Hot Right

Now

A Contemporary Landscape for Digital Thinkers, 2023

W.

Vol 5

A book by **awwwards.**

In the awwwards annual of 2018, we conceived the cunning idea of having a chatbot write our foreword (°◊°). Way back then (just four years ago) these artifacts were so rudimentary, that the chatbot only ended up suggesting a few phrases that actually made sense. Today, in 2023, no one could distinguish if this very text has been written by a human or an AI.

So yes, we might even go as far as to name ourselves'prophets' in our previous editions, in which we extensively explored the emergence of artificial intelligence, surveillance, the spread of fake information, censorship, technological wars, bioengineering, and the decline of technological enthusiasm and optimism. Perhaps there was something special in the air, something emanating from sentiment analysis on

social media, a glimpse that allowed us to imagine the approaching wave of superior knowledge. A whisper, a cosmic radiation heralding splendid, yet immensely complex times for the human mind.

This volume is a compilation of essays and thought pieces from prominent designers and digital creatives, confronting topics including, but not limited to: Virtual and Augmented Reality, the transition to no-code tools, and how AI is reshaping the digital industry.

We can’t begin to imagine how fortunate we are to be witnessing, with a front row seat and popcorn in hand, a technological revolution like the one that is approaching.

On February 10, 1996, **Deep Blue**, a supercomputer developed by IBM, defeated the reigning world champion, Garry Kasparov. Nowadays, even Magnus Carlsen wouldn’t stand a chance against the most basic chess app from the App Store.

In *The Age of Spiritual Machines* (1999) **Ray Kurzweil** introduced the concept of “**The Law of Accelerating Returns**”. This law suggests that the pace of change within various evolutionary systems (not limited to, but prominently including technological advancement) is prone to exponential acceleration.

According to the predictions made by Kurzweil, it was estimated that by 2030 we would experience changes that, from the perspective of the inhabitants of 2015, would be comparable to those that occurred between 1750 and 2015. If we express these changes in terms of years of distance, the following changes would occur in extremely short periods of time.

After the frantic last few months of a technological wave of AIs, data models, thousands of papers and research; the predictions by Kurzweil, which might have seemed fantastical in 2015, are starting to make sense.

ROADMAP

As digital creators, in recent months we've been caught up in a frantic race for AI adoption. We've witnessed the evolution of **ChatGPT**, **Whisper**, **Dall-E**, **Midjourney**, and **Stable Diffusion**, among many others. We've installed dozens of **HuggingFace** models, reinstalled **Google Collab** countless times, and lost patience with the hundreds of **Discord** channels. We have also trained our own models, patiently waiting for the beta invitations to **Dall-E**, **Runway Gen-2**, **Adobe Firefly** and **Wonder Studio**.

Just a week ago, Google launched its AI Suite at **Google I/O 2023**, introducing a suite of tools similar to **Microsoft 365 Copilot**. This suite boasts a multimodal AI with internet access and no temporal limitation on data training, unlike the current **GPT-4**.

THE DISINFORMATION AGE & THE PARADOX OF CHOICE

Just a couple of years ago, designers were worried about ‘**Impostor Syndrome**’, at this moment hundreds of anxiety disorders must be flying high in the community, due to the overwhelming amount of knowledge that is impossible to fully grasp.

Ironically, we are more ignorant of our surroundings today than in the past. The amount of data generated in the information age is so extraordinary that approximately 90% of all human knowledge has been generated in recent decades. This renders us blind to most of the available information and subjects us to ‘*The Paradox of Choice*’ every moment of the day. We live a reality totally paralyzed by an excess of information and options.

WEB3 - 0, IA - 100

Two terms, WEB3 and AI, were vying for prominence just a few years ago. Unfortunately, AI has taken the lead when it should have been the other way around. The introduction of blockchain into our economic and political structures was intended to safeguard citizens' freedoms and rights. Regrettably, but as expected, AI has outpaced it.

An earlier adoption of blockchain in social and administrative structures could have protected us from an uncontrolled advancement of AI that has the potential to jeopardize a country's labor and budgetary balance.

“Cryptography is the only secure way to protect individual rights in the information age. Cryptography is the ultimate safeguard of individual freedom in a digital world.” A Cypherpunk’s Manifesto, Eric Hughes - 9 March 1993

At the very moment of us drafting this introduction, *Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, is testifying before the US Senate*, warning lawmakers about the potential dangers of AI and urging them to introduce new laws and regulations.

Suddenly everyone else is rushing to try to slow down its progress to allow for legislation, and *this open letter to pause giant AI experiments* for 6 months is now famous. Italy has banned the use of ChatGPT, because it violates data protection laws and other EU countries are trying to follow suit, possibly hinting at their fear of the potential unemployment that could follow in the short term. Despite their opposition, they will only succeed in harming their own industries, rendering themselves incapable of competing with countries who've not imposed such bans. The pace of innovation is uncontrollable and exceeds the regulatory capacity of any government.

A BEACON OF HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

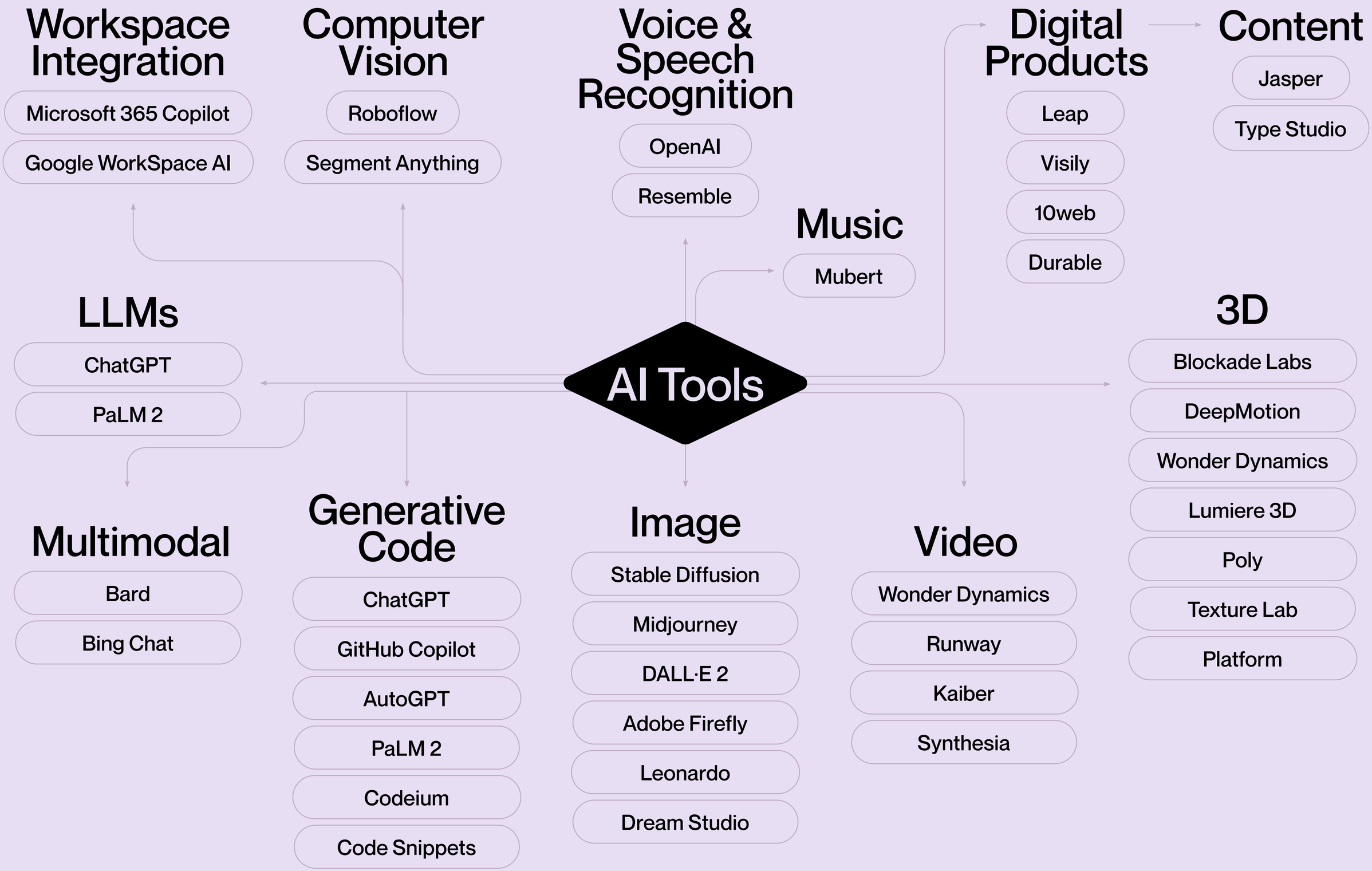
Our aim, my friend, is not to broadcast a message of fear, but rather one of hope. Every revolution brings with it extraordinary opportunity, and we still have some time before AI assumes all of our tasks. AI still requires human assistance, as showcased in this fascinating AI Generated Pizza Commercial, "*The Pepperoni Hug Spot*".

Tools used:

- Script: GPT4
- Images: Midjourney
- Video Clips: Runway Gen2
- VO: Eleven Labs
- Music: SOUNDRAW AI Music
- Graphics and editing: Adobe After Effects

See video

Quick overview of the most prominent AI tools:



Welcome to this supersonic journey through future human history. Are you ready?

Inside the mind of:

FRED PAQUET

Digital Lab Director at HOPIUM

hopium.com

Web3 is Revolutionizing the Auto Industry

GET READY FOR A WILD RIDE!

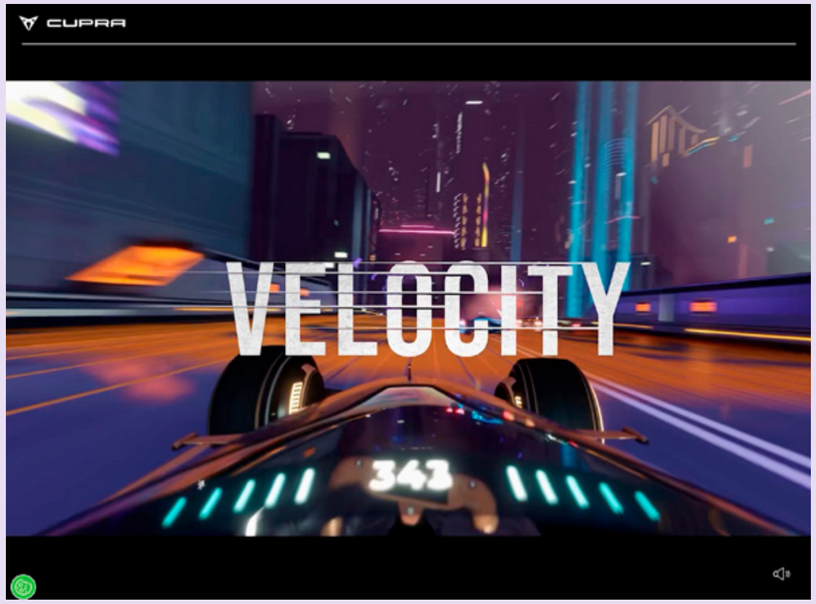
The auto industry is about to take a wild ride with the help of web3 technologies, such as blockchain, NFTs, and decentralized networks, creating a new digital space in the metaverse. This new realm will change how consumers interact with and experience vehicles, and how businesses operate and innovate in the sector.

Firstly, it's important to note that today, the metaverse trends are creating an amount of sterile one shot-experiences, driven by the urge to showcase technological knowledge without considering the long-term vision and brand purpose.

It's not just about the technology; the real game-changer is the ability for companies to create unique and immersive brand experiences in the metaverse. Thanks to NFTs and blockchain, companies will establish their digital territory and make their competitors green. When showcasing their vehicles and universes, companies can choose from pre-calculated 3D renders, streaming solutions, and WebGL. Of course, brands must decide what it costs, but some great actors have already developed stunning starters.

"When showcasing their vehicles and universes, companies can choose from pre-calculated 3D renders, streaming solutions, and WebGL"

By combining NFTs, blockchain, and 3D renders, companies will create an interactive, gaming-like experience for the customers (*Cupra Exemple*). For example, a car digital twin powered by Web3 technologies will give customers the ability to explore, customize and test drive the car in a virtual environment. This will make buying a car more engaging and interactive, and give customers a more realistic sense of what it's like to own and drive the vehicle. Furthermore, with the rise of the metaverse, companies will create virtual experiences that will be shared with customers, the community, and other companies, creating more opportunities for brand exposure and customer loyalty - and even generating new revenue streams.



Cupra Exemple


CAUTION

Marketing and Brand Partnerships? Well, why not launch a paired campaign with a luxury brand to set a limited edition of car HMI (Human Machine Interface) thanks to NFT. Why couldn't the digital twin have its own value based on customer stats, personalization, and game performance? The possibilities are endless.

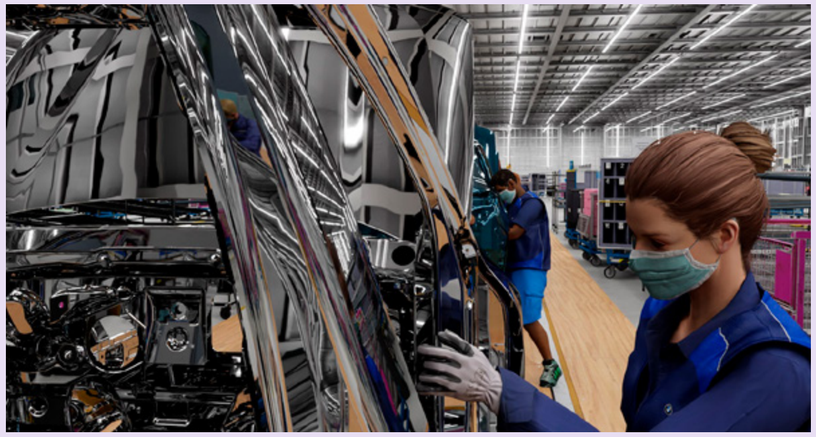
And let's remember the impact of AI. With the integration of AI technologies, companies can analyze vast amounts of data, optimizing the production process and improving the vehicle's performance and safety. In addition, AI-powered cars can drive themselves, improve fuel efficiency, and adapt to the driver's individual needs, improving the overall driving experience. The Knight Rider childhood dream will soon come true: Personalize interactions and companion voice; sound design adapted to the rolling environment, and so much more...

"With the integration of AI technologies, companies can analyze vast amounts of data, optimizing the production process and improving the vehicle's performance and safety"

For businesses, the benefits are undeniable. They will capture new data and insights, streamline supply chain operations, create new revenue streams, and improve customer engagement and retention, leading to more sales and lifetime value. (*BMW Example*)

And let's remember the long-term vision, Web3 technologies will play a vital role in creating a more sustainable future for the automotive industry, such as promoting a circular economy and reducing emissions, all while improving the overall customer experience. So it's a win-win situation!

In conclusion, Web3 technologies are revolutionizing the auto industry, and companies that fail to adapt will risk getting left behind, As for consumers, get ready for a whole new level of virtual car buying experiences. It's time to strap in and enjoy the ride.



BMW - NVIDIA Omniverse

Inside the mind of:

MAT MOSES

Creative Director at REGENCY CREATIVE

matmoses

Sustainable Infrastructures for Design and Development

In a world of ever-changing trends and technologies, the one constant that brings unity to them all is the need for a sustainable infrastructure within design and development.

The Problem

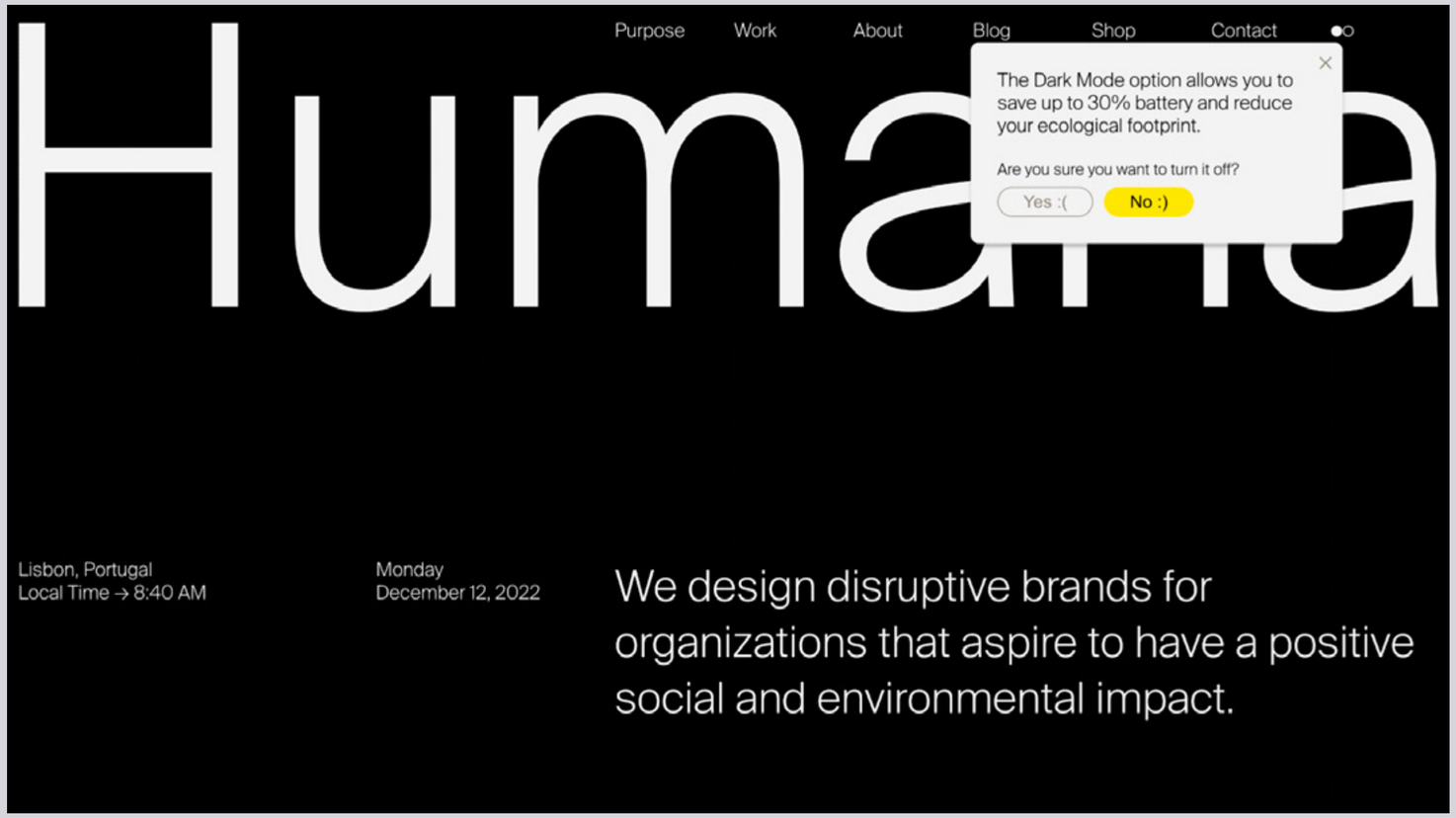
According to the online carbon calculator *Website Carbon*, the internet consumes 416.2TWh of electricity per year, with the average web page producing 0.5 grams of CO2 per page view. Throw in some heavy front-end activity and things really start to look interesting - the Apple site alone requires 219kWh of energy to run, the same amount of power as it would take to drive an electric car 1,402km!

So, how do we establish a more sustainable approach to web design, and create a less harmful infrastructure for development?

The Solution

The ultimate solution is a change in mindset - it's a change in the way we as designers approach our craft. Whilst naturally we strive to deliver exceptional creativity that is worthy of creating emotion amongst our end users - we must now also begin to consider the impact of our work and the carbon footprint of our output.

A considered blend of micro and macro steps will need to be considered in order to fully redefine and reimagine the internet as a whole. The key to implementing a sustainable infrastructure rests within education and communication, and the need to share the successes of our creative pioneers.



"The Dark Mode option allows you to save up to 30% battery and reduce your ecological footprint. Are you sure you want to turn it off?"

Design Decisions

Humana's Site of the Day from Nov 5 2022, is a perfect example of how micro design decisions can work to create a more sustainable design, without compromising on UI or interactions.

The default load state of Humana's site is dark-mode - an environmentally driven decision that is highlighted during the light-mode toggle. The simple yet evocative micro-copy highlights the impact of utilizing a dark colour palette over that of lighter, more vibrant tones.

Green Web Hosting

In the same way, we're seeing more Teslas on the streets, and more solar panels on roofs - running our sites from sustainable data centres is another prime example of a minor change that can establish major results.

When establishing the tech stack of a website, the environmental impact often isn't on the list, however, a simple change to a green hosting provider could significantly contribute to a reduction in carbon emissions. Whilst the industry now boasts a plethora of green hosting initiatives, ensuring your providers are able to evidence a certification such as Renewable Energy Certificates (REC) or Carbon Offset Certificates (VER) will ensure your hosting infrastructure remains accountable for their credentials.

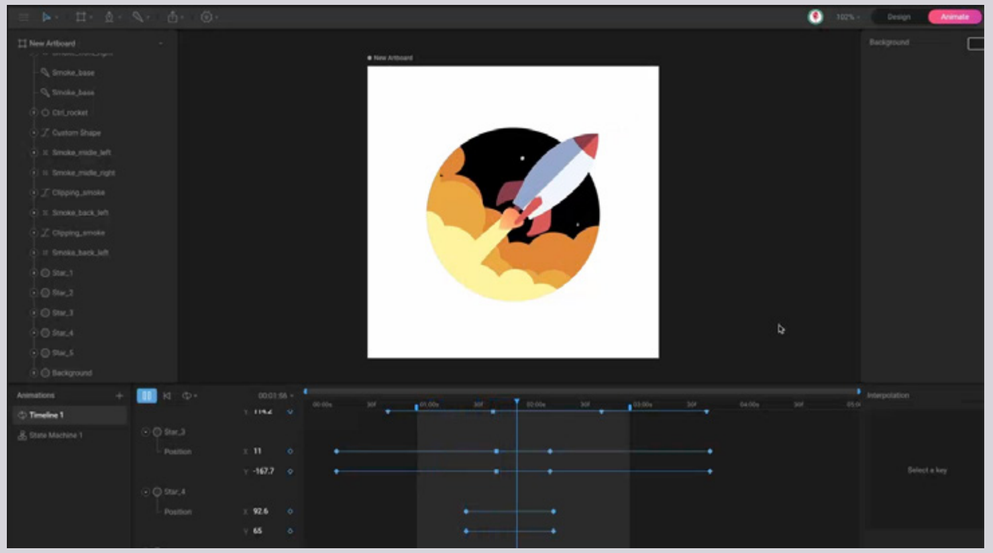
Adopting new technology

It's always easy to stick with the status-quo. Loading up Figma, rendering from AE, firing over Slack messages - it's hard to step away from the familiar favourites. But, how can we adopt new tools and technology to create a less energy-efficient workflow?

Rive App, a design and animation tool, is a great example of how adopting a new technology can significantly reduce energy overheads. In a side by *side comparison against* Lottie, Rive reported:

Rive web example
- File size: 18 KB (no compression)
- GPU Memory: 2.6 MB
- JS heap: 7.3 MB
- CPU: 31.8%

Lottie web example
- File size: 181.7 KB (no compression)
- GPU Memory: 149-190 MB
- JS heap: 16.9 MB
- CPU: 91.8%



The sheer difference in file attributes highlights the impact of seeking alternative technologies, and the effect this could have on website emissions.

Environmental Transparency

The Green Web Foundation - a not-for-profit organisation founded in 2006, is the world's leading authority on sustainable web design - working with key industry figures to establish a more environmentally focused future for the internet.

Building on the same principles of robots.txt to index websites, The Green Web Foundation is proposing a way for websites to annotate their emissions within their digital markup - carbon.txt.

README.md

What might this look like in practice?

If I host all the bits I need with one provider, like Krystal, might have a `carbon.txt` file at the root of my page, and it might look like this.

This is all a draft - please, please file an issue to outline what you would need to see to make this something you could support

```
[upstream]
krystal.co.uk
```

If a hosting company like Krystal didn't run their own datacentres, their carbon.txt file might look like this:

```
[upstream]
www.netwisehosting.co.uk
```

If Netwise ran *all* their datacentres on renewable power, all they might need to do is list their one provider like so:

```
Ecotricity Group Ltd
```

Under the hood, that would be enough to provide a verifiable check against a register of credits, because just filtering the register by the supplier, and taking into account the date we're checking might provide enough information - (if we know what the date is when we check, we can implicitly filter out ones that have already expired).

Anything that can follow links, and check a name against a register can confirm these claims are being made too

Visible on their *GitHub page*, a carbon.txt file intends to simplify the verification of a website's green-credentials, thus improving sustainable transparency and raising awareness of digital accountability.

The Future

Whilst we must all work together to establish a more sustainable approach within our industry, we can all individually consider our output when it comes to sustainable creativity and technical development. Balancing award-winning design, with a sustainable and environmentally focused mindset will ensure we as creators are able to continue sharing our vision, whilst also fixing our current climate crisis.

Inside the mind of:

ILJA VAN ECK

Designer & Webflow Developer

iljavaneck.com

Breaking the no-code barriers with Webflow

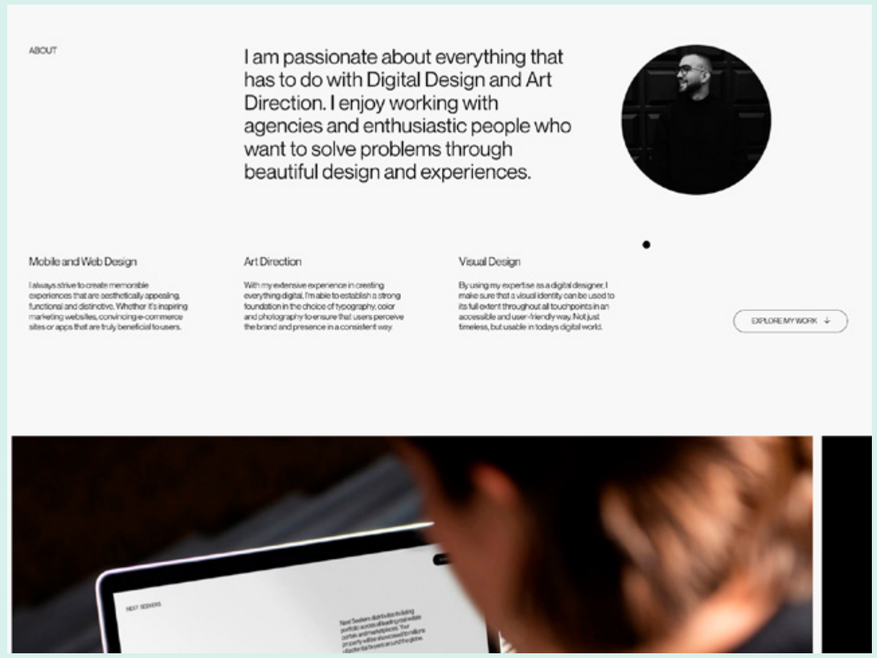
When thinking about Webflow and no-code you might think it’s yet another drag-and-drop website builder that generates messy code. Remember Dreamweaver? Webflow is nothing like that. It fully embraces all fundamental concepts like the box model, flexbox and responsiveness.

For all designers reading this:

THAT’S A GOOD THING.

When I found out about Webflow around 2 years ago, I had limited knowledge of coding. I was mainly a designer that knew how to (sort of) code some basic layouts. But, I had made a not-so-standard design for my portfolio and really wanted to develop it myself. So I opened a blank Webflow project and just played around with it. And don't ask me how, but after quite some attempts and tutorials, I had a responsive, functional portfolio.

I have to confess, a developer would have cried if they had inspected the code of that website. But that wasn't because of Webflow, that was me. After all, I'm the one that decided 'Div Block 37' was a suitable class name. I know, I know – it's not. But I was hooked, visually developing my designs was a ton of fun. So, I started learning all about class naming conventions and how to properly structure web pages. Fast forward one year, and I received a *developer award on Awwwards*, pretty cool for a no-code tool, right?

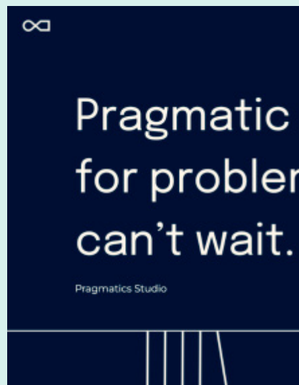


Martin Briceno Portfolio

And I’m just one of many other designers that learned how to develop using a tool like Webflow. It really empowers you to learn as you go, in an interface similar to the design software we all know – Figma for example. Speaking of Figma, if you know how Auto Layout works, you already know how a CSS flexbox works! The cool thing about this way of ‘visual developing’ is that you’re manipulating the CSS live, right on your canvas. If the button you clicked doesn’t give the desired result, just click another one.

“It really empowers you to learn as you go, in an interface similar to the design software we all know – Figma for example”

I’m pretty sure that by now, we have all seen some of the amazing websites that are being *built in Webflow*. From super smooth portfolios to immersive experiences with Three.js and WebGL implementations. Now, of course, that’s not so no-code anymore. But that’s the cool thing with Webflow, if you want to do something custom, you don’t have to hack your way around it. There’s dedicated fields and options to implement your custom code.



Moving forward, I personally think we'll see Webflow becoming more and more established in the industry. There's just something about this 'no-code movement' that appeals to many people from many different backgrounds. Marketeers might like it because they don't need a developer to publish changes to a website. Designers might like it to have full control on how their own designs are being brought to life. And developers might like it because they already understand all core concepts of building for the web, so they can focus on utilizing the tool to its full extent.

All in all, I think Webflow is actively contributing to empowering more and more people to create for the web. Heck, that's even their mission statement.

Inside the mind of:

ROMAIN PENCHENAT

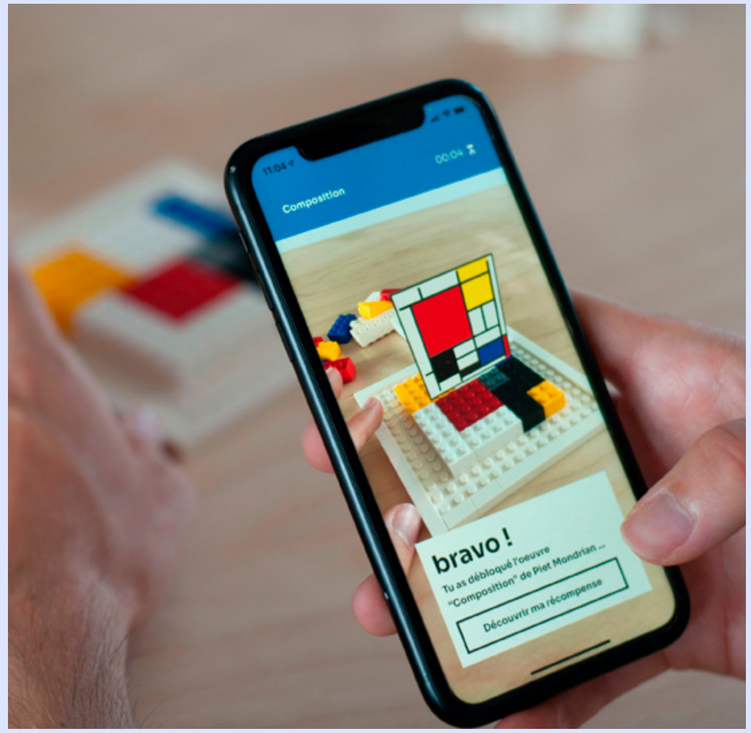
Product Designer at MEANINGFUL

romainpenchenat.com

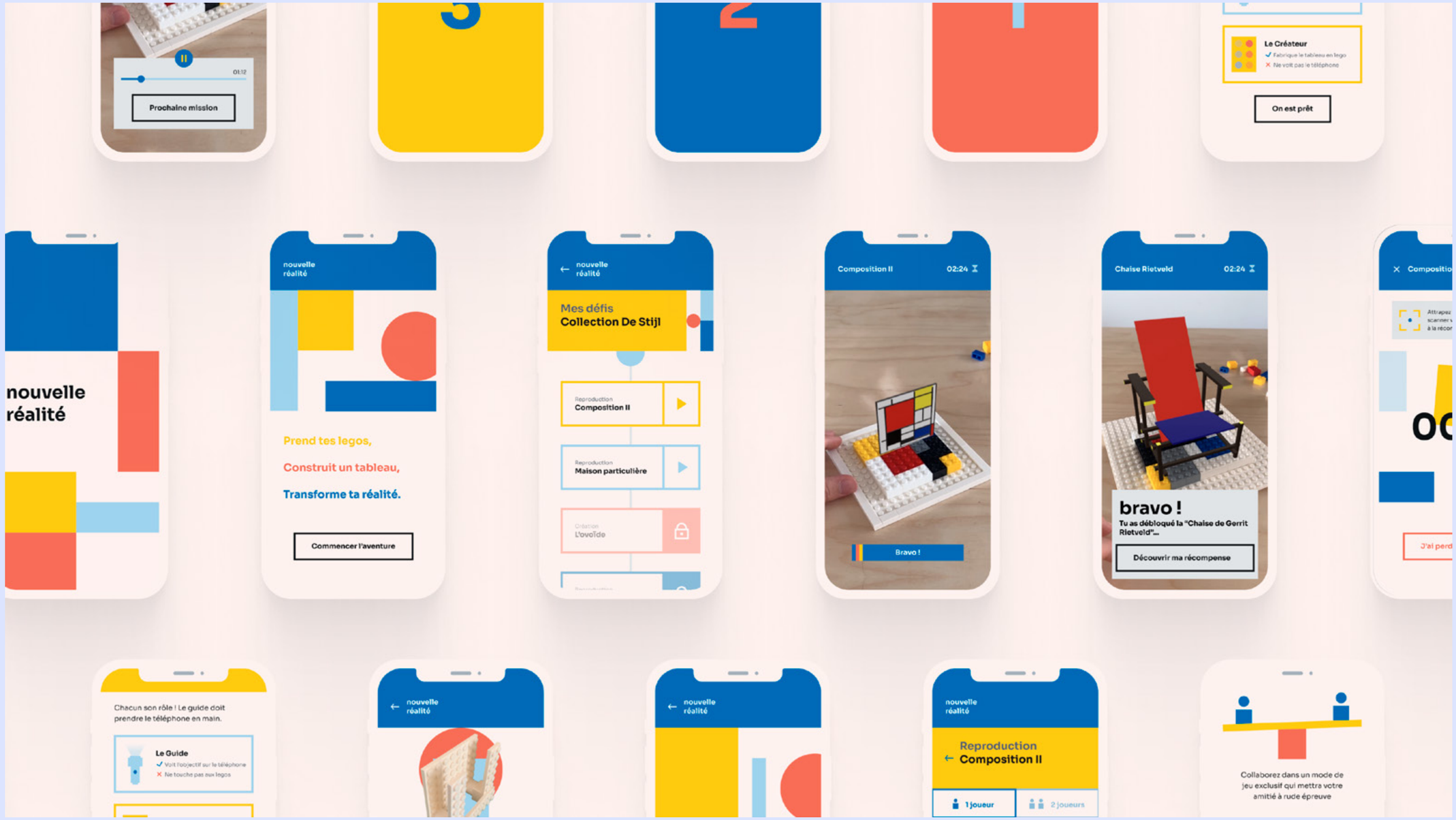
The Experience of Building the Game “Nouvelle Réalité”

The real challenge of the 2020s is no longer to bring new things to the virtual world, but to rebuild a link between the physical world and the virtual space to empower our lives.

With “nouvelle réalité”, we used the power of augmented reality to help children enjoy brick games in a more modern way. Using the phone as a frame for the game and not as the game itself, we built a new paradigm : the player now has access to an infinite series of memory games thanks to a few building blocks energized by a phone game. We therefore used modern AR capabilities to highlight a success and wrap it with modern art culture explanations in a streamlined experience. Augmented reality became a solution to make static games more interesting while bringing cultural knowledge into this fun experience.



nouvelle réalité intro


Prochaine mission
Le Créateur
On est prêt
nouvelle réalité
Prend tes legos,
Construit un tableau,
Transforme ta réalité.
Commencer l'aventure
Mes défis
Collection De Stijl
Reproduction
Composition II
Reproduction
Maison particulière
Création
L'ovoïde
Composition II
02:24
Bravo !
Chaise Rietveld
02:24
bravo !
Tu as débloqué la "Chaise de Gerrit Rietveld"...
Découvrir ma récompense
Chacun son rôle ! Le guide doit prendre le téléphone en main.
Le Guide
Voit l'objectif sur le téléphone
Ne touche pas aux legos
Reproduction
Composition II
1 joueur
2 joueurs
Collaborez dans un mode de jeu exclusif qui mettra votre amitié à rude épreuve

Building this experience was a mix of design and development from the start. We quickly tried 2D image recognition and 3D object recognition in order to find the best compromise and build an experience which takes into account these constraints. We also tried to play with different sensor capabilities to build unique intuitive interactions according to the device position : a stable flat device launches “timer mode” while a moving device launches the “AR detection mode”.

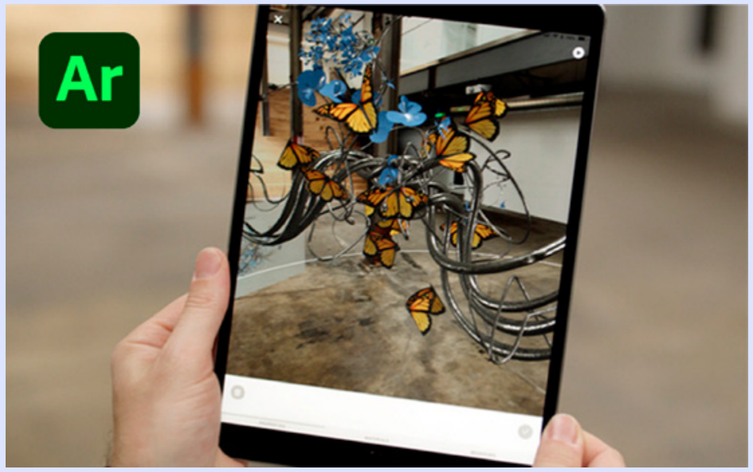
Usability is one of the most challenging aspects of building AR apps: nothing is stable, every movement impacts the experience and control is low. All of these enemies of modern usability practices are concentrated in a single technology. We should make sure to address each of them by helping people to find the AR content hidden around them thanks to visual clues, to switch manually between contexts while keeping the content as stable and as clear as possible. In the AR context, accessibility issues are the norm for a majority of our users : so addressing this is a requirement to making the MVP product work.

“Usability is one of the most challenging aspects of building AR apps: nothing is stable, every movement impacts the experience and control is low”

Working with AR challenges

Designing this kind of experience requires a mix of many different skills, from 3D creation to engineering, passing by interaction design. Even prototyping the basic core interactions of an AR app requires thinking about the many implications of it on the final result. An AR designer should be like a webmaster of the AR space, with a wide range of skills to be as effective as possible.

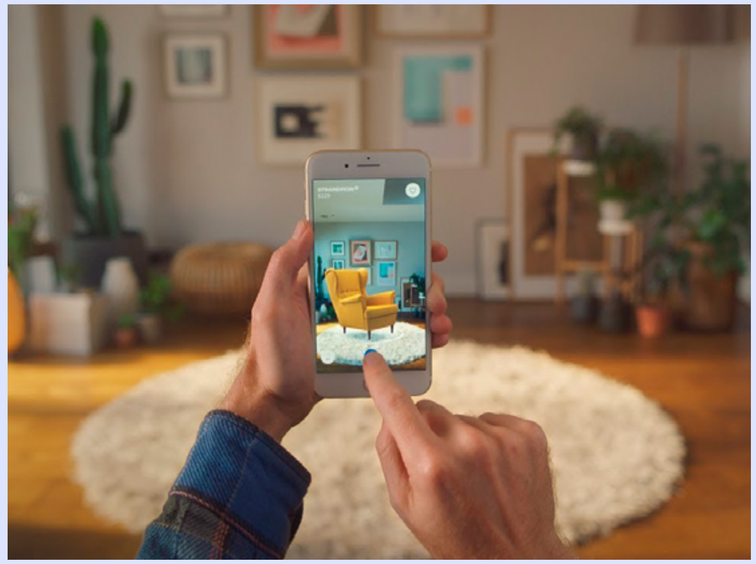
We have the chance to have access to many different tools that help us to browse this crazy new era. Smartphone apps like Adobe Aero and Typar allow us to discover the main principles of AR design. Gaming engines like Unity and Unreal engine allow us to build incredible, advanced prototypes with an interactive interface. Finally, development kits like AR Kit by Apple & ARCore by Google allow us to build and ship real efficient 3D apps to the public while making this code base ready for the upcoming generation of AR focused devices.



Adobe Aero

AR Kit & Reality Kit by Apple

Most existing AR apps are still at an experimental stage but some of them like Ikea Place, PeakFinder & Measures already provide great experience while just missing a more suitable device than our phones to explode. We should think of each of our AR projects as pioneers toward a AR powered device experience coming soon.



Ikea Place

Links to find more resources about the products I talk about:

Magic Leap headset

Stack Ar

Sky Guide

Mix reality Lynx R1 headset

PeakFinder

The Future of Augmented Reality

While working in the augmented reality field, it's absolutely necessary to choose a precise goal from the beginning. There are two kinds of AR projects : the ones that should be part of today's reality and today's business, and the ones that are seeds for the future.

While working on a project for today's reality, we can try to upgrade existing apps with an additional optional AR experience (to add a new interaction level to a game, to help people to recognize stars in the sky, boats on the sea or friends in the crowd...) or we can try to build new solutions for issues that haven't been and can't be solved without AR technology (how to pre-visualize furniture in a flat, try some shoes at home...). However, in that context, it's important to remember that on a phone most things are easier without AR than with AR because of the nature of the device itself.

While working on experimental projects, our mission is to anticipate AR focused devices where our only interface option would be our augmented vision. As of today, this kind of device already exists (Linx-R1 and Magic Leap) for professional use only. For these products, we can try to reimagine our mainstream apps in a more contextualized way or try to do better : privacy and respect of our attention will be a challenge with this medium. As a designer, we have the duty to explore solutions for a better future.

"There are two kinds of AR projects: the ones that should be part of today's reality and today's business, and the ones that are seeds for the future"

Inside the mind of:

LAN ZHANG

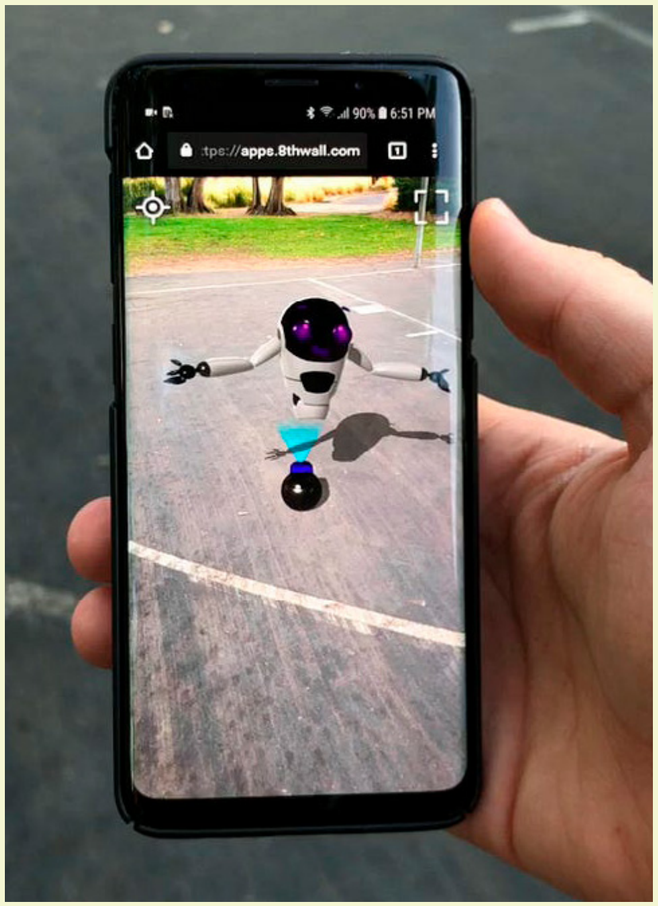
Creative Technologist at HAVAS CX

lanzhang.net

A More Intelligent Web in 2023

In March 2022, Niantic Inc, the company that made Pokémon GO, acquired *8th Wall*, the leading pioneer of a web-based augmented reality platform that offers developers, designers, and companies a powerful toolset to build interactive and engaging AR experiences on the web. Developers can use JavaScript and libraries like A-frame or Three.js to easily embed 3D models and animations into a mobile-friendly browser-based AR experience. Users don't need to download a native app on their phone. Instead, they can easily access the experience over a QR code or a URL through their mobile browsers. So far, 8th wall has been used for web AR experiences in retail, fashion, food, automobile, gaming, and many other industries.

After the acquisition this year, 8th Wall has accelerated its feature development. For example, lightship Visual Positioning system (VPS), the technology used in Pokémon GO, is now repurposed for the web. This technology allows creators to anchor content based on real-world location (see a video example *here*), enabling web experiences to be built around a physical historic landmark or any desired location. Furthermore, 8th Wall also recently introduced Sky Segmentation. Now, developers can utilize real-life sky as a web canvas for their 3D content or a browser backdrop.



WebAR - 8th Wall

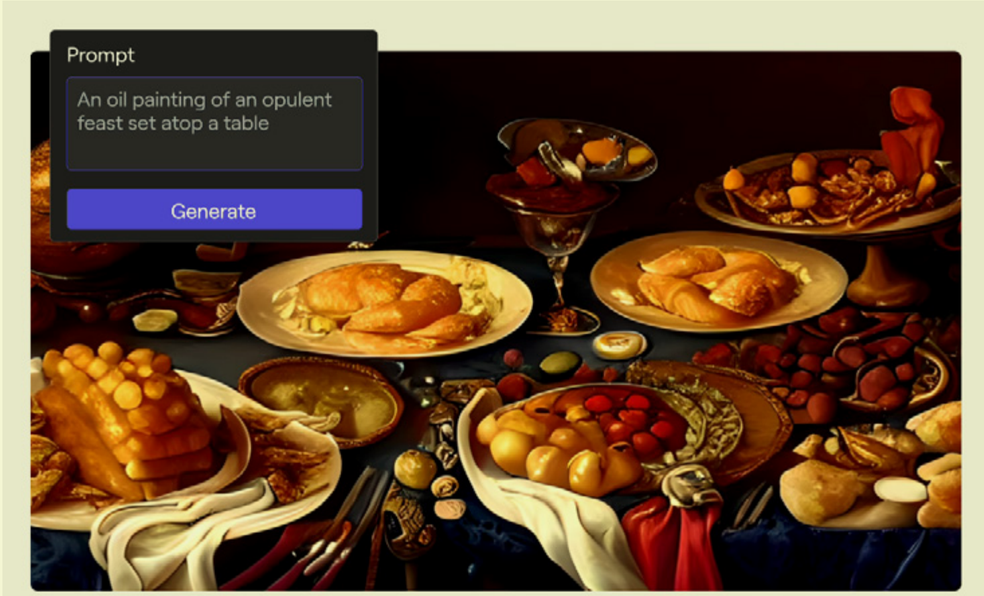
Introducing Sky Effects - 8th Wall

Meanwhile, tools powered by Artificial Intelligence have flourished, and many have inspired creativity, challenged conventions and stirred up controversy. The AI landscape is changing very rapidly as we watch AI-generated videos, images, and text evolve and appear more intelligent than ever. As creators, we started to see developers using GPT-3 to generate code or debug applications, and artists using DALL-E or Midjourney to create concept art, textures for 3D models, and so on. Most of these available AI-powered tools are accessible through the web, providing creators an easy gateway to interact and to experiment.

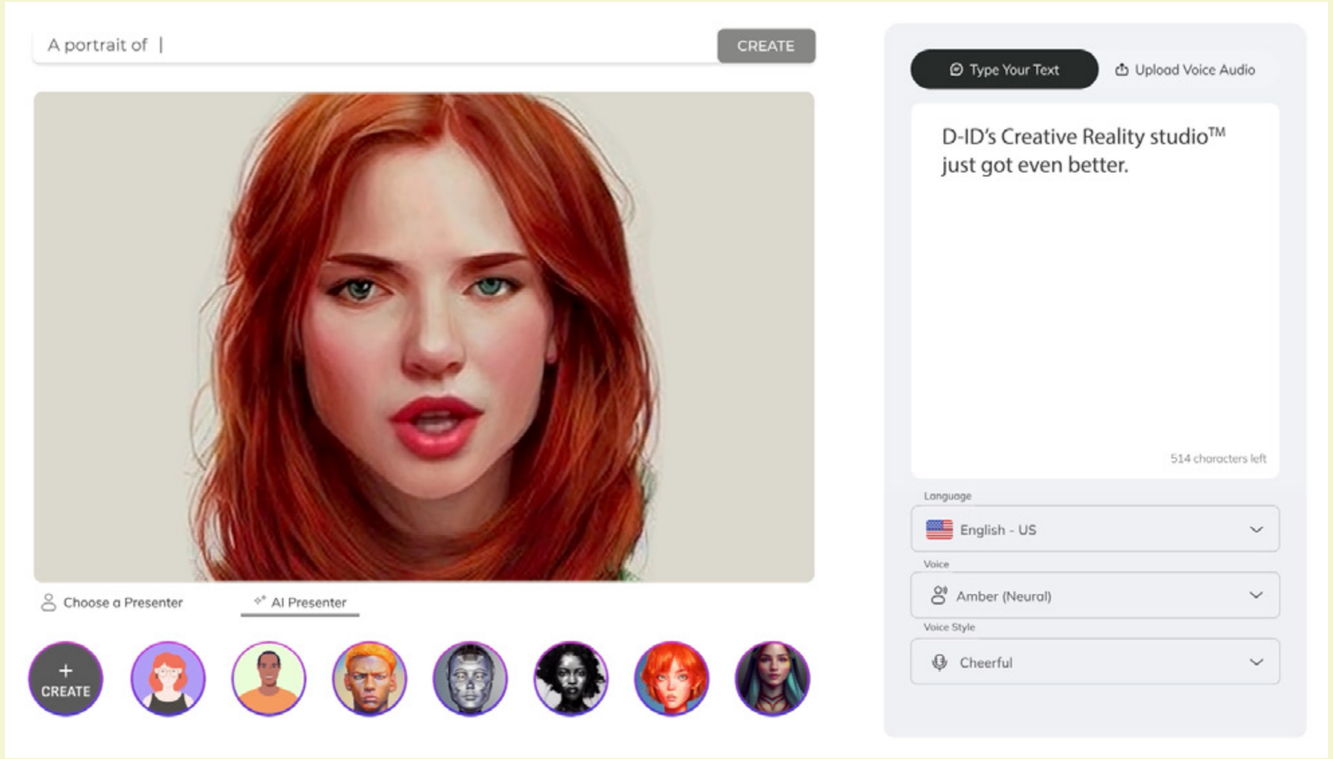
“As creators, we started to see developers using GPT-3 to generate code or debug applications, and artists using DALL-E or Midjourney to create concept art, textures for 3D models”

AI-generated video tools

We have some tools on the horizon that would generate videos from text input. We've seen Meta AI's *Make a video*, and *Google AI's Google's Video AI: Outrageously Good!*. Although text-to-video technology is not there yet as of December 2022, it's exciting to see where this technology will go in 2023. There are all-inclusive tools like *Runway* (Runway ML), an all-inclusive web-based video editing tool that uses AI and Machine Learning technologies, including Green Screen, Inpainting, or Motion Tracking. They've recently expanded their toolkit, so now creators can generate image assets to assist their creation as well. It is also interesting to see the rise of synthetic human generators or web-based deepfake tools. These are popular text-to-speech or text-to-video tools, where digital avatars can simulate how real people talk. Platforms like *D-ID* or *ElAI* can output a video of a virtual avatar speaking using any given speech input.



Generate Images AI Tool - Runway

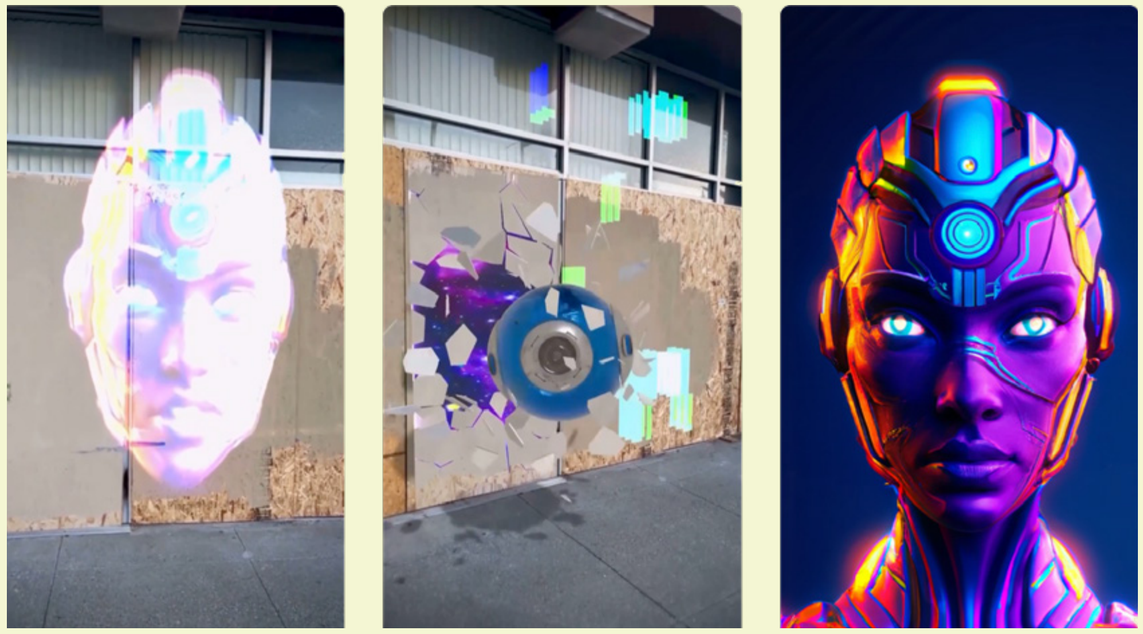


Digital People Text-to-Video - D-ID

Generate AI videos from just text - Elai.io

AI-generated image tools on the web

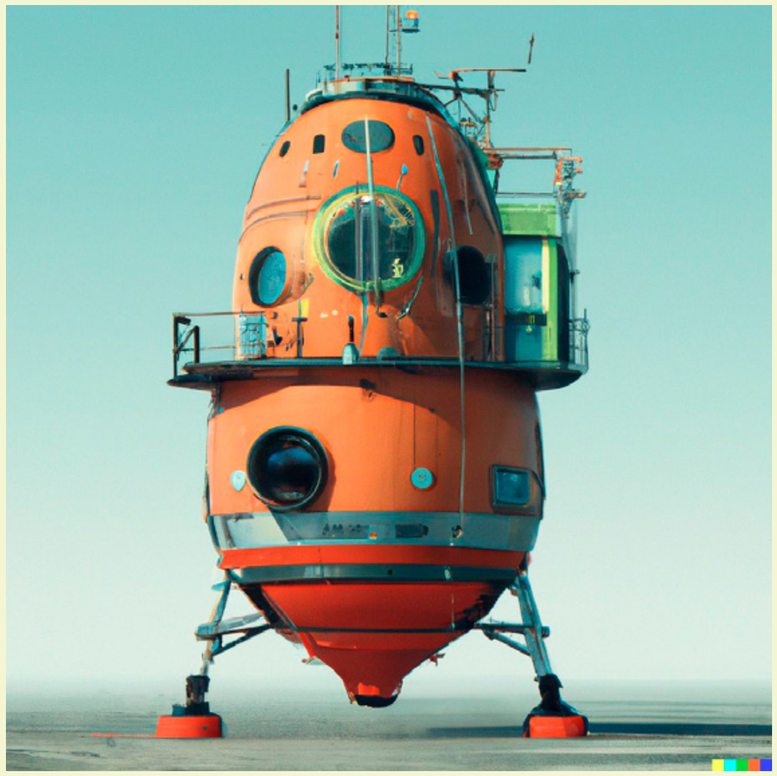
At this point, many of us have played with *DALL-E2* by Open AI or *Midjourney*. Both of these generative AI tools are based on the web. DALL-E is within its web application where Midjourney can be run on its web interface Discord App. Meanwhile, creators also use these AI-generated image tools to create web-based experiences. For example, 8th wall recently showcased their engineer Ian Curtis's experimental work around incorporating AI generative art applications like DALL-E 2, D-ID AI, and *Barium AI* into real-time web AR experiences. The artist used AI software to generate image texture assets that are used for 3D meshes, text-to-speech for the speech video, and so on. It's worth noting that these experiences themselves aren't generated. Only some of the assets are generated by AI.



Reference from Ian Curtis








openaidalle

AI-generated text tools on the web

These generative language models can produce text about anything. They do this by recognizing patterns in language and predicting what comes next. The most famous one right now is *ChatGPT* by OpenAI. ChatGPT is probably the most powerful NLP generative tool available to the public right now. It is a stand-alone web application that allows users to communicate with AI conversationally. Some developers are already using ChatGPT to debug or solve code (*the advent code of 2022 with ChatGPT*). It's not hard to imagine how these tools would become handy for lots of creators down the road.

Opportunities, controversy around AI-ethics, and takeaways

We are at a very exciting stage of web technologies as we can start merging realities into web experience or use tools like DALL-E or Midjourney to quickly visualize concepts and generate assets for prototyping purposes. AI-generated outputs from these tools can be pretty thought-provoking as well - maybe there's an opportunity for creators to build purely imaginative and out-of-this-world experiences.

However, we do need to be mindful and carefully examine our intentions when it comes to working with generative AI tools due to the controversy around the model's learning source (*Lensa backlash controversy*, *The misogyny of AI portraits* or *Children's book controversy*). As we learn to use these tools to our creative advantage, we need to acknowledge that these tools are biased because the internet data they are trained on are biased. It presents us with some interesting questions on copyrights, intellectual property, and creative ownership.

As web content creators, how do we address these topics if we do utilize AI-powered tools? We should take time to really understand the limitations of a model, as well as what it's good at. We also need to pay close attention to rules and ethics protection, keeping the pressure on the companies who make these tools to hold them accountable. Nevertheless, we had a great year of working with new tools and web technologies, and 2023 will only get more exciting!

Inside the mind of:

GIANPAOLO TUCCI

Multidisciplinary Designer

gianpaolotucci.com

How AI is changing the landscape of typography towards future scenarios

Artificial Intelligence is becoming more of an enabler for new experiences to become, predictively automated, relevant, and unique for people, through optimization via streamlining of processes, and tasks, aiming for a self-learning mechanism. In the Machine Learning evolution, AI will be trained by various forms of input, and delivering a new industry standard in the near future.

AI is also approaching (on a more accessible level) Art, Design, Communication, and Marketing. Focusing on the first 3, for example, AI image generator technology opens up a new frontier in which humans and “machines” can collaborate more efficiently, in moments of creation, broadening the spectrum of stylistic and imaginative opportunities while reducing effort and production time and as a consequence, waiting time.

The co-creation era has begun.

It opens a new door to the dialogue with the machine, where each “input” corresponds to a visual /fast “output”.

This is a love story between myself and a chatbot, what we do at least for one hour a day is typography. I’ve started from the conception of AI type. In the beginning of the project and investigation, we were trying to replicate typography lettershades.

With really bad results. I wasn't sure if the system hadn't been trained yet on typography, or if it was me wrongly prompting - it was actually both.

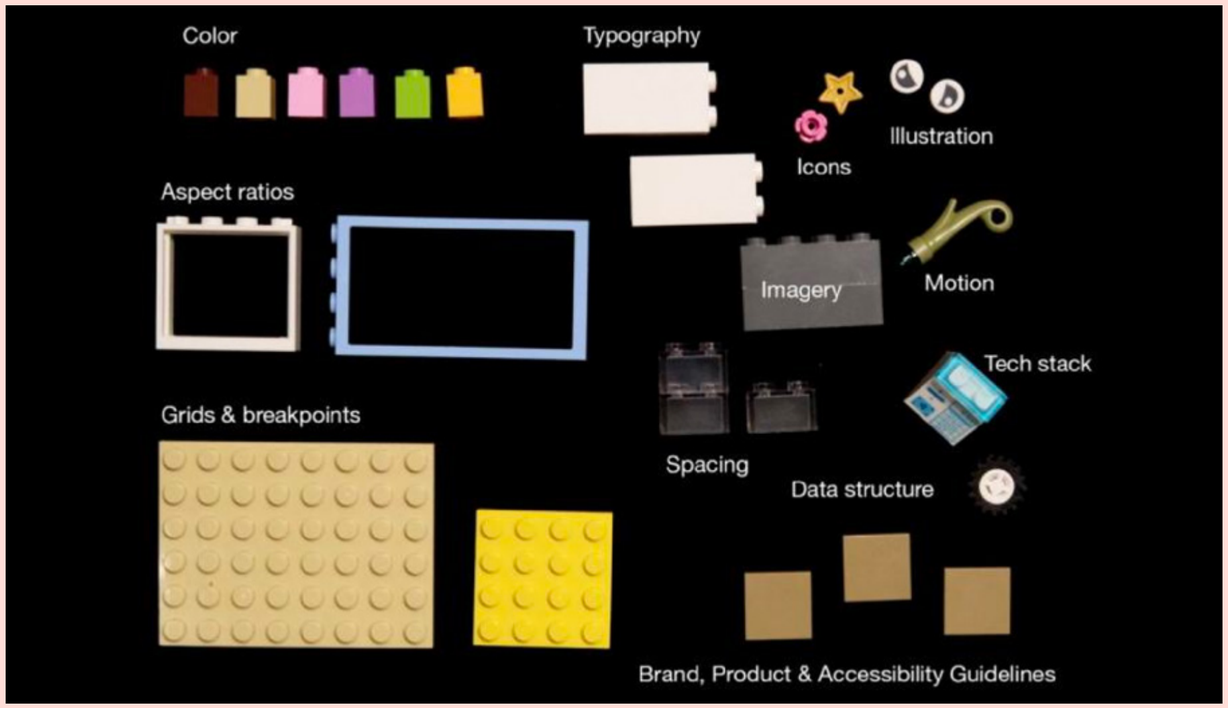
In the process and learning curve I've discovered and embraced "Aesthetics Imperfections" being the uniqueness and the core constant of AI image generations - I find this aspect of unexpected beautiful imperfections a synergy with nature truly fascinating - and it became the purpose of my investigation - typography that loses the rigor of function, to embrace a more aesthetic representation.

"I find this aspect of unexpected beautiful imperfections a synergy with nature truly fascinating - and it became the purpose of my investigation"

Working on a never ending discovery, generating branches of branches of directions, that were fading in the exact moment of the generation, I gathered knowledge, and pushed pretty hard styles, mashups, and cross-breeding opportunities with each version of mid-journey algorithms.

In V01 / V02 / V03

I compose the syntax of this new model of systematic conversation. It’s a playbook model. Let’s take as an example, atomic design and related building blocks.



I use the building blocks and apply them in the syntax composition;, subject, attributes, context and specs. Images can become a way to enrich it with guidance, and the usage of “Chaos” will help to diver-ge and or converge.

In v04, the most recent, there is a more interesting issue, the AI is filling the letters based on your prompt - not making them out of your subject. So I've mixed images created with previous versions, then combined and modified with V03, then used as references to follow in V04, gaining finally amazing results.

The curious case of the frog as experimental type research material

This is how the process and influenced control will be making things more interestingly unique with amazing possibilities even for such a topic as Typography and Lettering.

The combinations between versions are more often becoming a way to use it as a proper tool to play with instruments, and features as part of the process to gain results a real Co-Creation process more than a Direction process

From my POV, the dialogue and communication with the “Machine” will lead to extensive Machine Learning training, still based on human inputs, to feed a community shared consciousness, where all people are participating in the feeding. But as a brain, it will be tailored to the individuals that are controlling it, uniquely, preserving the differences between each of us.

To us as individuals, it will become an extension of the self.

“From my POV, the dialogue and communication with the “Machine” will lead to extensive Machine Learning training, still based on human inputs, to feed a community shared consciousness, where all people are participating in the feeding”

Technological acceleration has an impact on the meaning of Evolution - seen as an expansion of the possibilities of choice, outlined by an evolutionary technology acceleration, that goes in a direction that intertwines between biological and technological.

We are experiencing a sort of metabolism of new technologies which is the same as nature, is the same as the human organism, for example when we talk about networks or artificial intelligence, these are nothing more than a simulation of what we have in our nervous system.

This new technology reminds us of systems created by nature that we are trying to mimic, so this new “attitude” of technology to become more complex not in its use but in its composition, should automatically enrich the context for the evolutional elements of the digital ecosystem to be; by ensuring a correct integration of it as part of the process, enhancing the creative opportunities and not becoming a creative replacement - as it’s clearly not - it’s what we should unpack within its best utilization and application.

Typography, for instance, is one of these elements.

When typography as a medium of communication will break the barriers of the container (Print, Screen, and so) in new shaping dimensions, AR/VR/Metaverse/Multiverse/Enhanced generative design, will it still have the same rules and constraints?

We don’t know yet, but what we know is that it will deliver many opportunities when it comes to continuous evolution in shapes, colors, depth, and size, as a living organism able to self-shape according to the needs, one of these is an enhanced visual expression of the carried meaning.

This might affect brands and the old idea of brand restrictions as guidelines, towards evolving, diversified, and localized visual brand experience, moving from targeted advertisement to targeted brands, this is how generative design with AI integration can be leading a paradigm shift.

This means we will move from personalized experiences, to unique experiences, in which external parameters will be influencing the experience itself, making it unique. This means the level of standardization will no longer be the goal (in the context of accessibility for instance, but the baseline to deliver tailored uniqueness.

Imagine Typography weight, readability, contrast, and size becoming uniquely arranged for Visually Impaired People, from AI gathering knowledge about the individual.

This is one of many examples of a clear possible direction where AI and Typography could have a massive impact in design innovation and uniqueness.

“This might affect brands and the old idea of brand restrictions as guidelines, towards evolving, diversified, and localized visual brand experience”

All images have been co-created with midjourney

Inside the mind of:

ANDREAS PANAGIOTOPOULOS

Founder at UNCLOUDY & CO

uncloudy.se

The metaverse revolution: the good, the bad and the ugly...

VR and the metaverse have without doubt been on the tip of everybody's tongue for the past year, for good or bad reasons. According to a purist approach, although VR is not the metaverse, it is a crucial technology in order to fully experience it, because it adds the first-person view and immersion component to it.

Gaming Boom

On the gaming front, we have seen new titles being added to the established storefronts of Meta and Pico – the front-runners of consumer VR – at an accelerating pace: everything from small experimental experiences like ultra-popular “Gorilla Tag” to established studios’ new titles (or ports from flat screen well known IP games to VR) e.g. “Walking Dead: Saints & Sinners” hitting the stores almost biweekly. That’s a clear indicator that the VR gaming market is smoothly expanding and beginning to normalize. On the other hand, the consistent popularity of games like VR Fishing, ChessClub VR and Kayak Mirage indicates that a large portion of the current gaming audience is still fascinated with how well VR can imitate real life activities.

In the near future, and in conjunction with substantial hardware improvements (e.g. launch of Quest 3), I think that the consumer VR gaming market will expand beyond attracting players from the legacy core gaming pool - players who already own a PS, XBOX, etc and who tend to compare VR to flat screen AAA games - and see the first waves of gamers that make their debut gaming experiences in VR, with less prejudice and preconceptions. This is pivotal, as it will liberate the medium to create its own identity and truly find its own unique audiences. E.g. whereas a flat screen “Diablo” game is an action RPG, in VR it could be a genuine first person combat and fitness game (with swinging swords and dodging hits by physically bending your body) marketed to a completely different audience. That and the addition of more complex, in-depth and larger in content titles will make VR hardware a more attractive choice for gaming and reset the landscape of the whole gaming market. It will be a great time for thinkers of gaming concepts and mechanics that have previously been impossible to execute.

Seeing the tree but missing the forest

The biggest backlash that VR as a whole endured during 2022 was without a doubt the launch of Meta's Horizon Worlds: the now iconic post of Zuckerberg's avatar selfie posing in front a low-fi version of the Eiffel Tower from inside the social app was somewhat detrimental to the industry and resulted in an overwhelming amount of negative reactions. This stands as evidence that there still is a great deal of confusion around the metaverse, a VR app, the VR hardware and so on.

Those close enough to Meta's VR ecosystem know that Meta progressed the technology in leaps and bounds during 2022. Releasing a new headset, improving and expanding its developer portal and indie dev community, and releasing new great technologies like full body tracking and pass-through APIs; essentially turning its line of existing headsets into AR-ready devices. The Horizon Worlds case, Meta's attempt at recreating essentially a Facebook within VR (a stand-alone app within the store) with all its distinctive components from social interactions, emojis, mini-games and eventually functional brand storefronts that will stand as the equivalent of a Marketplace, is yet another example of a micro verse misinterpreted as the entirety of the metaverse.

Micro verse VS metaverse

2022 was the year of the boom of such micro verses, like the Sandbox, Engage platform, Decentraland, Horizon Worlds and Somnium Space to name a few. Some of them are even accessible from a web browser, without the need of a VR device. Each with its unique flavor and spin, be it an education/meeting platform, or the best place to attend virtual concerts, or a place where a brand can set a toned down virtual store, all share the same fundamental component of social interaction.

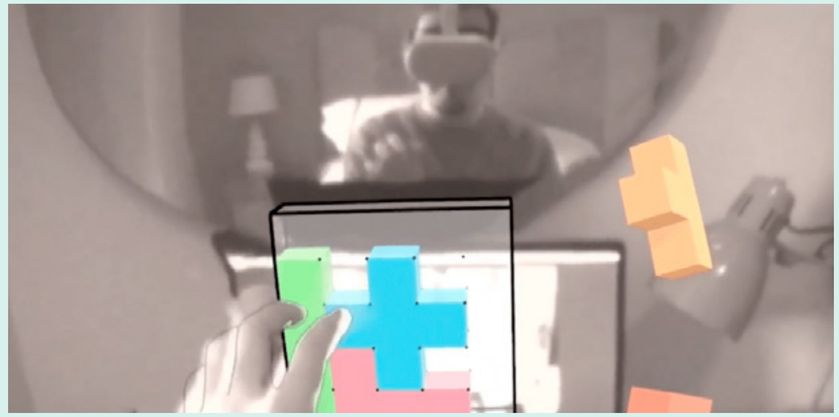
Now, with an intended monetization path aimed at brands setting up, renting, or buying virtual spaces within these micro verses, it is a matter of betting on which, if any, of those micro verses will evolve into “the VR place to be” before funding runs out. I assume that the holy grail for those platforms currently would be to attract/retain as many brands/ corporations as possible in order to build on scale. However, the capabilities of those platforms are still quite limited and could not serve the full spectrum of B2B and B2C brands key activities out there, since that would require true metaverse capabilities.

“Now, with an intended monetization path aimed at brands setting up, renting, or buying virtual spaces within these micro verses, it is a matter of betting on which, if any, of those micro verses will evolve into “the VR place to be”

For example, an automotive brand that wants to host the reveal of its new car model and invite press to the event, could not use any of these platforms, because their product is industrial, intricate, detailed and design-savvy. One such product could not be done justice in a platform that can deliver toy car graphics at best. On the contrary, some brands, mainly B2C from e.g. the food and beverage industry could set up fitting experiences for their consumers even now. These brands can afford being low-fi, playful and quirky, and therefore their audiences resonate well with that. Even more so, their consumers may already be VR users. A good example here is Cheetos building a Halloween experience in Horizon Worlds. Ultimately, to serve all, one such micro verse would have to cover a lot of ground in terms of offering high graphics fidelity (very hardware dependent), advanced customization capabilities and a strong social etiquette or curating entry to certain experiences within a free roaming virtual plane.

Brand-a-rrhea

The above limitations have not stopped many brands from “ente-ring” the metaverse anyway. In my view, this is mainly because metaverse was such an effective buzzword for 2022, and PR is still a major motivator for brands to shed their marketing budgets. Just a single mention of the word “metaverse” next to a brand name would suffice to generate a disproportionate number of headlines (assumed PR value), tones of readership and great brand exposure. This comes as a stark contrast to the actual anaemic attendance from real life people to those events/experiences. To add to that, the mystique surrounding how these events and experiences can be attended, when and how they are activated and from which devi-ce, strengthens the immense need for standardization of usage of VR technology, a solid distribution ecosystem and comprehensive instructions towards the public.



Benefit > Cost of Usage

My personal take is that within 2023, the metaverse as a buzzword will begin to die out and normalization of tools, ecosystems and knowledge around VR will accelerate. Brands will begin to understand more about it, whether they should enter a micro verse or not, in what way and what platform, all in accordance with their marketing goals and audience. At the same time, they will be establishing true KPIs, looking beyond just generating headlines and more towards monetization. It will be a great time for designers of immersive experiences to build great, meaningful use cases around the technology.

More clear assessment of usage of VR technology on a corporate level will begin to become a norm. VR will be used selectively to replace expensive real life activities with tangible benefits, like e.g. training of pilots on a flight simulator that could save airlines millions. But it won't be used for hosting virtual meetings, which would be a subpar experience to the real life or flat screen alternative, with the addition of a VR headset weighing heavy on the user experience.

"Within 2023, the metaverse as a buzzword will begin to die out and normalization of tools, ecosystems and knowledge around VR will accelerate"

As I usually say in my talks, everything built around VR should outweigh the cost of usage for the end consumer/user. The actual cost of usage for the VR technology sadly isn't the x,y,z hardware, but the procedure pit against the outcome. Picking up the headset, going through the steps of isolating yourself from the real world and into another dimension, running even the risk of looking a bit like a fool to the outside, is quite daunting. Whatever is in there, "it better be worth it". The actual process has been cut down to less than a minute nowadays, and it will probably be reduced even more for untethered devices. But this is not enough. The need for unique emotional impact, immersion and storytelling will be the true drivers for users to delve naturally into VR. That would be the benefit trumping the cost.

I think 2023 will be a golden era for innovative UX thinkers and makers to build competitive benefits inside the headsets that will make starting up a VR headset as intuitive as picking up one's iPhone. And to do that, one cannot go about copying existing UX principles, or dull real-life activities. We have to start thinking anew in terms of storytelling, immersion, identity and... magic.

"The need for unique emotional impact, immersion and storytelling will be the true drivers for users to delve naturally into VR"

Inside the mind of:

FRANCO ARZA

Developer at STUDIO FREIGHT

studiofreight.com

Open Source is our present (and future)

Open source software is the foundation of my love for programming. I've been using it for as long as I can remember, and it's always been a personal principle to give back to the community that has given me so much. I believe that collaboration is the key to progress, and that developers can push each other forward by building on top of each other's work and adding our own layers of complexity and functionality.

As someone who has worked at agencies, I've seen first-hand how not to do things. Too often, we take without giving back. But at *Studio Freight*, I've made it a priority to integrate open source software into our workflow. We believe in the value of sharing with the community, and if we find something valuable or interesting, we assume others will too. When we encounter a broken feature or a functionality that's missing, we don't hesitate to write a PR to add it. We believe that if a tool is beneficial to our team, it will likely be beneficial to others as well.

We identify patterns in our projects, abstract them, and build standalone components that can be released as tools or libraries. This is how *Lenis* was born, but it's just one of many things we've shared with the community through *Studio Freight's Darkroom* team. It's always a surprise to see our tools flourish on GitHub, with more stars than we ever expected.

"I believe that collaboration is the key to progress, and that developers ncan push each other forward by building on top of each other's work and adding our own layers of complexity and functionality."

MATTER // 05 RALLY OTHERS ON // 06 CHOOSE THE FUTURE

CONTACT

STUDIO FREIGHT

ABOUT

Studio Freight is an independent creative studio built on principle.

INDEPENDENT

We are owned by ourselves. At the heart of Studio Freight is independent thinking, we choose our opportunities and collaborators, and set our own expectations.

CREATIVE STUDIO

Studio Freight is a creative business, practice, and project. We build brands and experiences. We incubate products and experiments. We invest in companies and people. Our undertakings vary widely, but we approach our work with the intentionality of a studio, not the interests of an agency.

BUILT ON PRINCIPLE

If we don't decide how we build, others will. For our team and clients, our principles guide us in choosing the right partners, avoiding the traps of soft thinking, filtering great opportunities from great temptations, shaking the malaise of hard moments, honoring both performance and artistry, and making work we're all damn proud of.

PROJECTS

DRIVE	VC
LUNCHBOX	COMMERCE SAAS
BAD BOYS	ECOMMERCE
PATH ROBOTICS	MANUFACTURING
REPEAT	COMMERCE SAAS
FRESH PRINCE	ECOMMERCE
OVER COVID	NONPROFIT
ITALIC	ECOMMERCE
BOOST	FOOD & DRINK
TURNER'S	RETAIL
HANGOVER EASY	FOOD & DRINK
ELLIOT	COMMERCE SAAS

PROJECT DETAIL

INFO SITE↗

BUILT ON PRINCIPLE

GITHUB
LENIS
AWWWARDS
TWITTER
INSTAGRAM
VIMEO

P: +1 380.238.9363
E: HELLO@STUDIOFREIGHT.COM

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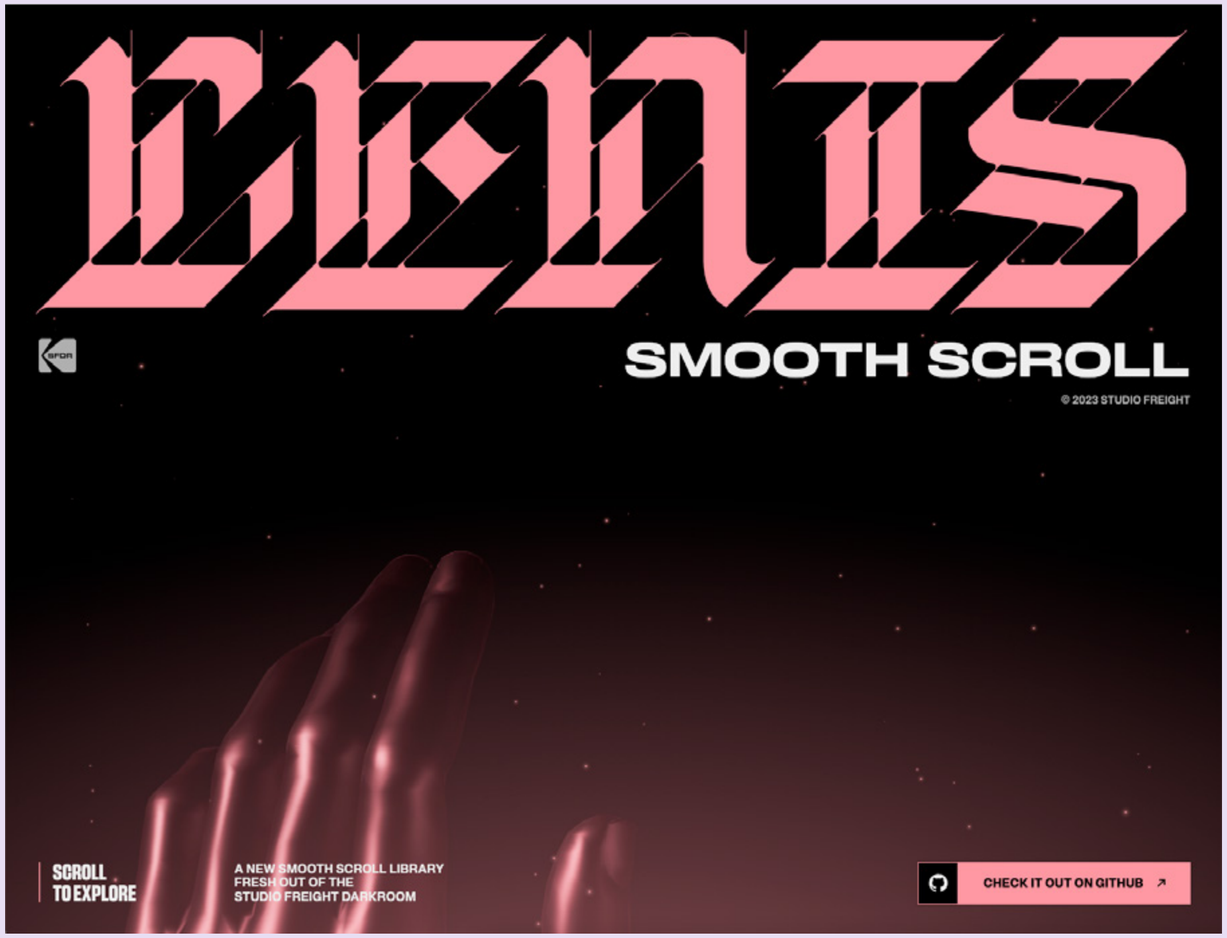
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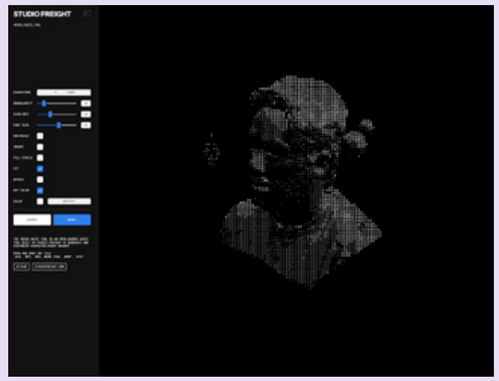
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STUDIO FREIGHT DARKROOM
SFDR
AS THE SPIRIT AVAILS
FOOL APPEARS
COMMITS
CALL ME ISHMAEL. SOME YEARS AGO—NEVER MIND HOW LONG PRECISELY—HAVING LITTLE OR NO MONEY IN MY PURSE
HELL AWAITS

Using open source software has had a positive impact on our workflow and development process. It's not always easy, but we've learned to evaluate and select the right tools for our needs, train our team members on how to use them effectively, and stay up to date with the latest developments in the open source community. And when we do encounter challenges, we work together to overcome them and find solutions.

A few takeaways from my experience: always read the tool's documentation and check the to-do list for opportunities to contribute, and review previous issues (even the closed ones) to see how the community has addressed similar features or ideas. Don't hesitate to contribute and open a PR, it's always welcome, no matter how small it may seem. Don't ever forget that the devs who started the project were beginners once too, and that everything around us was built by people who dreamt about it, and just went for it.

In the end, it's all about giving back and building a better future for everyone. That's the beauty of open source software, and I'm grateful to be a part of it.

Inside the mind of:

ALEX TKACHEV

UI/UX Designer

alextkachev.com

When Art Meets Technology: How AI is Reshaping the Graphic Design Industry

Artificial intelligence has begun to play an important role in our lives, it is used in robotics, SAAS projects, and art if we take the technology of creating arts like DALL·E 2

Here’s a good example of the use of artificial intelligence and augmented reality in a project: *nuro.ai*

The “nuro” team at the same time think about the safety of the planet. The main idea of the project: third-generation autonomous vehicles, built to improve everyday life — for everyone. Basically, their robotic, autonomous vehicles are used for deliveries. For me, this demonstrates the process of interaction between real people, in particular developers with AI, and shows how it’s combined well in one project.

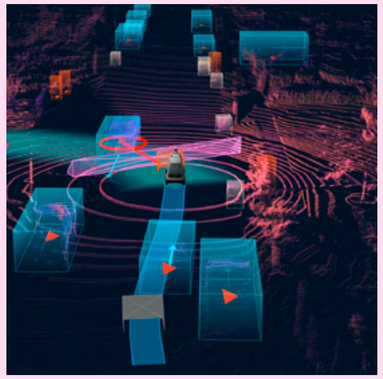
The different startups that attract investors, don’t go unnoticed if their project brings real benefits and simplifies people’s daily life.


Alex
nuro

Design Decisions

Robotics and AI are also suited for agriculture, for example “Small Robot Co”: *smallrobotcompany.com*

Their automated robots help simplify farm life, essentially replacing a human at work. Robotics helps determine weed density and locations, scanning emerging wheat and managing pests.



Small Robot Co - Small is good

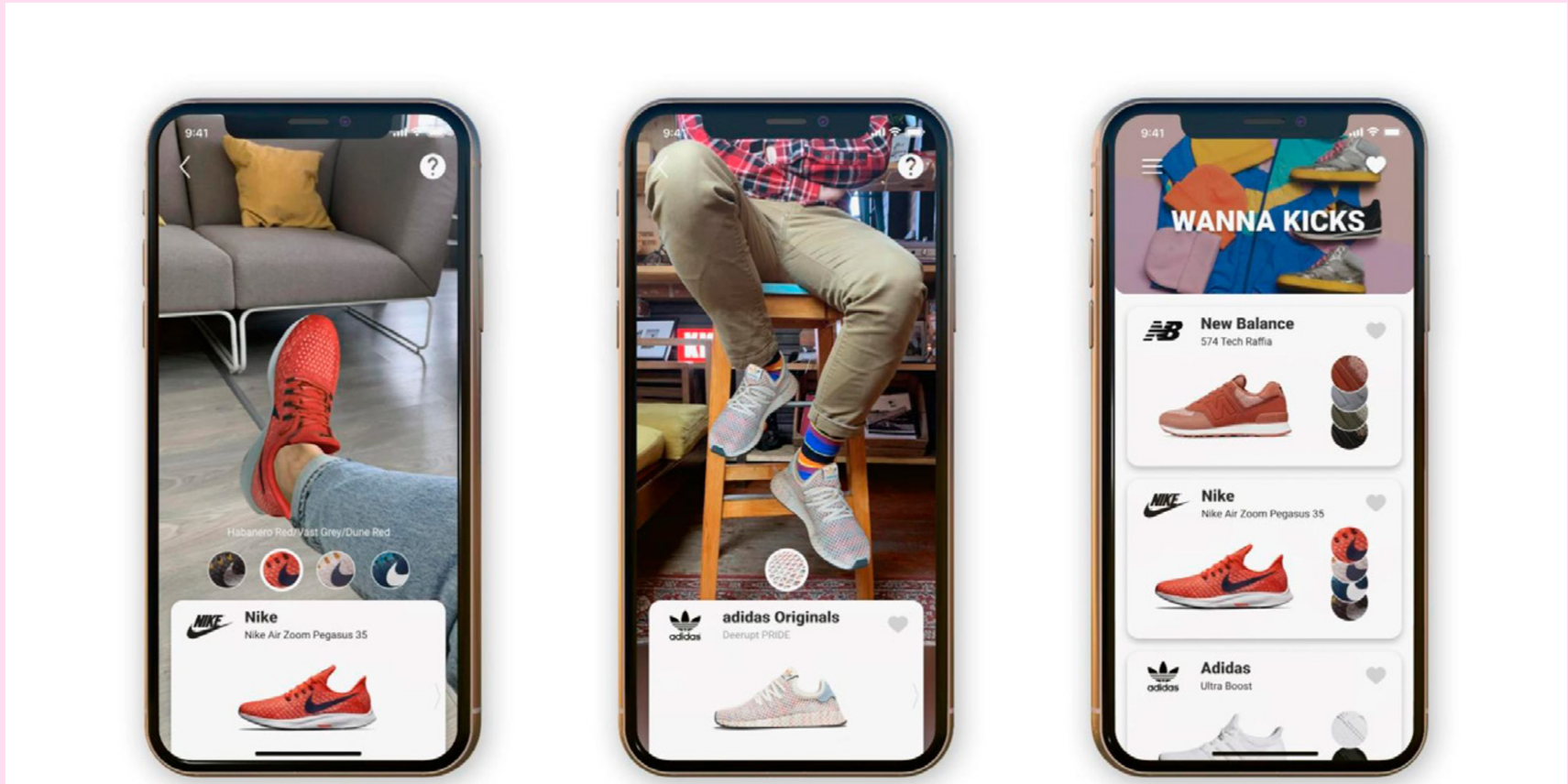
“Their automated robots help simplify farm life, essentially replacing a human at work.

VR & AR

Virtual and augmented reality are mostly associated with entertainment. Video games, metaverses, 360-degree projects where you are completely immersed in what is happening.

My vision of virtual reality goes through video games with even more interaction, for example, a suit that will convey the feelings of the main character. Online services may also use virtual reality, watching movies with friends when you are at a distance. Using services without a remote control and even a TV, in fact, in such an extended direction, you can keep on dreaming up new possibilities.

AR is already being used by various startups and big companies like: IKEA, Amazon, Target. For online shopping, or just to test how a new table will look in your room, and so on. And it will continue to develop in various directions, taking into attention all the hype around NFTs, I don’t exclude that the galleries of a new generation will also gain popularity, exactly with the use of VR and AR.



wanna.fashion

Inside the mind of:

MAURICIO TONON

Digital Creator

tonon.co

AI is awesome!

I’m always curious about everything, and AI tools allow me to explore my curiosity quickly and efficiently. Working as an Art Director for years, the biggest challenge I ever faced was to have too many ideas in my head, and not so much time or even the skills to reproduce them as I desired, that’s the reason why I started learning 3d in the first place, it was the only media that allowed me to create something completely unrealistic, that looks completely believable.

I can’t draw by hand, so illustration is out of the question for me. But even with 3d, it takes at least 1 day to produce 1 piece, when you have 50 ideas per day, that runs short, so when I got in contact with AI generated imagery, it was like a dream, magical thing, that helped me clean my head of crazy ideas on a daily basis. I never intended to use it in my work at first, but it just naturally became part of my workflow on 3d, concepts and moodboards, andt now I use it to create series and final works directly from AI.

“I never intended to use it in my work at first, but it just naturally became part of my workflow on 3d, concepts and moodboards, andt now I use it to create series and final works directly from AI.”

In my daily routine, I use AI from concepts to textures to even final images directly from Midjourney. I usually use it to generate quick concepts which I run with the client, and we make a decision together on the concept, **sometimes directly at the briefing meeting**, then I just produce it in 3d, animate it and ship it. On the other hand, I also use it to generate moodboard images for Experience design and branding work. Instead of scrapping the internet trying to search the perfect ones, I just create it, the way I want. Now I'm thinking of using AI to generate an NFT series, see where it goes.

And about this idea that AI will steal all our jobs, I have this to say:

AI is a tool, like Photoshop, Figma or Cinema 4d, it's just way more efficient and fast. So by itself, the AI will do nothing, literally, will just sit there and get dust on its digital brushes, it DEMANDS human input, the creative part, the idea, to start working. And it's not random at all, especially if you know what you are doing, and that is the reason why artists are the best AI users, because they actually know what they are doing, and not just searching on the internet for a famous artist to put in their prompts. So if you are an "artist" who just knows how to operate a software, yep you will love your job. If you are a creative person that can come up with ideas, concepts, SOLUTIONS, you will be fine and well employed.

Don’t take me wrong, AI limitations are HUGE, until now AI art has generated some weird faces, wrong eyes and hands, oh hands, that’s a big miss, but it’s getting better and better every day, really fast, so soon, the only limitations will be yours as a user, what you can imagine, how far can your mind go, how free you can let your creativity run.

About possibilities, endless too, if you can imagine you can produce it, soon video AI will get to a decent level too, and that will change the whole industry, again. Today you can create textures for your 3d application directly from Midjourney, modify images, create concepts from zero. I see in a few years, everyone in their metaverse room, with a digital display like a painting and every day you can go there, type what you want to see and completely change the mood of your room based on art.

And if you want to start dipping your toes in this area, here is my advice:

Study and practice, be curious and question everything.

For sure, AI looks like magic, but it's just technology well applied. Anyone can get into Midjourney or Dall-E type some words and get a visual pleasant result. But art is not about that. Art imposes doubts, it challenges the conformists and conforms to the audacious, art has a purpose, has a message, needs to make the audience think at least a little. And it's ok to generate beautiful images for the sake of it, but they are this, beautiful images, not art. So study art movements, understand what they were and why they emerged and how artists at that time used art to really change things, study techniques, think about HOW Van Gogh painted those sunflowers. Also, work on your creativity, on your ideas, on your concepts, how you make them come alive is secondary, could be AI, 3d, illustration, music, painting, pottery, the list goes on and on, but only you can have the idea, only you can be curious about something and question the status quo and provide a new solution, not AI, not machines, but you. And staying hydrated is really important.

"But art is not about that. Art imposes doubts, it challenges the conformists and conforms to the audacious, art has a purpose, has a message, needs to make the audience think at least a little"

Inside the mind of:

JONATHAN MORIN

Designer at JOMOR DESIGN

jomor.design

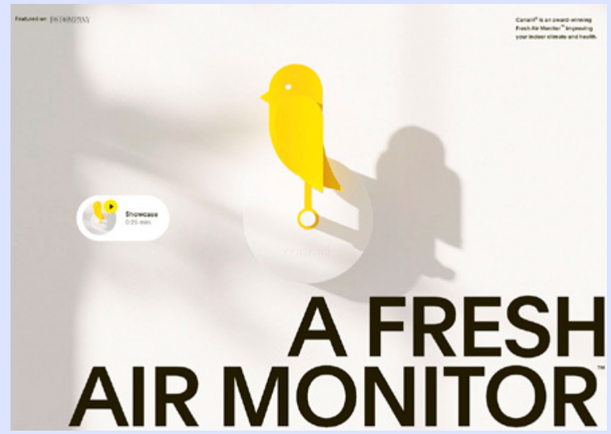
What about that “no-code” thing?

Every day, we're seeing more and more no-code tools, jobs, and workflows coming into play. **The emergence of no-code tools was bound to happen sooner or later**. Coding is no cakewalk. It is insanely complex to master—truly master— and it's a never-ending battle to try and stay up to date with every progression the industry is going through. It's hard enough to be at the top of your game in any field; it's especially hard if you're looking to become full-stack developers. The pressure is indisputable, and every coder trying to "crush it" is feeling that weight. So if you're a coder busting your ass to stay ahead of the curve, I truly applaud you.

That said, here is something that absolutely rings true to me; (Get ready to clutch your pearls) *Even people who can't code should have the ability to create for the web*. What!? Blasphemy!

The people who founded no-code tools noticed that undeniable need and longing from the non-coding majority. It became some kind of unavoidable necessity. The truth of the matter is; **people should be able to build websites[1], apps[2], workflows[3], without having to devote their entire lives to learn all the ever-changing intricacies of the coding world. From day one, the goal was to democratize "the web".** This whole thing was founded on the idea that we could level the playing field and make it accessible—at least on some level—to all.

websites[1]



birdie.design

icam-inox

contekst

So why are we seeing this rapid expansion of no-code tools in our industry?

The answer is easy; *demand*. People crave that power and the opportunities that come from using those tools. The overwhelming majority of individuals who don't know how to code still want the ability to create for the web or, at least, have the option to. The beauty of it all; there's something in it for everyone. No matter what specific sector you're in, whatever role you play, in whatever type of company, chances are there's a no-code/low-code tool out there for you. One or many, that could help you in your day to day, and increase your bottom line. What's not to love about that?

apps[2]

webflow.com/apps

workflows[3]

How to structure Webflow CMS workflows Webflow CMS Automations Part 1

No-code, shmo-code

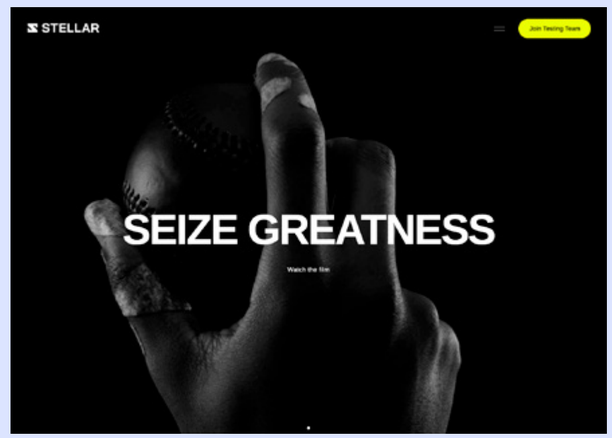
Let's be clear—just so we're all on the same page—*everything uses code*. We all know that. So when we hear terms like *no-code* and *low-code*, we should know that those aren't descriptive of the technologies themselves, but rather descriptive of the way people can interact with them, i.e. people don't need to know code in order to use the tools. For me—even though I still use a whole bunch of "no-code tools" in my everyday life; Figma, Illustrator, iCal, microwave, washer and dryer—my main weapon of choice is Webflow. I use it to build top-notch websites[4]. Webflow is a major asset for my business. A short list of benefits that come from using Webflow would look something like; Focus and flexibility, quicker turnarounds, rapid prototyping (using the actual browsers), user-friendly CMS for my clients, quality results, accessibility optimization, etc. And to top it all off, this tool has also been a stepping stone into the coding world—as a designer—allowing me to better understand the ins and outs of website making, which is nothing to discount.

Just like the future of code itself, the future of no-code looks very promising. More and more novel professions will see the light of day, and that will impact our industry's landscape for the better. We'll simply need to do our best to navigate those new opportunities and learn to adjust as we go. Luckily for us, we're already pretty good at that kind of thing.

websites[4]

jomor.design

priestess



forstellar

Inside the mind of:

NORMAN DUBOIS

Designer & Founder at UNDESIGNED

normandubois.design

Trend based design vs brand based design

Have you ever wondered why so many websites look the same? You see a lot of similar type combinations, layout grids and animation effects in recent websites. Is it just a coincidence? Or are we just copying design trends, because we think they're beautiful? Sure, trends are cool and who doesn't love scrolling through the awwwards website, visiting all the amazing websites featured there. But do we really want to see the same designs over and over again? Does it really help our clients? Or are we just trying to copy some trends just to get featured, too? Maybe we are too focused on becoming famous, when instead we should care what really visualizes and helps the companies and brands we are working for.

So what's the solution for all of that?

First of all, we should take a step back and start with a clear strategy. Start with a concept first, before you jump on the computer and browse through all those fancy inspiration sites. Involve some kind of brand strategy - even if you're designing "just" a website. That may help you come up with a new idea for unique design solutions. To create something different. To create something meaningful. To stand out. And, you don't run into danger of just copying some trends.

Start with simple questions: What's the business? What are the core values? Who is the brand/website targeting? What other brands does the target audience like? What is the brand's position in the market? Who is the competition and how does the brand/website stand out? You could even think of how to translate the physical experience of the brand/product in the digital space!

With this information, you can come up with a concept and distil that in your visual elements. Keep in mind - every design choice should have a clear rationale behind it. If you combine typeface - does it make sense? Don't just copy a grotesk with a serif typeface just because you've seen it on some websites before. Ask yourself: Does it add to the concept? Does it make sense? Do I really need to put that word into an italic cut, or is it just because everyone else is doing it? Does that kind of highlight makes sense? If you don't have a rationale doing it, just don't. I know - type is beautiful. Everyone loves type. That's nice. But, it's important that you don't just use it because you like it.

The most important thing to remember is that you're not creating for some judges, the fame or for yourself (If it's not your portfolio...). You are creating for your clients and their users. So create a design that speaks to them. The fame will come automatically if you do great work!

"The most important thing to remember is that you're not creating for some judges, the fame or for yourself (If it's not your portfolio...). You are creating for your clients and their users."

Here are some examples, where you can see how a concept is being translated into a design language.

TRUE STAGING

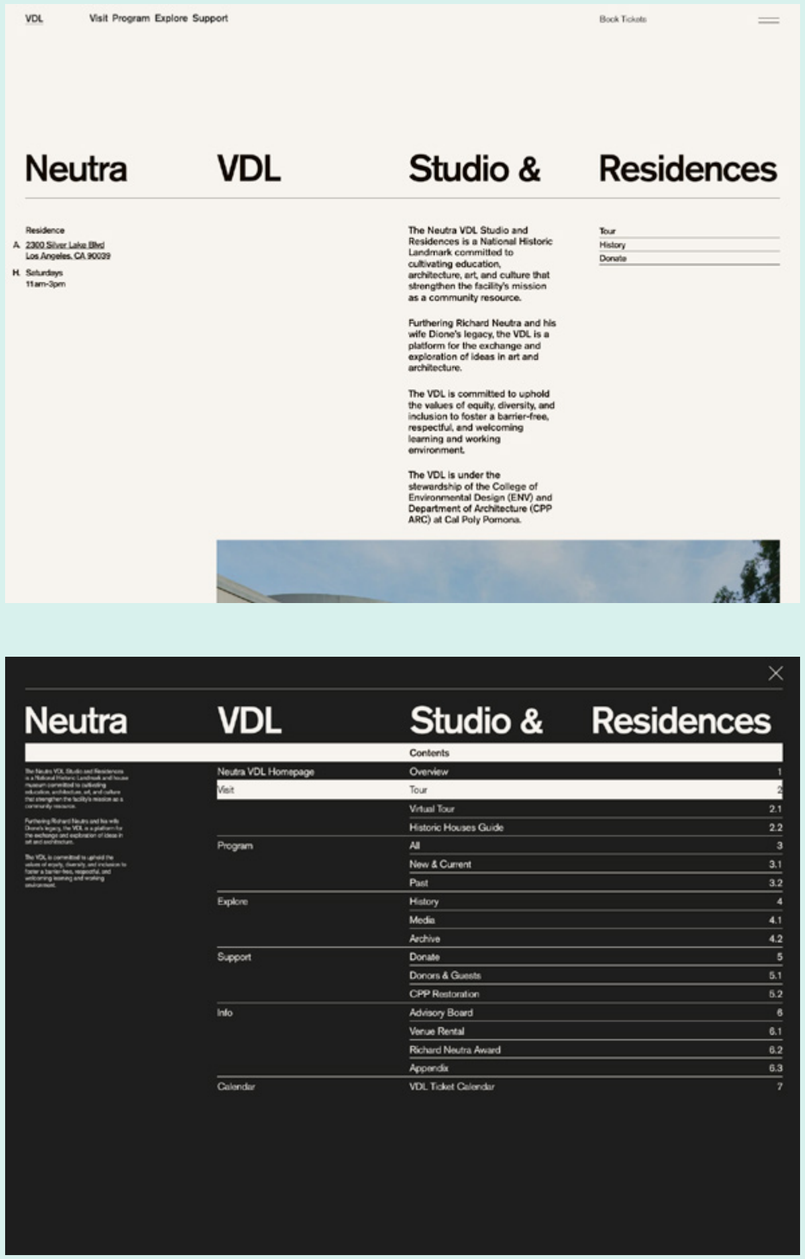
3D is trendy. Interactive experiences are trendy. But here it makes sense. It abstracts the companies core business and transforms that into a digital environment. The design choices have a clear rationale behind them.

truestaging.co.uk

NEUTRA VDL

Swiss typography and editorial based layouts are trendy. But here it pays tribute to the brand. The grid based layout is not created because of a trend, but because it fits the brand's character and the kind of content that is displayed.

neutra-vdl.org



JAMS BASIC AGENCY

BASIC took inspiration from the physical objects. They abstracted the physical experience of playing a vinyl into a digital layout and design element.

jams.basicagency.com

NICCOLO MIRANDA

The concept of an analog newspaper is visible throughout the whole experience. The intro animation is reminiscent of a spinning newspaper that gets thrown in front of you, the type combination pays tribute to newspaper typography. The designer wanted to convey that editorial, newsletter style layout & took inspiration out of the printed object.

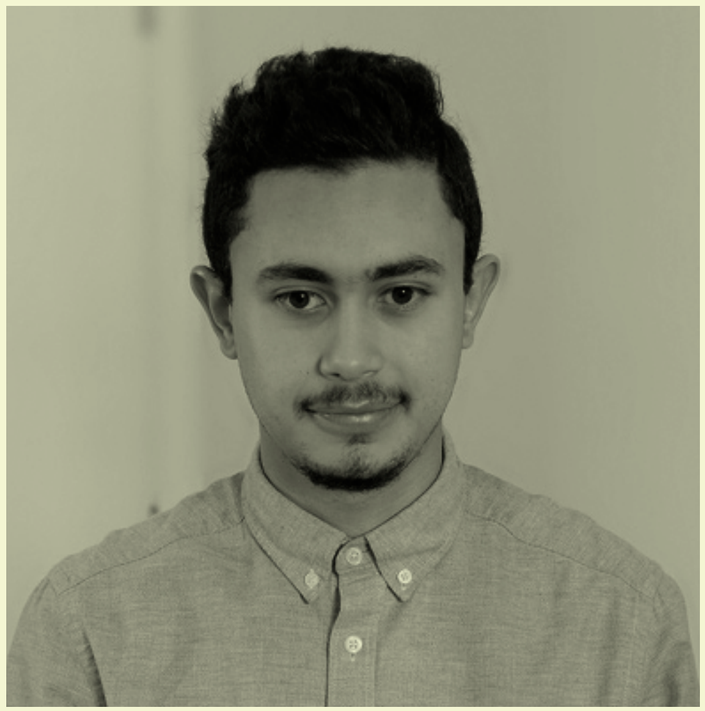
niccolomiranda.com

Inside the mind of:

RODOLPHO HENRIQUE

Designer at MCKINSEY & COMPANY

rodolphohenrique



Democratizing the web, the digital world is for everyone

Think about the process to get your idea on the internet 10 years ago: You would probably need experts with specific skills to sketch, design, test, and code, just to give life to your idea. The access to technology and design to build something and put it out there was a niche for only a few people from a few social bubbles.

This sounds fine for big institutions, that historically have the power of money to burn, but now, think about small or micro organizations, a freelancer photographer in Africa, or a business owner in Colombia, who doesn't even have a budget to spend on a website

Democratization of the web refers to the process by which access to the web and technology rapidly continues to become more accessible to more people. That's why I truly believe this new wave of no-code tools is a really important milestone in the digital world.

1. I'm really optimistic to see how the "no-code" tools (like Webflow — which I'm a huge fan of) are growing fast. I don't believe they will ever replace the full development, but there is a great thing that comes with these tools — the fact of democratizing the web.

2. Programmers and designers know their jobs won't disappear with a broad-scale no-code takeover (even no-code is built on code), that's where the 'democratization' aspect lies

The biggest advantage of no-code tools is that it doesn't require any advanced coding skills. It allows you to test your ideas without needing any experts; automation is done through plug & play and drag & drop mechanisms.

3. Thinking from a product/service perspective, these tools can be a great way to prototype and test new ideas. Using no-code platforms allow you to create and publish applications quickly, so you can rapidly test out different scenarios and see how they work in the real world. This whole process brings the strong power to iterate and validate ideas quickly

The raising of no-code apps that enable people without coding skills to build, automate, and innovate — all without writing a single line of code.

WEBFLOW	*webflow.com*
BRAVO	*bravostudio.app*
RUNAWAY	*runwayml.com*
BUBBLE	*bubble.io*
STAGE	*stage.so*
LANDBOT	*landbot.io*
NOTION	*notion.so*
FRAMER X	*framer.com*

Thanks to our community

without you, the wonderful ecosystem of inspiration that is awwwards would not be possible

awwwards.