

TOWARD A NEW AGE

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1. ARTIST STATEMENT

I am a graphic and interactive designer and front-end developer. I think design has potential and power to intervene and tip a worlding's affective bloom-space. Teaching, learning, and learning-through-teaching are central to my practice, as is research and accretion. Practically my current work is heavily focused on typography, 3D rendering, and image-making with a punk and non-precious relationship with my digital tools. I am more interested in the broken rather than the right way to do a thing because through dissolution of processes new better ways might be built, and I might build new free tools to do these things better. I like building websites because I still believe in the net as a playground, weird warren, and way to find fellow travelers. Moments of randomness make their way into my work, but only as a way to escape from tired work patterns that might constrain what I make. I strongly believe in free access to tools and raw materials for digital craft, and

1. ARTIST STATEMENT

the typefaces I make are all free to use and re-combine. This and my interest in teaching are parts of my larger belief in community building through generosity. Humor, critical theory, technology, and politics are also central in my work; humor serving to temper the seriousness of the deep topics I only begin to scratch the surfaces of.

2. **PROPOSAL** (deprecated)

For my thesis I will make a series of three publications that examine the present moment through the lens of fashion and technology. I will combine my own writing and existing writing on themes of being marked and unmarked, technical materials, identity ambivalences, and deconstruction, among others. I will develop a custom display typeface for each issue. This publication will be aimed at people interested in critical fashion theory to inspire conversation and questions about what future we are creating and what mechanisms we are using to do so.

I believe in books as a medium even as I am critical in their use of resources and contribution to pollution. Similarly I both am critical of and believe in fashion as a potent mechanism for augury and discourse. To quote DJ and theorist Terre Thaemlitz: "Is it possible to conceive of clothing as non-market driven forms of cultural resistance?" To which

2. **PROPOSAL** (deprecated)

I add: is it possible to conceive of design as such? Both design and fashion remain exciting to me because they are languages of hidden signs. Just as I now see kerning everywhere I go, in fashionable silhouettes I now see the articulation of identity ambivalences. This publication I am proposing combines both design and fashion and much more besides, to unravel the past, detail the present, and dream the future.

3. **ABSTRACT**

In centaur chess - also known as cyborg or advanced chess - humans play in collaboration with an AI that generates a set of moves that the human chooses from. Since the 90s most humans play worse than most mid-level chess AI, but we can still beat the best supercomputers when playing as a human-AI pair. What does a future of centaur design look like? Collaboration with AI is the near future, but what will the profession of graphic design look like in 15 years? Can we build an ethical future of design? One that is self critical in its relation to capital and works against inherent injustices of data violence.

4. SPEECH

Thesis Defense Speech

Oskar Radon, Fall 2020

Hello and welcome to my thesis defense! :)

I originally proposed: A book about clothing that could prepare the wearer for a future of climate change.

The project became: an essay about automation and the future of design, accompanied by some images I made using machine learning.

Basic structure of this talk:

- I'll explain the process I used to make the cool images that accompany the essay
- Then I'll talk a little about the essay
- And hopefully that will lead into a fun discussion about its various themes.

In the essay I tried to ask a lot of questions and not provide too many answers, because my aim is to get to better questions about the future of graphic and UI design and I think we're only going to do that together.

A little bit of a background:

What is a GAN?

A class of machine learning (ML) frameworks invented in 2014 in which two neural networks are pitted against one another to create some kind of output that is similar to a given dataset.

Whats up with the faces?

The original model - which is like an instance of styleGAN - was trained to make images of people's faces, and it was trained on a dataset of 70k images from flickr.

Image making Process

Scraped tons of images - 10k for the posters, 3k for the logos

Preprocessed em, trained the model

Output images

4. SPEECH

What I thought was going to happen is I would get a weird poster generator and logo generator

As I say in the essay, from a machine learning standpoint I failed, but it inspired me to write!

So now I'll show some images from the training process as I go over the main points of the essay.

Main points of the essay:

The first is this idea of **Centaur design**:

Where a person and machine are working in tandem, and I don't think we're there yet because machine intelligence isn't there yet

Then I go into a **High level overview** of the current state of affairs:

For designers there's a plethora of tools to automate design: from Canva to Squarespace
Mostly work that junior designers would probably be doing, and "boilerplate" design - where the client knows they want something that looks like a lot of other stuff
These aren't great jobs for designers, but what happens when we start *automating creative thinking*? This is inevitable, but maybe we aren't that close, maybe we have time to talk about this stuff and try to steer towards an ethical future.

This leads me into the "**tangled web of the automation problem**"

-how is it going to affect labor? We need social services that are going to care for all of these displaced people - M4A, UBI, etc

-how about the environmental impact? Green energy is worryingly not so green

-how about all of the slave labor of conflict minerals happening in central africa? I mention deep sea mining gold rush, and sci-fi books where we start mining asteroids or spreading colonialism to alien people - can we try out something different???

-How about the new avenues for data collection and sophisticated prediction models this will allow for? Surveillance is a bourgeois concern - a lost cause maybe, what do we do about that?

McKenzie Wark's idea from *Capital is Dead*: this construction of the **Hacker class / vectoralist class**

Paired with this Michael Rock quote - "Design is in a modulating role between a user and the world"

Design is in a cool position to intervene maybe!

4. SPEECH

Leads into David Rudnick's Strelka talk from 2017 - *We need new systems of ateliers, we need to support one another and figure this out together*

And then I have this concept of **Variable brands**

We're moving into a future of more big data, the proliferation of mixed reality overlays
1-to-1 mirrorworld reality - Basically everything will be accounted for, tracked
Benjamin Bratton was talking about this indirectly in 2016 with the stack, specifically the address layer

This is again already happening - netflix is showing you different images in the cards based on what sort of movies you like

In minority report a kiosk in a store addresses tom cruise, etc.

Who is building the design tools of the future?

StyleGAN the FFHQ model - where did these images come from? Did everyone knowingly consent? Who did the preprocessing? Well, amazon mechanical turk workers - precarious labor, underpaid, etc.

That's not great

That leads into a call to **Open source the tools so we can decide together the systems of ethics we're baking into these practices**

This idea of "stray generosity"

- Blender
- Free fonts
- Npm packages
- Stack overflow answers
- Youtube tutorials

Again here's the labor problem - how do u make money to eat and pay rent if you're doing all this free labor? It comes back to this self-supporting community and the necessity of governmental support - european governments have social programs to support artists - I think we could have those programs too!

which leads into self-teaching and

How to teach for this future?

If we're saying these tools haven't been built yet but when they're there we could see way less jobs for people coming out of school

This is where I would like to hear from educators and how they are thinking about this!

4. SPEECH

To me it seems like:

-adaptability

Something from the Erik Carter talk

What Bijan says "it's your job to be stoked"

This is also the Meta- skill of the student: find a way to fit your project into a new skill you want to learn and what you're already interested in

That's how to resist the "javascript fatigue" of design tools - like I want to learn figma but I already know sketch :-> im going to make a project

And then I end on this idea of a beautiful move

AlphaGo vs. Lee sedol in 2016 - made a new style of play, it made moves that no human would play because it "thought" about the game differently

It's up to everyone watching right now to make these new styles

This concept of "productive error" - I wouldn't have had this idea on my own, it came from self-teaching and doing it wrong and being ok with failure because it made something beautiful and cool

I hope this essay has the tone of like in the wild west I'm a prospector and I come into town and im like "hey I found a bunch of gold just sitting out in the desert, what should we do about this?" - which is cognizant of the colonialism inherent in this metaphor -> points back to the tangled web of problems

I would like to end by saying thank you to everyone who supported me in this process <3

So now I would like to open our this up to a conversation with the panel

and then we'll open it up to everyone if you want to ask questions or bring up what this made you think about :)

5. CREATIVE BRIEF

A. Project Vision

An essay with three sections:

- Propose future tools that can be used to automate design processes equitably.
- Show what the output from these tools could look like.
- Provide historical context and precedents for these tools.

Accompanied by images from a styleGAN model trained on contemporary graphic design posters and logos.

B. Audience

Graphic designers who are interested in critical theory and their profession. People interested in technology, AI, and building an equitable future.

C. Methods & Materials

For creating images: I found archives on archive.org, tumblr, and various sites. Then scraped them, batch processed the images, and did

5. CREATIVE BRIEF

other pre-processing including reviewing and removing outliers and rotating them. Then I ran the training, and output images. I did this with four models. Throughout this process I wrote the essay with my mentor Rob Lewis.

D. Comparative Media

Essays or talks by designers: [David Rudnick at Strelka](#), Dot Dot Dot or Émigré magazine, Erik Carter's essay "[Do You Want Typography or Do You Want The Truth?](#)" for *The Outline*.

E. Marketplace Application

An essay about graphic design, could be published in a journal or made into a small chapbook.

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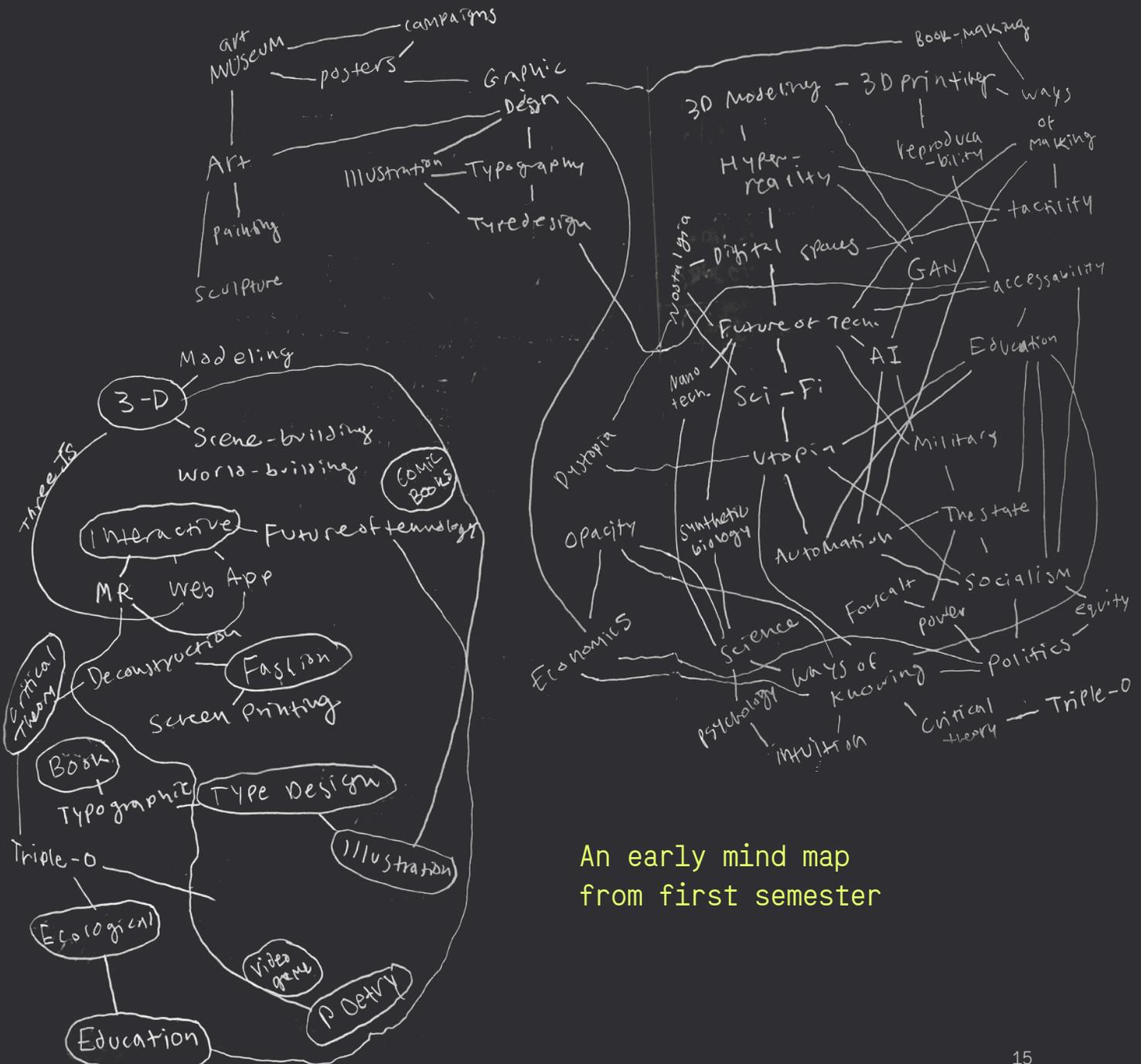
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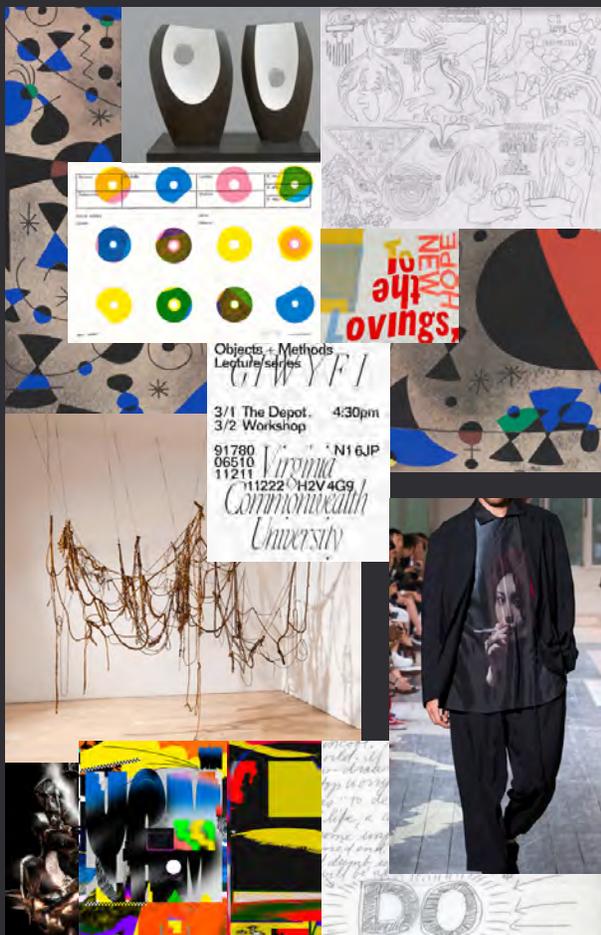
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7. JOURNAL



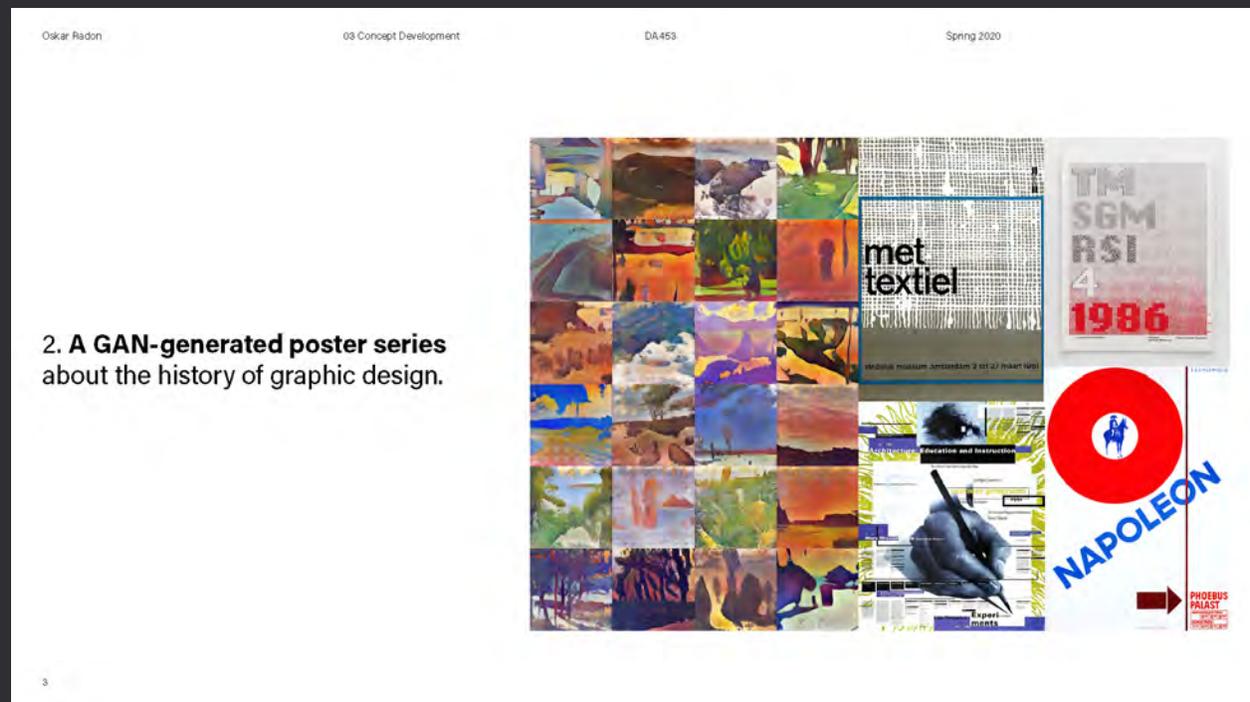
An early mind map from first semester

7. JOURNAL



Early mind-map/collage exercise

7. JOURNAL



Early concept collage

7. JOURNAL

Actual makeup of each dataset:

Dataset #1

6,869 poster images

"design" are.na channels - 3088

anothergraphic - 566

calarts poster archive - 2171

IBM poster archive - 109

yalegraphicdesign tumblr - 1175

random images from Type I - 164

Dataset #2

10,609 images

Dataset #1 +

gurafiku tumblr - 1336

metahaven - 267

david rudnick - 824

hassan rahim - 59

mikey joyce - 213

michael oswell - 507

jonathan castro - 110

7. JOURNAL

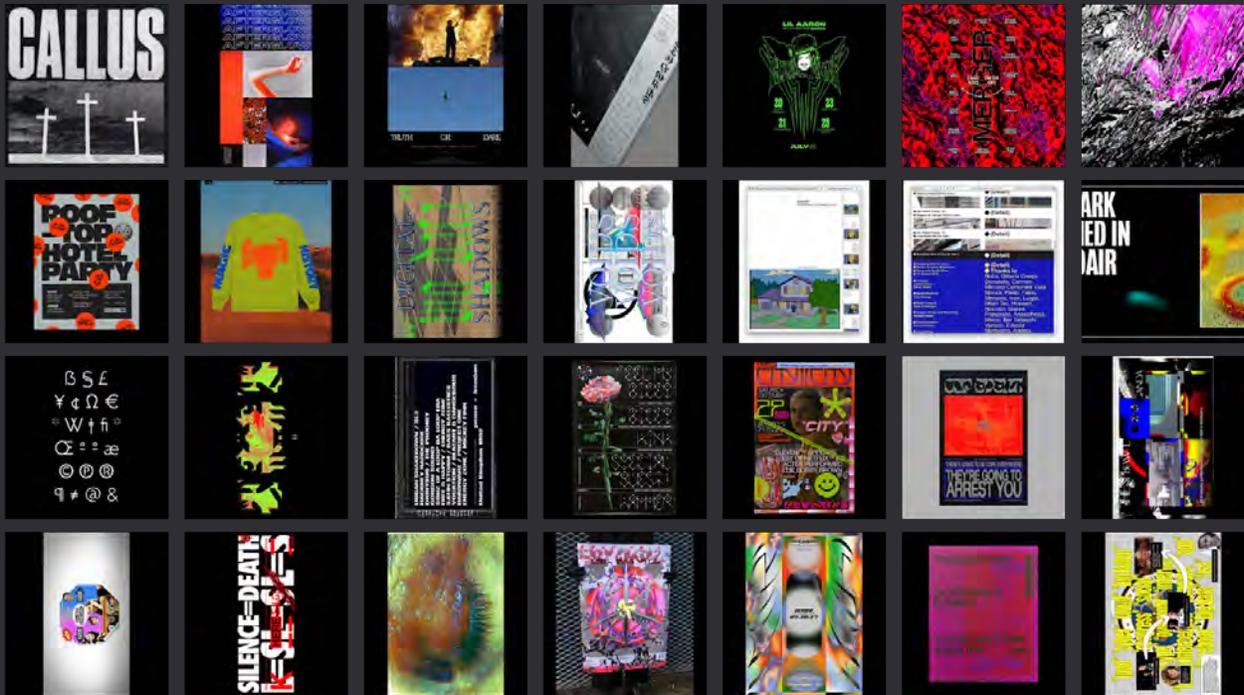
Dataset #3
1,980 images

metahaven - 267
david rudnick - 824
hassan rahim - 59
mikey joyce - 213
michael oswell - 507
jonathan castro - 110

Dataset #4
2,920 logos

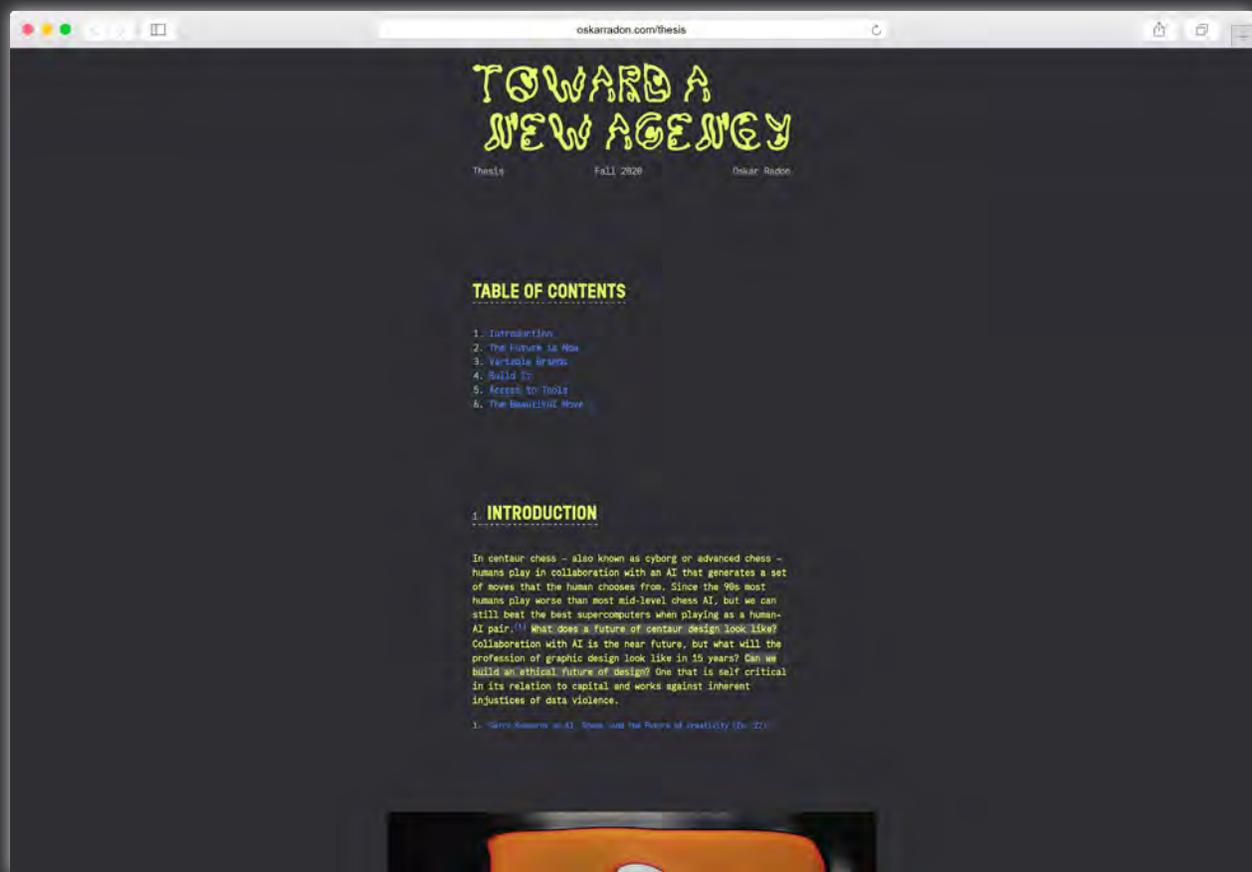
All from logobook.com,
big and small companies,
international, contemporary
and historical

7. JOURNAL



A few of the training images used for model #3

8. DOCUMENTATION



Website mockup

8. DOCUMENTATION



Output from model #3, trained on poster images

8. DOCUMENTATION



Output from model #4, trained on logo images

8. DOCUMENTATION



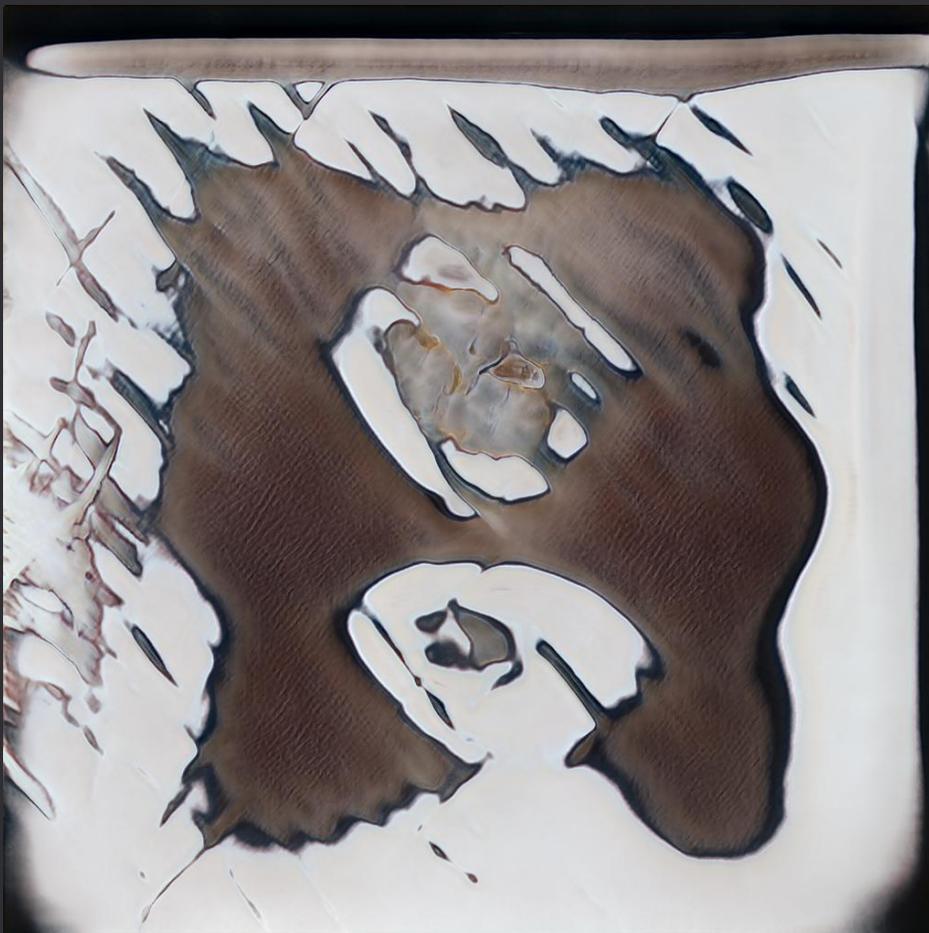
Output from model #2, trained on poster images

8. DOCUMENTATION



Output from model #4, trained on logo images

8. DOCUMENTATION



Output from model #3, trained on poster images

8. DOCUMENTATION



Output from model #3, trained on poster images

0. **THANK YOU!**
