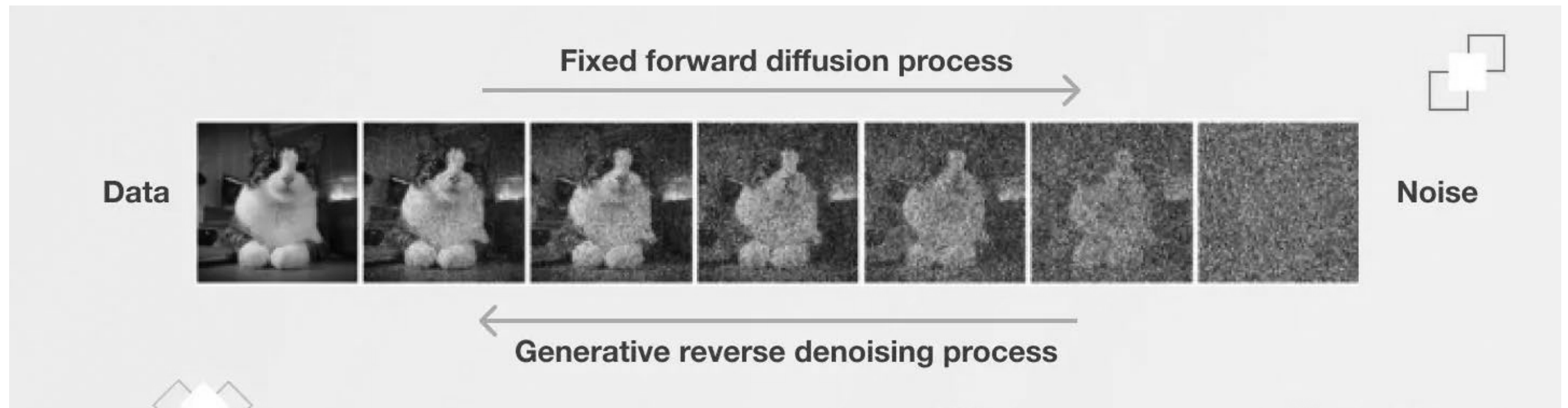
design

overview

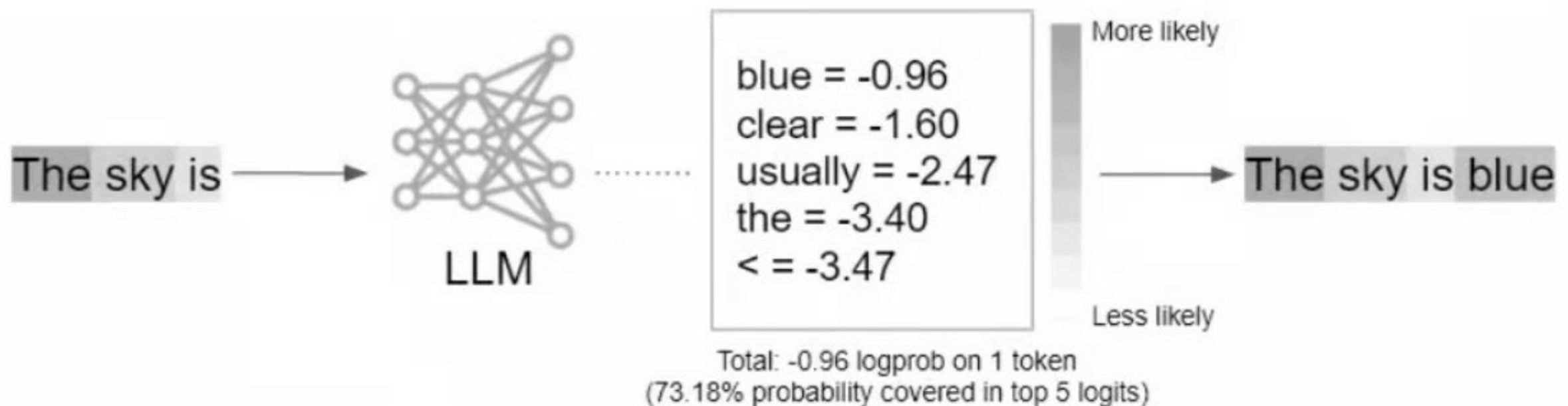
feedback

show stereotypes

Diffusion model and LLM



<https://www.simform.com/blog/how-does-generative-ai-work/>



<https://gixtools.net/2023/06/how-to-get-better-outputs-from-your-large-language-model/>

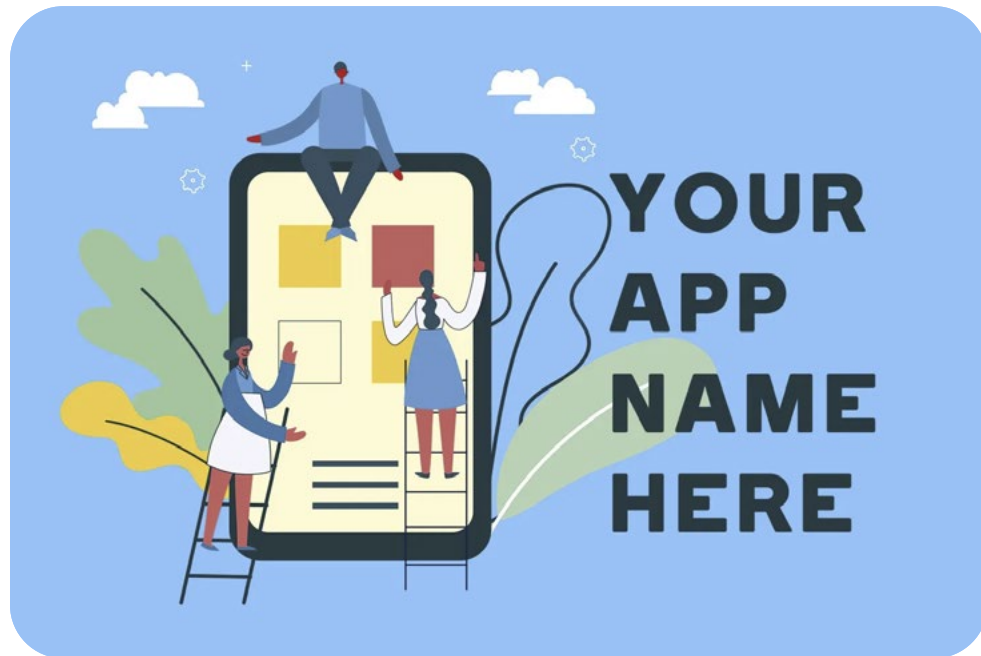
Properties of GenAI

They do not think or know. Predicts outcome step by step, based on statistics.

Reproduce subjects, styles and biases that appear frequently in the training data.



Are standardised styles more replaceable by GenAI?



“Corporate Memphis” illustration style for every tech startups, showing how templated our world already is before AI.

colors without any blending. Facebook's Alegria uses non-representational skin colors such as blues and purples in order to feel universal,^[4] though some artists working in the style opt for more realistic skin colors and features to show diversity.^[1]

Corporate Memphis is materially quick, cheap and easy to produce, and thus appealing to companies; programs such as Adobe Illustrator can be used to produce such designs rapidly.^[citation needed]

“Corporate Memphis” on Wikipedia

“The more design processes are standardized, the more the results become templated. Is it possible that the more the work is templated, the easier it becomes to replicate with automation? Is it possible that this way of working has also produced a type of centralized intelligence, a homogenization of aesthetics and ideas? Is it possible that designers designed themselves into a corner ripe for an automation takeover?”
Jarrett Fuller, 2025

Fuller, J. (2025, August 18). AI isn't design's biggest problem. Fast Company. <https://www.fastcompany.com/91382025/ai-isnt-designs-biggest-problem>



Is what we are already doing similar to what GenAI can do?

Satisfy users by
responding to prompts

“Problem solving” for clients

Average, statistically likely
outcomes

Borrowing from trends and
proven solutions

Generating new assets based on
training data it cannot understand

Appropriating marginalised cultures
to dress up commercial products

Biased training data and
homogeneous workforce
behind GenAI developers

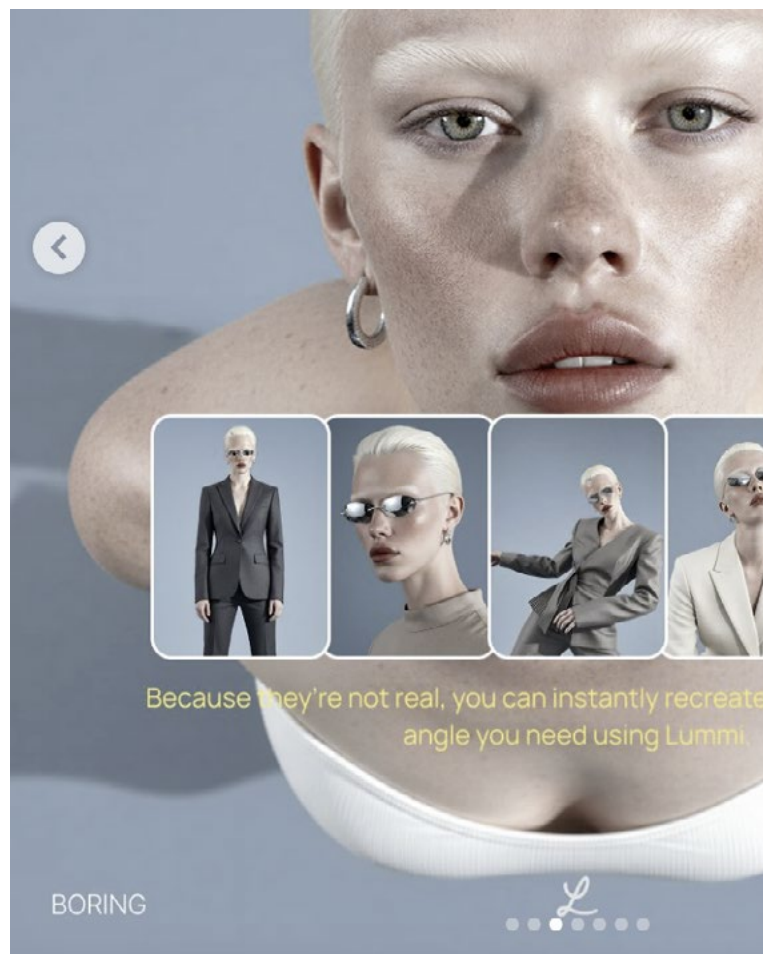
Standardised tools and
homogeneous workforce

Activity 1

10 minutes

Group discussion: Think of an example of AI in graphic design. It could be how you used it in your work, or how you noticed AI design out in the world.

Think about
what the AI tool referenced;
what goals do the AI outcomes serve;
what/who is left out because of AI



Instagram post by @lummipics, advertising free prompts for generating AI models

Short Break

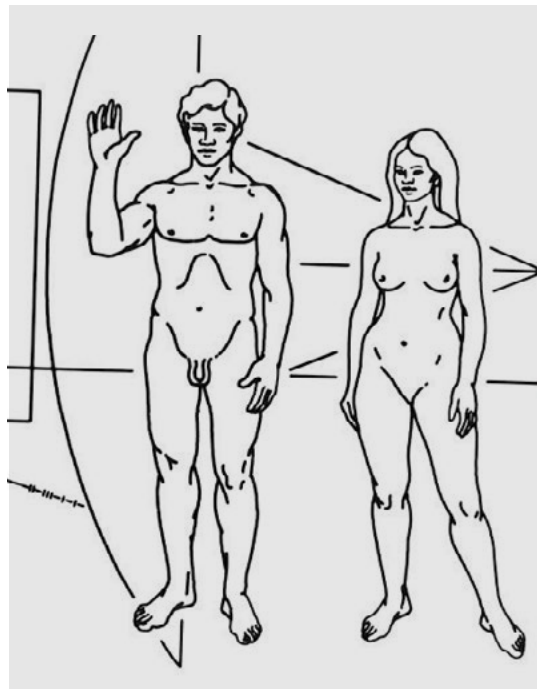
Feminist Design

Recognising the world we live in

Feminist bell hooks uses the phrase “Imperialist White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy” to describe the current system we live in. These systems of oppression intersect and reinforce social hierarchy.

The graphic design industry can reflect these assumptions about the world.

Feminism challenges these interlocking systems. It invites us to rethink what we often take for granted.



The 1973 Pioneer plaque depicting man in a more active posture



Scientific illustration by Maria Sibylla Merian. These types of drawings are powered by exotic flora and fauna in colonies.

Capitalist

Design as a means to encourage excessive consumerism.

Standardised processes and tools make designs easy to scale. Scalability and growth are features of modern capitalism.

Personal pressures to constantly upskill and self-promote to remain competitive in an unstable work environment. Devalue one's own labour.

Using “branding” to regulate workers' relationships with their work

Patriarchal

Framing activities in masculine ways to legitimise. Problem-solving instead of decorating.

Hegemonic masculinity informs what have value:

- Competitive achievements: celebrity designers, design awards, conferences.
- Control: top-down process centering client briefs. Serving the need to control, rather than collaboration and inclusivity.
- Dominance: high-end design often focus on exclusivity; traditionally associated with masculinity.

Feminist Perspectives

Feminism: not about women having what men have, but questioning the assumptions we take for granted.

Feminists seek to end domination and create caring, equitable relationships throughout society.

Highlighting power dynamics, challenging hierarchies.

Examining representation: who's voice is ignored? What counts as legitimate knowledge? Who decides?
E.g. Art vs craft

Care, collaboration, empowerment, harmony with nature, instead of dominance and violence.



What GenAI can do

What non-exploitative, feminist designers can do

Individual
achievements

Efficient
Caring

Facilitating and
collaborating

Extracting values
from inspirations
Empowering
communities

Replicating
“authenticity”

Real inclusion in
design process

Friction-free
Friction to
encourage thinking

“Rational”
Aware of its
own standpoint

Consistent
Dynamic

Scalable
Specific,
embodied

Unambiguous
Ambiguity for
complexity and
diversity

Problem-solving for
power holders
Accountability
to publics

Examples

Context-specific design: Kenya Hara's Umeda Hospital signage design (2001)



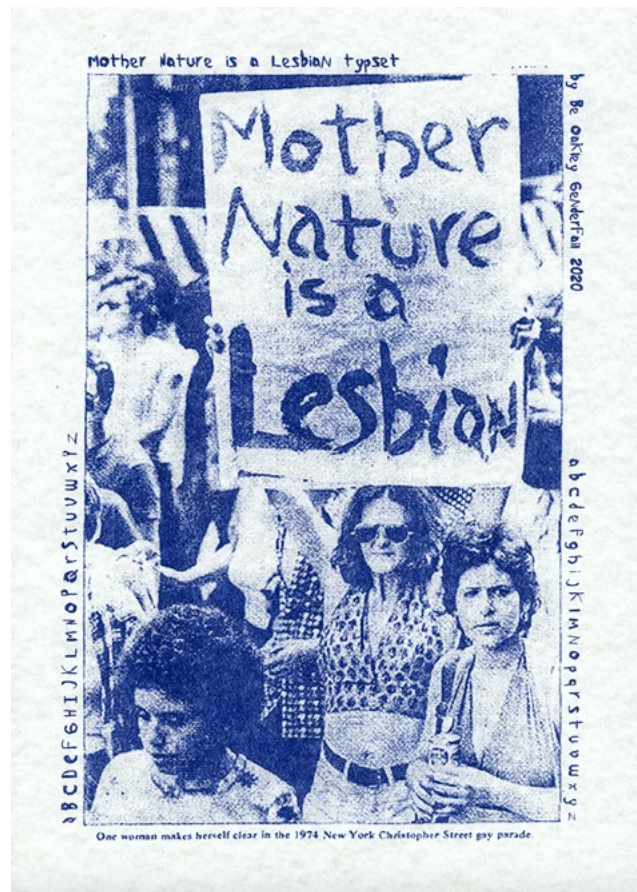
Adding friction: Protest-inspired fonts by GenderFail and Vocal Type

GenderFail Open Sourced Protest-inspired Fonts

Since 2018, GenderFail has been making fonts based on protest signs from queer and trans projects, the protests for black lives since the Stonewall Riots of 1969 to the present.

Terms of use

Queer, trans, and non-binary folks, black and Indigenous folks can use any of these fonts for personal, for-profit, non-profit, mutual aid and fundraising uses. Please consider donating (if you have the means and want to support this non-commercial work) via our PayPal account at genderfailproject@gmail.com or [online here](#) if you can. If you are a sizeable for-profit business or corporation, don't you fucking dare



VOCAL
TYPE

Typefaces
Custom
Design
History
Progress
Information
Reach
Sign In

@

TATSURO

Nearly 30 years before Dr. King marched with "I AM A MAN" signs, Tatsuro Matsuda was commissioning and installing a sign that read "I AM AN AMERICAN" on his family's storefront.



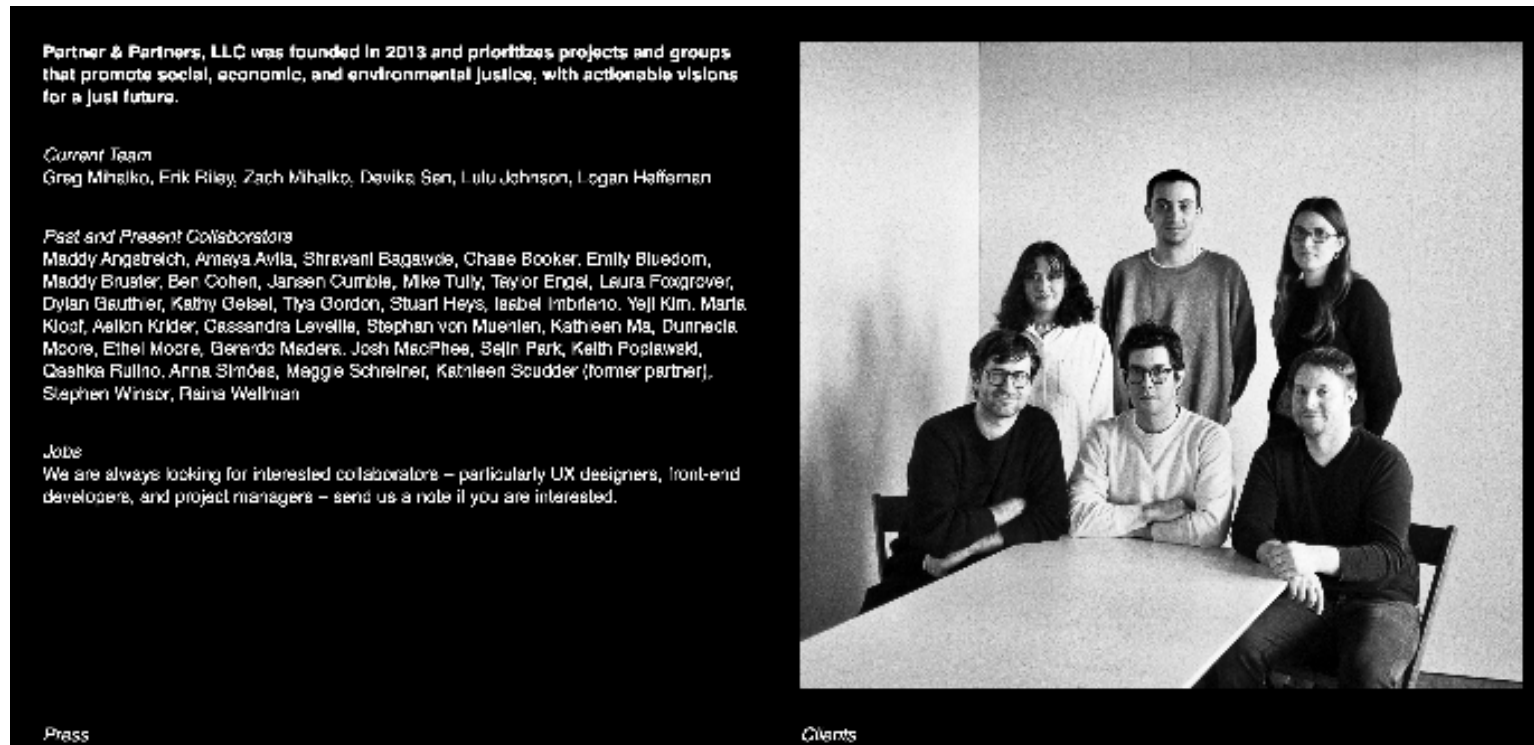
I AM AN
AMERICAN

“Every typeface we create emerges from careful research into genuine narratives and historical artifacts”

Japanese internment camps were established during World War II by President Franklin D. Roosevelt through his Executive Order 9066. From 1942 to 1945, it was the policy of the U.S. government that people of Japanese descent, including U.S. citizens, would be incarcerated in isolated camps.

Caring and empowering practice: Partner & Partners

A worker-owned design practice



In the face of staggering income inequality and aggressive anti-unionization efforts, worker ownership is a proven strategy that can mitigate oppressive economic conditions.

Good labor practices = good design

AIGA Eye on Design

Co-op clients



More on design co-ops

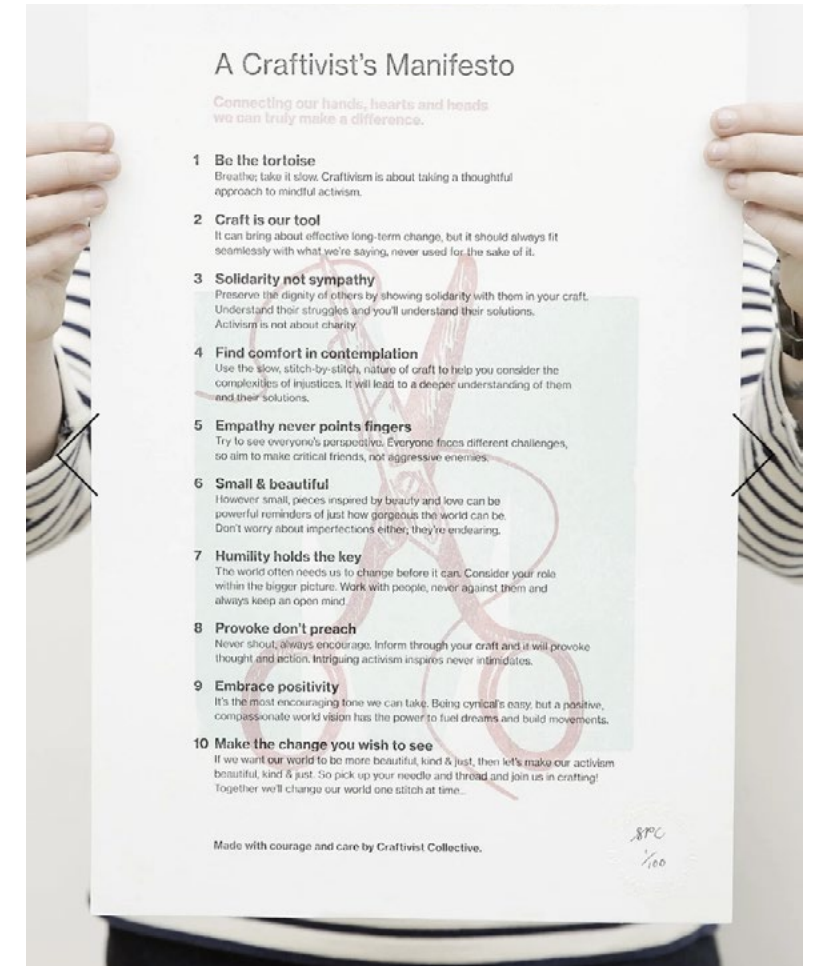


[Anti-oppression Resource & Training Alliance](#)
[United States Federation of Worker Cooperatives](#)
[Generative Somatics](#)
[Github Tech-coops](#)
[Allied Media Conference](#)
[Co-op 101: A Guide to Starting a Cooperative](#)
[Sustainable Economics Law Center](#)
[ICA group](#)
[Owner2owners.nyc](#)

<https://partnerandpartners.com/>

<https://eyeondesign.aiga.org/every-design-studio-should-be-a-worker-owned-studio/>

Facilitating co-creation: Craftivist Collective

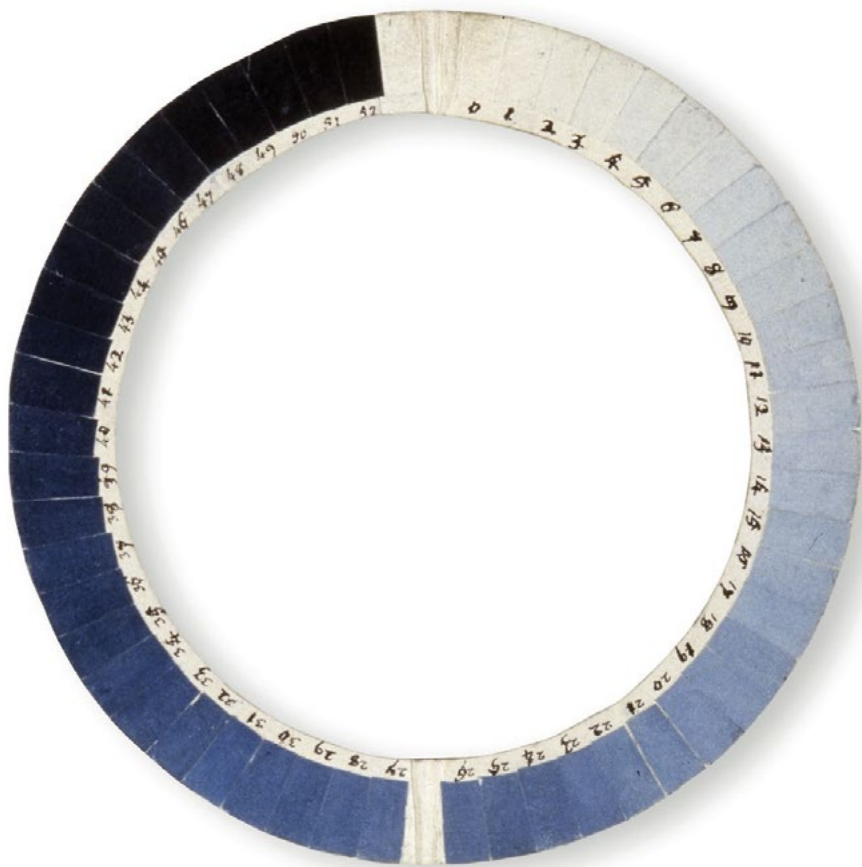


Activity 2

10 minutes

Groups of 2s

Speculative design exercise: Imagine you travelled to an alternative universe. It could be a better world, a worse world, or just different. You are a graphic designer sitting at your desk. Write about a tool you use.



Activity 3

15 minutes

Take a packaging (prepared) and redesign it. Choose one of the following challenges:

- Use as little printing as possible.
- Create an extra mandatory information.
- What would it look like if it was free?
- What would it look like if it doesn't want to be bought?

Creative Submission by 20 April

You are invited to submit one or two A5 pages of creative work inspired by today's workshop. Selected submissions will be included in a collective zine and exhibited at SaltSpace Gallery in August.

The zine will be risograph printed in two colours. Please prepare your artwork using no more than two colours.

A submission link will be emailed to you in a few days.

Your submission can take any form:
an activity you completed today;
a piece of speculative fiction; a tool
for commoning, hacking, vandalising,
or reimagining; an essay; a letter to
graphic design; a case study;
a manifesto, etc.

Thanks for coming!

Please fill in a feedback form
and leave your email address.

For any questions
please email me at
s2762037@ed.ac.uk