

PEDAL OFF THE METAL
AN INVESTIGATION INTO GLOBAL DESIGN AND THE
POLITICS OF CONSUMPTION

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ABSTRACT

The research presented in this thesis is an investigation into global design and the politics of consumption. The aim of the research is to provide a survey of seventy-nine key global design events held in 2014 and present the results of an empirical study of the key components witnessed in the staging of a global design event. The second aim of the study is to discuss the role that global design events play in perpetuating global inequalities as cities are further shaped by creative economic policy. The written research component of this thesis is used to inform my creative projects and communication design practice.

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Introduction

Project Overview

As digital technology continues to evolve, it has become more apparent that we exist as local, regional, national, and global citizens. Without ever leaving the comfort of our homes, we are connected globally through the consumption of products and services; mass consumption connects the rich to the poor, the producers to the consumers, and the west to the east, the north, and the south. A quick glance at the items on my little desk in west Toronto shows traces of a global network; coloured pencils designed in Springfield, Illinois made somewhere in China; an Energizer battery charger made in China with instructions written in French and English; scrapbooking parts made by a small paper company in Kyoto, Japan; a tattered manila envelope sent from Ljubljana, Slovenia, containing a book published by a press in Queensland, Australia. With very little effort, my consumption habits span the globe. I am confronted with the visceral delight in having these items on my desk and the knowledge that these privileges are not without cost to someone, somewhere. These items embody the unsettling reality that the negative effects of global mass consumption, including climate instability, water and food shortages, the dwindling of resources, and ensuing political conflicts, are most severely felt by the the most vulnerable and least privileged members of society.

In a highly visual, digital and global world, there is a heightened awareness of our global interdependence and the planet as a finite space. We are connected through flows of information, knowledge, money, commodities, people and images. The spatial distance once felt has collapsed through technological developments in communication, transportation, production, and distribution

strategies. While the global ubiquity of American brands like Coca-Cola, Disney, and McDonalds are widely seen as a flattening or homogenization of local cultures, more nuanced readings show that these forces of homogenization are also met with resistance as cultures seek to assert their unique identities, and nations seek to differentiate. As sociologist Mike Featherstone argues, one paradoxical consequence of the process of globalization and the awareness of the finitude of the planet and humanity, is not to produce homogeneity but to familiarize us with greater diversity, the extensive range of local cultures (Featherstone, 1993, p.169). Featherstone also notes that this familiarity with other cultures via global flows such as immigration, media, travel, products and technology, does not imply greater tolerance or cosmopolitanism. Increased exposure to other cultures and ideologies may also lead to “a retreat from the threat of cultural disorder into the security of ethnicity, traditionalism or fundamentalism, or the active assertion of the integrity of a national culture in global cultural prestige contests” (Featherstone, 1993, p.174). Featherstone’s argument is helpful in contextualizing global design events in a globalized world that is both increasingly tolerant and xenophobic. Global design events follow a long tradition of global prestige contests through which countries promote business-class design tourism and cultural consumption that reasserts national identities, and defines what its national culture is—and what it is not.

My research is an investigation into the global design event as an act of national identity building based on cultural consumption at the level of the city. The research is an empirical study and quantitative analysis of the seventy-nine key global design events listed on the 2014 Dezeen World Design Guide. As design practice becomes further entrenched in market values, *Pedal Off The Metal* is a call to slow down and reimagine the possibilities of design communication. It

reflects my belief that designers have a responsibility to be socially and politically engaged with the communities and environments we live in, and our impact locally and globally.

Branding Cities Through Soft Power

The shift from mass production to flexible specialization and niche markets in the late 80s sparked an increased interest in space specific culture and the representational power of the city. Though governments had long practiced the art of promotion to differentiate itself from other locales, it was at this time that the systematic application of marketing became accepted as a valid activity for public sector management agencies (McCannell, 1973). In 1989, the Marxist geographer David Harvey published a survey on the postmodern condition, locating a new economic order organized around consumer markets and symbolic goods related to new forms of social distinction and identity (Harvey, 1989). Harvey saw this as capital's 'culture fix', which he saw working particularly at the level of the city, where spectacles, festivals, shopping, experiences and ethnic quarters had transformed the derelict industrial cities of the developed world into centers of upmarket cultural consumption (Harvey, 1989). The commodification of culture and urban social spaces has intensified over the past few decades, as culture and creativity is further incorporated into the local economic policies of cities globally (Hesmondhalgh, 2002, Florida, 2002, DCMS, 2001). Sociologist Mike Featherstone has suggested that the current phase of globalization may be comparable to the intense period of globalization between 1880 and 1920, which "drew in more nations into a tightly structured, global figuration of independence and power balances, (producing) an intense nationalism and willful nostalgia" (Featherstone, 1993). This combination of nationalism and nostalgia can be seen manifested in the establishment of national symbols and ceremonies, the reinvention of traditions, and the reconstitution of collective national identities by the state. More recently, Harvey's culture fix can be seen as an insidious tourism marketing

strategy dubbed “bragging rights” a perceived entitlement to communicate about one's accomplishments (Bragging rights and destination marketing, 2014). As military power and strong-arm tactics continue to have negative effects on global popularity, the concept of soft power has gained traction among global powers and emerging nations. Joseph Nye, the American political scientist widely accepted as the pioneer of the concept of soft power, sees power as the ability to influence the behavior of others to get desired outcomes. According to Nye,

There are several ways one can achieve this: you can coerce them with threats; you can induce them with payments; or you can attract and co-opt them to want what you want. This soft power – getting others to want the outcomes you want – co-opts people rather than coerces them (Nye, 1990).

Nye identifies soft power as a measure of a country’s attractiveness, based on three main resources: Culture, Political Values, and Policies. Based on Nye’s approach, the global consulting firm EY published a document for emerging markets stating that the variables of soft power could be broken down into three general categories: Global Integrity, Global Integration, and Global Image (fig.1).



Figure 1. Soft Power Variables, rapid growth markets. Ernst & Young (2012)

However, as Nye cautions, the concern with soft power is that it is not a leveling of global power; whether co-optive or coercive, the power of a nation is already determined by existing historical relationships of power (Nye, 1990).

In December 2013, the London-based Monocle Magazine published its fourth annual Soft Power Survey. The survey ranks the top thirty most attractive countries and identifying factors contributing to their climb or fall in the rankings. Countries are ranked according to a broad grouping of five factors used to increase the soft power of a country (fig. 2), and then further broken down into subcategories including diplomatic infrastructure, annual tourists, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, high-ranking universities, foreign students, world-class athletes, global brands, architecture, gastronomy, music, film, and pop culture (fig. 3). The results show that Germany, the UK, USA, France, and Japan were considered the most attractive by other nations. These results echo Nye's belief that soft power is not a leveling power; the most economically powerful countries in the world were also ranked the most attractive, propped up by existing wealth and networks of global influence.

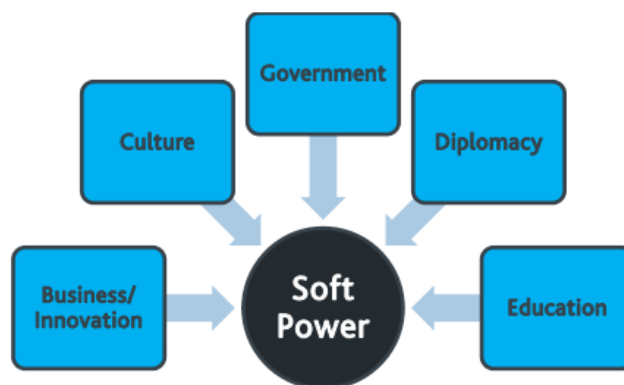


Figure 2. Component Parts of Soft Power, Monocle/Institute for Government (2010)

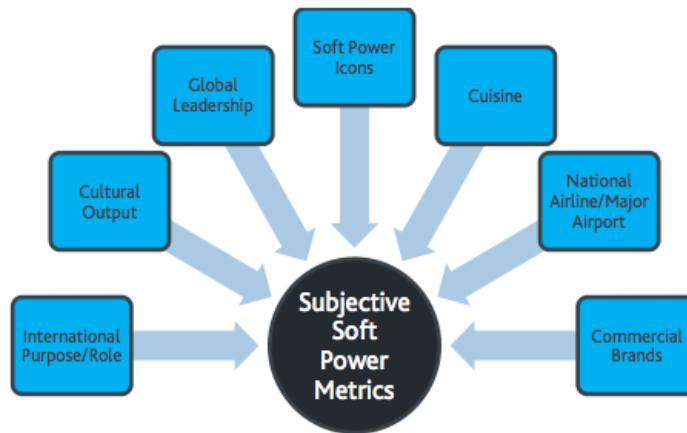


Figure 3. Subjective Categories, Monocle/Institute for Government (2010)

Over the past two decades, the role of place has emerged as a critical force in the growth of the meetings industry. The UN World Tourism Organization released a report on best practices for the MICE industry (Meetings, Incentives, Conferencing, Exhibitions), a sector strongly focused on the destination potential of cities, stating that the industry is a key driver of economic growth, regional cooperation and intellectual development with many emerging markets hoping to follow the economic successes of Singapore and Hong Kong. The MICE industry in Singapore is thriving much in part to a government-led initiative to create The Singapore Exhibition & Convention Bureau (SECB), which aims to promote Singapore as a dynamic business events destination. The Singapore Tourism Board website states that in 2013, “Singapore hosted 3.5 million business visitors, an increase of 3 percent from the same period in 2012. These visitors spent an estimated S\$5.5 billion (excluding sightseeing, entertainment, and gaming expenditure).” A 2013 report released by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC) indicates a 6.5% increase in overnight tourists between 2011 and 2012, with the boost of over two million visitors that year accredited to the MICE

industry. The drive to assert its global identity is evident in the HKTDC report, claiming its status as “Best Business City in the World” at the 2012 Business Traveller Asia-Pacific Travel Awards, and “Best City for Business Events” in the prominent MICE publication CEI Asia.

This research will explore the role that global design events play as a strategy in national identity building and as part of a growing industry of business-class tourism. Using the soft power indexes as a starting point, the research in the next section provides a survey of the key components of a global design event, followed by a discussion of the findings. The goal of the research is to contextualize global design in the creative economy, and locate the current status quo of design in a market-driven context. The data will help to understand the relationship between design and consumption at the level of the city, and provide a platform from which to reimagine and reclaim the design process as a socially conscious practice.

Research Design & Data Collection

The Dezeen World Design Guide was selected as a research site for three main reasons: 1) The publication is well-established and influential in its field, 2) The information is easily accessible to the public via the internet, and 3) The events listed cover design on a broad scope, and draw a global audience.

Design Parade	Hyères, France	Villa Noailles
Design Shanghai	Shanghai, China	Shanghai Exhibition Centre
Design Week Portland	Portland, Oregon	Various
Designer's Days	Paris, France	Various
DesignEX	Sydney, Australia	Sydney Exhibition Centre
DesignMarch	Reykjavik, Iceland	Various
Designs of the Year	London, UK	Design Museum
Diseño República Dominicana	Santo Domingo, Dominican Rep.	Centro Cultural de España
DMY Berlin	Berlin, Germany	Airport Berlin Tempelhof
Domaine de Boisbuchet	Boisbuchet, France	Domaine des Boisbuchet
Downtown Design Dubai	Dubai, UAE	The Venue
Dutch Design Week	Eindhoven, Netherlands	Various
Feria Habitat Valencia	Valencia, Spain	Feria Valencia
FID	San Jose, Costa Rica	Antigua Aduana
Formex	Stockholm, Sweden	Stockholmsmässan
Furniture China	Shanghai, China	Shanghai New International Expo Centre
Future Everything Festival	Manchester, UK	Manchester Town Hall
Habitat Expo	Mexico City, Mexico	World Trade Centre
Helsinki Design Week	Helsinki Finland	Various

Figure 4. Sample image of global design events data collection (2014)

The methodology was guided by an empirical study of the Dezeen World Design Guide of key global design events, using a quantitative content analysis approach to the research. The data was collected from 79 key design events listed on the Dezeen website. In addition to the information gathered on Dezeen, the sources included individual websites, relevant news and social media sites, and Wikipedia. The data was categorized into ten main categories as follows: 1) Event Title, 2) City, 3) Venue, 4) Date, 5) Duration, 6) Founding Date, 7) Event Category, 8) Main Partners and Sponsors, 9) Themes and Categories, and 10) Social Media (fig.4).



Figure 5. Design events word frequency visualization using Wordle (2014)

The information was then formatted using data visualization software from the website Datawrapperr, and text analysis was conducted using the online word frequency generators Wordle and TagCrowd. The results were recorded and analyzed (fig. 5). The Main Partners and Sponsors category and the Themes and Categories section yielded the greatest volume of data. The data was edited to include only the significant findings in the visualizations. 650 items were collected for the Main Partners and Sponsors category (fig. 6). The Themes and Categories analysis was conducted using 1500 thematic words collected from the websites.

This research aims to give a broad scope of global design through the analysis of one set of data. Events listed on Dezeen are identified as “key fairs, conferences, and festivals” in global architecture and design. Three attempts were made to contact Dezeen regarding the details of the selection criteria, but no further information could be gathered. Another path could have been to include data from other sources such as ICOGRADA or Design Week, however, the Dezeen listings were the most comprehensive and accessible at the time of research.

Government + Cultural Institutions	Academic Institutions	Banks	Trade Assoc	Events Organizers & Fair Venues	Auto Industry	Supply Chain/Logistics
53NOMA	Amalhuac University	ABN AMRO	ABTT	100%Design	Audi	DHL
A&C Republic South Africa	Design Academy Eindhoven	Erste	AMIDMO	100%Design	Audi	MCX
Abelia	Finnish Culture & Academic Inst.	Slovenská sporiteľňa	Asia/Pacific Design Federation	100%Design	Audi	Laender Express
AECID	Goethe Institute	National Bank	Alliance Française des Designers	IIDEX	Audi	Merit International
Agglomeration Community of Toulon Provence Mediterranean	Keio University	ING	American Hardwood Export Council	IDS	Audi	
Algeria Ministry of Culture	Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University	La Caixa	American Society of Interior Designers	Biennale Interieurs	Audi	
Amsterdam Fund for the Arts	Parsons	Worldpay	RGD	Bayern Design	Audi	
Apex Brazil	Pratt	United Credit Tiriac Bank	Association of German Industrial Designers	BDC	Audi	
Arts Centre Melbourne	The Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts	AWS	D&AD	BDC	Audi	

Figure 6. Sample image of data collection: Partners and Sponsors

The image shows a screenshot of the 'dezeen guide' website. On the left, a world map displays numerous red location pins. A pop-up window for 'Barcelona Design Week' is visible, providing details such as the location (Barcelona, Spain), dates (7-14 June 2014), and a description of the event as a series of conferences, exhibitions, and networking sessions. On the right side of the page, there is a navigation menu with 'Home', 'Calendar', 'About', 'Search', and 'Dezeen'. Below this, a section titled '2013 2014' lists various design events in a red-bordered table. The events listed include: 50th Anniversary New York, AIA Convention, Architecture International, Amsterdam, Architect @ Work, Barcelona Design Week, Beijing Design Week, Bologna Design Week, Biennale Interieur, and D&AD.

Figure 7. Dezeen Guide to key global design events (2013/2014)

Components of a Global Design Event

The components of a global design event were researched using all seventy-nine events listed in the Dezeen World Events guide (fig. 7). From the results of the data collection and the ten categories established, five main components were found. The components will be discussed under the following five headings: 1) Bright Lights, Big Cities: the city and venue as existing global brands, 2) Spectacular Investments: the partners and sponsors that drive the events, 3) Celebrity Endorsements: the programming of the event and the celebrity guests used to draw ticket sales, 4) Luxury Living: the celebration consumption through the marketing of high-end lifestyles, and 5) Media Buzz: social media for the purposes of promotion, profit, and future events.

Bright Lights, Big Cities

Predictably, the international status and brand identity of the city itself was a key aspect in the planning of a global design event. This section will discuss the importance of location to the events. A textual analysis revealed that the name of the host city or country was incorporated into 56.5% of the event titles. 74% of the host cities were national capitals, or cities larger than the capital. International accessibility was a key consideration, and 93% of the host cities surveyed had international airports of the same name; the remaining 7% of host cities were located in Belgium and France. With the exception of Domaine de Boisbuchet, which can be reached domestically by air via Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris, the remaining host cities were less than 100km away from an international airport.

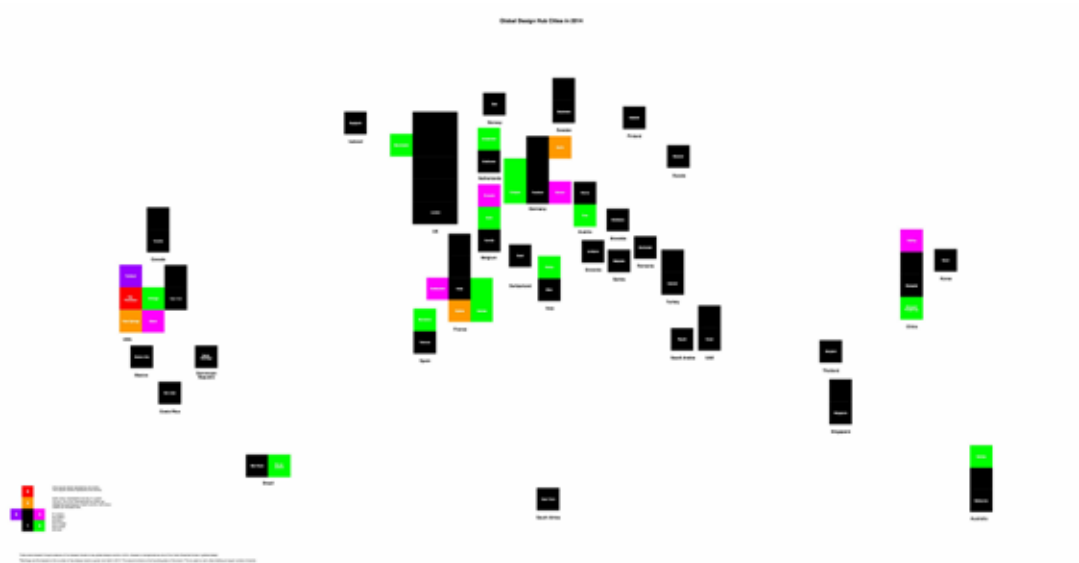


Figure 8. Cities of Global Design, 2014

As seen in figure 8, the data taken from Dezeen shows a high concentration of design events in London, hosting ten international design events in 2014. Each colour block represents a different city. Two stacked blocks of the same colour indicates that the city hosted two global design events in 2014. Three blocks represents three events. Frankfurt and Paris were second with three key events each, followed by New York, Toronto, Cannes, Stockholm, Cologne, Istanbul, Dubai, Singapore, Shanghai, and Melbourne with two key events each. Over half of the events were held in EU countries. Global design events depend on the positive branding of the city to attract visitors and potential investors, and to set the stage for various transactions to occur.



Figure 9. Establishment of global design events by founding date, 2014

The second aspect surveyed was the founding date of the events (fig. 9). Parallel to the rise of soft power and the creative industries in the late 80s, we can see a sharp increase in the number of global design events. 61 of 75 events surveyed were founded in the 1980s or later. 50 of 75 events were founded after 2000. The increased interest in the national identity, the symbolic value of cities, and place branding is reflected in the establishment of annual global design events.

The third aspect surveyed was the venue and category of the event. The majority of the events were at a single venue, namely large exhibition, trade and conference centers (fig. 10). A textual analysis of the terms used in the event descriptions on each individual website revealed that the word exhibition was the most frequently used. Festival, and fair were the next most frequently used, followed by the words event, trade and conference. Series, Networking, and workshops were also used to categorize the nature of the events.

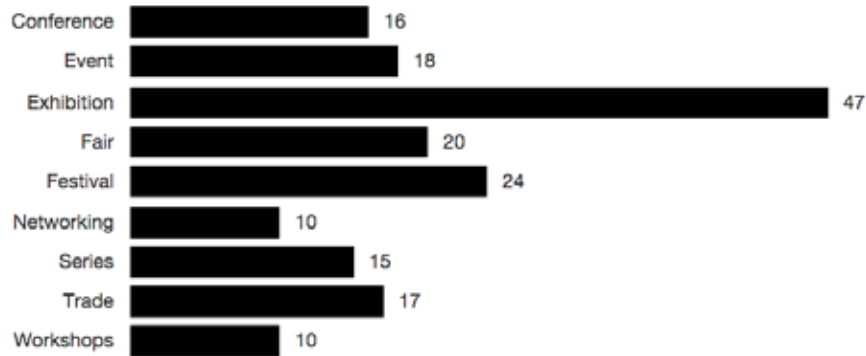


Fig. 10. Frequency of key words used to describe global design events, 2014

Venues in this category were found to have common characteristics. 3D Printshow is held at the Metropolitan Pavilion, an historic five-story building in Chelsea, a western borough of Manhattan and the center of the New York art world. Alldesign Istanbul is held at the Hilton Istanbul Bosphorus, a five-star resort-style hotel and convention center in the heart of Istanbul. Creativities Unfold, the design event in Bangkok, is held on the sixth floor of the Emporium Shopping Complex. Emporium is Bangkok’s first luxury lifestyle mall, housing five-star luxury suites, entertainment, a national design center, and direct sky train access. Design Shanghai is held at the Shanghai Exhibition center, once the tallest buildings in Shanghai and a major landmark of the city. It was built in 1955 to commemorate the alliance between China and the Soviet Union and is situated along the premier shopping streets of Shanghai. Single-venue events were 1) Centrally located at prestigious landmark buildings, 2) Located near luxury lifestyle shopping areas and high-end entertainment districts, and 3) Had direct access to or in the immediate vicinity of five-star luxury accommodations.

Many of the events indicated their location as “Various”. Current research by the tourism and destinations management industry, indicate a trend towards

multi-venue event mobilizing a greater number of spaces around the city. The shift in local economic policies towards creative cities sparked an increased focus on what urban geographer Peter Hall describes as the indefinable aspects of urban life — the “atmosphere”, “buzz”, or “vibe” of the city — which have become commonspeak in the events industry (Hall, 1998). Paris Design Week organized their programming into city-wide ‘circuits’. Participants could choose from circuit options, such as Art & Design, Design & Architecture, Food & Design, Design in France, and Fashion & Design. Melbourne Indesign showcases three distinct design districts within the city, all within walking distance of each other. The Mextropoli event in Mexico City incorporates keynote speakers and workshops with bicycle tours of the city and a mobile radio project. Events held at multiple venues often included architectural and cultural landmarks, workshops, and planned social opportunities. In addition to exhibition and trade fair style events, programming was extended to include city and studio tours, restaurants featuring regional cuisine, cocktail and bar nights, film screenings, and musical events. While single-venue events seemed to focus on showcasing wealth, luxury, and prestige, multiple-venue events programming appeared to focus on staging a personal connection between the attendee, the city, and the local culture. Both single and multiple venue events are designed to attract attention and place recognition, and reveal what aspects of local culture are valuable to the city brand.

Spectacular Investments

An empirical study was conducted to understand the breakdown of funding sources for key design events. A list of 650 main sponsors, supporters, and partners was collected from the event websites and categorized into 23 industries.

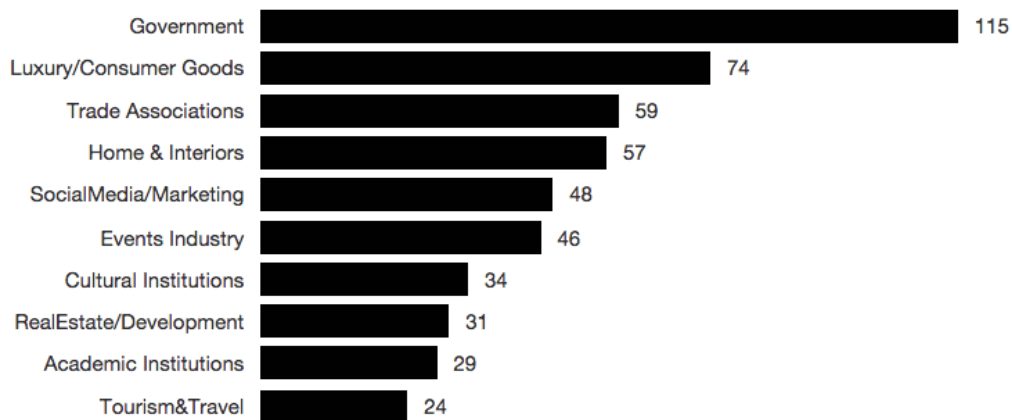


Figure 11. The top ten categories for the funding of global design events, 2014

The top ten categories of sponsors and partners were 1) Government, 2) Luxury and Consumer Brands, 3) Trade Associations, 4) Home and Interior Brands, 5) Social Media and Marketing, 6) Events Industry, 7) Cultural Institutions, 8) Real Estate and Development, 9) Academic Institutions, and 10) Tourism and Travel (fig. 11). This kind of large-scale network, according to geographer and public policy educator Allen J. Scott, is one of the conditions necessary conditions for the emergence of a creative city as a distinctive unit on the contemporary global landscape (Scott, 2006). In addition, the ten categories of sponsors and partners of these events were found to reflect the necessary components of soft power (Business, Culture, Government, Diplomacy, Education).

In the government sector, the majority of support came from local or national councils, city ministries of arts, culture, commerce, and tourism. Events were also supported by local foreign embassies. A significant amount of support also came from local chambers of commerce. Global design events are perceived to have a positive impact on the global image of a city, promoting a positive image

of local and national governments, and drawing foreign tourism. Government involvement is also supported by the rapid growth of the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) industry. Current MICE research shows that global events help to expand global reach, increase access to new markets, and drive high-end tourism and consumption. Supporting global design events in other countries was also common. The majority of partners and sponsors for the Venice Architecture Biennale were from Australia. Australia was featured at the Italian event, supported by the Australian government, the City of Perth, the University of Western Australia, The University of Sydney, Canberra-based star architect Alastair Swayne, and Australian companies such as Zip boiling water systems. The Shenzhen/Hong Kong Biennale received support from government and cultural institutions in the Netherlands, Germany, and Greece. Supporting events in other countries via guest appearances and foreign embassies also contributes to the development of soft power.



Figure 12. Audi showroom at Design Miami, 2014

Luxury and consumer goods were the second largest category of supporters of these events. Most of the companies provided support for one or two events;

Audi sponsored a total of ten key design events, while BMW supported three (fig. 12). A large number of sponsors were in the beverages industry, including global brands such as Absolut, Tanqueray, Carlsberg, and Perrier-Jouët, as well as non-alcoholic brands such as San Pellegrino, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and Red Bull. Luxury brands such as Van Cleef and Arpels, Fendi, Swarovzki, and Hermes were also key sponsors. Event sponsorship is incorporated into the corporate strategy of companies for many reasons. Supporting events can enhance brand image, engage employees, and gain trust and recognition from local communities. In addition, sponsorship helps companies gain access to specific demographics through advertising, data collection, market research, strategic partnerships and co-branding opportunities. Studies on sponsorship and global sports events show the persuasive power of sponsorship to reach consumers on a psychological level, influencing cognitive and affective responses to the brand, and purchase intentions (JW Kim, 2010). This strategy can be seen in Coca-Cola's participation at the Istanbul Design Biennale, where they sponsored and co-hosted a workshop with designers using bottles and cans to make objects called Happy Designs with Recycled Materials. Studies on the relationship between corporate sponsorship and global events are ongoing. Emerging research also shows that sponsorship has been increasingly used to facilitate major structural changes, such as mergers (JW Kim, 2010).

Supporting trade organizations varied from event to event, but the majority of the support came from the industrial design, interior design, furniture, and architecture industries. Trade organizations represent large powerful networks of companies that often play a significant role in the direction of economic and social policy, and furthering national goals. In the home and interior brands category, a significant amount of support came from kitchen and bathroom companies,

as well as upmarket home appliance brands. Smeg, sponsoring the Venice Architecture Biennale, is an Italian domestic appliance manufacturer with subsidiaries in sixteen countries, as well as two representative offices in Hong Kong and Saudi Arabia. Miele is a German domestic appliance manufacturer, operating in forty-seven countries. Dekla, an luxury interior store in Toronto, is the distributor of Scavolini, Italy's biggest kitchen brand. Scavolini exports to over 50 countries worldwide. The Scavolini website boasts that in some markets it has "built up a brand notoriety so high that it has become synonymous with Italian design." (Scavolini, 2015) In addition were global brands such as Johnson Tiles, Vitra, and IKEA, representing the UK, Switzerland, and Sweden, respectively.

Social media and publishing companies played a large supporting role in the marketing and promotion of these events. The companies in this category were specifically identified as main partners or key sponsors on the event websites. Key contributors in this category were industry-specific social media networks such as Archello and Architonic, web-hosting and marketing companies such as Media Temple, Media Globe, and Roiker, and industry and lifestyle magazines such as Oasis Magazine and Knack Weekend. Other forms of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were also used, but were not listed as partners or sponsors to these events.

The events industry also played a significant role in global design events. Soft power can also be seen as a networking power; connections between cities via global events can establish cultural bridges between nations, facilitate trade relations, and open new markets. Connections can be seen between London and Shanghai, through Clerkenwell Design Week's backing of Design Shanghai. Tracing DMY Berlin's network shows ties to design events in Bratislava, Milan, Hong Kong, Sao Paulo, Miami, Helsinki, New York, Taipei, Beijing, Tokyo, and

Seoul. Maison et Objet, one of Europe's most important trade fairs and a multi-city luxury design event, is partnered as part of Singapore Design Week. In addition to the Singapore event, Maison et Objet holds its branded event in Paris and Miami. Leading up to the 2015 event in Miami is a networking tour, traveling through Mexico City, Sao Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro. The data led to further connections between Maison & Objet and MIPIM, the leading real estate event — both of which could be traced back to the world's largest global events organizer, Reed Exhibitions. Reed's portfolio extends globally, with joint venture partnerships in China, Latin America, Russia, and the Middle East increasing over the past decade. Reed Exhibitions is affiliated with the media conglomerate Media 10, the organizer of Clerkenwell Design Week, Design Shanghai, and 100% Design London. Reed's main competition for market share is UBM, whose annual global events include Beijing Design Week and Furniture China, Messe Frankfurt of Light + Building, Tendance, and Ambiente, and the global events company Informa, who organize IDS (Reed Exhibitions, 2014). The research shows three key nodes of global dominance in the global design events industry: The UK, Germany, and China.

Support from cultural and academic institutions was significant. Design institutions, arts centers, museums, cultural centers, visual arts and design universities were the main sponsors in this category.

The real estate and development category included real estate agencies, corporate real estate investors, property developers and construction companies. Architecture firms were listed in a separate category, but it is relevant to note the connection between these industries. The sponsors in this group included companies like Emaar Properties, a real estate development company known for its large-scale projects such as the Burj Khalifa in Dubai. The designer of the Burj Khalifa, was the American architect Adrian D. Smith who supported the

AIA convention in Chicago, along with the American architecture firm Gensler, designer of high-profile national symbols such as the Shanghai Tower, the John F. Kennedy International Airport, and the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Dubai. Other sponsors included AFIRE, a foreign investors network, and Koray Holding, a leading Turkish construction company known for high-rise office buildings, commercial centers, and 5-star hotels. The presence of these sponsors seems to indicate the direction of global design events towards city brand development and tourism.

The tourism and travel category was comprised of airlines, accommodations, and rental car or taxi companies. Over half of the sponsors in this category were boutique or luxury hotels. Some examples are the upscale Crowne Plaza Hotel, Pullman, and Melia—all international lifestyle hotel chains targeting business travellers and the meetings and incentives industry. The global events industry is widely seen as an area of tourism with the potential for dynamic growth in the coming years.

Building Legacies

Celebrity guests were a common feature of global design event and provided keynote presentations, talks, workshops, tours, exhibitions of their work, and hosted awards ceremonies. For some shows, there was a correlation between partners and sponsors and featured guests. For example, 3D Printshow in New York was sponsored by Adobe and Stratasys and featured two speakers from Adobe, six Adobe artists, and three speakers from Stratasys. Autodesk, the show sponsor for 3D Printshow in Paris, also featured two speakers at the New York show. The Wearable Technology show in New York featured two speakers from their platinum sponsor Freescale Semiconductors, as well as one speaker from their gold sponsor Clothing+.

Others such as Design Indaba in Cape Town and Mextropoli in Mexico City invited celebrity guests from other countries. Design Indaba's 2014 line-up featured guests from the US, Canada, and the UK and focused on innovation, creativity, and activism in graphic design and new media. Design Indaba's website features famed American graphic designers Marian Bantjes, Louise Fili, Jessica Hische, Steven Heller, and John Maeda. Mextropoli's theme had more of an architectural bent, and featured architects, sociologists, and urbanists from various countries, while local architects and artists ran workshops. Mextropoli's list includes the American sociologist Richard Sennett, Liu Xiaodu, of the leading Chinese architectural firm Urbanus, and Dominique Perrault, a leading Parisian architect. Design Days Dubai featured such guests as Paula Zuccotti, the founder of The Overworld, an innovation, trends forecasting and insight consultancy, and the luxury jeweler Van Cleef and Arpels. Zaha Hadid Architects was featured at Design Miami, 3D Printshow, and the London Design Festival (fig. 13). Bono, Jared Leto, and Kanye West appeared as presenters at the 2014 Cannes Lions.



Figure 13. Bridge installation at V&A Museum by Zaha Hadid for London Design Festival 2014.

Local politicians and national icons also made appearances. London’s mayor, Boris Johnson gave the keynote speech at MIPIM 2014, the international real estate and property event, while Miami mayor Philip Levine made a stop at Maison & Objet in Miami Beach (fig. 14). Mayor Kadir Topbas appeared at the opening of Istanbul Design Week; Princess Reema Bandar AISoud was a featured speaker at Saudi Design Week.

Through this participation, celebrities give their endorsement, lending to the event the qualities they are perceived to have by the public and within the industry. As celebrity faces help to brand the event with desirable qualities, the celebrity figure is also branded by the event (fig. 15). The relationship further shapes public perception of both the guest and the event.



Figure 14. Mayor Philip Levine serving as Grand Marshall in Design Miami’s 2014 Art Deco Parade



Figure 15. Roundtable with Kanye West at Cannes Lions, 2014

Luxury Living

This section describes the themes and topics explored at global design events. The data compiled in this section included text describing specific themes of the event, titles of the talks and workshops given by featured celebrity guests, and vision or mission statements of the event itself. The discipline or industry (architecture, design, furniture, interiors) was found to be important in the naming of 80% of the events. The seven events held in Germany branded their event without location or theme and using acronyms (imm, DMY) or abstract terms instead (Ambiente, Tendence).

A simple word cloud application was used to locate possible recurring themes generated from the seventy-six event summaries listed on the Dezeen World Design events map. Though a search for the top ten most frequent words revealed very little detail about the themes of the events, design, architecture, furniture, and products were at the top of the list. A top thirty most frequently used search revealed the words interiors, city, and new. An analysis of approximately 1500 words collected from the individual event webpages shows similar findings. Design was still the most frequently used word, appearing 155 times, followed by architecture, furniture, and interior. The next group of frequently used words were fashion, city, product, and create, followed closely by home. Future, art, light, global, society, economy, kitchen, living, graphic, brand, high-end, technology, awards, and urban were also used more frequently than other words. Another noticeable feature was a high frequency of adjectives and nouns denoting the city name (eg. Paris, Parisian). Sustainability appeared on the list seven times, while climate, environment, ecology, consumption, and responsibility occurred once.

Though most of the events were based around the consumption of products or culture, some events offered alternative themes. The most common were

sustainability, design education, and the social responsibility of design. While some events offered alternatives to a market-driven approach to design, it can be said that only a small portion of the programming was dedicated to exploring these topics.



Figure 16. Design object exhibited at Paris Design Week 2014 by Livius Haerer



Figure 17. Designed by Slovak students and Vitra, DMY Berlin 2014



Figure 18. Maison & Objet event venue, Miami Beach Convention Center 2015



Figure 19. Barcelona Design Week event party 2014

The events target luxury and upscale markets, and innovation in lifestyle products such as high-end furniture, lighting, home appliances, and interior design (fig. 16-18). The meetings and incentives industry also targets a similar demographic of privileged, affluent, and culturally savvy global business travellers (fig. 19). Under this economic strategy, cities are heavily promoted as tourist destinations and economic hubs for a growing culture of global business and leisure travellers.

Media Buzz

Of 79 events, 75 of the websites provided links to social media to promote the event. These results show the importance of social media in the promotion and shaping of the events (fig. 20-21). The data was collected from the event websites using the following criteria: 1) the social media sites were visible as button icons or links that led to an external page, and 2) the links were easily accessible on the main page.

The results showed that the two most popular social media were Facebook and Twitter, followed by Instagram, Pinterest, Youtube, LinkedIn, Flickr, and Google+. 69 of 79 events provided links to Facebook or Twitter; 25 contained links to Instagram; 17 linked to Pinterest and Youtube; and 16 connected to LinkedIn. 31 of 33 host countries held design events that used Facebook as a promotional tool; 30 of 33 host countries held design events that used Twitter as a promotional tool. The average number of links was three per event, with a minimum of zero and a maximum number of 293 (not included in the average). As seen in the visualization below, 296 buttons and links were collected; Facebook and Twitter were the most popular, combining to make up nearly 60% of the total, followed by Instagram, Pinterest, Youtube, LinkedIn, Flickr, and Google+ (fig. 22).



Figure 20. Bratislava Design Week Facebook page, 2015

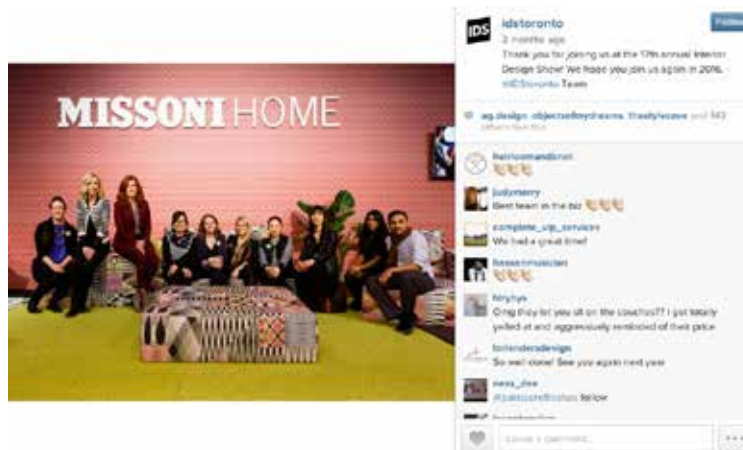


Figure 21. Interior Design Show Toronto’s Instagram, 2014

With Facebook’s over 1.3 billion active users and the 284 million monthly active users on Twitter, many global brands are investing in effective social media strategies to reach their target audiences. According to FastCo, the eleven biggest Olympic sponsors paid out over a billion dollars to use the Olympic logo and post pictures and videos of the event. Most of their marketing focused on social media. Mark Pritchard, the global brand building officer for Proctor & Gamble claims that “social media space provides a better return than TV” (Fast Company, 2012). The FastCo article suggests three main points about social media and global events: 1) Social media can boost the visibility of the event and provide a platform from which to engage their clients, 2) Social media can also increase the profile of the event and promote celebrity guests, and 3) Social media is seen as a public, unmediated form of expression, and more trustworthy than traditional media. Like the Olympics, forming partnerships or sponsoring global design events can provide access to specific audiences via social media and a co-branding opportunity for the event and the sponsor.

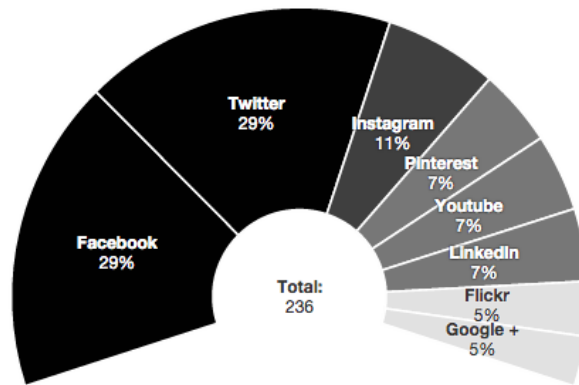


Figure 22. Percentage of all links to social media found on key global design websites, 2014

Discussion of the Research

The research presented here offers a broad survey of the key components of global design events. The five sections presented in the last section are listed as follows: 1) Bright Lights, Big Cities, 2) Spectacular Investments, 3) Building Legacies, 4) Luxury Living, and 5) Media Buzz. Through this research, I have shown how the production of a global design event plays a key role in building the image of a city as a brand. The movement to brand cities is matched by widely accepted theories on urban growth, such as the highly influential *Rise of the Creative Class* by sociologist and economist Richard Florida in 2002.

In this section, I would like to identify two key problems related to global design events. First, global design events cater to the corporate elite and business-class travelers, perpetuating patterns of cultural imperialism. The rise in global design events is also linked to the quest for soft power and trends towards city-branding. While research and analysis on soft power and city-branding continues to propel global industries forward, there has been little reflection or critical research in this area. Secondly, the lack of empirical research and analysis on what constitutes a creative economy does not allow for policymakers and community leaders to effectively address positive and negative effects related to global design events.

Global design events are important to draw attention to a city, expand its brand recognition, and generate buzz factor or interest around its cultural qualities. The research reinforces how design and cultural consumption function as twin engines of soft power, engaging key components listed on the *EY* and *Monocle* soft power indexes. The particularly effective soft power influence of global design events can be seen when compared to *Monocle's* subjective soft

power metrics, as referred to in *Figure 3* in the second section. First, global design events promote the international purpose or role of the city (City of Design, City of Culture etc.) and show global leadership and prestige. Second, global design events generate positive cultural output, promote soft power icons (celebrities and design superstars), and expand the reach of commercial brands. Third, these events attract business-class travelers, giving the city an opportunity to impress visitors through unique experiences of local culture: airports, hotels, trains, sight-seeing, culture, shopping, and cuisine.

As previously mentioned, existing literature on urban growth suggest that creativity is a key driver of the economy and that cities globally are in competition with each other. This is backed up by various theories of soft power and the creative economy, as well as by attractive incentives to join global networks such as UNESCO's Creative Cities Network.

There is no doubt that there are widely varying and even oppositional objectives at play in a soft power network. There are also, undoubtedly, aspects of many global design events that thoughtfully engage local communities. However, tourism and global city branding are at the heart of global design events, with regional and national identity being key to attracting an elite group of business tourists. This kind of branding strategy sells mythical representations of national identity, imagined through designed products. Soft power, though widely accepted as a more peaceful alternative to hard power, also reinforces and exacerbates existing global inequalities through long-standing practices of cultural imperialism. The appeal of soft power conceals a darker side of tourism, which Eddie D'Sa argues is a new form of imperialism characterized by "gross economic disparities between tourist and host, racism, and the flouting of economic and social rights of communities" (D'Sa, 1999). Tourism by nature values one group of people over

the other. Global design events, a touristic industry by nature, also perpetuate and heighten these disparities. Though soft power has been widely analyzed from an economic standpoint, analysis of soft power from other perspectives is still lacking. Susan Fainstein, professor of urban planning at Harvard, argues that while on one hand, globalization has increased networking, on the other hand, it has increased travel (Fainstein, 2005-2007). From a business standpoint, travel is a necessity to maintain control (Fainstein, 2005-2007). Global design events commoditize the city for this market of travelers, combining business with leisure and cultural consumption. This top-down approach to urban growth focuses development on visitors, rather than those who actually live there. Dennis Judd coins this kind of uneven development the tourist bubble, pockets in the city where convention centres, sport stadiums, large hotels and festive shopping malls teem with visitors but are rarely frequented by locals (Fainstein, 2005-2007).

Another problem of this kind of development is that while it is widely argued that tourism boosts local economy there is little evidence to show exactly who and how local communities benefit. An important aspect of tourism is that it provides unskilled workers with employment; however, it often does so without providing living wages, benefits, or stability. In such a profitable industry, the benefit to top-tier management, financiers, and developers is clear. It is doubtful that workers in these industries reap such rewards. If tourism is to be truly beneficial to local societies and economies, these precarious labour conditions must be further researched and addressed.

Researchers such as Kavaratzis and Ashworth propose strategies on how to move forward with city branding. Their analysis helps to understand how global design events are used towards to execute this strategy. The logics of branding strategy can be seen in geographical naming (London Design Festival, Helsinki

Design Week, São Paulo Design Weekend, Paris Design Week, Saudi Design Week, Singapore Design Week, Toronto Design Offsite, Milan Design Week, Downtown Design Dubai, Design Miami), product-place co-branding through cultural identity constructions (Nordic design reflecting simplicity, minimalism, and functionality, Milan and Italy as a luxury brand mecca) and awards of prestige (The London Design Medal, the Perrier-Jouët Design Entrepreneur Medal, The DMY Berlin awards), and in place management. City branding through place management relies on a delicate balance of control and spontaneity (or illusion of spontaneity), and can be seen in the trend towards city-wide multi-locational events. However, their proposal does not address how branding a city will actually benefit local communities and fails to acknowledge the substantial lack of empirical evidence showing the benefits and limitations of city branding.

Similarly, Richard Florida's *Rise of the Creative Class* shows a similar lack of empirical evidence and was largely dismissed by academics in the first few years after its publication due its weak analysis. However, the concerted marketing campaign made the book very successful in disseminating its main themes around creativity and urban economic growth (Markusen, 2006). These themes as outlined by Florida:

My work is based on a relatively simple underlying theory—that human creativity has replaced raw materials, physical labour and even flows of capital as the primary generator of economic value, and that a new class structure is emerging as a result of that basic economic transformation (Florida in Lang et al, 2005: 218).

In her paper *Urban Development and the Politics of a Creative Class: Evidence from the Study of Artists*, Ann Markusen critiques the notion of “the creative

class” and the fuzzy causal logic about its relationship to urban growth. She observes that scholarship on the role of the arts and culture in urban economies continues to assume an economic base framework for analyzing urban growth, despite the lack of evidence to support this framework (Markusen, 2006).

Florida’s theory, centered around the economic value of human creativity has proven to be particularly appealing to chambers of commerce, mayors, and other civic boosters. The rise in global design events reflects the influence of Florida’s model in the economic policies of world cities. However, the concept of creativity has not been clearly defined. Markusen argues that “there is little in the dialogue so far that tells practitioners or readers how creativity works, what distinguishes it from non-creative activity, and how creative occupations and skills are formed (Markusen, 2006).” She states that, “most mayors waving the banner of creativity use it to showcase their anchor arts institutions and make claims about urban amenities, mostly directed at tourists (Markusen, 2006).” Though the tourism and events industry has quickly capitalized on this trend, without a clear definition of creativity, it is impossible to evaluate the effects of the so-called creative class on urban growth and transformation.

The lack of evidence to support what constitutes creativity and the creative economy therefore destabilizes the popular notion that it contributes to urban growth and transformation. Markusen observes that “while elites use Florida’s arguments to argue for the large arts anchor institutions in cities, most artists understand the negative effects that arts trophy-focused expenditures and strategies will have on lower income communities and on the diversity of artistic venues and funding streams (Markusen, 2006).” In practice, the broad scope of Florida’s creative class model conflates and effectively erases the differences, inequalities, and struggles of those within so-called creative class professions.

Global design events represent the status quo of a global economy that I argue is unacceptable to a socially-conscious design practice. The economic shift towards city and nation branding via global design intensifies the commodification of culture, creativity, education, and everyday life. Though Markusen's study does not include designers, challenges to consumption and the status quo in design can be seen in the three versions of the First Things First Manifesto, first in 1964, second in 2000, and third, 2014. The First Things First Manifesto indicates a desire for design to expand its boundaries in a profession often entrenched in the work of commercial advertising, and increasingly corporate learning environments that perpetuate inequalities and funnel designers into market-driven practices.

Visual Research and Creative Projects

In my visual research, I practiced design as a means of discovery and learning, a way to engage with the urban environment, and to resist the status quo. Covering a broad scope of global design and consumption, the research shows that global design events employ branding strategies to increase its soft power. Global design events promote the consumption of a city and its culture through elite international tourism networks. Through the marketing and consumption of design products, national identities are reconstituted and reasserted. Whether on a local, municipal, or national level, achieving a coherent national identity involves a contestation of values, histories, and identities. During the course of my research, I took part in three international events in Toronto, where I was able to get a sense of these tensions between many of the groups that came to assemble under the umbrella of a flagship global event, and the ways in which power was made visible. I witnessed the ways in which power and prestige overshadowed, even engulfed, other voices. I also saw demonstrations of resistance to dominant narratives.

In the next stage, I use the research to inform my personal visual explorations and communication design practice. The overarching goal of the written and visual components of *Pedal off the Metal* are to call for a slowing down or rethinking of our relationship to capitalist systems of consumption and how we perpetuate these systems of power and inequality. Drawing from my research of global design events, my visual explorations reflect upon the construction of national identities through design consumption and consider ways that design can resist these constructions in favour of individual and local identities. As a designer, my intent is to support and align myself with marginalized narratives and develop my own understanding of the environment and communities that I live in.

My approach to the design process is psychogeographic. Psychogeography was coined in 1955 by Guy Debord and is a method of exploring the city. It is defined as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals (Debord, Situationist International Anthology, 1955 p.50)." Psychogeography is a way of drifting around the city and gaining new and heightened awareness of urban environments. In psychogeographic terms, this process is called a *dérive*. There are four main reasons for using this methodology:

- 1) It promotes discovery through the disruption of daily patterns we have in our relationship to urban environments.
- 2) It is a resistance to touristic and consumption-driven movements through the city.
- 3) It is a personal exploration of an urban environment that is guided and informed by the individual's history and identity.
- 4) It is a call to slow down, to notice, and to reflect upon our environments.

The first project entitled *Curious Collections* explores psychogeography as a method of collecting. Using the process of *dérive*, my method is to leave the house and begin walking without a destination, but with a goal to discover something new. Through this exploration, I gathered objects of interest through photographs and created sets of gas pipes, mailboxes, graffiti, and typography.

The *Gas Pipes* series was a collection that stemmed from the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan (fig. 23). It was one of the most widely documented and visual disasters in history. I was living in Hiroshima at the time, and became acutely attuned to the invisible systems of energy, water, and food that tie us

together. As objects and debris from the tsunami continue to wash up along distant shores, there is an eerie sense of how small the planet is, and how powerful the forces of nature are. Thinking of these systems, I surveyed the gas pipes in my area around Brockton Village in Toronto. These gas pipes are everywhere in various shades of grey and black, with caps of red and rusty joints that show their age. Collecting these, I discovered that it was difficult to find two that were exactly the same along Bloor St. The individual forms are like odd typographic creatures, with their own logic. Across the street, there are posters on street poles protesting Line 9, a pipeline planned by Enbridge Gas to transport tar sands between Sarnia and Montreal. Examining these collections provided inspiration, an ongoing bank of source material for visual research, and raised questions and awareness about the neighbourhoods I explored.



Fig. 23. Curious Collections: Gas Pipes, 2015

The second project called *City as Self-Portrait* uses mixed-media as a way to capture local identities (fig. 24). Using the same concept of collecting through urban exploration used in *Curious Collections*, various media are used to suggest multiple voices and identities. This includes illustration, collage, sound, video, and animation. All of the pieces in this project explore time, place, and memory and the constant resurfacing of the past, merging with the present. In many of the pieces in this project, I also draw from personal memory to create unexpected associations and a sense of dream logic. This way of working is to assert that the work is not meant to represent the city as a singular identity, but rather a revelation of the city as a self-portrait of the designer. The New Orleans series is a collection of maps showing an experience of the city. These maps can be explored by the viewer as a *dérive*. If turning city branding on its head means to move from branding as a representational question to branding as an ontological question, this project asks how branding can ask questions about being and experience.



Fig. 24. City as Self-Portrait: New Orleans, 2015

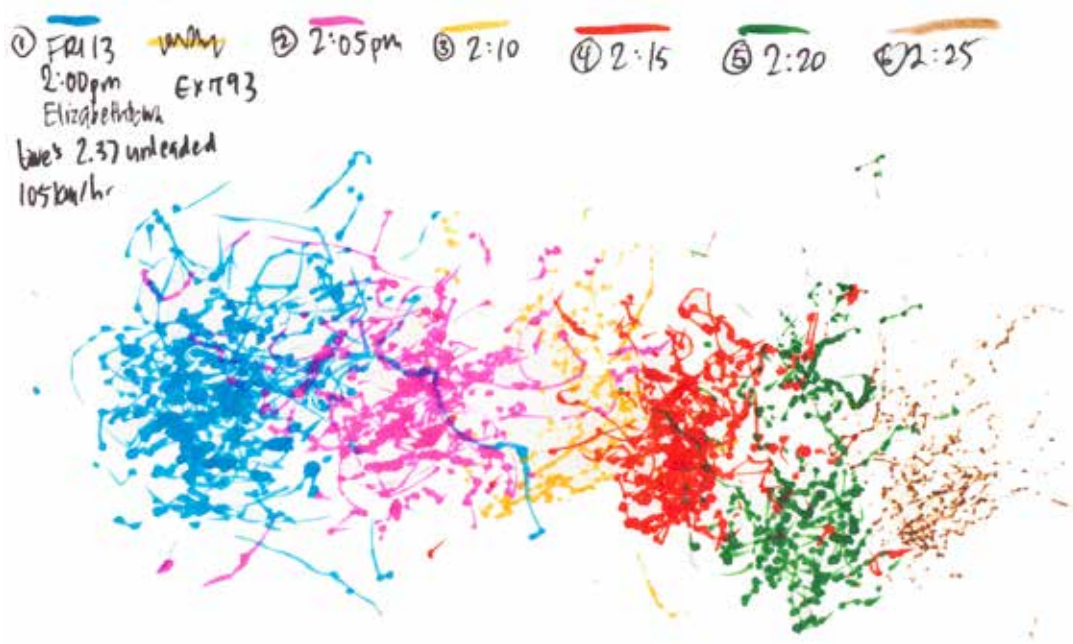


Fig. 25. City as Self-Portrait: The Highway Strip, 2015

The Highway Strip was an exploration with a goal to capture the visceral experience of driving down the I-75. I strung Copic pens from the rearview mirror and held a sketch book underneath, letting the movement of the truck and the pen create the markings as we crossed the terrain. Each colour was used for 5 minutes, starting at Elizabethtown. The image as a whole tracks 30 minutes of driving, the movement of traffic, and the bumps on the road (fig. 25).

The third project explores social media as a new platform for design. As a response to the market-ready, packaged nature of global design, I created a webpage on Cargo Collective that documents and shares my process publicly, also linking to other social networks like Tumblr and Instagram. This form of presentation resists the conventions of design by drawing attention to individual

experience. It is constructed to show the labour of design process and asks viewers to make their own connections.

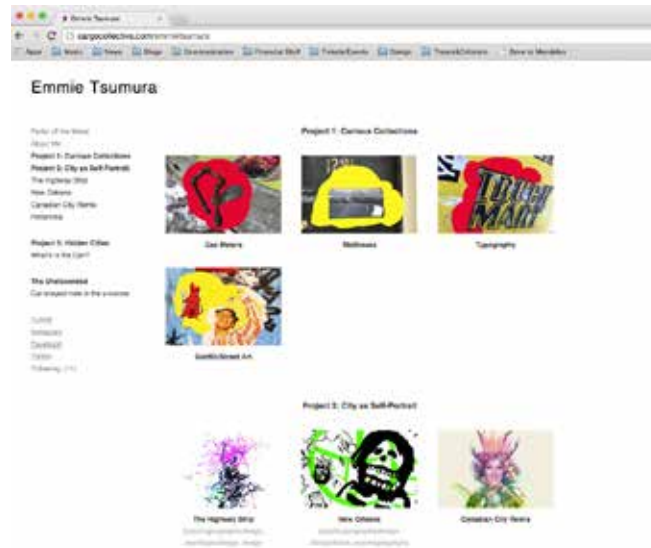


Fig. 26. <http://cargocollective.com/emmietsumura>, 2015

Global design events show city-branding as a top-down process that represent large and diverse populations, creating illusions of a collective whole. In response, these projects explore society as dissensus and a fragmented whole. Approaching the city in this way, branding is reversed to move from the ground up, asking questions about individuality and urban existence.

The second part of this project incorporates the concept of the *dérive* as a way to collect material via social networks and engage publics. Using my Facebook site as a platform, I created an event called, “What’s in the Can?” (fig. 27) The project looks at bathroom graffiti as a way of discovering alternative, unpopular, or hidden narratives in the city and encouraged people to explore the city to find them. Over twelve days from March 3rd to 15th, 110 participants

joined to collaborate on a collection of images. I discovered that people were enthusiastic about working on something together. It inspired people to share the event to their networks, and the event received contributions from people outside my network. Another interesting result was the sharing of stories and memories of their selected graffiti. The project was successful in exploring how creative ownership could be disseminated across a public, and points to the potential of quickly mobilizing networks towards common and non-commercial goals. It also looks at un-designed spaces and considers how the everyday urban landscape can be both a shared and personal experience.



Fig. 27. Facebook Collaboration: What's in the Can, 2015

At the time I began this project, the CUPE strike at York was just beginning, following the CUPE 3902 strike at the University of Toronto. To support the strike as a union member and to be able to pay my monthly bills, regular classes on Wednesdays and studies during the week turned into union meetings, picketing,

and strike duties. Interestingly, the strike drew parallels with these projects. I was assigned the role of analyzing and creating material to be disseminated through social media. Through Facebook, CUPE mobilized their members, shared photos, organized meetings and rallies, and connected with other student movements across Canada and globally. Twitter was the most up-to-date source of information, with information and misinformation circulating faster than any other media and networks quickly formed. The bizarre science of hashtags and memes surfaced; some hashtags caught on, others faded quickly. Infographics fired back and forth. Tweets were retweeted, screen-captured, and collected. This unexpected project reinforced that social media is a battleground.

Design educator Katherine McCoy states, "Design is not a neutral, value-free process. A design has no more integrity than its purpose or subject matter" (McCoy, 1994, p.111). The integrity of a design is reflected in both form and content. Whether crafting slick ads for luxury cars, rebranding a failing restaurant chain, or creating infographics during a strike, design has social and political implications. For McCoy, choosing to maintain the status quo is a political decision; the integrity of design and designers lies in these choices. In this spirit, the American artist and educator Susan E. McKenna also states that, "construction of meaning is inseparable from the production of power" (McKenna 1999, p.75). She argued that the very act of designing is a construction of meaning which is inherently political.

The ongoing struggle against the commodification of our public spaces and our education system highlights an opportunity for designers to engage beyond aesthetics to the social.

Summary

My thesis project *Pedal off the Metal* explores the relationship between design and consumption through an empirical study of 79 key global design events in 2014. The research phase revealed that global design events are part of a larger movement towards city branding, driven by global trends towards creative economies and soft power. Dominant narratives are reestablished through selected local design, which is branded and consumed as regional and national culture; design and consumption are used as ways to reassert the identity of the city. The research confirmed that global design events function as national prestige contests, strengthen global trade networks and draw business-class tourism. Through this research, I was able to locate the status quo of global design which conflates creativity with capital, homogenizes culture and packages difference for touristic consumption. Despite positive effects that tourism and design events may have on local societies, they both tend to favour the elite, perpetuating long histories of power, privilege, and imperialism. The global design industry commoditizes design, creativity, and every day urban life to be consumed by, and created for, tourists.

The visual research and creative projects are informed by the results of this research. In opposition to the status quo of global design events, the work explores how branding can move from the representational to the ontological; how branding can ask questions about experience and individuality, rather than prescribe identities and solutions. The projects seek to reclaim creative ownership from the market, harness social media as a creative platform for resistance, and find alternative ways of engaging with our environments. Rather than design as a driver of market values, *Pedal off the Metal* is a call to slow down and investigate design as a poetic, inherently social and communicative process.

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Appendix A

Process Work - Visual Exploration

The following pages contain the process work of various projects conducted during the course of this thesis. The projects explore various ways that conventional design can be challenged through the use of psychogeography in the design process. Each of the projects aim to create an alternative approach to the top-down city branding strategies discussed in this paper. It considers how branding can move from the representational to the ontological, and how branding can ask questions about individual experience and urban existence.

Unlikely Mascots

Emmie Tsumura, 2015

Satirical mascots were created to explore humour as a way to disrupt and challenge the importance of these icons and symbols to Canadian identity. They were created using a selection of the five components of global design events identified in the research paper: Cities, Sponsors, Celebrities, Luxury Lifestyles, and Media.

Creating these mascots was a step in figuring out what kind of visual effect was desirable in the creation of these pieces. While my intention was to create pieces that encouraged social engagement and interpretation, the “finished” sense of these mascots made them less conducive to that and functioned more as commentary. This led me to consider how I could create more open visual spaces that allow for exploration and discoveries. As Dutch designer Jan van Toorn states:

Representation is a form of making and a form of excluding at the same time. It is impossible for a message to include every aspect of the subject. The acceptance of this inadequacy of communication leads to the conclusion that every message is in fact by definition limited.

If we accept this inadequacy, we can begin to explore ways of making that can refer to what he calls “the sea of facts” which exist beyond representation.



Figure 28: Unlikely Mascots: Rob Feaver (2015)



Figure 29: Unlikely Mascots: Drier, (2015)



Figure 30: Unlikely Mascots: Gretzkavine, (2015)



Figure 31: Unlikely Mascots: Princess Celine Poutine, (2015)



Figure 32: Unlikely Mascots: Princess Celine Poutine, (2015)

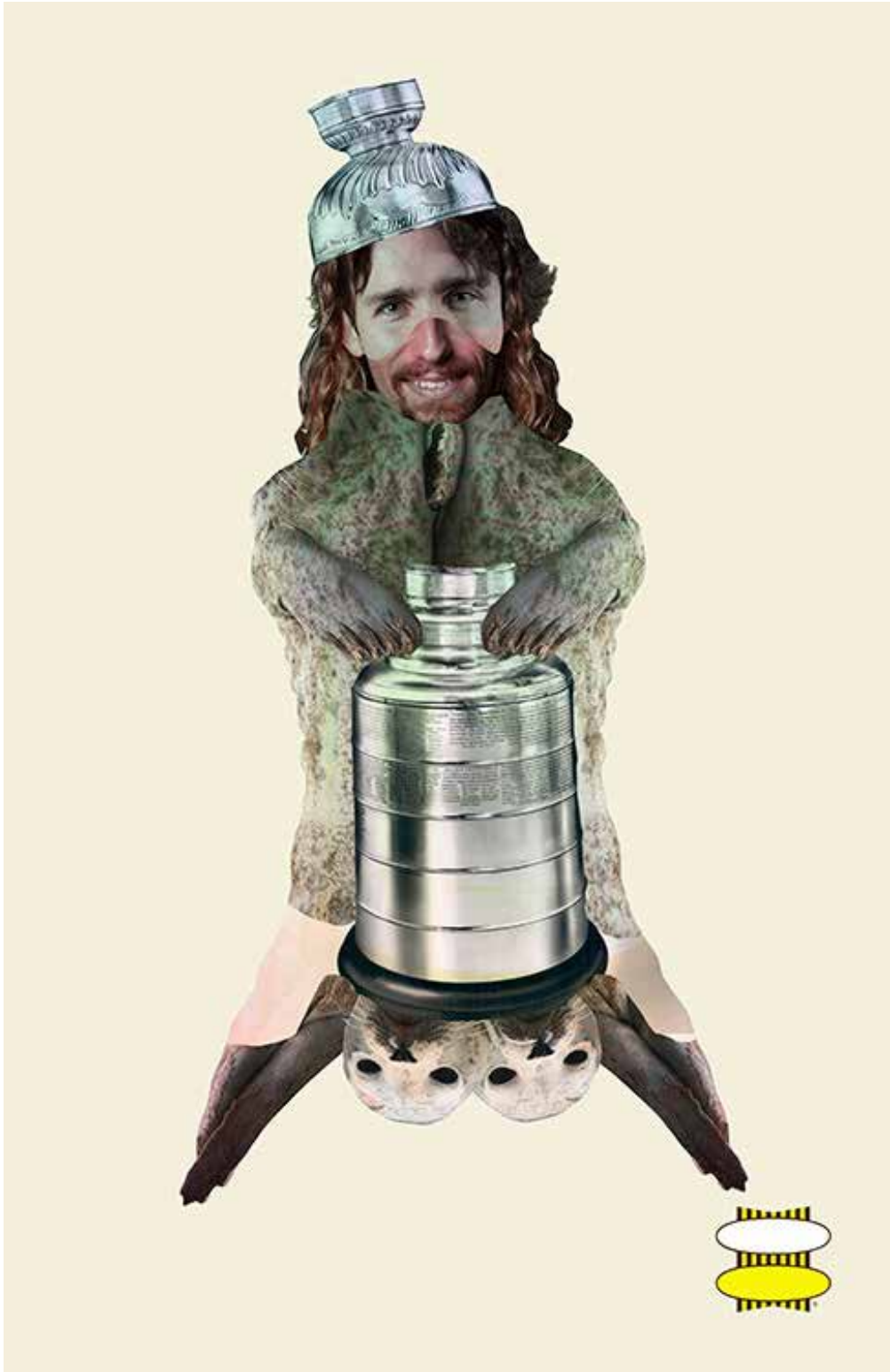


Figure 33: Unlikely Mascots: Princess Celine Poutine, (2015)

Spring Thaw

Emmie Tsumura, 2015

Around mid-March, the streets of Toronto can be chaotic. Winter lags on as spring draws near; temperatures flux; cars and cyclists battle for space on the road as it widens and narrows as the snow melts and falls again. On the days when it warms up, an astonishing array of objects begin to surface.

These found objects were designed for fast-consumption, disposability, and obsolescence: candy wrappers, lipstick-stained cigarette butts, pop-can tabs, rubber gloves, take-out coffee cups and sleeves, usb cords, plastic bottles, lotto tickets, shiny foil gum packages and crumpled fast-food wrap. Though buried under snow for days or weeks, they reappear again, existing now as waste. These photos were collected along Bloor Street West.

This reality of urban life and consumption is invisible to global design events, despite the design problem it reveals. The familiar brand is complicated by the strangeness of its representation. The colourful, handdrawn sketches are warm and accessible, while the same illustrative quality suggests a darker narrative upon closer inspection.

From Christie Street

|

To

|

Lansdowne Avenue

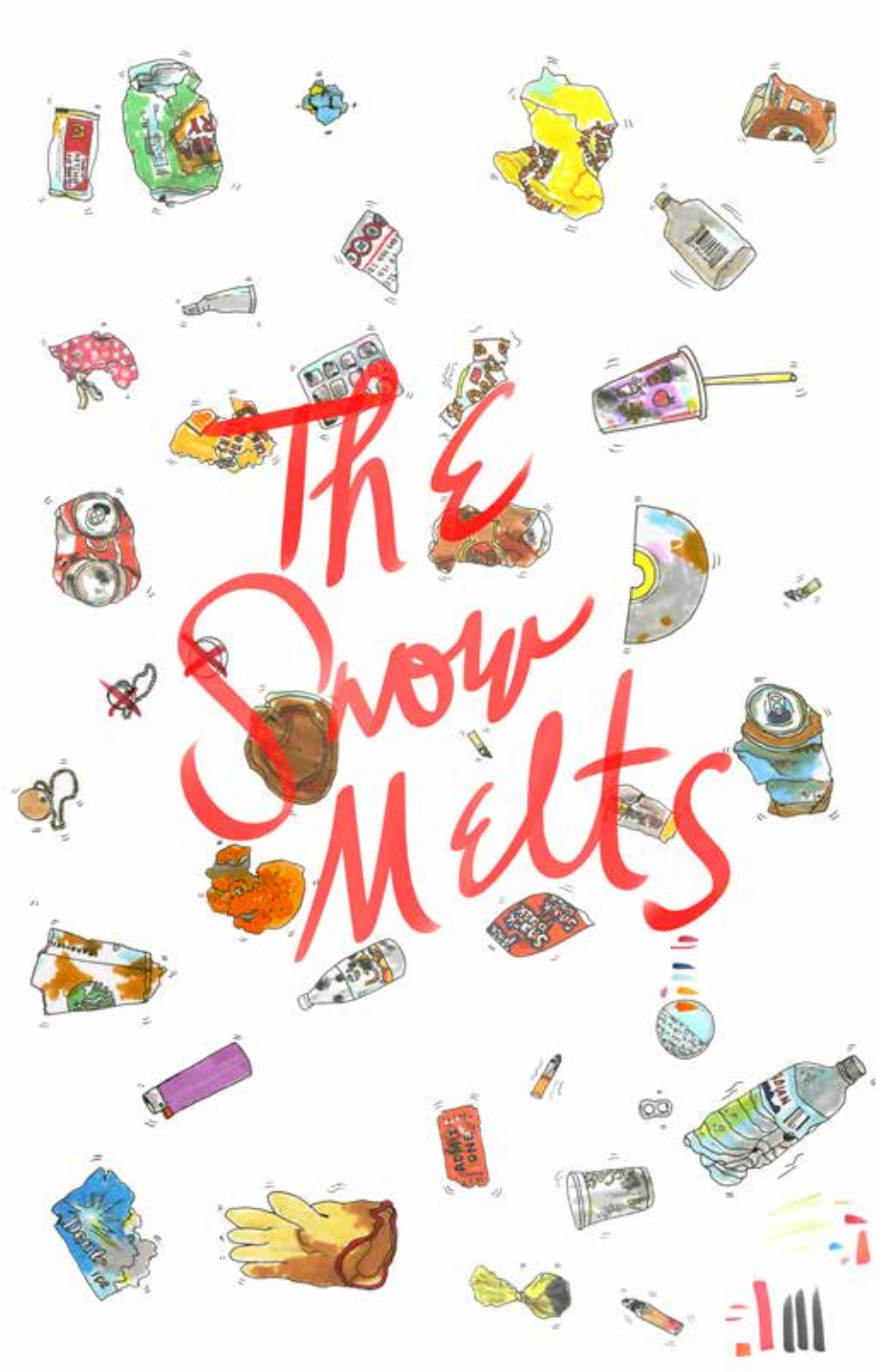


Figure 34: The Snow Melts A, (2015)

The Highway Strip

Emmie Tsumura, 2015

I recorded about eight hours of highway driving from Windsor, through Detroit, and down the I-75 south to New Orleans. The recordings were taken with various pens suspended from the interior of the truck, making markings on paper as the truck hit various contours of the road. Each pen colour was used for the length of a song, and then switched. Approaching design as a method of discovery, the markings propose a different way of seeing and remembering travel as motion; an individual, multisensory, spatial and geographic experience.

Alabama I-59S SAT, PS614
EXIT 106
Lanes 1.99 unleaded
4:15-4:45

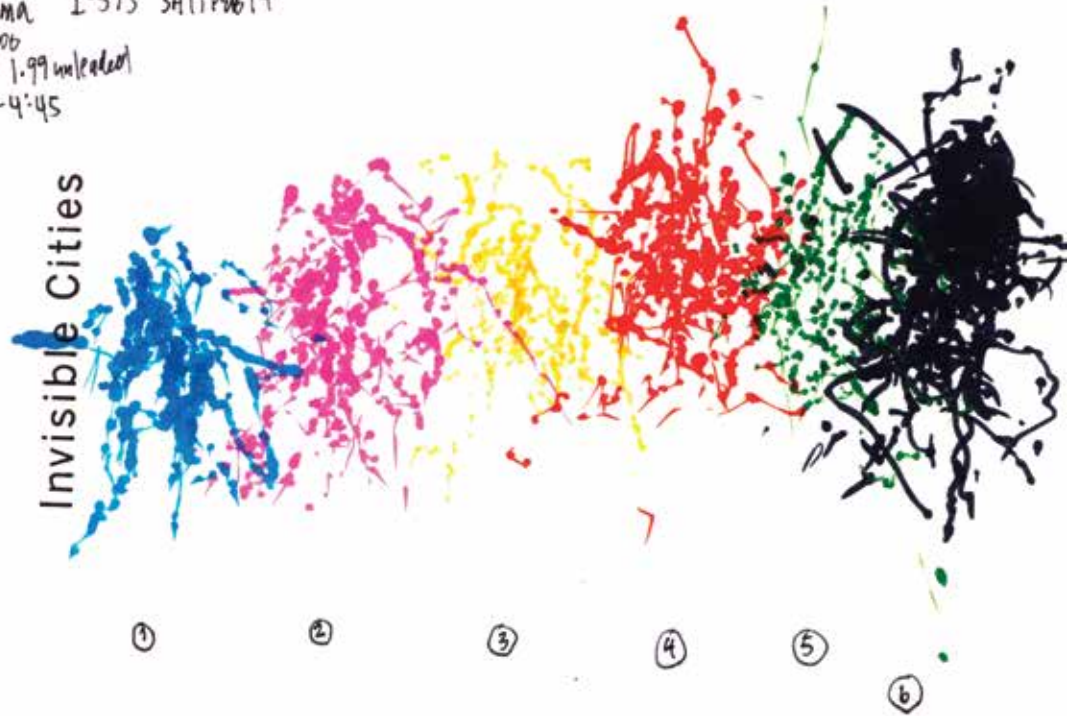


Figure 36: The Highway Strip A, (2015)

① Fri 13 2:00pm
Elizabeth
Lanes 2.37 unleaded
105km/hr

② 2:05pm ③ 2:10 ④ 2:15 ⑤ 2:20 ⑥ 2:25



Figure 37: The Highway Strip B, (2015)

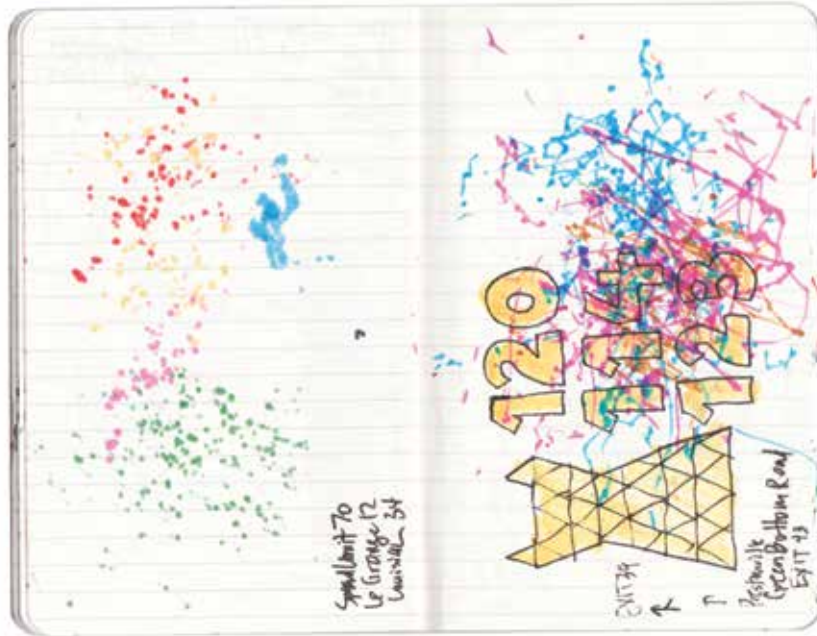


Figure 38: The Highway Strip C, (2015)

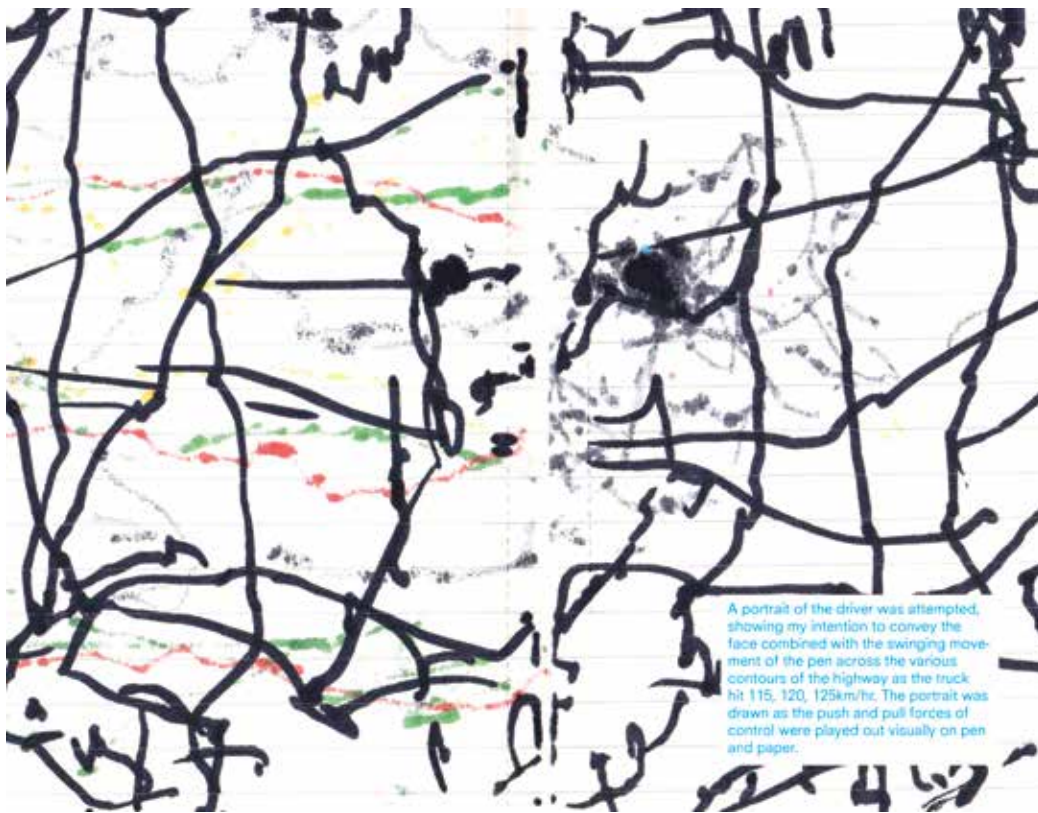


Figure 39: The Highway Strip D, (2015)

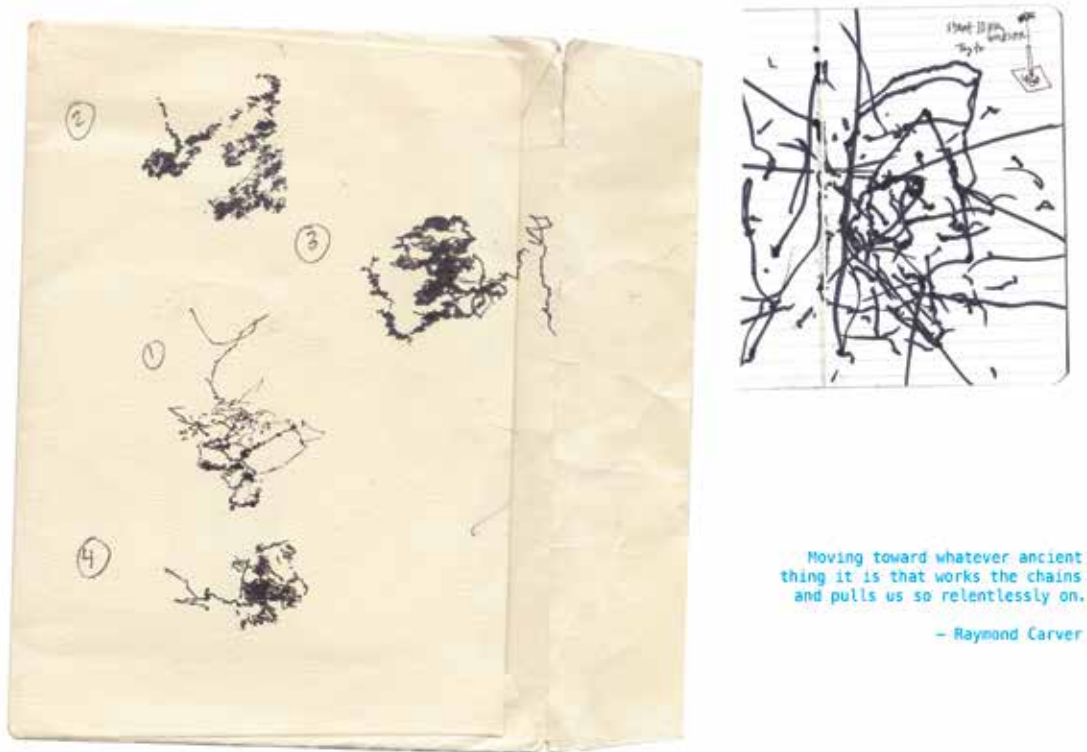


Figure 40: The Highway Strip E, (2015)

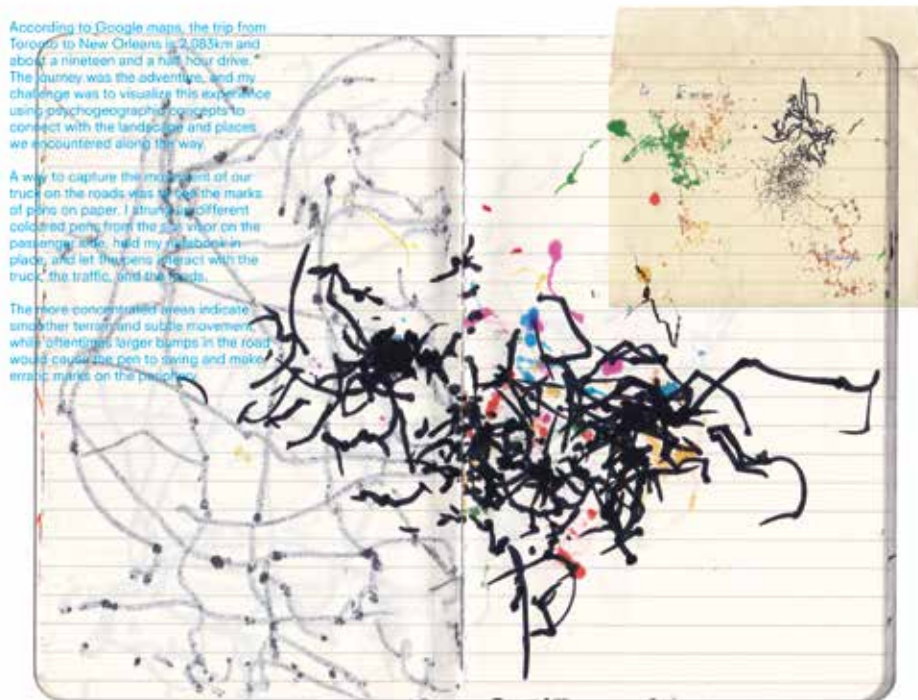


Figure 41: The Highway Strip F, (2015)

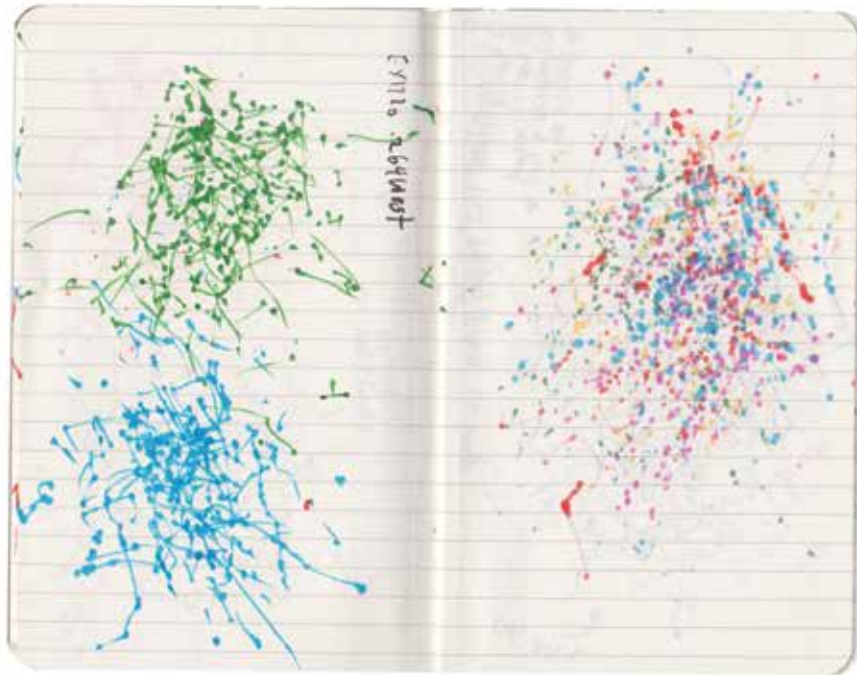


Figure 42: The Highway Strip G, (2015)

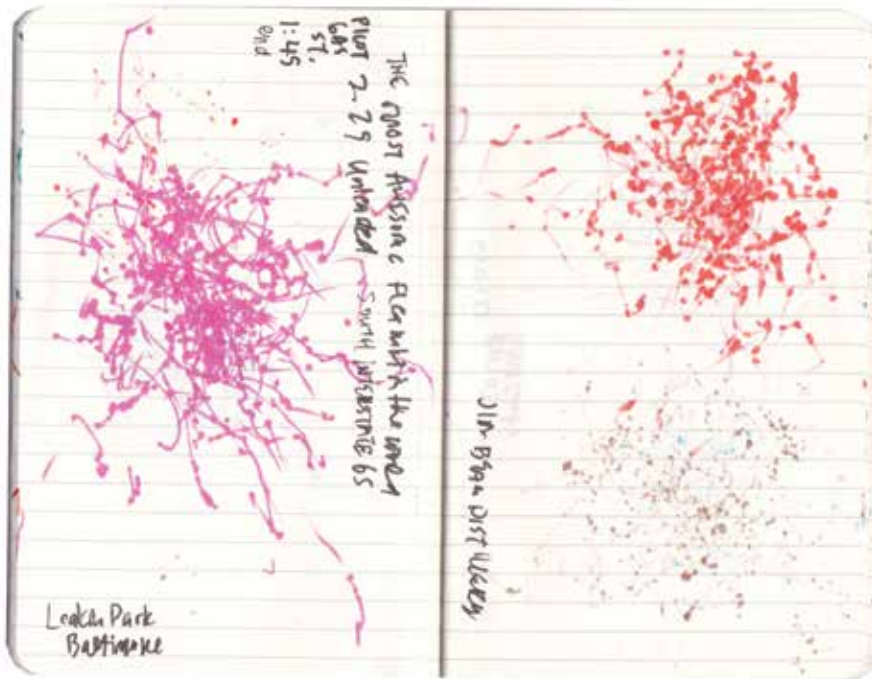


Figure 43: The Highway Strip H, (2015)

NOLA

Emmie Tsumura, 2015

This is a series of maps, drawn from life, photographs, and memory, then re-assembled. Drawing these objects and faces from Mardi Gras 2015 reflects an individual experience of the city of New Orleans. It is a self-portrait, in this sense, rather than a portrait of New Orleans. They are intended to be open in form - the viewer can travel spatially through the elements as they would in a psychogeographic *dérive*, discovering each as if by chance. The maps ask how branding can move away from representation, and towards ontological questions about being and individual experience.

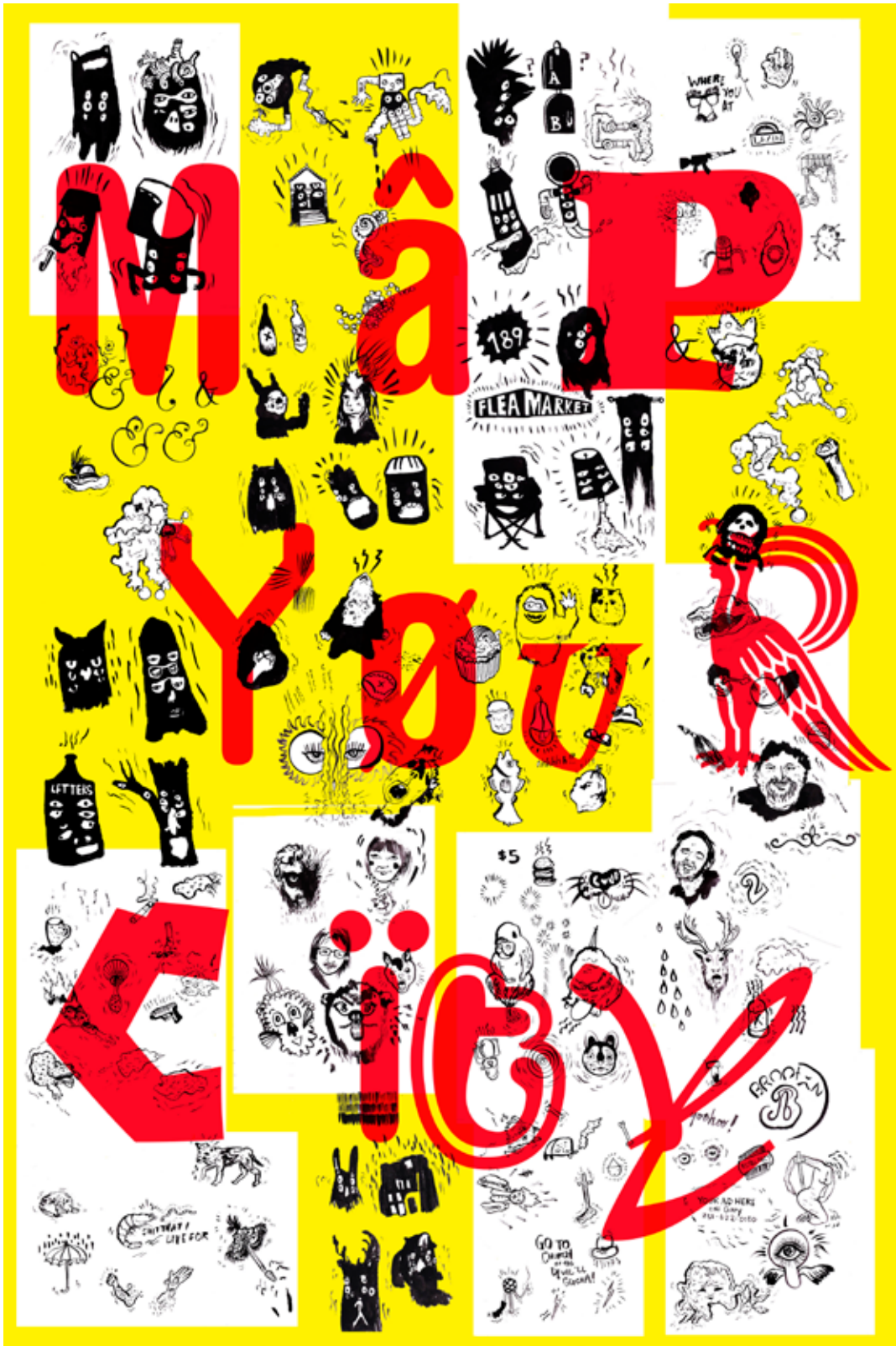


Figure 44: NOLA Map A, (2015)



Figure 45: NOLA Map B, (2015)



Figure 46: NOLA Map C, (2015)

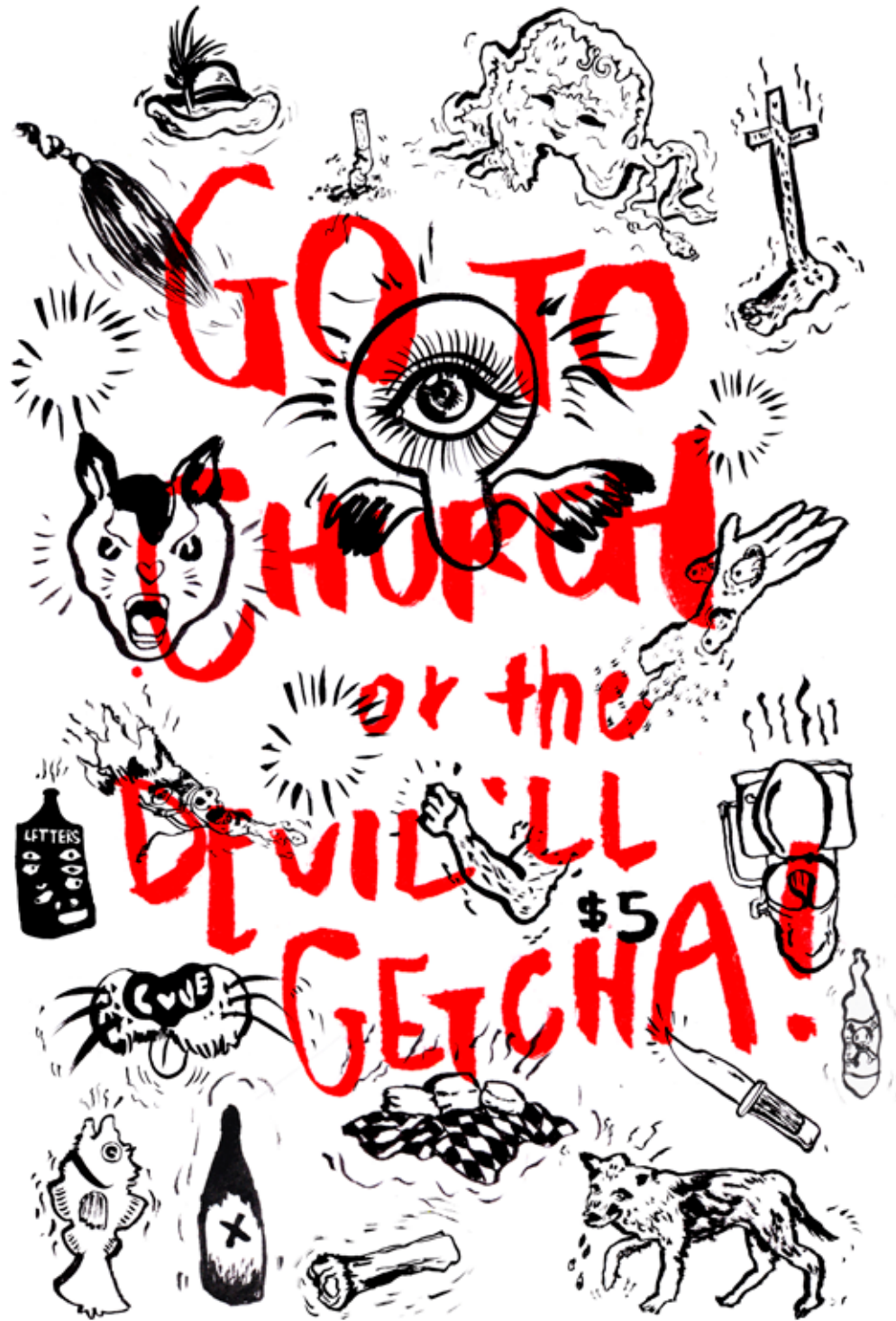


Figure 47: NOLA Map D, (2015)



Figure 48: NOLA Map E, (2015)

Digital Witness

Emmie Tsumura, 2015

By digitally mapping vernacular forms by hand, an understanding of their formal qualities and the speed at which they were created developed. Seeing an act of graffiti can be something like a chance encounter, as the information is often painted over, or buried under other markings. Using the language of these forms to challenge the conventions of branding, corporate slogans are appropriated and disrupted. Rather than rigidly controlling the meaning, the visuals encourage the viewer to drift, or *dérive*, through the visual field and make connections between various elements.



Figure 49: Digital Witness A, (2015)



Figure 50: Digital Witness B, (2015)

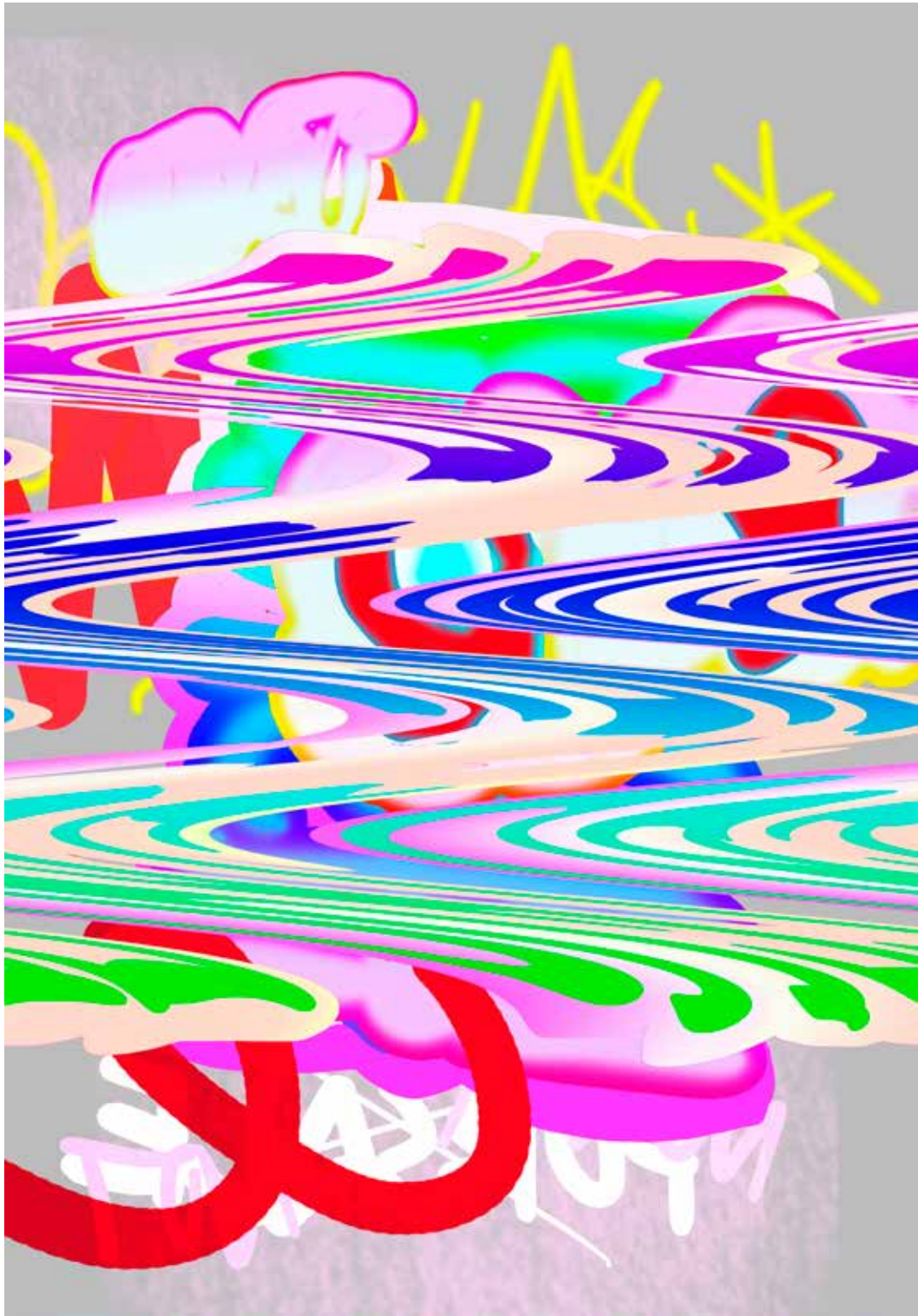


Figure 51: Digital Witness C, (2015)

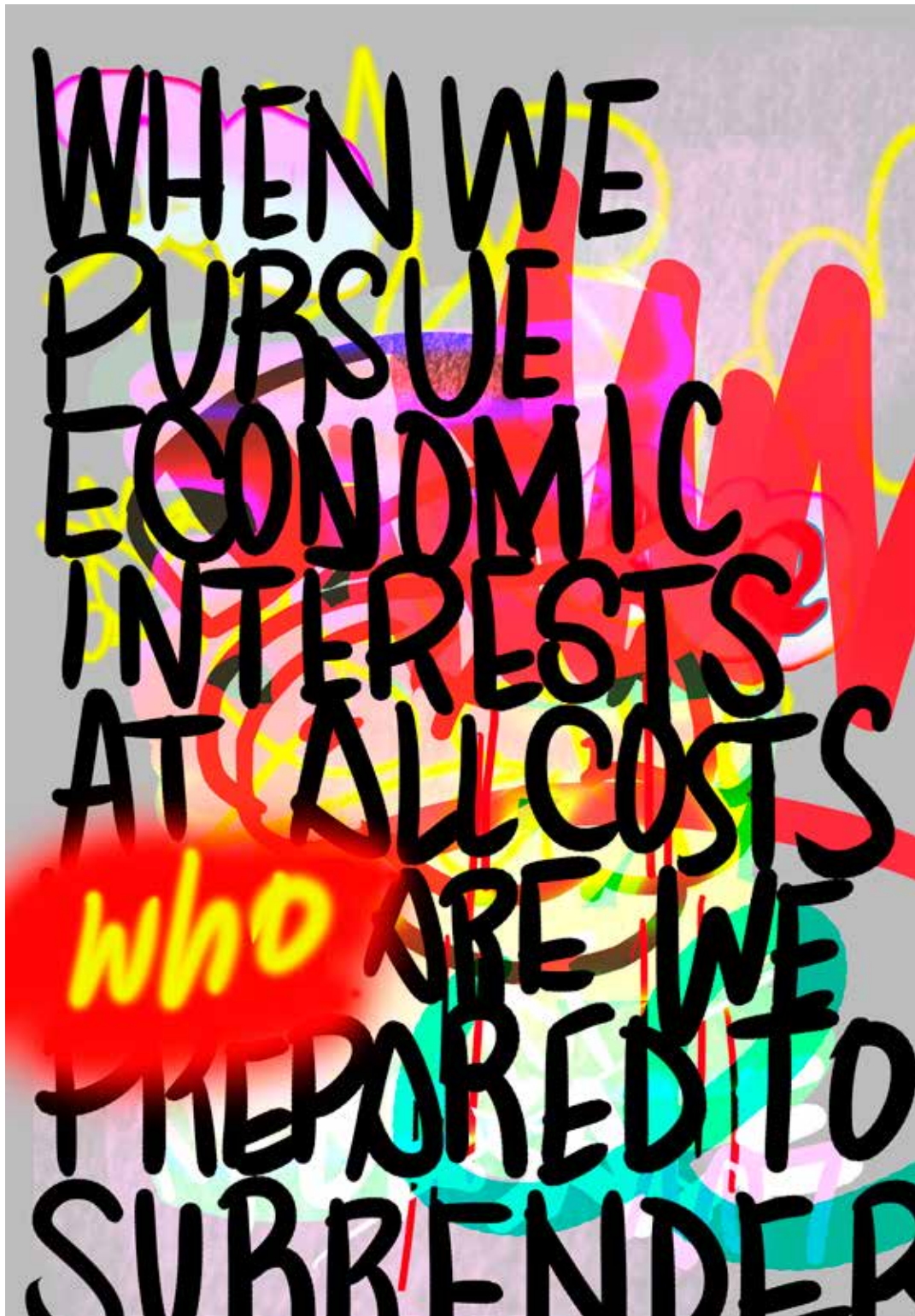


Figure 52: Digital Witness D, (2015)



Figure 53: Digital Witness E, (2015)



Figure 54: Digital Witness F, (2015)



Figure 55: Digital Witness G, (2015)



Figure 56: Digital Witness H, (2015)



Figure 57: Digital Witness I, (2015)



Figure 57: Digital Witness I, (2015)



Figure 58: Digital Witness J, (2015)

Cat-Shaped Hole in the Universe

Emmie Tsumura, 2015

Sometimes we can feel what is not there. Sometimes absence is what shapes us. These scraps from other projects create new forms through absence. Many explorations created during my thesis year were left behind. Some of them fit in to what I am trying to do. Others are still uncategorized. They need more time.

A psychogeographic approach to design is a way to explore these elements, combine, and re-combine them to examine their forms and what new meanings are created. The experience of a masters thesis can feel like this, though all the loose ends are meant to be tied up. Still, these explorations and their elements hang in the balance, potential paths for another time.



Figure 60: Cat-Shaped Hole in the Universe A, (2015)



Figure 61: Cat-Shaped Hole in the Universe B, (2015)

Appendix B

Final Presentation

These typographic slides were presented at the culmination of my thesis year.

Hand-drawn lettering and layouts provide an alternative to conventional design.

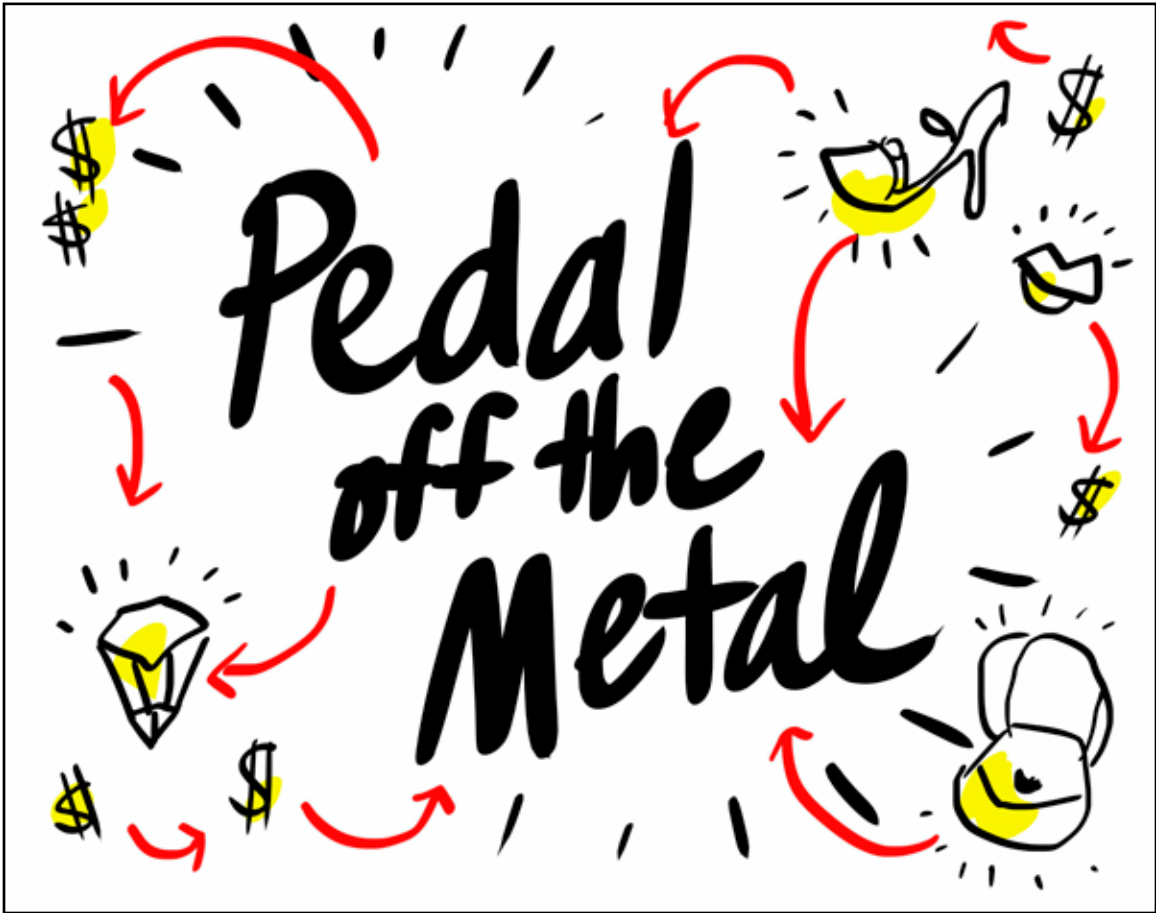


Figure 62: Final Presentation Slide 1, (2015)



Figure 63: Final Presentation Slide 2, (2015)

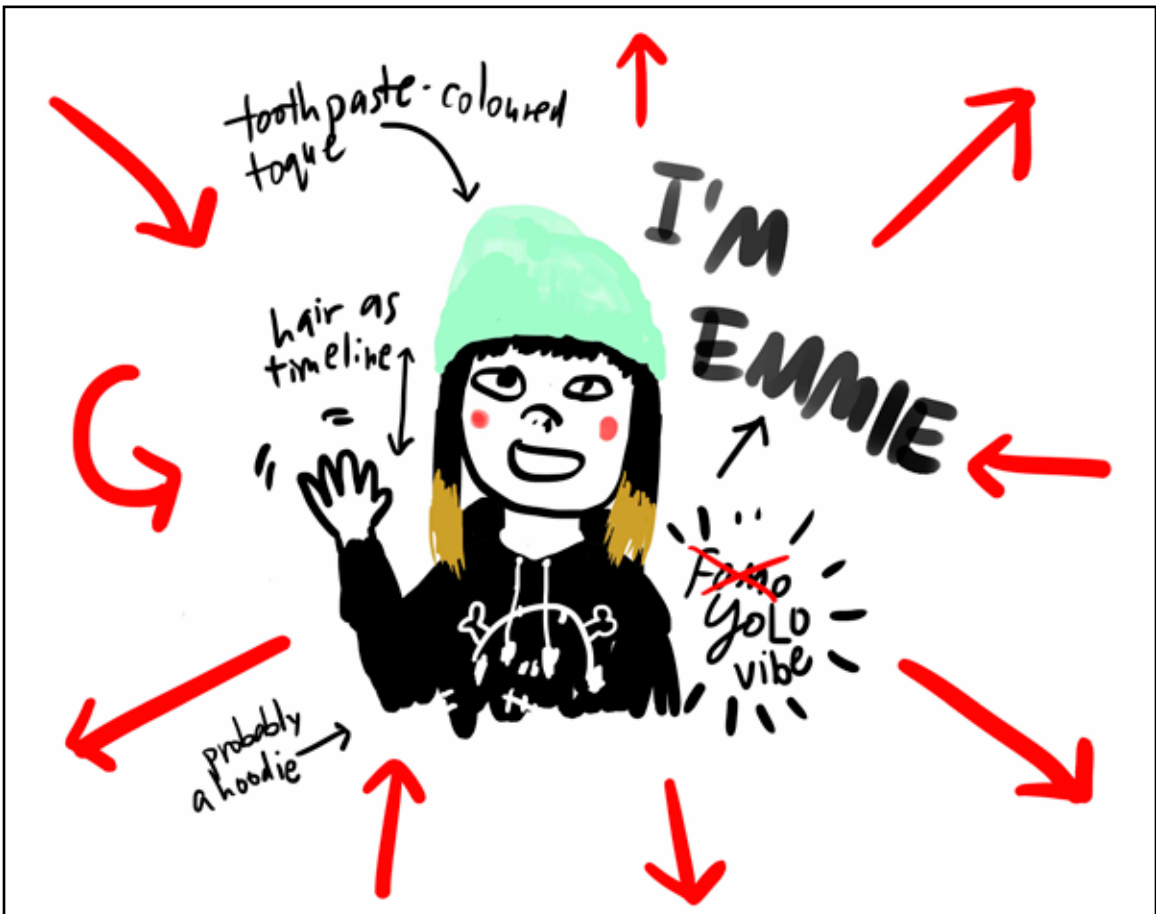


Figure 64: Final Presentation Slide 3, (2015)



Figure 65: Final Presentation Slide 4, (2015)

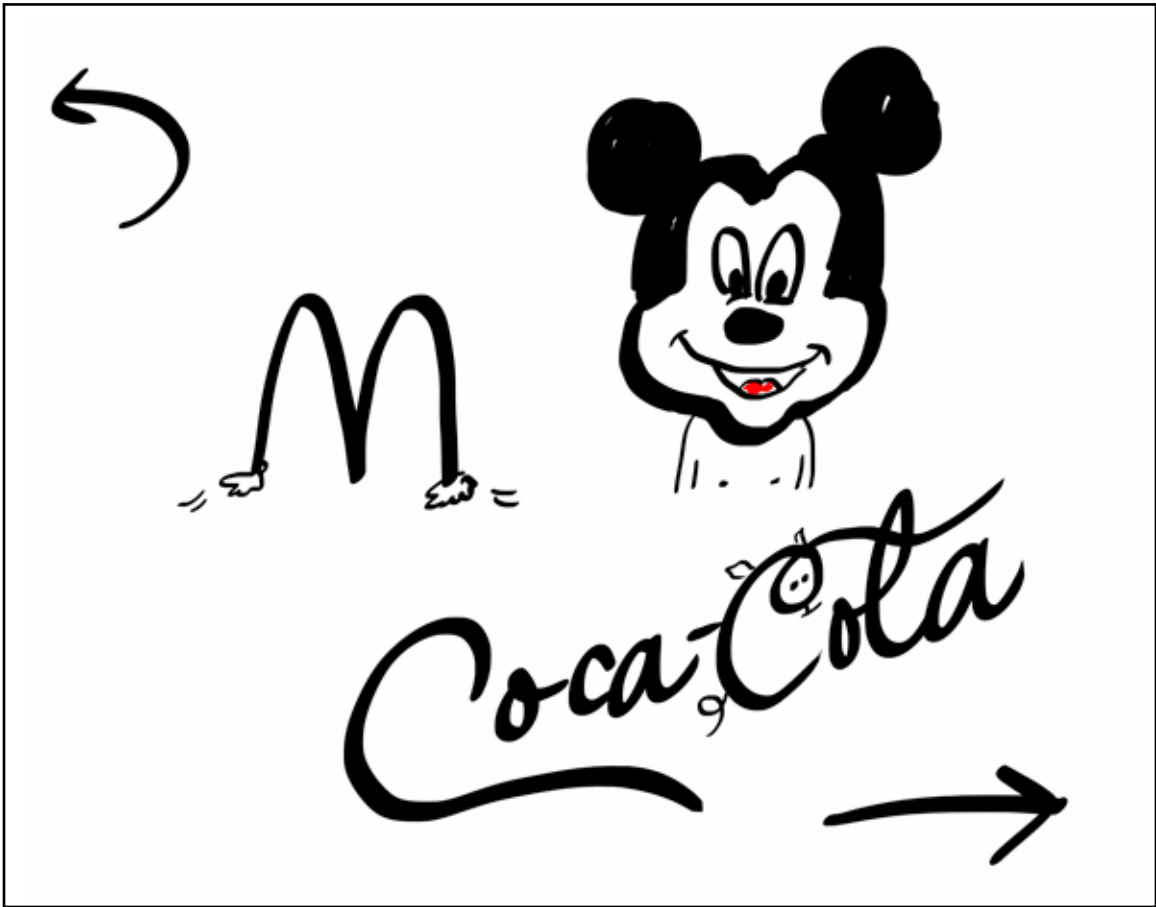


Figure 66: Final Presentation Slide 5, (2015)

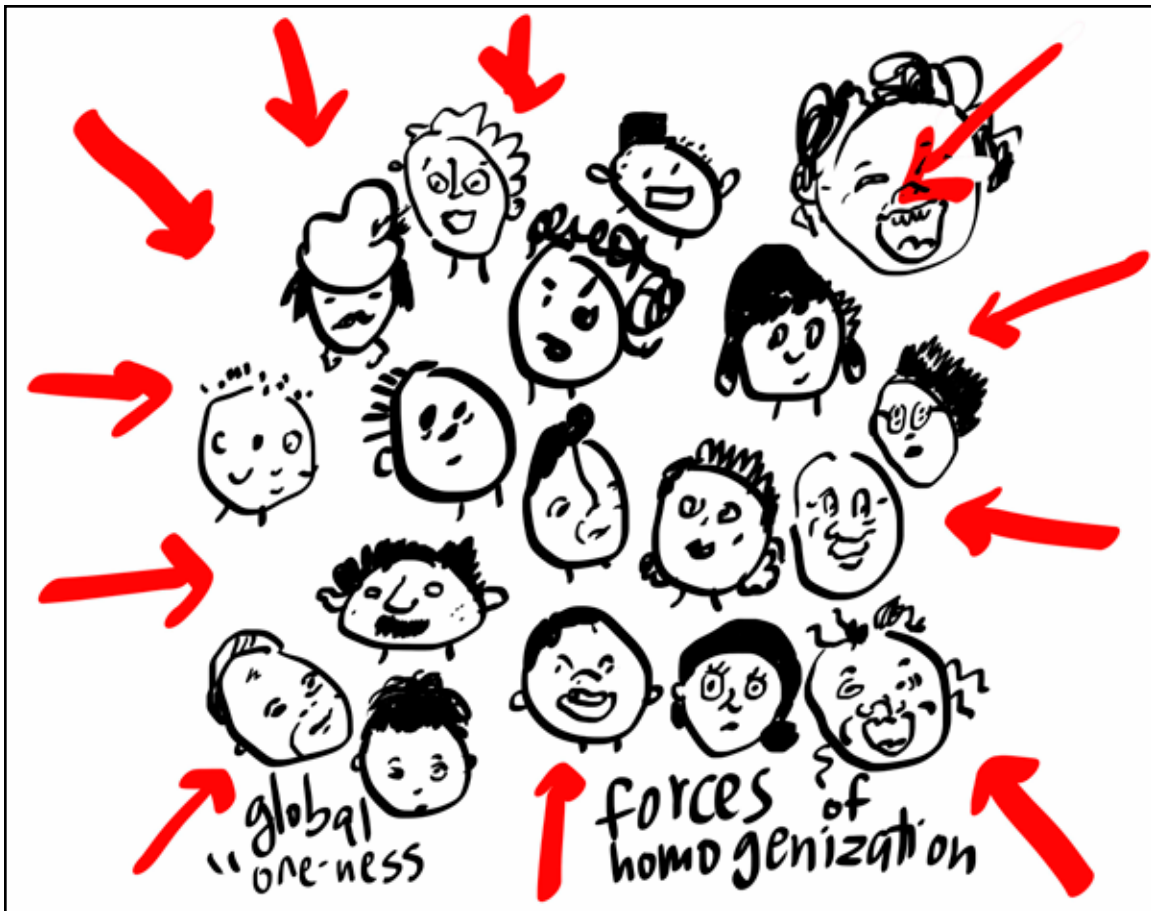


Figure 67: Final Presentation Slide 6, (2015)

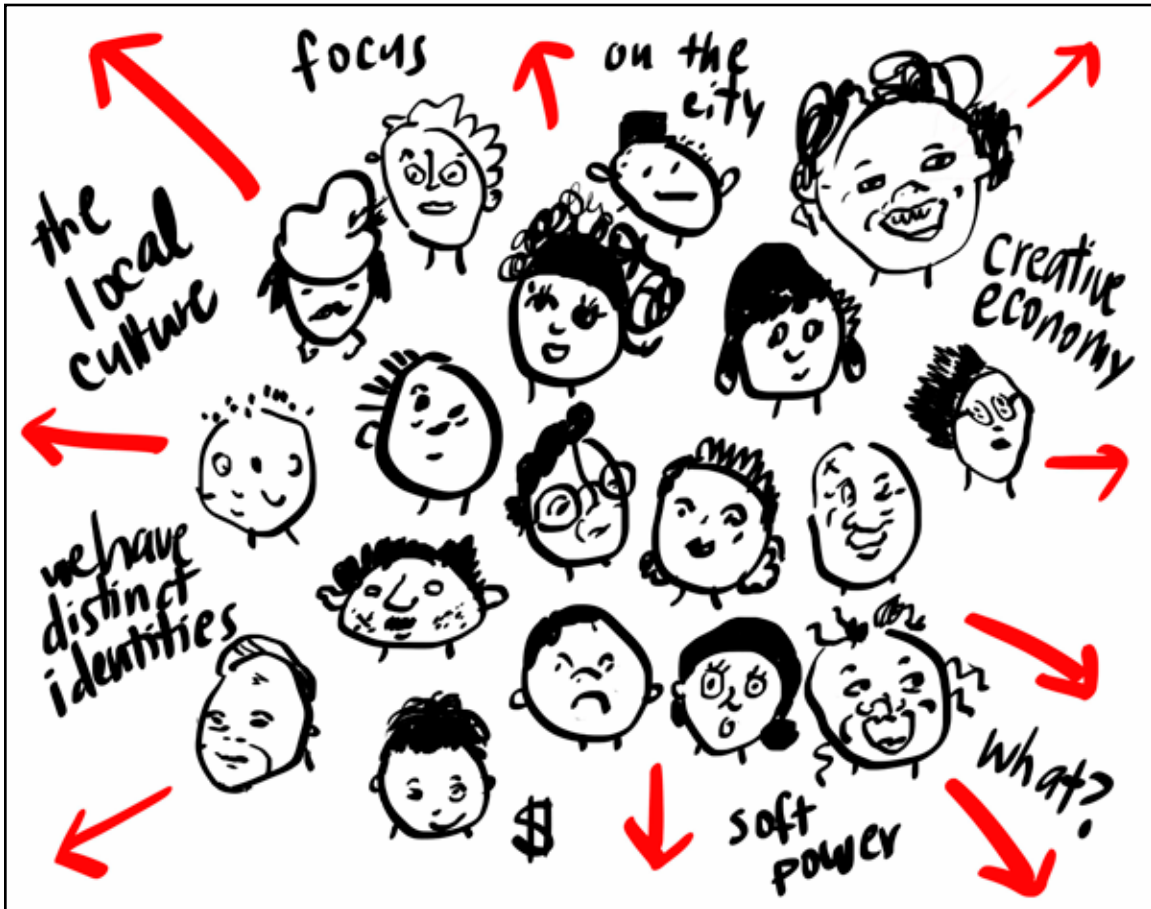


Figure 68: Final Presentation Slide 7, (2015)

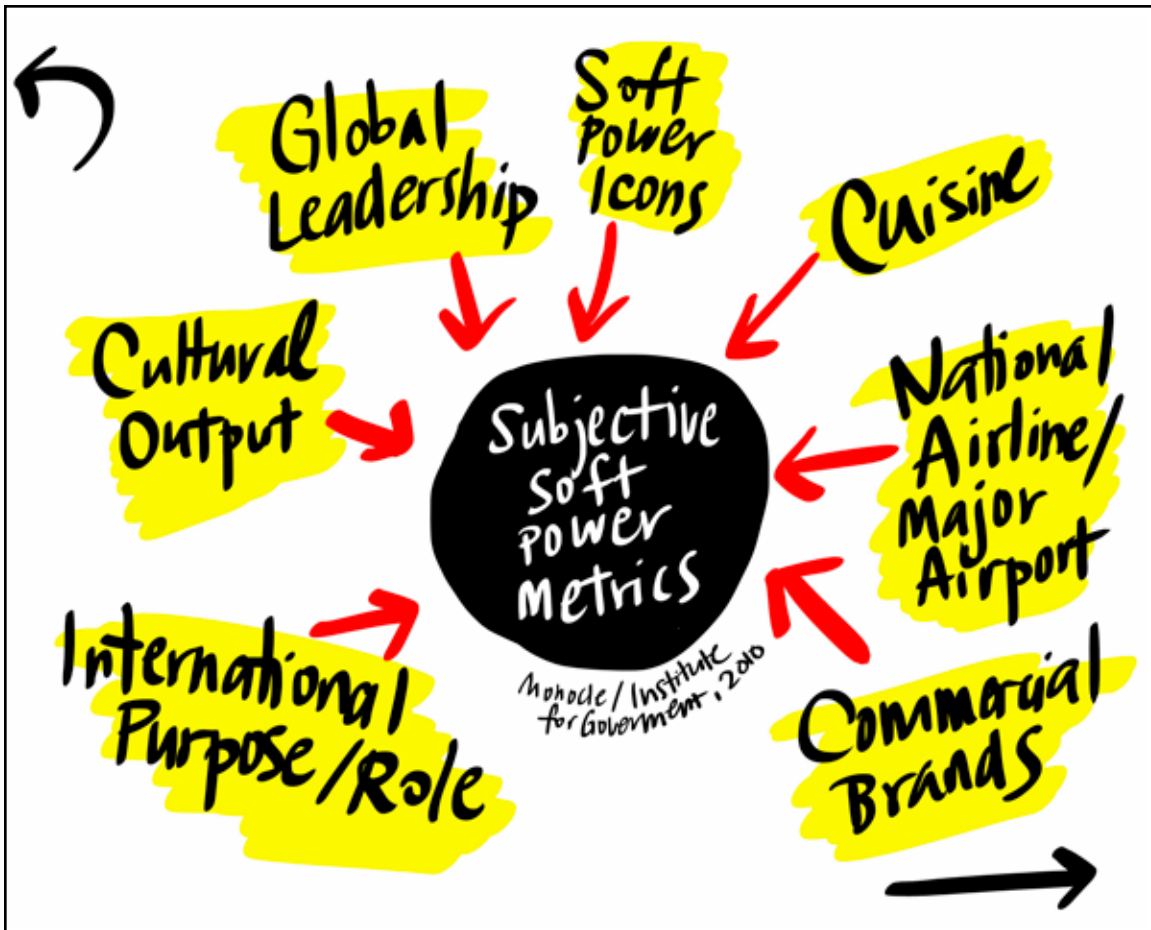


Figure 69: Final Presentation Slide 8, (2015)



Figure 70: Final Presentation Slide 9, (2015)

79 KEY GLOBAL DESIGN EVENTS 2014

www.dezeen.com

CHECKLIST

- High Profile Cities
- Big Investors
- Celebrities
- Luxury lifestyles
- Media Buzz



QUICK FACTS

1. 61 of 75 events were found in the 80's or later
2. London held 10 design events in 2014
3. Kanye West spoke at Cannes Lions 2014

Figure 71: Final Presentation Slide 10, (2015)

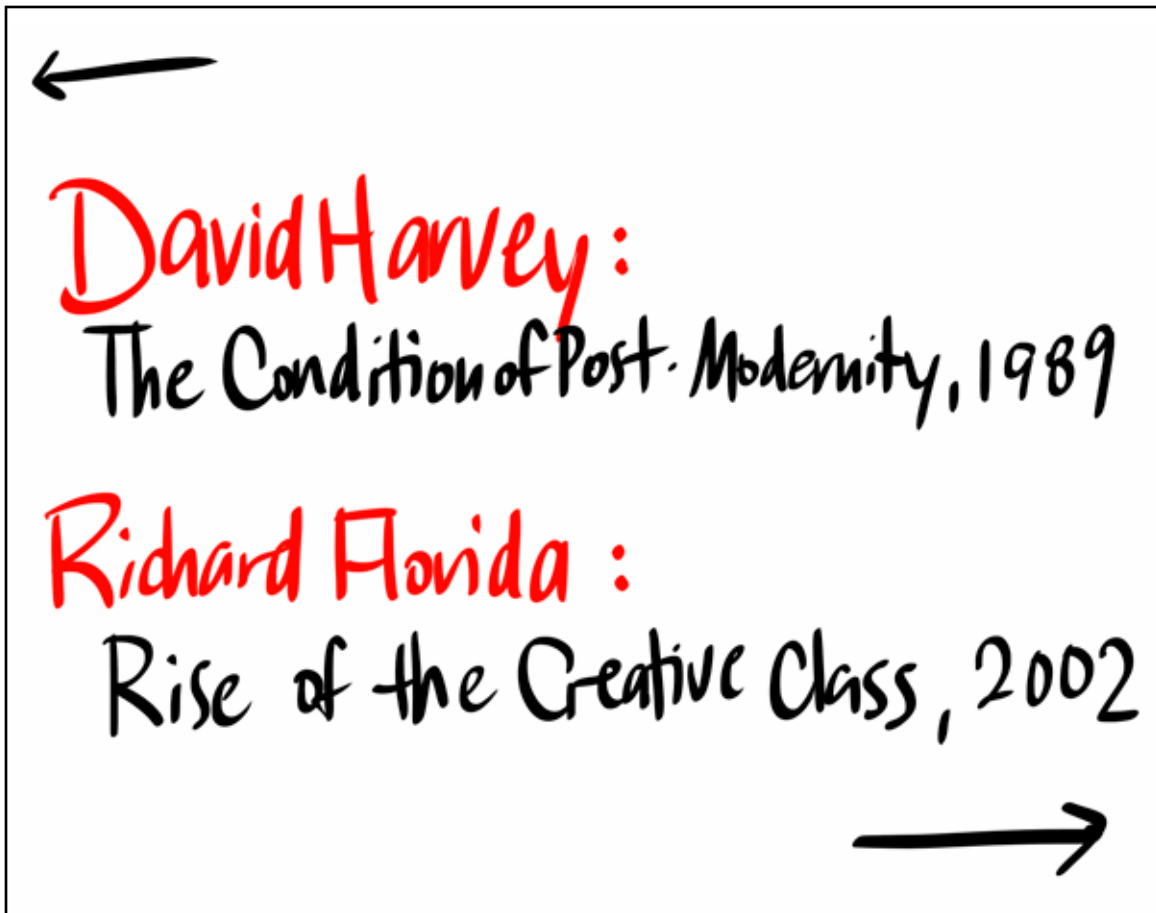


Figure 72: Final Presentation Slide 11, (2015)

TWO KEY ISSUES



1. Global design events cater to the corporate and social elite; this perpetuates existing patterns of cultural imperialism. →
2. Soft power and city-branding are widely accepted theories, but very little critical research has been done in this area.

Figure 73: Final Presentation Slide 12, (2015)

"While elites use Florida's arguments to push for the large arts anchor institutions in cities, most artists understand the negative effects that arts trophy-focused expenditure and strategies will have on lower income communities and on the diversity of artistic venues and funding streams."

- Anne Markusen, 2006

Figure 74: Final Presentation Slide 13, (2015)



Figure 75: Final Presentation Slide 14, (2015)

The Research Question:

How can
psycho geography
be used in graphic design
to explore alternative
ways of seeing the city?

Figure 76: Final Presentation Slide 15, (2015)

Psychogeography

A way of 'drifting' around the city and gaining new and heightened awareness of the urban environment. ← called a *dérive*

Figure 77: Final Presentation Slide 16, (2015)

THE 3 PROJECTS

1

Curious Collections

2

City as Self-Portrait

3

Hidden Cities

Figure 78: Final Presentation Slide 17, (2015)



Figure 79: Final Presentation Slide 17, (2015)