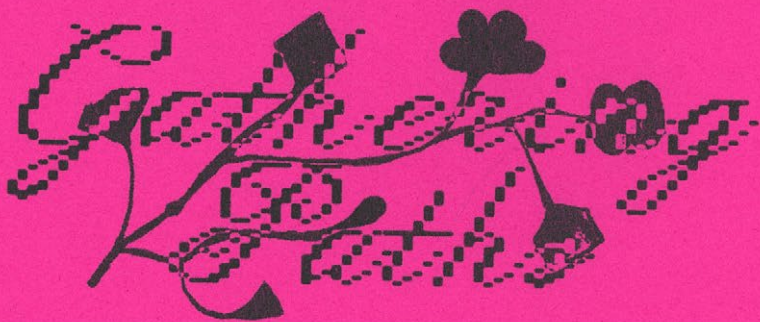




A fragmented
publication

on talking
about

graphic design

Introduction

This zine is the result of three workshops conducted at Glasgow Zine Library, exploring how the co-creation and self-publishing process can enact and explore a critical and feminist way of practising graphic design, expose what we take for granted, and imagine alternatives.



The three workshops (1: Graphic Design, AI, and Feminism; 2: Graphic Design, Power, and Aesthetics; 3: Graphic Design and Social Good) introduced critical ideas and included active discussions and hands-on activities in which participants worked on their own creative responses. Participants were then invited to submit a creative response, which are included in this zine and will be exhibited at SaltSpace Gallery.

In a culture that celebrates big shiny case studies, I wanted to create a brief space for working designers to have conversations about a more just future, beyond seeing design as top-down problem-solving, toward seeing design as a medium for the expression of collective imagination and a tool for care.

I would like to thank all participants for actively engaging in the workshops and submitting their work for this zine. I would also like to thank Glasgow Zine Library for providing the venue, and my partner Cam for being the photographer for the events. My supervisor, Prof. Michelle Keown, and Lucy Ribchester for helping me to plan my workshops.

I hope self-organised and self-published projects like this one provide a loose yet fertile space for critically thinking about graphic design, and could inspire others to start their own conversations.



(1): According to a UK and US survey in 2015, graphic designers overwhelmingly understand the industry as being more masculine than feminine (Roberts et al., 2015). New data shows that 74% of graphic design students are women, yet only 47% of working designers are women (Gitnux, 2026)

Workshops

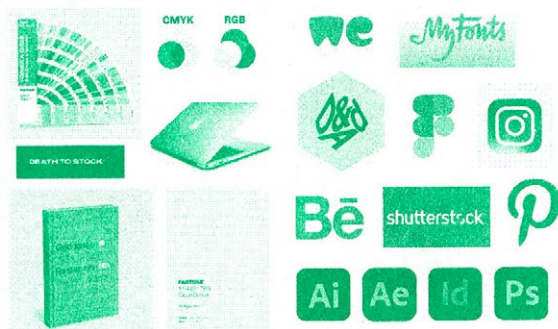
What is a graphic designer's relationship with the world?

We are problem-solvers, desire-ticklers, billboard-erectors, strategists, crafters, and cool-hunters. We are magicians that wield emotions; machines that replicate trends; editors that trim anything we touch into an innocent smile. We move forward, future-proofing our clients, future-proofing ourselves, but where are we heading? Where are we currently standing?

Workshop One: Graphic Design, A.I., & Feminism

Graphic Design now

Standardised tools



Diffusion model and LLM



Three workshops were conducted on weekday evenings at Glasgow Zine Library, inviting working designers to join me on a two-hour journey with a presentation, casual discussion, and time for activities.

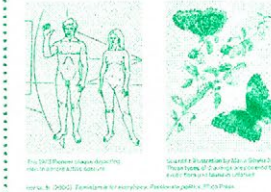
In the first workshop, we invited participants to explore how AI's "replacement" of designers reflects both a patriarchal and capitalist way the design industry functions. Participants in this workshop considered: How feminist thinking might lead us toward a resilient future? Can we change our design processes to become less scalable and machine-readable? What are some of the examples of these? Participants used a discussion of AI as an anchor to explore how the design industry could change.

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.



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



Discussion

Homogenised
design outputs
and how AI
works

Designers
feeding AI

Pressure of
efficiency and
monetising
hobbies

The language
we use to talk
about design

What if we add
friction to the
design?

What if we
design against
market logic?

Generating
new assets
based on
training data
that it cannot
understand

What would
be prioritised
if products are
free?

Replicating
“authenticity”

Extracting
values from
inspirations

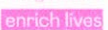
Appropriating
marginalised
cultures to
dress up
commercial
products

Real inclusion
in the design
process

Workshop Two: Graphic Design, Power, & Aesthetics

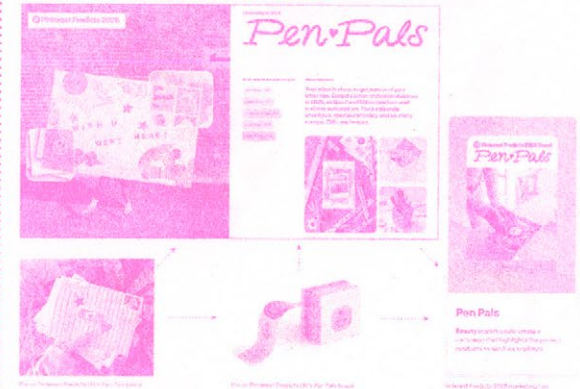
We invited participants to take a brief look at graphic design's role, its power, and how it is influenced by power and social norms. We challenged what designers take for granted, and explored how aesthetics are not neutral, and what makes designs authentic.

What's shaping our norms?

Tools	Process	Goals	Values
What do these tools decide for us?	What type of outcome do these processes produce?	How do we define success? Whose interests matter?	What do they actually mean? Who is empowered?
  	  	  	    

Graphic design is everywhere and it has the power to influence people. At the same time, what designers do is shaped by the industry norms, which are not neutral, but shaped by various powers. Take aesthetics as an example. This workshop explores how power legitimises itself through co-opting trendy, marginalised aesthetics, distilling “cool” and “authenticity” into templated graphic styles. At the same time, we discussed the power dynamic between the client and designers, and whether individual designers have the privilege of insisting on authenticity.

Cool hunting as design process



Authentic look vs. “authentic” look

Shaped by real conditions	Mimics of the original constraints
Meaningful within a community	Taken out of context

“If we ignore capital for a few minutes, we can imagine another model for design based on the lived experience of the communities we exist within. Communities created through shared values and knowledges, based on lived experience, concretised through design into cultural objects... then circulates back into an expanding community.”
 Kevin Yuen Kit Lo, *Design Against Design*
 U.S.A. & H.K. Graphic design designer and educator



Workshop Two Participants

Participants were tasked with creating a collage using existing packaging to alter the meaning of the original text and images. The collage on the left is a fun exploration of dialling up the advertising language. The collage on the right talks about the experience of being an artist.



Discussion

Politics of
“authentic
design”

Making
important
information
appeal to a
wider audience

Authenticity
of images: stock
photo vs actual
event photos vs
internal image
bank

Workshop Three: Graphic Design & Social Good

We invited participants to take a brief look at graphic design's role and impact in society, and how "socially good" design is more than good intentions.

Design is often framed as a forward-looking, problem-solving activity that moves us towards better futures. But better according to whom? Who decides? Who is left behind? This workshop explores why "better" is not universal and discusses whether imposing a top-down design solution on people is a form of violence. Ben Green (2021) suggests that good intentions are not enough; we need to think about "what type of society they promote in both the short and long term."

Are we biased?

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)

When well-meaning systems are designed mainly by people with similar backgrounds and experiences, they may unintentionally overlook how those systems affect others and may also find it harder to notice the harms or biases that arise.



Why Western Designs Fail in Developing...
in design, Tuesday, 16th June, 12:45pm. #Accessibility... more

Gitnux and D&A Graphic Designers (2026).
When Agencies are biased - design gender inequality
in design, Tuesday, 16th June, 12:45pm. #Accessibility... more

Everything can sound positive

neighbourhood gentrification positive change
commercial entrepreneurialism social innovation
assimilation inclusion

by K. Y. K. (2024). Designing for design. [Self-Made].



To invest is to imagine a brighter future & in doing so, take the first step towards it.

<https://www.credentia.com/insights/signs-of-gambling-addiction-in-robinhood-app/>

Can we design good outcomes without a good process?

How we work impacts whose problems we are solving, and what approaches we take when we are trying to do "social good" with design.

What is the design process?
For example, how much are people who will end up using your design involved in the design process? Do you solve problems you've never experienced?

What is the structure of the workplace? How stable is the job? Can you decide how you work? Do you feel comfortable challenging your boss?

How does everyone define success of a project? Is it client happiness? Awards and features in design blogs? Statistics? How big the billboard is?

Discussion

Who has the power to decide the goals and values?

The client and the budget have more power than the designers

Who has the luxury of doing socially good design?

Design co-op

Small leverages we can pull in the design process

Clients commission star artists because they expect brave solutions. Who gets to be that star artist? Is it a privilege?

Supporting your own neighbourhood

Design conferences vs the reality of working as a designer

Ground your practice

Difficult job market

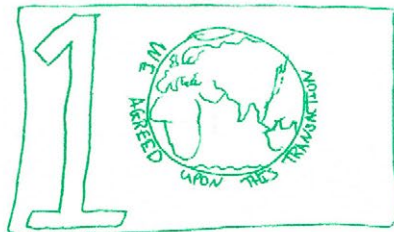
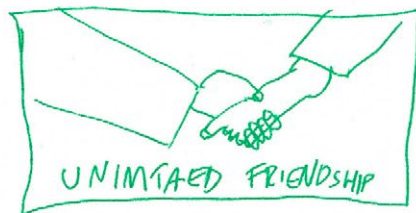
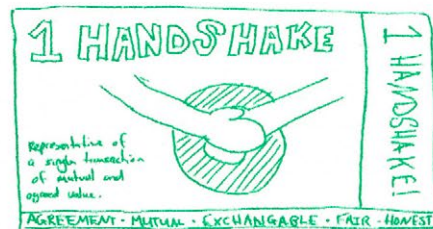
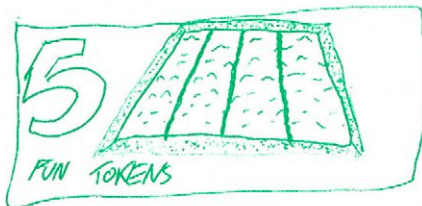
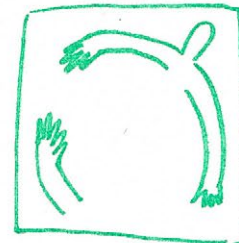
Keep accessibility in mind

If a designer does what they are told, are they responsible for the social impact of the results?

Are we designing for other designers, or are we really thinking about the impacts of our actions?



- community
- supporting others
- sustainability



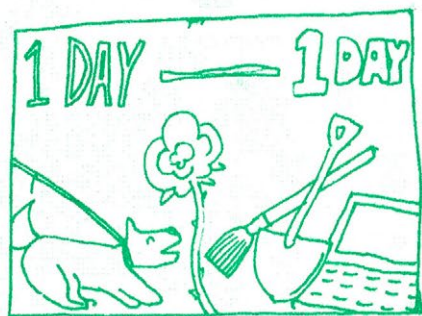
To participate life we must experience life through five senses. We must see the world, hear its subtle messages, smell its flavours, taste its sweetness and touch its surface.



- * Five Senses.
- * Take good care of your health & being
- * Sight / Smell / ~~See~~ ^{hearing} / taste / touch

Workshop Two and Three Participants

Participants were tasked with creating a bank note for a community they are a part of, and consider what is considered valuable to them.



Creative Responses

I invited my workshop participants to submit a piece of creative work that's inspired by the workshop.

Optional personal information is included with each submission.

By collecting

participants' responses

to create this collaborative zine,

we are juxtaposing

multiple

voices

on a common theme

about graphic design and society.

olhapuri chappal, Jhumka earrings, Bandhani print, Dupatta, Mirror work, Embroidery, Bindi, Turmeric Latte, Ashwagandha, CULTURAL APPROPRIATION, Yoga, Chai, Yoga, Henna, Kolhapuri chappal, Jhumka earrings, Bandhani print, Dupatta, Mirror work, Embroidery, Bindi, Turmeric Latte, Ashwagandha, Yoga, Chai, Yoga, Henna, Kolhapuri chappal, Jhumka earrings, CULTURAL APPROPRIATION, Bandhani print, Dupatta, Mirror work, Embroidery, Bindi, Turmeric Latte, Ashwagandha, Yoga, Chai, Yoga, Kolhapuri chappal, CULTURAL APPROPRIATION, Jhumka earrings, Bandhani print, Dupatta, Mirror work, Embroidery, Bindi, Turmeric Latte, Ashwagandha, Yoga, Chai, Yoga, CULTURAL APPROPRIATION, Kolhapuri chappal, Jhumka earrings, Bandhani print, Dupatta, Mirror work, Embroidery, Bindi, Turmeric Latte, Ashwagandha, Yoga, Chai, Yoga, CULTURAL APPROPRIATION, Mirror work, Embroidery, Bindi, Turmeric Latte, Ashwagandha, Yoga, Chai, Yoga, Jhumka earrings, Bandhani print, Dupatta,

Anupa Joshy
Communication Designer
@anupajoshy

"I work with community organisations and publicly funded institutions. As an Indian and immigrant, it's important for me to focus on the intersection of culture and identity."



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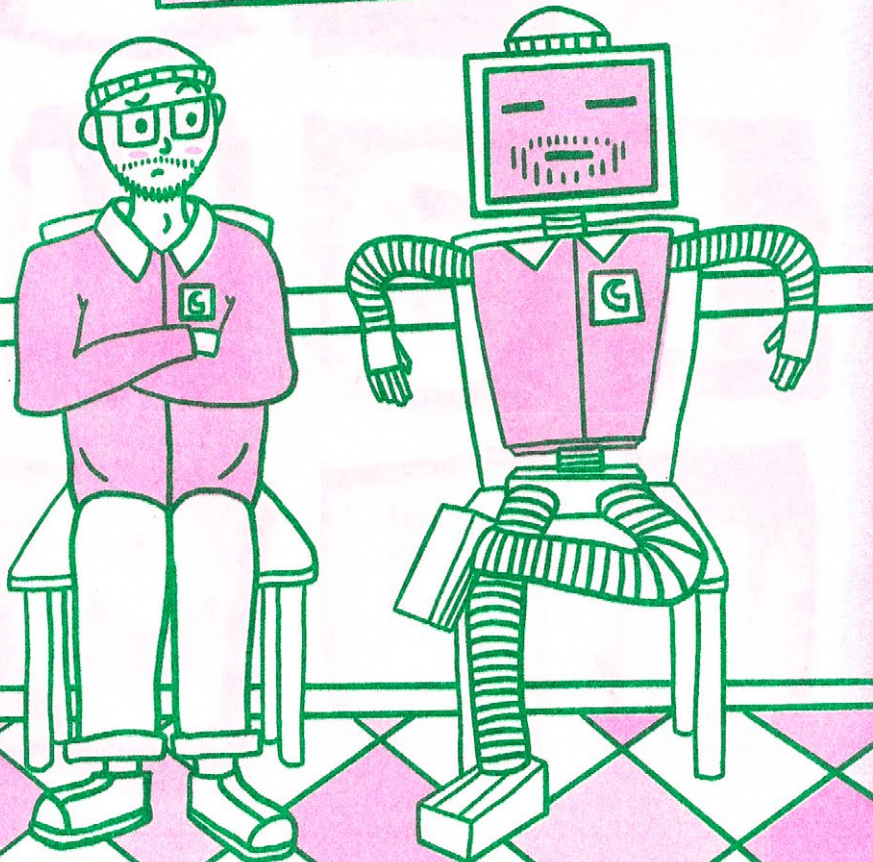
Josafinni (Finni) Porter
Chambers
Spatial Designer
@josafinni
josafinni@gmail.com

"Josafinni (she/her) is a designer of spaces that are co-designed with communities. In playful workshops she uses listening as a tool to design with people. Finni designs for well-being, inclusivity and joy. Currently, Finni is designing and facilitating a multi-sensory experiential exhibition at the V&A Dundee co-designed with adults with learning disabilities. Other major works include interior design for The Nook by SAMH, with Anna Campbell-Jones, a non-clinical mental health space in Glasgow."

LOOS
+ TEN
DINO

JOB INTERVIEWS

LOOKING
FOR UNIQUE
INDIVIDUALS

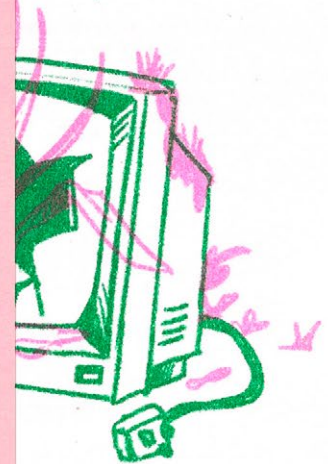


Heather Scott
Video Designer
@heather.scott.mov

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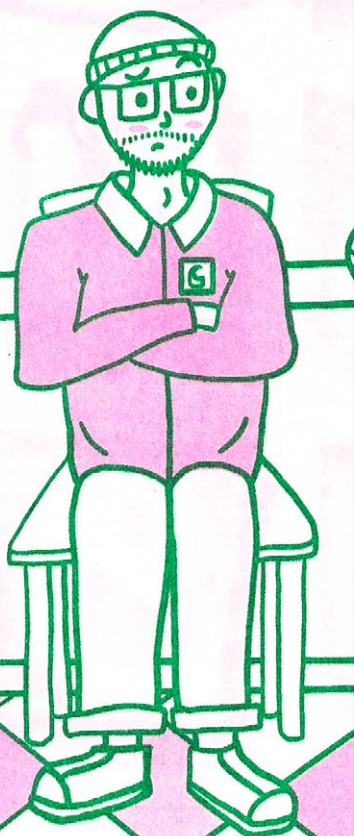
phase of efficiency [capitalism], we've
quick results and focusing on ourselves.
can do is care for others.

resources, skills and spaces. Care about
d why. The one thing a robot cannot do,
ill separate us and define us.



JOB INTE

LOOKING
FOR UNIQUE
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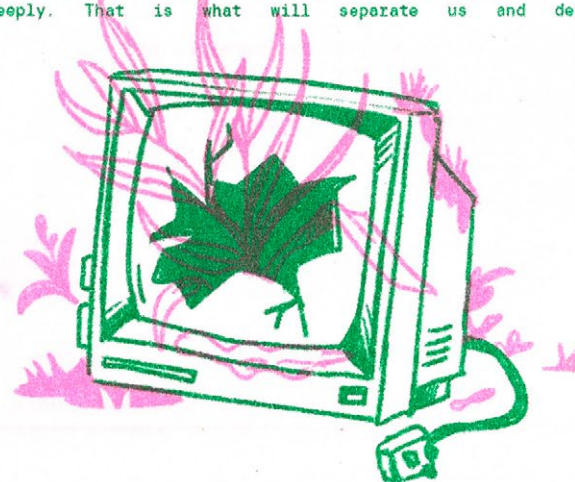
Fraser Robertson
/ Lost Astronaut
Graphic Designer & Illustrator
@_LostAstronaut
hello@lostastronaut.design

Exercise

your ability to think freely.

In a world currently obsessed with the chase of efficiency [capitalism], we've reduced ourselves to repeatable trends, quick results and focusing on ourselves. The most radical thing we can do is care for others.

Collaborate, question, challenge, share resources, skills and spaces. Care about who you work with, and who it affects, and why. The one thing a robot cannot do, is care deeply. That is what will separate us and define us.



**The flood gates of A.I.
design have been unleashed.**

**Has industry and capitalism set
the stage for this though?**

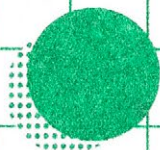
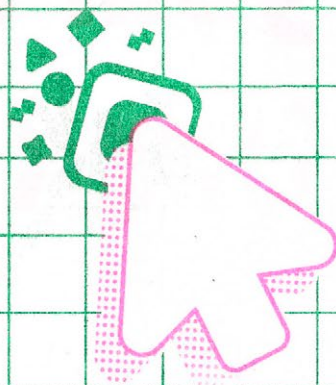
Starting out in the industry, I took every design-related opportunity to get my foot in the industry. Slowly moved from one job to the next, eventually landing in a design studio. For years I kept myself small, trying to do everything, hoping my long hours and technical know-how on the tools would impress my male senior designers and creative directors. And it worked.

But reaching my 30s, I've realised I've spent over a decade moulding my work to impress the heads of our industry, instead of creating work that I believe in myself. I learnt that if you were not the loudest in the room, your idea wouldn't be picked up. It took pivoting to freelance, and moving countries, starting again and working with smaller women led businesses to learn this wasn't always the case.

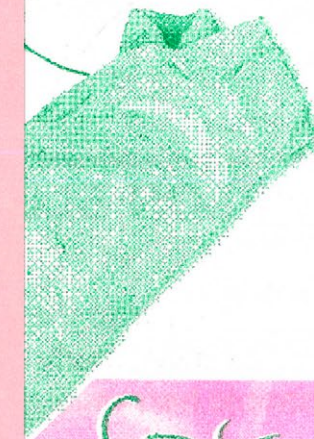
Over the years, I saw a lot of good design, but also a lot of churn and burn, which is now being replaced by A.I. And in a way, some of the A.I. design hallucinations and vibe coded design, reminds me of the obnoxious overconfidence of some in this industry.

I don't see the problem our industry is facing being A.I. itself, but a society that revolves around capitalism, which design has been pushed to conform to.

Spaces like this zine, and smaller community workshops where we can support each other's ideas even if they are not the loudest in the room, feel like a starting point to build a better, co-designed future.



☆
FEL 20 RAP



SOLIAL
GOOD
GOOD

Jade Paynter
Motion Designer
@jadepaynter

The flood gates of
design have been

Has indust
the st

Starting out in the industry, I took every design-related opportunity to get my foot in the industry. Slowly moved from one job to the next, eventually landing in a design studio. For years I kept myself small, trying to do everything, hoping my long hours and technical know-how on the tools would impress my male senior designers and creative directors. And it worked.

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Over the years, I saw a lot of good design get churned and burn, which is now being replaced. And in a way, some of the AI design has a vibe coded design, reminds me of the overconfidence of some in this industry.

I don't see
A.I. itself, but
capitalism
conform to

Spaces like
workshops
even if they
a starting

Right:

Rayhan Ahmed

fun

rayrayhan@hotmail.com

Next spread:

Joanie Chung

Graphic Designer

@pixelsbyjoanie

joaniechung5@gmail.com



WARNING

THESE DESIGNS CONTAINS A TRAP

DESIGN AND WRITTEN BY JOANIE CHUNG @PIXELSBYJOANIE

When it comes to “social good”, while these product designs certainly include you, they actually also include you in a broken system that really only benefits your evil CEO overlords and government institutions.

ACTIVISION BLIZZARD

WARNING:

This design is a trap that looks like Pride inclusion, but hides this company's misogynistic and homophobic harassment lawsuits.

THE BAIT:

This gaming company has LGBTQ+ staff who design and make queer characters and in-game seasonal Pride Month items and “skins” for this game, letting queer and marginalised players have some representation.

THE FINE PRINT:

While it is a labour of love by LGBTQ+ staff members, and yes, the work and designs are an act of “social good”, the company uses this work and its inclusion of marginalised characters to signal values that it does not practice internally. In a lawsuit by the California Civil Rights Department (formerly DFEH), they alleged there was a “frat boy” culture of harassment and inequality towards female and marginalised employees. One female employee, Kerri Moynihan, was subjected to severe sexual harassment before she died by suicide at a company retreat. Reportedly, male co-workers shared and passed around an explicit photo of her at a company holiday party. Activision Blizzard's design values “sales and representation”, not “worker safety and empowerment.”



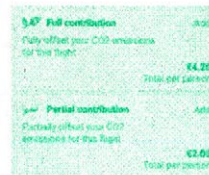
THE CARBON OFFSET BUTTON

WARNING:

This design is a trap that takes a fee to reduce your guilt by 100% while the airline reduces their CO2 emissions by 0%.

THE BAIT:

This optional payment button includes you, the passenger, in the solution. Now you have the power to “offset” CO2 emissions and make our Earth greener



THE FINE PRINT:

This is a smokescreen that commodifies activism. “Saving the planet” is now a small micro-transaction and doesn't do anything to transform the airline industry's dependence on fossil fuels. While this design “includes” the user by seemingly empowering you as the protector of the environment through your generous act of paying a small fee, it doesn't change the fact that CO2 from the jet engine still enters the atmosphere. This design enables the airline companies to greenwash and make no actual change to the environment

DELIVEROO FOOD DELIVERY APP

WARNING:

This design traps you in a system with no job security, no benefits, and no worker rights.

THE BAIT:

This food delivery app means that anyone can be a delivery driver, with 50+ languages and a great UI, everyone, including someone without a traditional resume, can “onboard” and get a job.

THE FINE PRINT:

While you can enter the system easily, this system is very precarious. You are self-employed, which means you have no right to the UK's Statutory Sick Pay. You also get no pension, no holiday pay. You can get a hotel room for your family, but ONLY if you are hospitalised during a delivery. This business structure funnels profit and security for the top (shareholders and executives) and keeps you at the bottom

* Some better alternatives for food delivery apps: Locavore (Glasgow/Central Belt), Edinburgh Food Social (Edinburgh), MealShift (UK), The Drivers Cooperative (NYC)



Conclusion

What would graphic design look like if we adopted a collective, feminist approach, recognised the powers shaping our actions, and questioned what we take for granted? What could our relationship with work look like? How and what would we design?

My approach to answering these questions is to gather my thoughts into workshop materials and discuss them with other designers.

The conversations we had are different from what we hear in usual design events. Trends, high-profile case studies, self-promotion, strategy, and tools are all important if we wish to survive in a peculiar industry. But we also need space to discuss other things.

According to feedback, all participants think workshops like these offer something that's missing in the current design industry. While more fantastic, critical books have been written about graphic design in the past few years, I, as a full-time graphic designer, was unaware of these books before I started my Master's degree. That's why I decided to host a series of short, weekday evening workshops for other working designers who may also be searching for answers, questions, echoes.

I hope this zine shows that hosting events and self-publishing are ways to engage designers without requiring a tremendous investment of resources. Let's start casual and small; let's do something now.



Resources (UK)

A small list of things that inspired this zine

Glasgow Zine Library

A self-publishing library and community arts space in Glasgow. They have an international collection of over 4,000 zines. This is an inspiring space, showing what design looks like when it's politically engaged, in the hands of communities and non-designers.

32-34 Albert Road
Glasgow, G42 8DN
www.glasgowzinelibrary.com

Zine Fairs

Many cities have annual zine fairs, where local self-publishing artists sell their zines. Though the publications are not often graphic design-related, graphic design is used to present topics that the stallholders care about.

Good Press (bookshop in Glasgow)

A workers' cooperative that is a bookshop, events space, risograph printer, and bookmaking studio that supports self-publishing and independent small presses. Most of the books in the picture can be found at Good Press.

32 St Andrews Street
Glasgow, G1 5PD
goodpress.co.uk

Offprint (book fair in London)

A large book fair that features small publishers, distributors, artists, and organisations working in the art and design field.

www.offprint.org/en/



Recommended Readings

Caps Lock (2021) by Ruben Pater

The Politics of Design (2016) by Ruben Pater

Design Against Design (2024) by Kevin Yuen Kit Lo

Feminist Designer (2023), edited by Alison Place

Lecture Zine series on Instagram by Darren Raven @drnraven

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Matos, A. (2022). *Who can afford to be critical? An inquiry into what we can't do alone, as designers, and into what we might be able to do together, as people*. Set Margins'.

Pater, R. (2016). *The politics of design: A (not so) global design manual for visual communication*. BIS Publishing.

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Tsing, A. (2015). *The mushroom at the end of the world: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Princeton University Press.

Vedeb, O., & Grant, J. (2024). *What is post-branding? How to counter fundamentalist marketplace semiotics*. Set Margins'.

Vickress, A., & Parke, L. (2024). *Imperfect index*. Sold-Out Publishing.

Vickress, A., & Parke, L. (2025). *Imperfect index vol. 2*. Sold-Out Publishing.

Images

P1, 2, 22 (left): Photos taken at the workshops. Cameron Dickie

P3: Edited image of Glasgow Zine Library. Beth Tianxin Xia

P4: First Things First manifesto. <https://eyeondesign.aiga.org/why-ken-garlands-first-things-first-manifesto-keeps-getting-updated/>

P6-7: Public domain image. Hippolyte Baraduc. <https://pdimagearchive.org/images/acefad1c-e01b-4bff-ba7d-389966f54183/>

P8, 9, 12, 13, 16, 17: Presentation slides used at the workshops. Beth Tianxin Xia.

P14, 15, 20, 21, 22 (right), 23: Works made during the workshop by participants.

P26, 29, 30, 33, 34, 37, 38-39: Submissions by workshop participants.

P25: Public domain image. Karl Blossfeldt. <https://pdimagearchive.org/images/ba639772-d92c-4203-ad02-890d443598da/>

P41: Printing and binding this zine. Beth Tianxin Xia

P43: Books that inspired this project. Beth Tianxin Xia.

Gathering Paths: A fragmented publication
on talking about graphic design

Written and designed by Beth Tianxin Xia, as part of a dissertation project at the University of Edinburgh. With contributions from Rayhan Ahmed, Joanie Chung, Anupa Joshy, Jade Paynter, Josafinni (Finni) Porter, Fraser Robertson, Heather Scott, and anonymous workshop participants.

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