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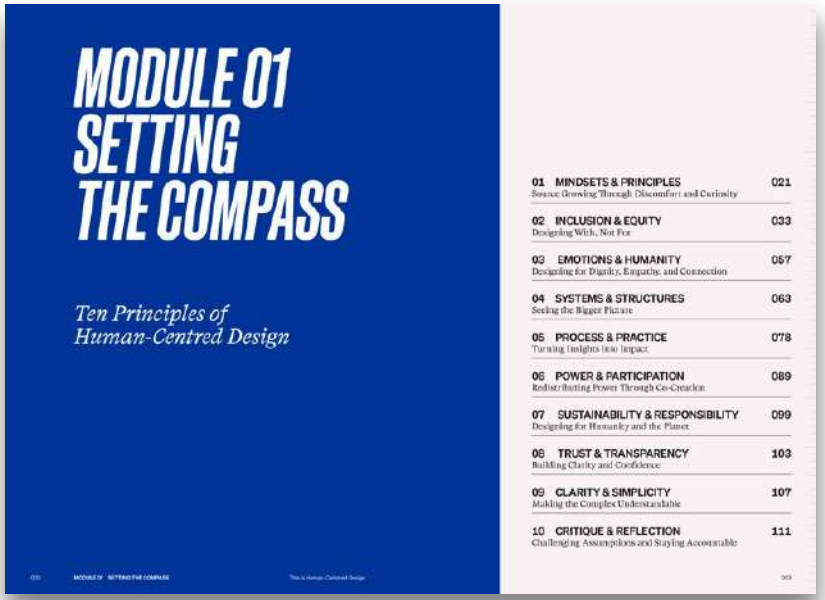
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CHAPTER 1
MINDSETS & PRINCIPLES

Growing Through Discomfort and Curiosity

Earlier in my career, I was drawn to projects and roles that promised excitement – the free snacks, the pool tables, and the buzzwords painted on the walls. I chased what I thought success looked like: higher pay, impressive titles, and the external signs of progress that society teaches us to value. At the time, it felt like the natural path, a way to prove that I was moving forward.

But with experience came perspective. I began to see that those things, while nice in the moment, often distracted from what truly mattered: the quality of the work itself and the difference it made. I found myself asking harder questions about purpose, integrity, and the kind of impact I wanted to have. I found myself having longer, more meaningful questions with people that I trusted and who helped shape my perspective of the world. The symbols of success began to feel hollow when the work lacked depth or meaning.

I came to understand that meaningful work isn't defined by perks or prestige. It's defined by contribution—by the feeling that your effort leaves something or someone better off than before. Once I shifted my focus from chasing status to creating genuine value, everything about how I approached design began to change.

What exactly is 'Meaningful work'?

Bringing meaning to your work transforms your life. It helps you connect your values to what you do each day and focus your energy on what truly matters. By doing this, you build a reservoir of resilience that you can draw from when things get hard, when ambiguity feels endless, when others misunderstand your ideas, or when the system resists change.

I often hear the same reflection when I speak to people working in corporate environments. They ask why they work for a tech company or a bank and wonder, "Should I quit my job and work for an NGO instead?" My answer is always the same: it depends.

You create meaningful work not by changing sectors but by bringing intent to what you already do. When you work with purpose inside systems that need care and reform, you create impact where it's often most needed. When you approach your role with empathy, curiosity, and a commitment to improve conditions for others, you practise meaningful design no matter what organisation you work for.

Purpose is the 'why'
the deeper motivation behind your contribution.

If you're unsure how to answer this question, connect with the people who use your service. Listening to their stories about how they experience what your organisation produces is a lovelier. It reminds you why your work exists in the first place and often stirs a renewed sense of motivation, empathy, and pride. It's easy to lose sight of purpose when buried in internal priorities, but real meaning lives in the lives.

Practice is the 'how'
the craft, rigour, and methods you use to shape outcomes.

If you're unsure how to answer this question or feel that your craft skills have stagnated, look for opportunities to teach as part of your role. Teaching forces you to simplify, clarify, and articulate your thinking in new ways. It helps you rediscover the fundamentals of your practice, see patterns you may have stopped noticing, and reconnect with the curiosity that first brought you into this work.

Presence is the 'who'
the awareness and intentionality you bring to each moment, each conversation, each decision.

If you want to strengthen your presence, start by paying attention to your state before entering a meeting or conversation. Take a moment to slow down, breathe, and notice what you're bringing into the room, such as your mood, assumptions, and your energy.

Presence is not about performing calmly or confidently; it is about showing up consciously, ready to listen and adapt. Over time, this small act of awareness can transform how others experience working with you and how you experience the work itself.

It's not always about who you work for. It's about how you work. Bringing intent, empathy, and care into misaligned or rigid systems is itself meaningful work. Many of these environments need people who can humanise them from within, who can hold space for better questions and create small shifts that ripple outward. That work is slow and often invisible, but it matters deeply.

To bring meaning into your work, you must connect three things: your purpose, your practice, and your presence.

THIS IS HUMAN CENTERED DESIGN

PRACTICAL GUIDE TO DESIGNING BETTER SERVICES, SYSTEMS, AND EXPERIENCES

CREATIVE BUSINESS

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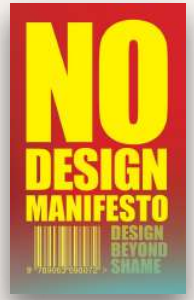
This is Human Centered Design cuts through jargon and hype to offer a clear, honest guide to what human centered design really is, how to practise it with integrity, and why it matters today. Structured around ten core principles, including Curiosity, Inclusion & Equity, Systems Thinking, Participation, and Trust & Transparency, the book combines reflective stories, practical exercises, and real world case studies.

Drawing on conversations with hundreds of practitioners, from emerging designers to leaders shaping complex systems, it helps readers navigate ambiguity, align values with action, and build the confidence to design with purpose, humility, and lasting impact.

GERRY SCULLION & JAKOB SCHNEIDER

Gerry Scullion is a service designer, educator, and founder of This is HCD, a leading human-centered design community and podcast. As director of Humana, he helps organizations drive meaningful transformation through design. Jakob Schneider is a designer, creative director, and co-founder of KD1. He published This is Service Design Doing, a widely used service design book.



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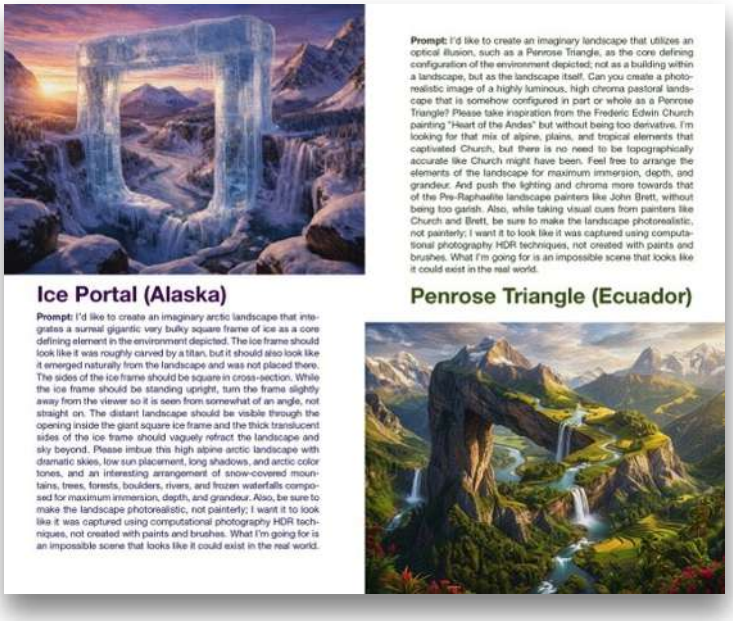

Ice Portal (Alaska)

Prompt: I'd like to create an imaginary arctic landscape that integrates a surreal gigantic very bulky square frame of ice as a core defining element in the environment depicted. The ice frame should look like it was roughly carved by a titan, but it should also look like it emerged naturally from the landscape and was not placed there. The sides of the ice frame should be square in cross-section. While the ice frame should be standing upright, turn the frame slightly away from the viewer so it is seen from somewhat of an angle, not straight on. The distant landscape should be visible through the opening inside the giant square ice frame and the thick translucent sides of the ice frame should vaguely refract the landscape and sky beyond. Please imbue this high alpine arctic landscape with dramatic skies, low sun placement, long shadows, and arctic color tones, and an interesting arrangement of snow-covered mountains, trees, forests, boulders, rivers, and frozen waterfalls composed for maximum immersion, depth, and grandeur. Also, be sure to make the landscape photorealistic, not painterly; I want it to look like it was captured using computational photography HDR techniques, not created with paints and brushes. What I'm going for is an impossible scene that looks like it could exist in the real world.

Prompt: I'd like to create an imaginary landscape that utilizes an optical illusion, such as a Penrose Triangle, as the core defining configuration of the environment depicted; not as a building within a landscape, but as the landscape itself. Can you create a photorealistic image of a highly luminous, high chroma pastoral landscape that is somehow configured in part or whole as a Penrose Triangle? Please take inspiration from the Frederic Edwin Church painting "Heart of the Andes" but without being too derivative. I'm looking for that mix of alpine, plains, and tropical elements that captivated Church, but there is no need to be topographically accurate like Church might have been. Feel free to arrange the elements of the landscape for maximum immersion, depth, and grandeur. And push the lighting and chroma more towards that of the Pre-Raphaelite landscape painters like John Brett, without being too garish. Also, while taking visual cues from painters like Church and Brett, be sure to make the landscape photorealistic, not painterly; I want it to look like it was captured using computational photography HDR techniques, not created with paints and brushes. What I'm going for is an impossible scene that looks like it could exist in the real world.

Penrose Triangle (Ecuador)



PROMPT

ART & DESIGN IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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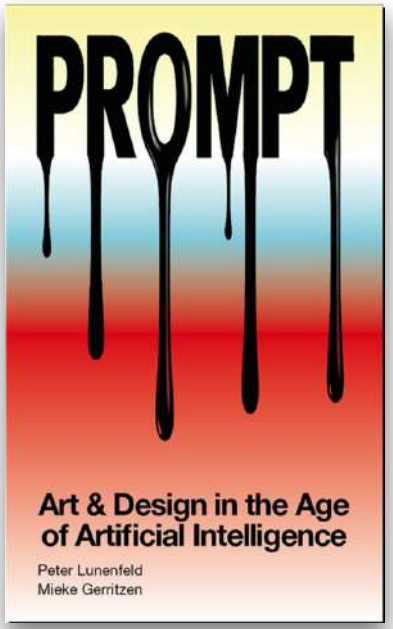

Artificial intelligence is reshaping creative work at breathtaking speed, yet public debate often swings between hype and fear. Prompt offers a grounded alternative: a clear guide to understanding AI as a new medium for human creativity. Written for creative professionals, students, and cultural leaders, the book explores how AI is transforming art, design, architecture, media, and visual culture.

Rather than focusing on technical systems or economic disruption, it asks how these tools can be used creatively, critically, and responsibly. Through essays, interviews, case studies, and visual examples, Prompt provides inspiration and practical orientation: not a manifesto or manual, but a thoughtful toolkit for creative resilience in a rapidly changing world.

PETER LUNENFELD & MIEKE GERRITZEN

Peter Lunenfeld is a professor at UCLA and founder of the Institute for Technology & Aesthetics. Mieke Gerritzen is a designer and curator, and Creative Director at Next Nature Network. She has written ten books and created twenty exhibitions on technology and media.



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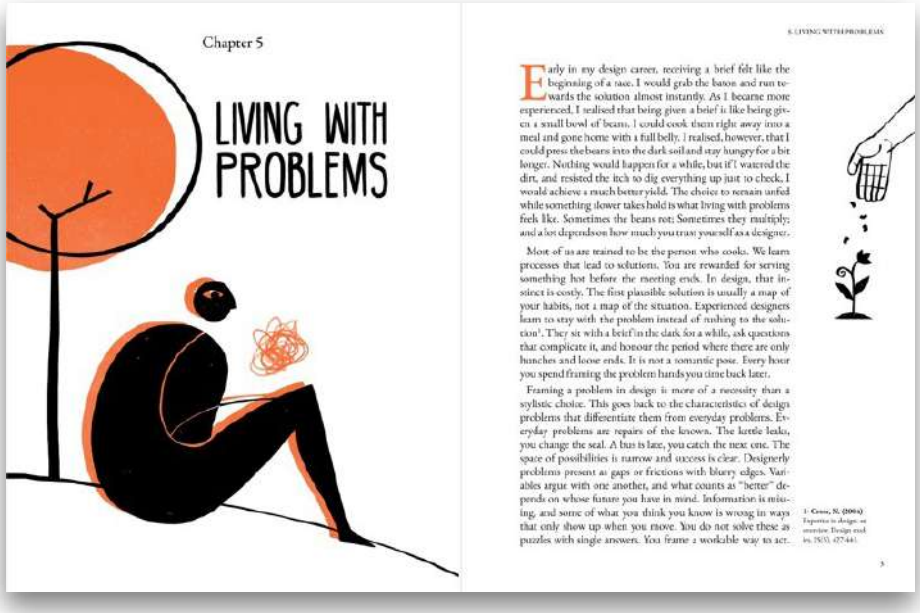
Chapter 5

LIVING WITH PROBLEMS

5. LIVING WITH PROBLEMS

Early in my design career, receiving a brief felt like the beginning of a race. I would grab the baton and run towards the solution almost instantly. As I became more experienced, I realised that being given a brief is like being given a small bowl of beans. I could cook them right away into a meal and gone home with a full belly. I realised, however, that I could press the beans into the dark soil and stay hungry for a bit longer. Nothing would happen for a while, but if I watered the dirt, and resisted the itch to dig everything up just to check, I would achieve a much better yield. The choice to remain unfed while something slower takes hold is what living with problems feels like. Sometimes the beans rot; Sometimes they multiply; and a lot depends on how much you trust yourself as a designer.

Most of us are trained to be the person who cooks. We learn processes that lead to solutions. You are rewarded for serving something hot before the meeting ends. In design, that instinct is costly. The first plausible solution is usually a map of your habits, not a map of the situation. Experienced designers learn to stay with the problem instead of rushing to the solution[1]. They sit with a brief in the dark for a while, ask questions that complicate it, and honour the period where there are only hunches and loose ends. It is not a romantic pose. Every hour you spend framing the problem hands you time back later.

Framing a problem in design is more of a necessity than a stylistic choice. This goes back to the characteristics of design problems that differentiate them from everyday problems. Everyday problems are repairs of the known. The kettle leaks, you change the seal. A bus is late, you catch the next one. The space of possibilities is narrow and success is clear. Designerly problems present as gaps or frictions with blurry edges. Variables argue with one another, and what counts as "better" depends on whose future you have in mind. Information is missing, and some of what you think you know is wrong in ways that only show up when you move. You do not solve these as puzzles with single answers. You frame a workable way to act.

1- Cross, N. (2006) Expertise in design: an overview. Design stud ies 28(5), 427-441.


BEFORE THE SOLUTION

Staying with the problem is a mental challenge. You are three days into a brief and you have nothing to present. The team next door already has concepts on the wall. Your client emails asking for a progress update and you reply with questions instead of slides. A colleague glances at your desk and sees index cards and scribbles where they expect wireframes. That silence, the gap between receiving a brief and having something to show for it, is where this chapter lives. You rarely get paid to come up with problems, and when you do, there is little shared understanding of what a "good" problem even looks like. Most tools and methods point you towards the solution, and framing the problem feels like an onboarding phase, something to get through so you can move on to what your job is supposedly about. But when you plant the beans instead of cooking and serving them, you do not wait idly. There are things you can do to make sure they are not rotting in the dark but growing into something worth the hunger.

This chapter introduces you to designers' habits of living with problems and making the best of it. We begin with the hardest part: learning to tolerate not knowing. Uncertainty is where most designers flinch, and where the best ones settle in. From there, we look at how to collect and scope the pieces of a problem, how to judge what fits inside your frame and what to leave out, and why the size of a problem and the size of its solution are rarely what you expect. We then turn to iteration, not as polishing a fixed answer, but as a discipline of letting each attempt talk back and reshape the question. The chapter widens to consider how zooming out of a brief can transform its possibilities, how problems sit inside larger systems, and how to untangle their apparent complexity. We close with a move that experienced designers learn to make: turning the problem itself into something valuable, so that the frame becomes a feature rather than a constraint to be overcome.

Of knowledge naught remained I did not know,
Of secrets, scarcely any, high or low;
All day and night for three score and twelve years,
I pondered, just to learn that naught I know.

Umar Khayyam
Rubá'iyyát. Sa'idi 1991, p. 125

BEFORE THE SOLUTION

LIVING DESIGN BEYOND TOOLS AND TEMPLATES

DESIGN

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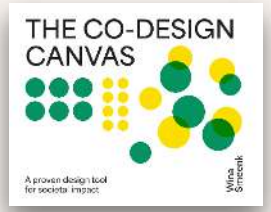
Design is a deeply human capability, and it is increasingly practised through tools, templates, and AI that can generate polished solutions at speed and scale. The risk is a profession whose outputs look right yet lack depth, character, and humanity. If you have ever felt your process is correct but your outcomes are interchangeable, the gap is rarely in the tools. It is in what comes before them.

Before the Solution helps you build the practice between projects. It focuses on the part of practice you can train without a brief in front of you: how you sit with a problem before reaching for a template, how you let a prototype change the question rather than just refine the answer, how you decide what to ignore, and how you stay in charge of the work when AI is in the room.

MORTEZA POURMOHAMADI

Dr Morteza Pourmohamadi is an award-winning design educator, researcher, and leader working at the intersection of design practice and cognition. He holds a PhD in Design Computing and Cognition from the University of Sydney, where he teaches design studios. Over two decades, he has helped leaders, entrepreneurs, and organisations tackle complex challenges through creativity and design.



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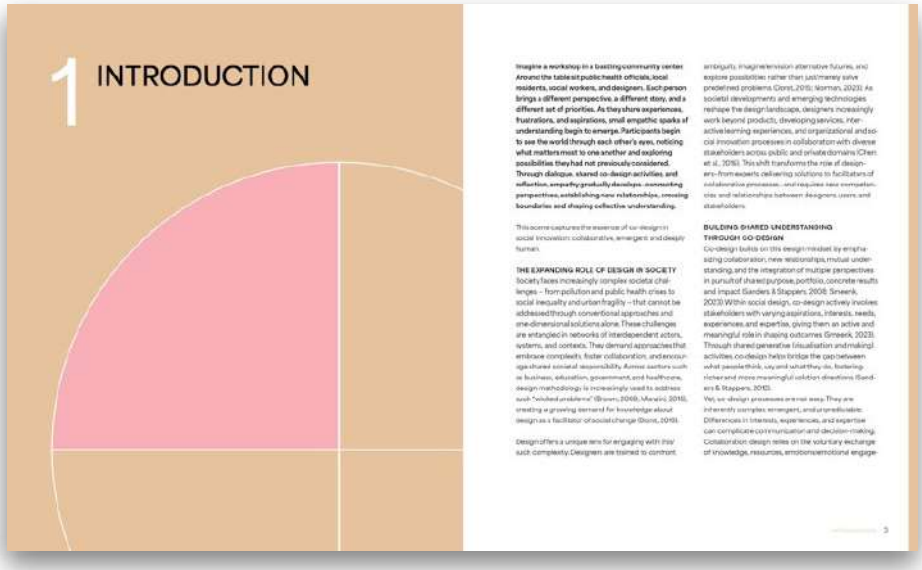
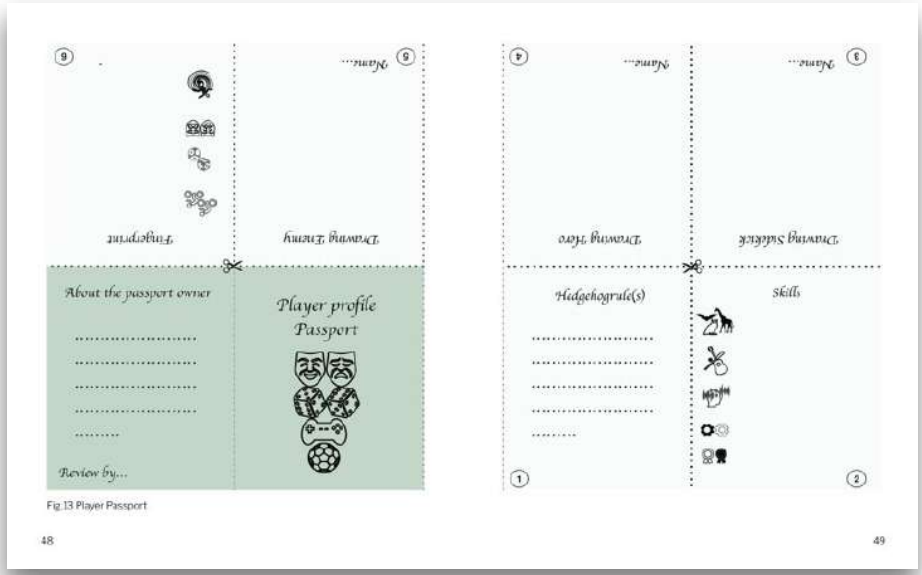

1 INTRODUCTION


About the passport owner
Player profile Passport
Review by...
Fingerprint
Drawing Enemy
Drawing Hero
Drawing Sidekick
Hedgehogrule(s)
Skills
Fig.13 Player Passport

THE EMPATHY COMPASS

DESIGNING WITH CARE IN COMPLEX SOCIETAL SYSTEMS

DESIGN

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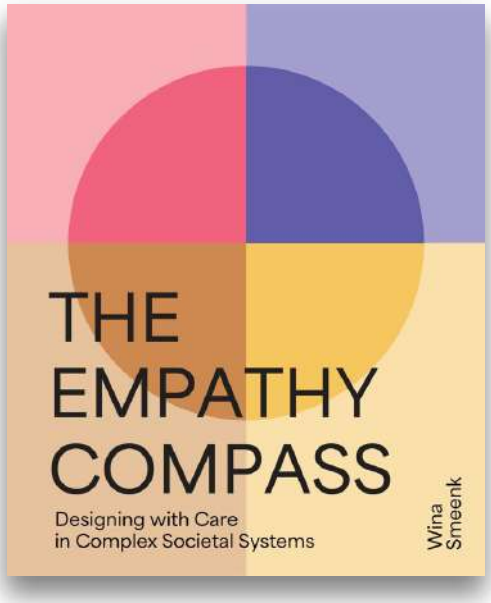
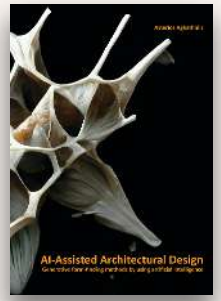


Empathy is widely celebrated in design, policymaking, and organisational change, yet it is often reduced to a tool that reinforces existing assumptions. The Empathy Compass challenges this by reframing empathy as a systemic, relational, and ethical orientation. In complex issues such as healthcare, climate transition, ageing, and digital governance, empathy shapes whose voices are heard, what counts as evidence, and which futures become possible.

At the heart of the book is the Empathy Compass: a four-quadrant framework helping designers, researchers, policymakers, and leaders navigate tension, difference, and complexity more consciously. Through case studies and practical reflection, the book offers language and structure to balance care with analysis, involvement with reflection, and conviction with openness.

WINA SMEENK

Wina Smeenk specialises in innovation, human-centered and co-design. She is Professor Societal Impact Design, developed many educational programs and co-founded the Expertisenetwork Systemic Co-Design. She also worked as an innovation strategist and designer for international companies like Sony, Playstation, and Giant Bicycles.



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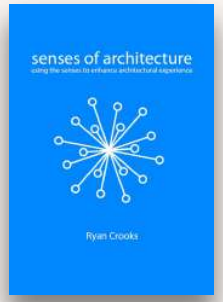

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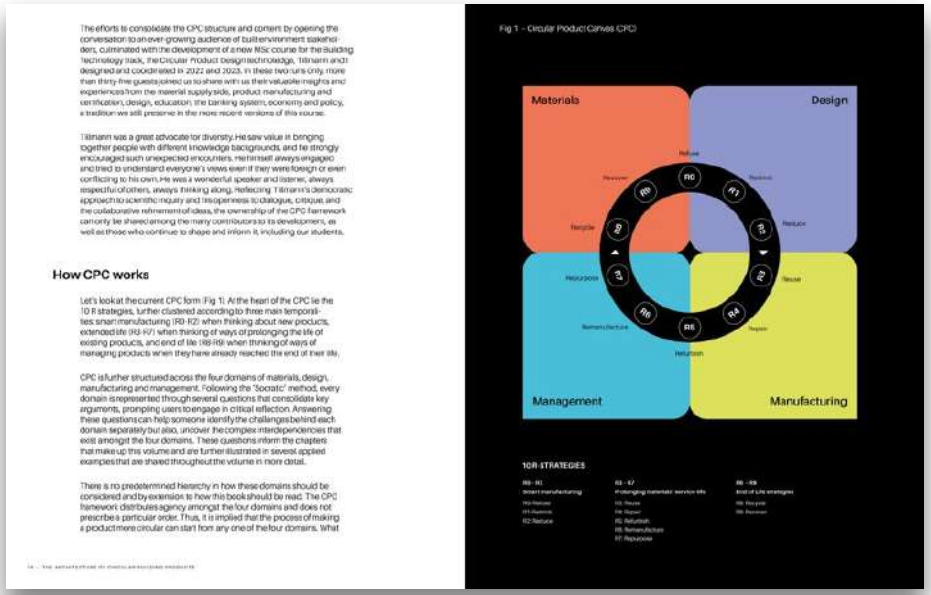



THE ARCHITECTURE OF CIRCULAR BUILDING PRODUCTS

A SYSTEMIC DESIGN APPROACH

DESIGN

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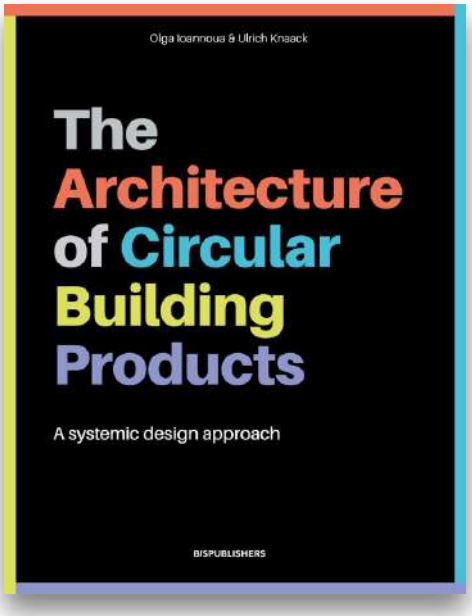
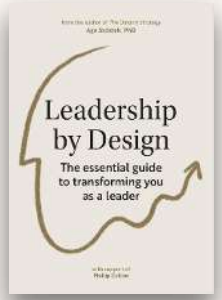


The transition to a circular built environment shifts focus from buildings as single objects to the components from which they are made. This requires architects, engineers, manufacturers, policymakers and other stakeholders to rethink how materials are sourced, products are designed and buildings are managed throughout their life cycle.

This book offers a practical methodology for advancing circularity in the built environment through the domains of materials, design, manufacturing and management. Edited by Olga Ioannou and Ulrich Knaack, close collaborators of the late Professor Tillmann Klein, it combines research, industry expertise and real world applications to provide valuable insights into circular building products and processes.

ULRICH KNAACK & OLGA LOANNOU

Olga Ioannou is Assistant Professor at TU Delft, where her research focuses on circular building products, bio based materials and systemic design. Ulrich Knaack is Professor at TU Delft and TU Darmstadt, specializing in construction systems, façade technology and innovative materials. Together, they combine research, education and practice to advance circular and sustainable approaches in the built environment.



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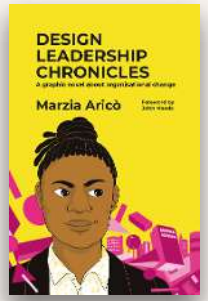

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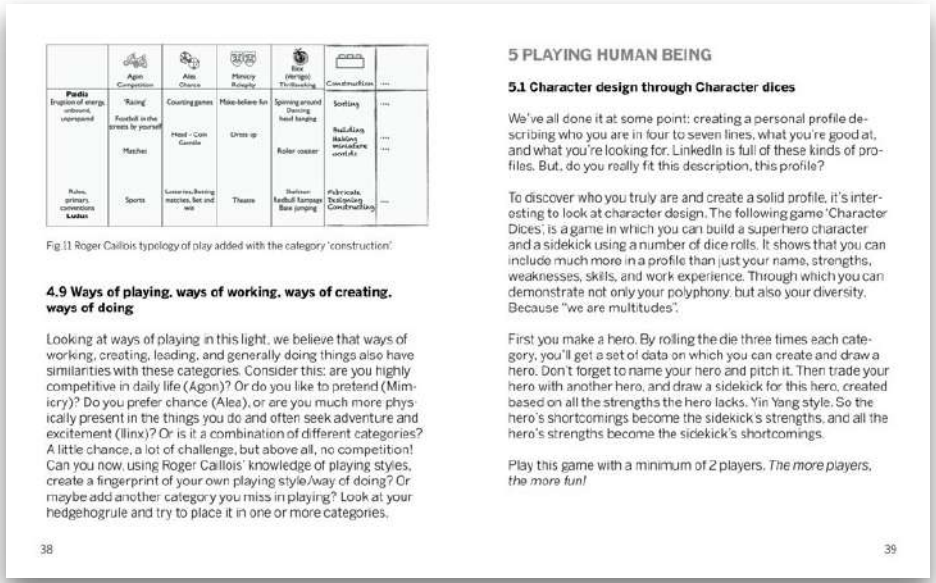

	Agon Competition	Alea Chance	Mimicry Roleplay	Ilinx (vertigo) Thrillseeking	Construction	...
Paidia Eruption of energy, unbound, unrepaired	'Racing'	Counting games	Make-believe fun	Spinning around Dancing head banging	Sorting	...
	Football in the streets by yourself	Head – Coin Gamble	Dress-up		Building, Making miniature worlds	...
	Matches			Roller coaster		...
Rules, primary, conventions **Ludus**	Sports	Gambling, Betting matches, bet and win	Theatre	Skydiving Football Rampage Base jumping	Fabricate, Designing Constructing	...

Fig.11 Roger Caillois typology of play added with the category 'construction'.

4.9 Ways of playing, ways of working, ways of creating, ways of doing

Looking at ways of playing in this light, we believe that ways of working, creating, leading, and generally doing things also have similarities with these categories. Consider this: are you highly competitive in daily life (Agon)? Or do you like to pretend (Mimicry)? Do you prefer chance (Alea), or are you much more physically present in the things you do and often seek adventure and excitement (Ilinx)? Or is it a combination of different categories? A little chance, a lot of challenge, but above all, no competition! Can you now, using Roger Caillois' knowledge of playing styles, create a fingerprint of your own playing style/way of doing? Or maybe add another category you miss in playing? Look at your hedgehogrule and try to place it in one or more categories.

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5 PLAYING HUMAN BEING

5.1 Character design through Character dices

We've all done it at some point: creating a personal profile describing who you are in four to seven lines, what you're good at, and what you're looking for. LinkedIn is full of these kinds of profiles. But, do you really fit this description, this profile?

To discover who you truly are and create a solid profile, it's interesting to look at character design. The following game 'Character Dices', is a game in which you can build a superhero character and a sidekick using a number of dice rolls. It shows that you can include much more in a profile than just your name, strengths, weaknesses, skills, and work experience. Through which you can demonstrate not only your polyphony, but also your diversity. Because "we are multitudes".

First you make a hero. By rolling the die three times each category, you'll get a set of data on which you can create and draw a hero. Don't forget to name your hero and pitch it. Then trade your hero with another hero, and draw a sidekick for this hero, created based on all the strengths the hero lacks. Yin Yang style. So the hero's shortcomings become the sidekick's strengths, and all the hero's strengths become the sidekick's shortcomings.

Play this game with a minimum of 2 players. *The more players, the more fun!*

39

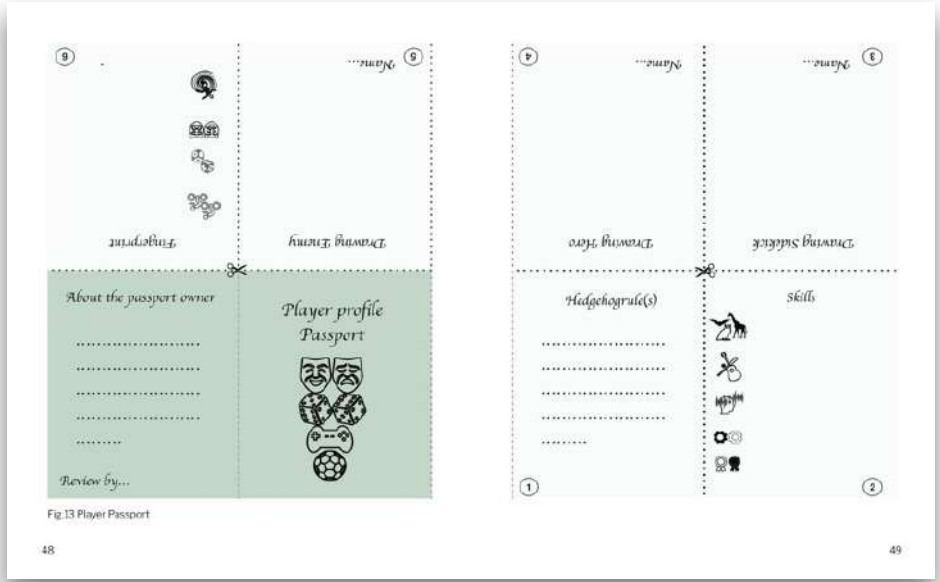

Fig.13 Player Passport

48

49

THE PAIDIA PRINCIPLE

THE WELL-PLAYED PATH TO BOLD LEADERSHIP, BALANCE, AND AGENCY

DESIGN

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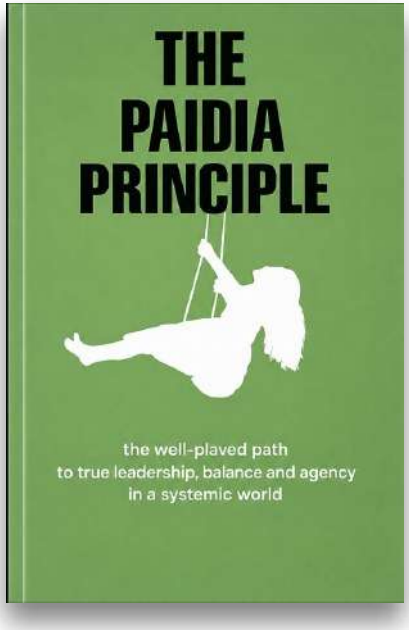

"The Paidia Principle" presents play as a powerful way of working, thinking, and leading. In a world focused on control and certainty, this book offers an alternative: a well-played path toward agency, balance, and confident decision making.

Through play, readers learn how to work with what drives them, challenges them, and sets them apart, and turn this into a source of direction and strength. Rather than avoiding uncertainty, the book shows how to engage with it, opening up space for new choices and ways of acting.

Written for anyone facing pressure at work or in life from leaders, entrepreneurs, designers, creative professionals to athletes, parents, and beyond, this book provides a grounded and practical approach to navigating complexity and taking ownership in an ever changing world.

EVA DEN HEIJER & IMARA FELKERS

Eva den Heijer is visual artist, game designer, lecturer and coach at HKU Utrecht, developing playful methods for growth in education and work since 2004. Dr. Imara Felkers is philosopher and educator researching play as inquiry and embodied practice. Together, they explore playful approaches to learning, collaboration and personal development.

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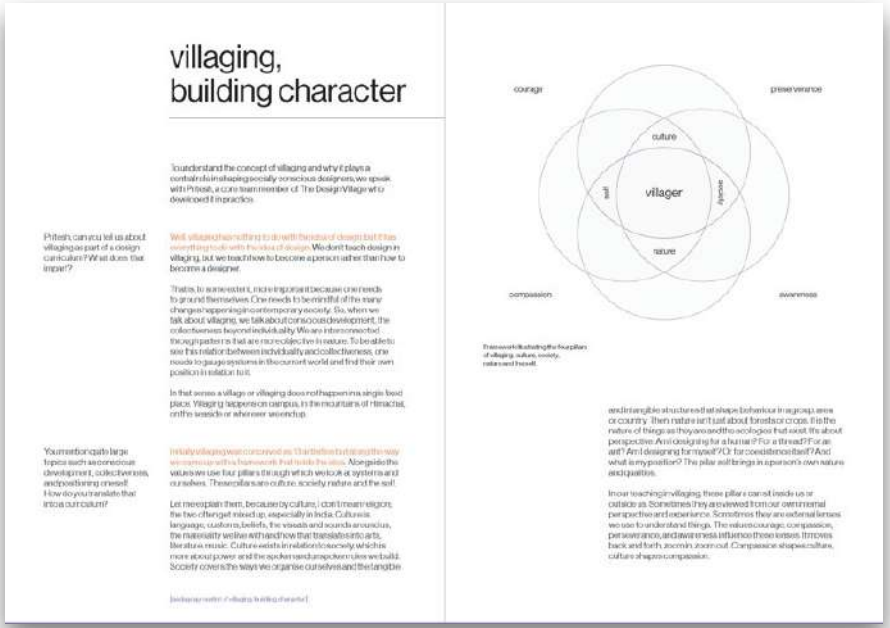

villaging, building character

I understand the concept of villaging and why it plays a central role in shaping socially conscious designers, we speak with Pritesh, a core team member of The Design Village who developed it in practice.

Pritesh, can you tell us about villaging as part of a design curriculum? What does that impart?

Well, villaging has nothing to do with the idea of design but it has everything to do with the idea of design. We don't teach design in villaging, but we teach how to become a person rather than how to become a designer.

That is, to some extent, more important because one needs to ground themselves. One needs to be mindful of the many changes happening in contemporary society. So, when we talk about villaging, we talk about conscious development, the collectiveness beyond individuality. We are interconnected, though patterns that are more objective in nature. To be able to see this relation between individuality and collectiveness, one needs to gauge systems in the current world and find their own position in relation to it.

In that sense a village or villaging does not happen in a single bed place. Villaging happens on campus, in the mountains of Himachal, on the seaside or wherever we end up.

You mention quite large topics such as conscious development, collectiveness, and positioning oneself. How do you translate that into a curriculum?

Initially villaging was conceived as that before but along the way we came up with a framework that holds the idea. Alongside the values we use four pillars through which we look at systems and ourselves. These pillars are culture, society, nature and the self.

Let me explain them, because by culture, I don't mean religion; the two often get mixed up, especially in India. Culture is language, customs, beliefs, the vessels and sounds around us, the materiality we live with and how that translates into arts, literature, music. Culture exists in relation to society, which is more about power and the spoken and unspoken rules we build. Society covers the ways we organise ourselves and the tangible

[villaging content of villaging, building character]

Three-world fulfilling the four pillars of villaging: culture, society, nature and the self.

and intangible structures that shape behaviour in a group, area or country. Then nature isn't just about forests or crops. It is the nature of things as they are and the ecologies that exist. It is about perspective. Am I designing for a human? For a thread? For an ant? Am I designing for myself? Or for coexistence itself? And what is my position? The pillar self brings in a person's own nature and qualities.

In our teaching in villaging, these pillars can sit inside us or outside us. Sometimes they are viewed from our own internal perspective and experience. Sometimes they are external lenses we use to understand things. The values courage, compassion, perseverance, and awareness influence these lenses. It moves back and forth, zoom in, zoom out. Compassion shapes culture, culture shapes compassion.



Collective work: missing materials during the course Design Machine.

Villaging also implies community, and you mentioned collectiveness. What does that mean in this context?

See, the words villaging or village bind us together. But I also see it as a living, larger organism, slowly moving, growing steadily. This collectiveness first happens in the micro context of The Design Village. When learners join they become part of this organism, which leads to a certain degree of togetherness and responsibility toward one another.

Of ten people accept this connection without question. When you enter an institution, group or culture you start to know the people and slowly identify with it. You may carry that identity throughout your life, even in small recognitions like "Hey, you're also from The Design Village". This familiarity creates instant connections driven by shared experiences. As you engage with others you seek the pathways you have traversed in their journeys and identify familiar patterns that create this sense of collectiveness. This depth of collective understanding may not always be articulated, but it is inherently felt.

That is collectiveness at the micro level. Then, there is a certain outcome that The Design Village expects or speculates: through the process, the student will become a systems thinker. They will start thinking in terms of the larger whole from a systemic point of view, which is a broader collectiveness. Recognising togetherness, dependability and interrelatedness in this collectiveness is important.

[villaging content of villaging, building character]

So in these collectivities, the micro and macro, certain questions arise that we address in villaging courses: how to think as a collective? How to coexist with our differences? How to spread the ideologies that you have, in the world as well? How to pass on the way you are thinking to another?
At the same time I am convinced that all designers naturally have this sense of responsibility toward many things. They carry a weight on their shoulders and sense that they should be mindful of others. Irrelative of whether it does good to themselves or gets them to earn money. They will help others, let another company succeed, because they somehow feel responsible for solving problems in the world.

Do you really feel all designers share that sense of responsibility and act on it?

Yes every designer has that. Every designer in the world. But I don't think designers use it to their advantage. I think the world uses them for their advantage. It's sad that there is this love-hate relationship with design and its responsibility: we are often in this ideological state, but at the same time working in a capitalist system.

There is nothing wrong with working in a capitalist system because that is the current economic reality in many countries. You have to work with it. In this context, much of design ends up tied to marketing, advertising and profit. The capitalist question is how do I think in terms of profit? As a designer, how will I tell the story of a product to make a profit? Most designers think in those terms. Only a small number actively aim to change society through design.

At the same time designers feel a burden to be responsible to society: not to change too much, to care for the environment, the people around them, and culture. They feel like they must take care of everything, but who else is with them?

The systems to keep the capitalist ideology in place are societal systems, the intangible laws of society, the governmental structures. Right now, I feel like designers are not getting enough opportunities to enter policy making circles where they could influence these issues, make laws, and change perspectives.

You said villaging helps students recognise collectiveness, these larger systems, and their place in them. How does that awareness begin for learners?

Now we can dive a bit more into the actual activities we do with learners. The first course of villaging is about unlearning. During this unlearning we question anything and everything. Whether it is religion, cultures or the contexts you come from, like home, school, a group or a small society. We question what we think we know and our perspectives.

THE DESIGN VILLAGE

EDUCATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF DESIGNERS FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

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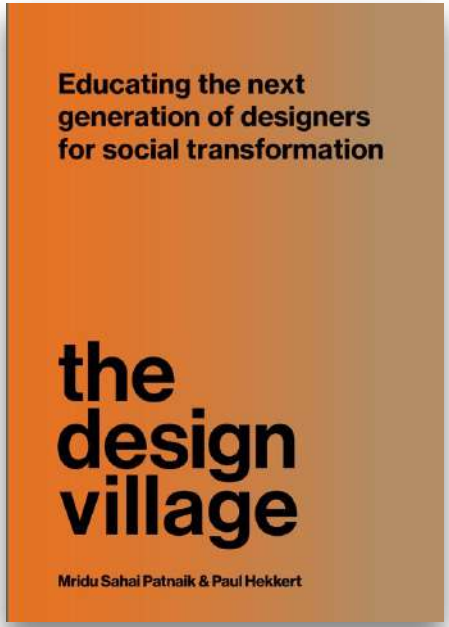

As the world keeps changing, designers must learn to anticipate, intervene and guide systems towards a more just and sustainable future. This requires rethinking not only the skills designers need but the foundations of design education itself.

In The Design Village, co-founders Mridu Sahai and Paul Hekkert share insights from a decade of building a pioneering design school in India. Rather than simply adding courses about impact, they propose a new educational framework centered on values that matter today.

Through interviews, essays and practical examples, the book shows how to instill values in students like compassion and courage, cultivate critical thinking and self-direction and collaborate with diverse stakeholders. It offers fresh perspectives for educators, students and anyone interested in the future of design education.

MRIDU SAHAI PATNAIK & PAUL HEKKERT

Mridu Sahai Patnaik is a leading voice in design, architecture and education in India, and partner of architecture firm Archohm. Paul Hekkert is a renowned design researcher and former professor at Delft University of Technology. Together, they bring decades of experience in design practice, research and education, united by a shared belief that design should create meaningful social impact.

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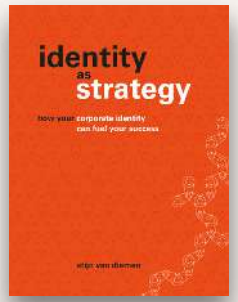

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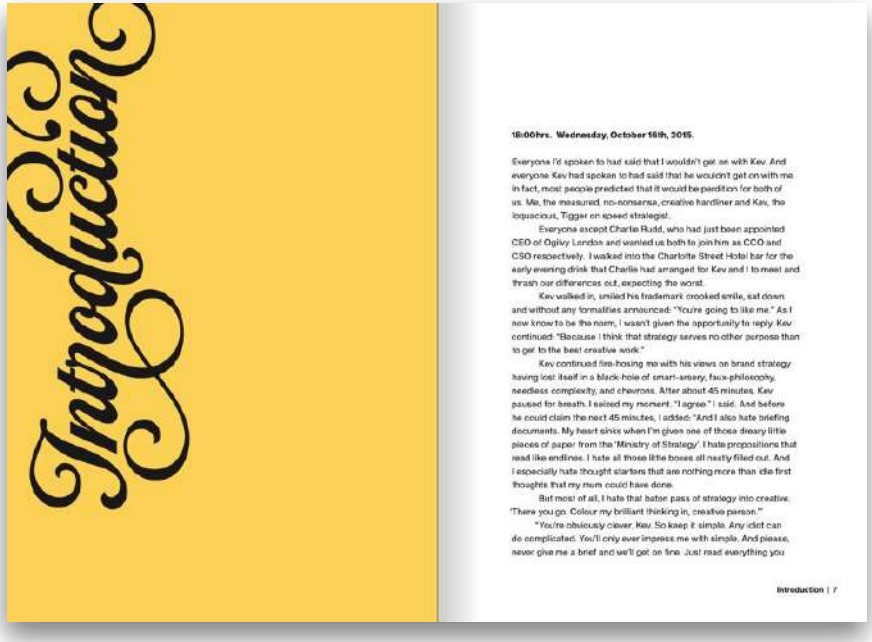
Introduction

18:00hrs. Wednesday, October 16th, 2015.

Everyone I'd spoken to had said that I wouldn't get on with Kev. And everyone Kev had spoken to had said that he wouldn't get on with me. In fact, most people predicted that it would be perdition for both of us. Me, the measured, no-nonsense, creative hardliner and Kev, the loquacious, Tigger on speed strategist.

Everyone except Charlie Rudd, who had just been appointed CEO of Ogilvy London and wanted us both to join him as CCO and CSO respectively. I walked into the Charlotte Street Hotel bar for the early evening drink that Charlie had arranged for Kev and I to meet and thrash our differences out, expecting the worst.

Kev walked in, smiled his trademark crooked smile, sat down and without any formalities announced: "You're going to like me." As I now know to be the norm, I wasn't given the opportunity to reply. Kev continued: "Because I think that strategy serves no other purpose than to get to the best creative work."

Kev continued fire-hosing me with his views on brand strategy having lost itself in a black-hole of smart-arsery, faux-philosophy, needless complexity, and chevrons. After about 45 minutes, Kev paused for breath. I seized my moment. "I agree." I said. And before he could claim the next 45 minutes, I added: "And I also hate briefing documents. My heart sinks when I'm given one of those dreary little pieces of paper from the 'Ministry of Strategy'. I hate propositions that read like endlines. I hate all those little boxes all neatly filled out. And I especially hate thought starters that are nothing more than idle first thoughts that my mum could have done.

But most of all, I hate that baton pass of strategy into creative. There you go. Colour my brilliant thinking in, creative person."

"You're obviously clever, Kev. So keep it simple. Any idiot can do complicated. You'll only ever impress me with simple. And please, never give me a brief and we'll get on fine. Just read everything you

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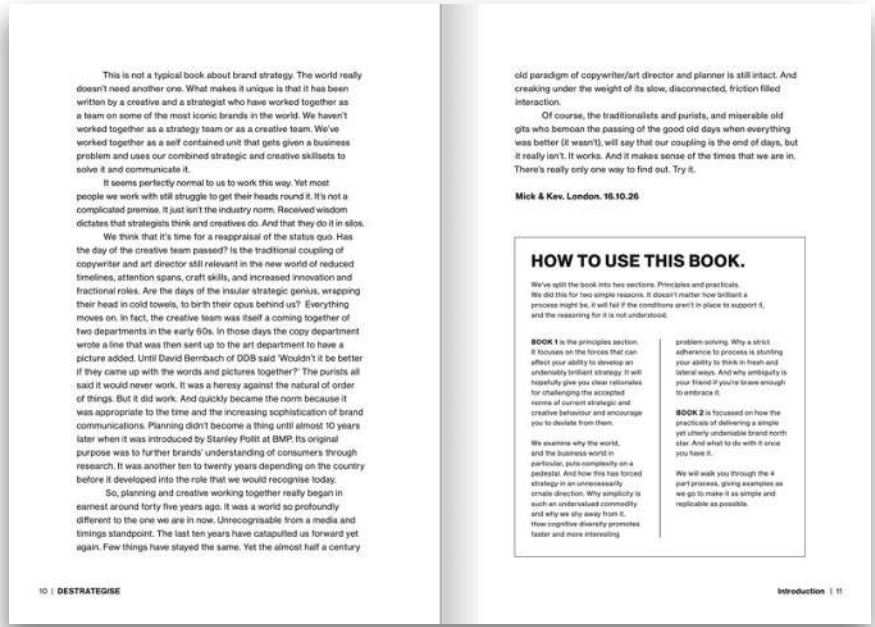
This is not a typical book about brand strategy. The world really doesn't need another one. What makes it unique is that it has been written by a creative and a strategist who have worked together as a team on some of the most iconic brands in the world. We haven't worked together as a strategy team or as a creative team. We've worked together as a self contained unit that gets given a business problem and uses our combined strategic and creative skillsets to solve it and communicate it.

It seems perfectly normal to us to work this way. Yet most people we work with still struggle to get their heads round it. It's not a complicated premise. It just isn't the industry norm. Received wisdom dictates that strategists think and creatives do. And that they do it in silos.

We think that it's time for a reappraisal of the status quo. Has the day of the creative team passed? Is the traditional coupling of copywriter and art director still relevant in the new world of reduced timelines, attention spans, craft skills, and increased innovation and fractional roles. Are the days of the insular strategic genius, wrapping their head in cold towels, to birth their opus behind us? Everything moves on. In fact, the creative team was itself a coming together of two departments in the early 60s. In those days the copy department wrote a line that was then sent up to the art department to have a picture added. Until David Bernbach of DDB said 'Wouldn't it be better if they came up with the words and pictures together?' The purists all said it would never work. It was a heresy against the natural of order of things. But it did work. And quickly became the norm because it was appropriate to the time and the increasing sophistication of brand communications. Planning didn't become a thing until almost 10 years later when it was introduced by Stanley Pollit at BMP. Its original purpose was to further brands' understanding of consumers through research. It was another ten to twenty years depending on the country before it developed into the role that we would recognise today.

So, planning and creative working together really began in earnest around forty five years ago. It was a world so profoundly different to the one we are in now. Unrecognisable from a media and timings standpoint. The last ten years have catapulted us forward yet again. Few things have stayed the same. Yet the almost half a century

10 | **DESTRATEGISE**

old paradigm of copywriter/art director and planner is still intact. And creaking under the weight of its slow, disconnected, friction filled interaction.

Of course, the traditionalists and purists, and miserable old gits who bemoan the passing of the good old days when everything was better (it wasn't), will say that our coupling is the end of days, but it really isn't. It works. And it makes sense of the times that we are in. There's really only one way to find out. Try it.

Mick & Kev. London. 16.10.26

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK.

We've split the book into two sections. Principles and practicals. We did this for two simple reasons. It doesn't matter how brilliant a process might be, it will fail if the conditions aren't in place to support it, and the reasoning for it is not understood.

BOOK 1 is the principles section. It focuses on the forces that can affect your ability to develop an undeniably brilliant strategy. It will hopefully give you clear rationales for challenging the accepted norms of current strategic and creative behaviour and encourage you to deviate from them.

We examine why the world, and the business world in particular, puts complexity on a pedestal. And how this has forced strategy in an unnecessarily ornate direction. Why simplicity is such an undervalued commodity and why we shy away from it. How cognitive diversity promotes faster and more interesting problem-solving. Why a strict adherence to process is stunting your ability to think in fresh and lateral ways. And why ambiguity is your friend if you're brave enough to embrace it.

BOOK 2 is focussed on how the practicals of delivering a simple yet utterly undeniable brand north star. And what to do with it once you have it.

We will walk you through the 4 part process, giving examples as we go to make it as simple and replicable as possible.

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DESTRATEGISE

WHY BRAND STRATEGY HAS LOST ITS WAY. AND HOW CREATIVITY WILL SAVE IT.

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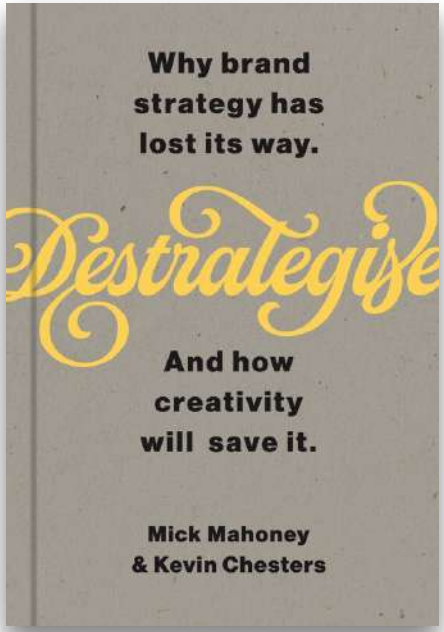
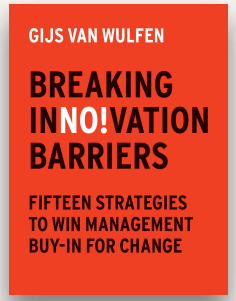


Brand strategy has become unnecessarily complicated: too many frameworks, too much jargon, and too often, uncertain outcomes. This book simplifies it all. Drawing on 50+ years of combined experience, Mick Mahoney and Kevin Chesters present a proven approach built around three simple questions.

Refined over the past decade, their method cuts through the noise to create brand positioning that is clear, practical, and undeniable. Challenging outdated silos between strategy and creativity, the book shows how stronger ideas come from connection, collaboration, and cognitive diversity. Simpler works better. If you want to build a brand strategy that is impactful, actionable, and impossible to ignore, start here.

KEVIN CHESTERS & MICK MAHONEY

Mick Mahoney is one of the UK's most awarded creatives, with 30+ years in advertising and accolades including a Cannes Grand Prix, Cannes Lions and D&AD Pencils. Kevin Chesters, former CSO at Dentsu, Ogilvy and W+K London, now advises brands such as M&S, adidas and Heineken, and lectures on creativity worldwide.



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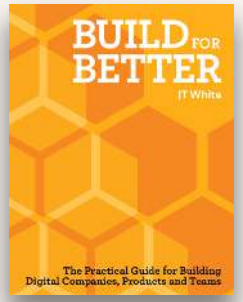

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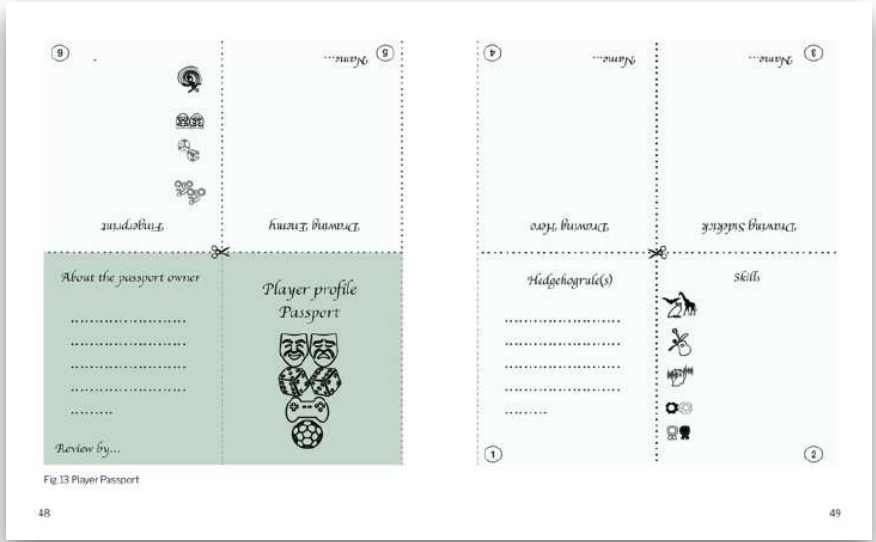

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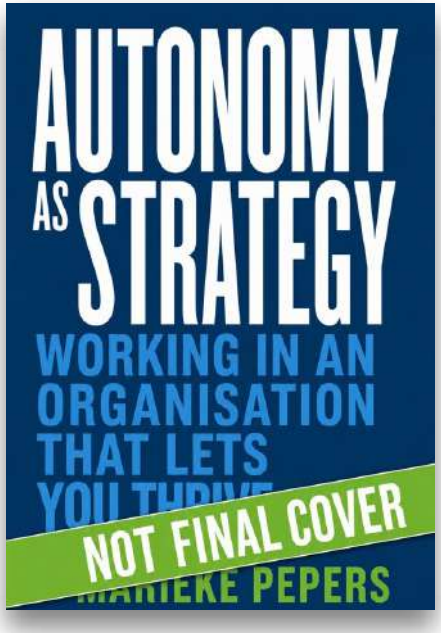


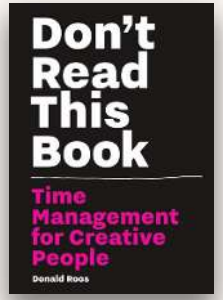
The world of work is at a turning point. As labor shortages grow and the need for purpose increases, organizations face major challenges. Yet companies that dare to rethink work are proving more attractive to talent without sacrificing growth or success.

In this book, Marieke Pepers shares the story of Nmbrs, where trust is the foundation of success. Through autonomous teams, a four-day workweek with five days' pay, and a strong feedback culture, Nmbrs demonstrates a new way of working that fosters autonomy, collaboration, and connection.

Filled with practical insights, lessons learned, and employee experiences, this inspiring book offers entrepreneurs, leaders, and HR professionals a proven alternative to the traditional model of work.

MARIEKE PEPERS

Marieke Pepers is Chief People Officer at Nmbrs, a fast-growing software company known for its People First approach. With over 25 years of experience in HR and organisational change, she has helped shape a culture built on trust, autonomous teams, strong feedback, and a four-day workweek with five days' pay. She is a sought-after speaker on agile working and self-management.



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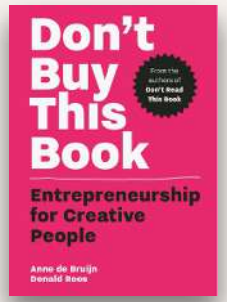

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DONALD ROOS & ANNE DE BRUIJN

Donald Roos is a creative entrepreneur and founder of the ToDon’tCompany. Trained as a (typo)graphic designer, he collaborates with professionals across disciplines and developed the ToDontList-method to help creatives focus amid endless ideas. With Anne de Bruijn, he wrote Don’t Read This Book, Don’t Buy This Book, and If You Don’t. They also created the Don’t/Do This thought experiment game.

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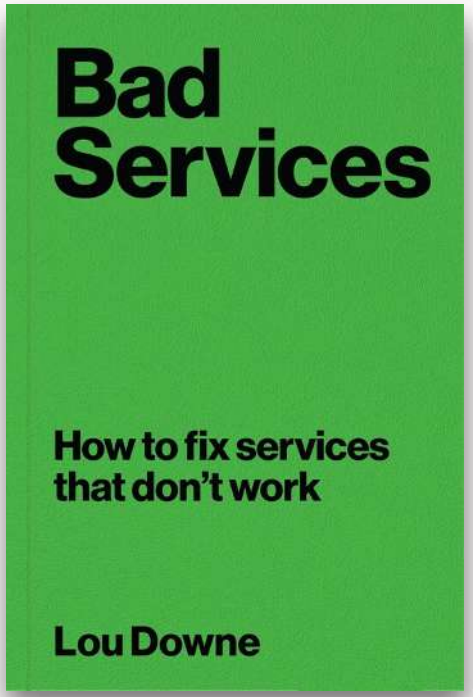

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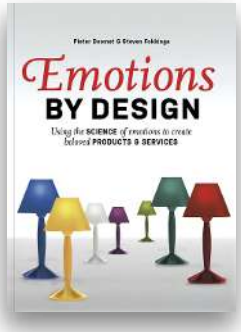

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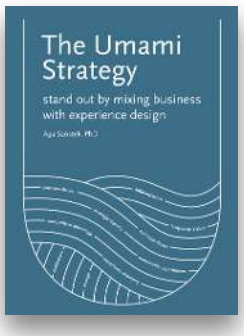

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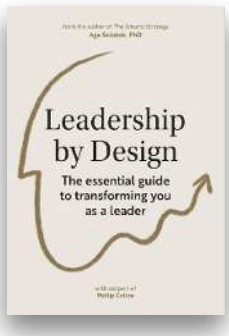

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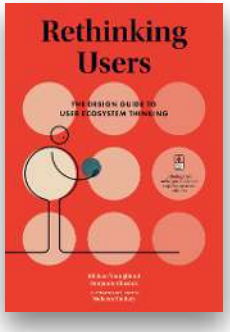

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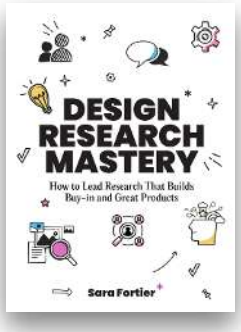

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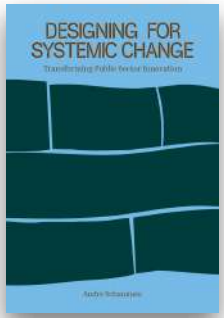

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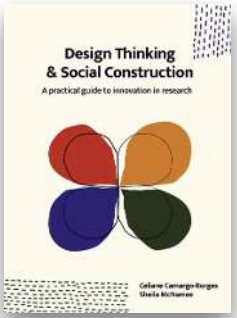

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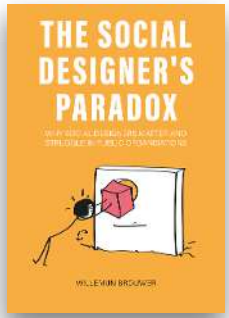

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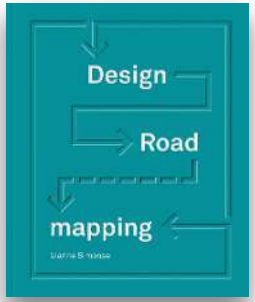

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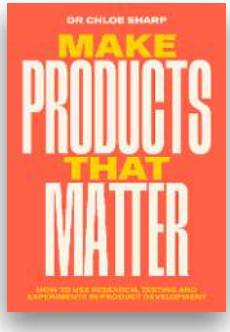

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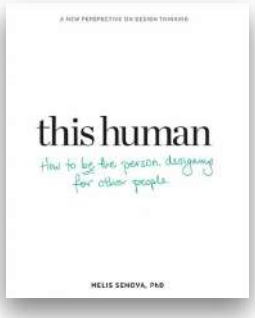

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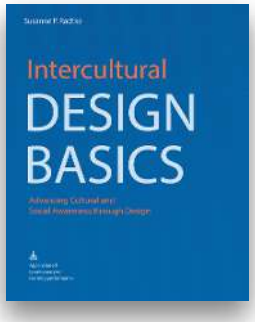

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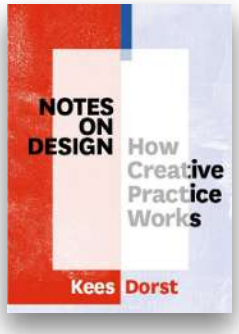

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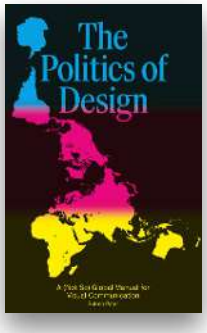

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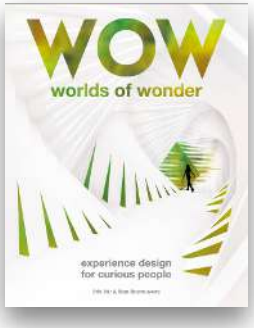

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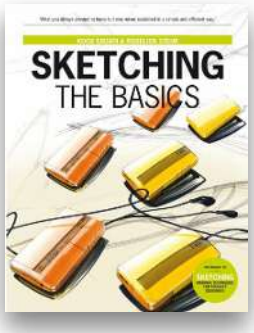

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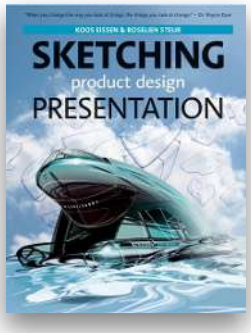

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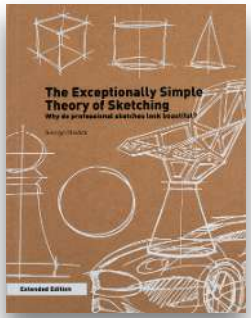

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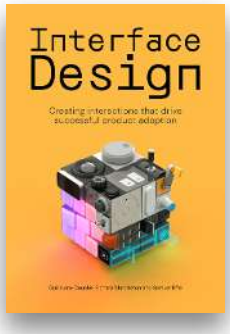

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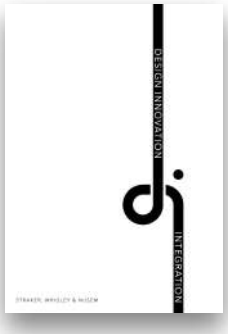

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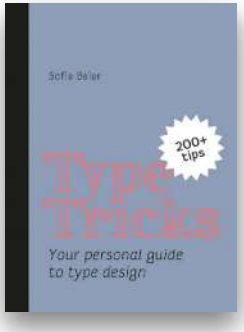

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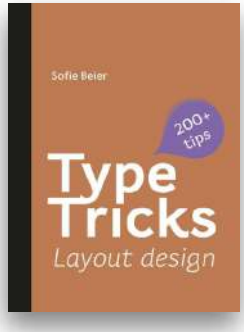

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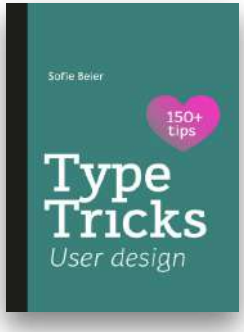

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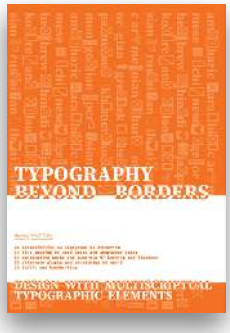

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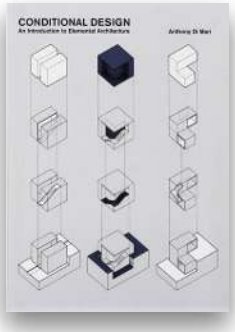

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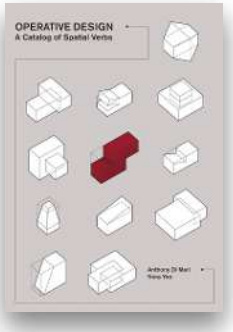

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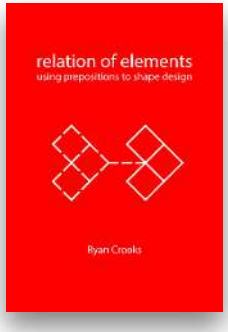

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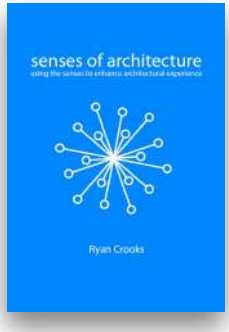

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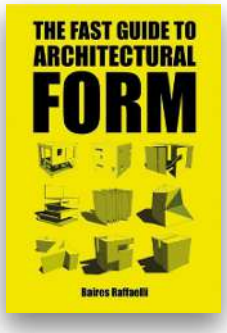

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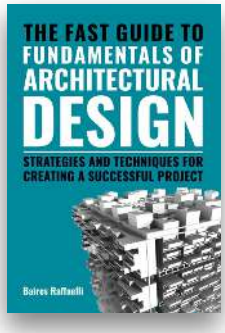

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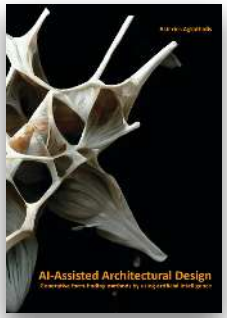

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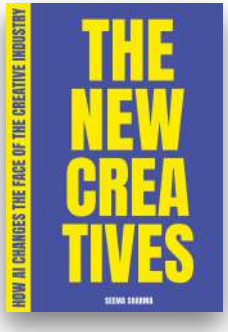

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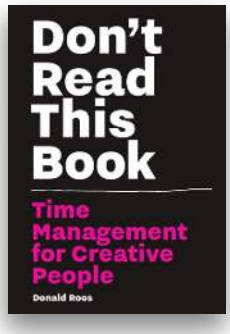

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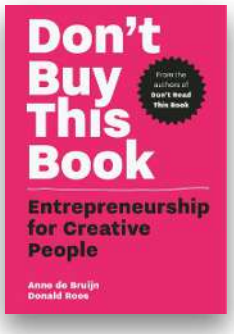

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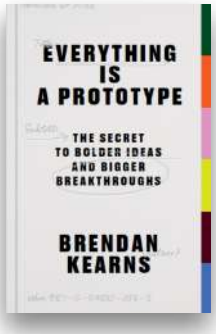

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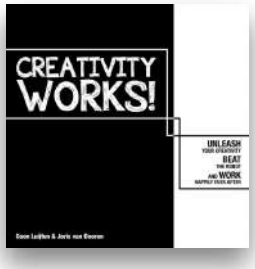

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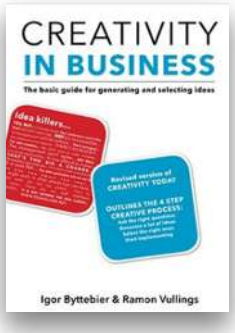

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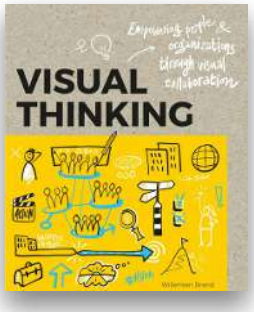

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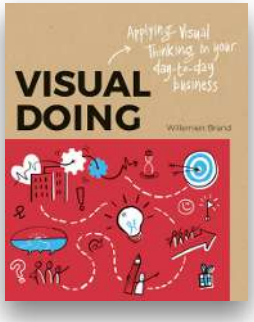

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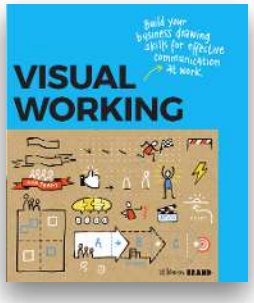

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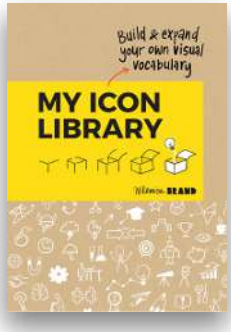

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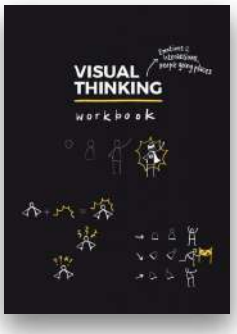

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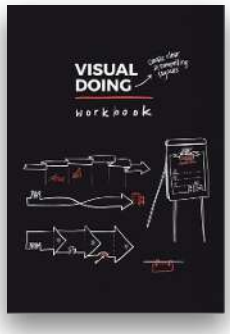

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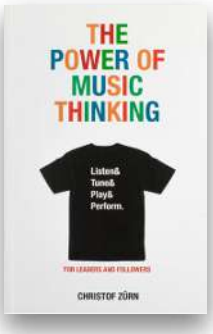

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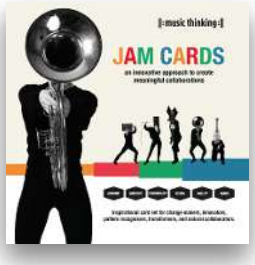

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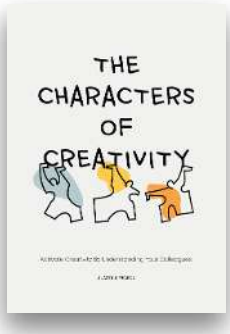

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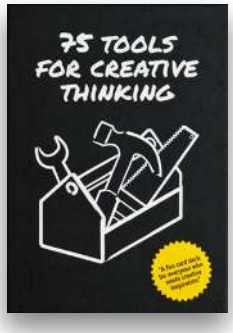

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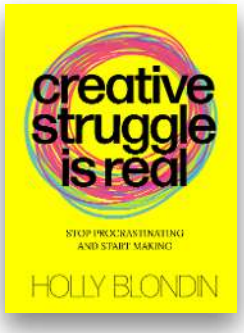

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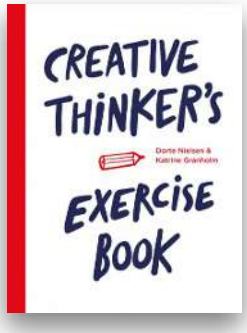

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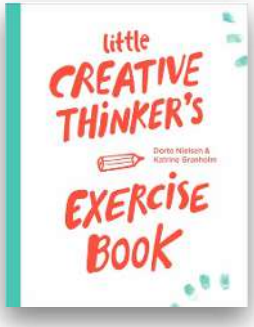

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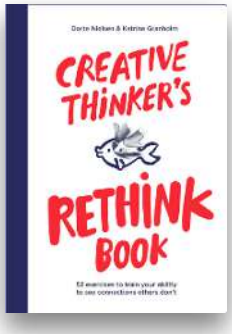

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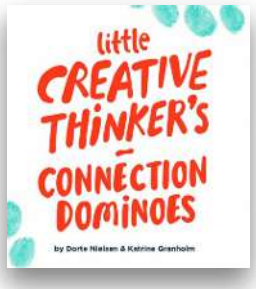

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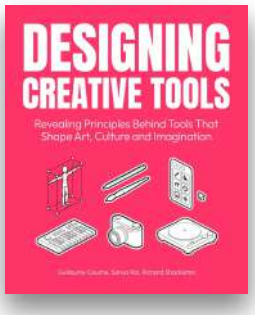

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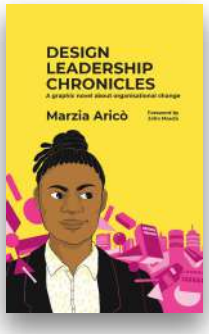

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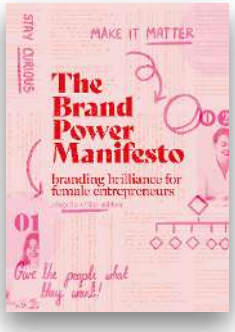

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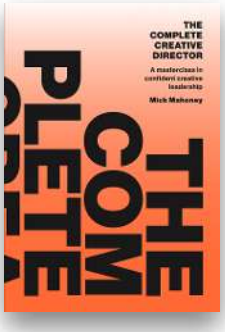

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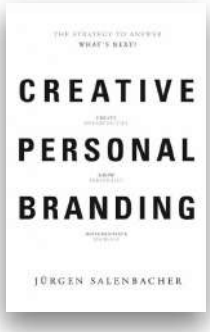

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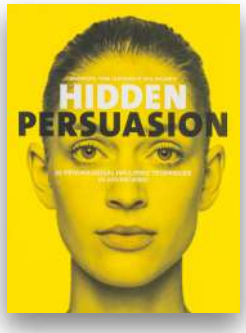

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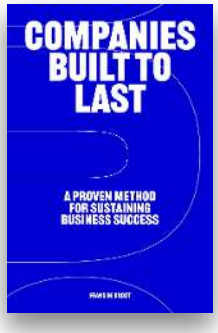

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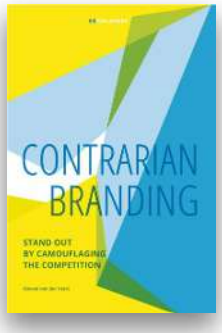

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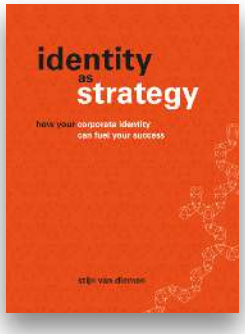

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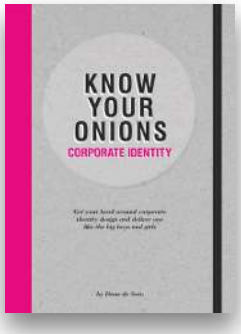

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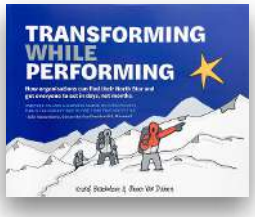

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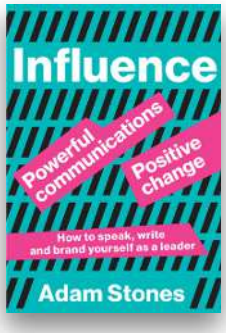

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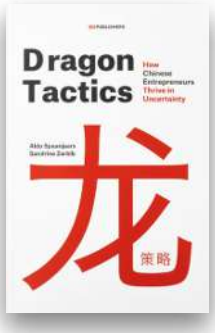

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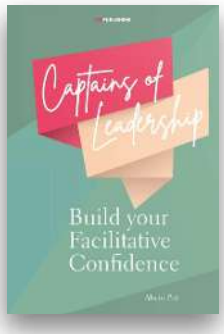

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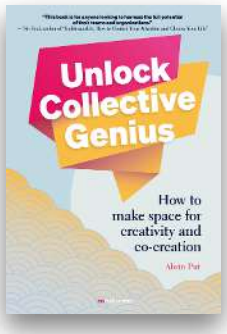

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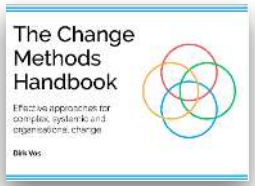

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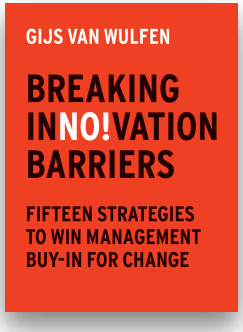

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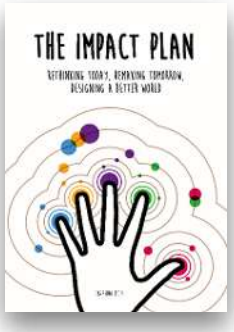

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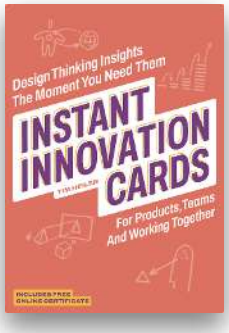

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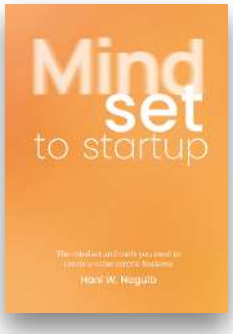

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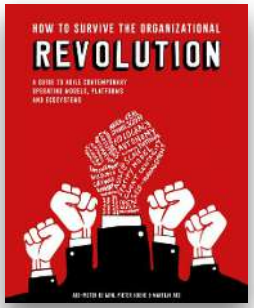

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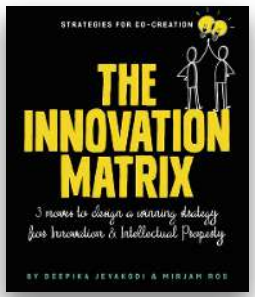

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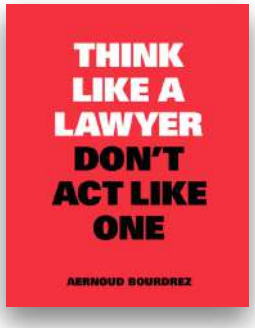

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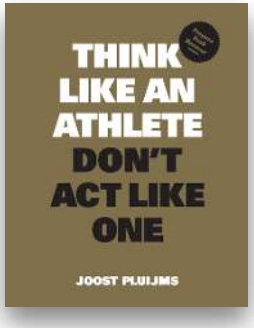

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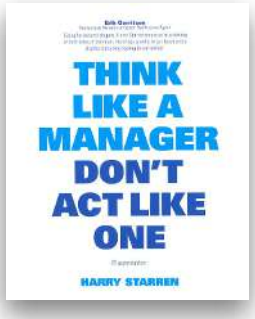

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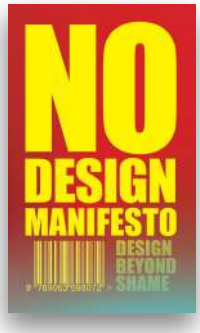

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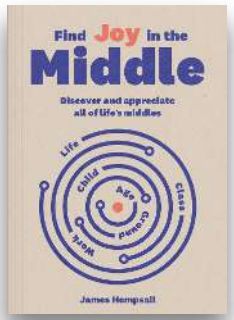

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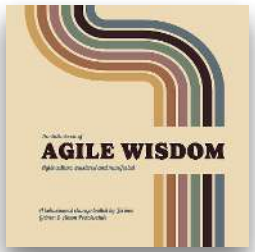

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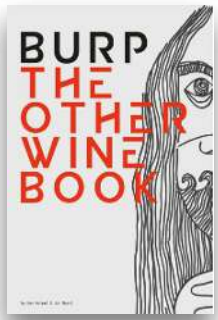

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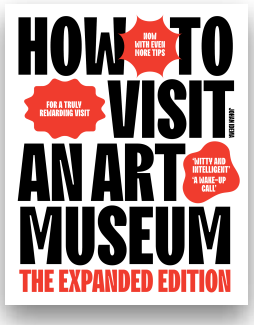

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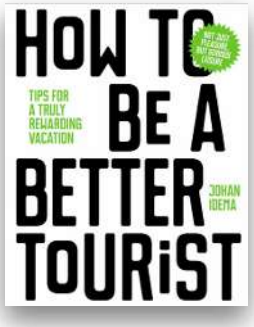

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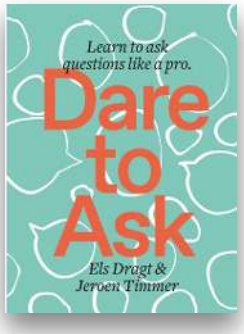

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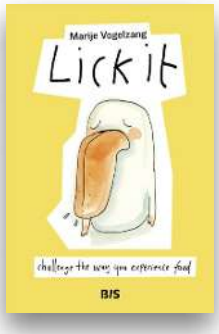

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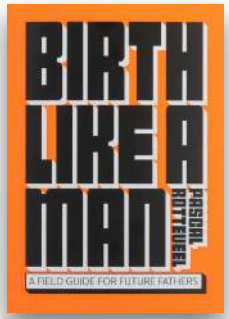

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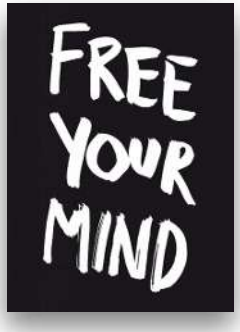

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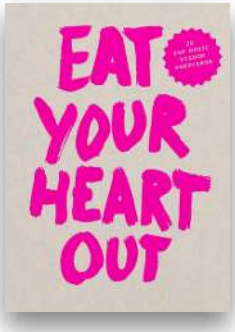

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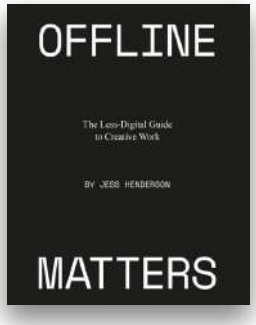

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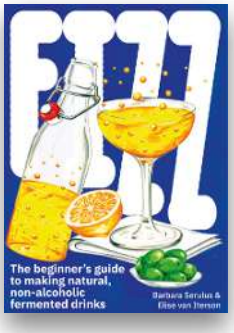

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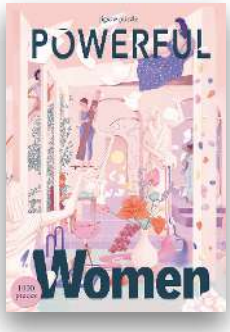

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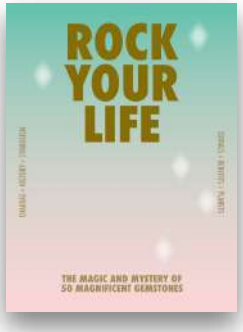

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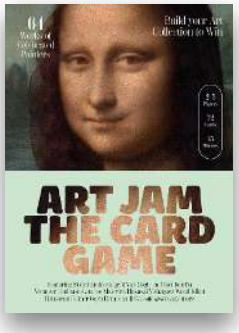

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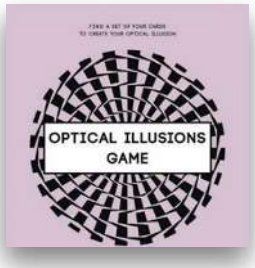

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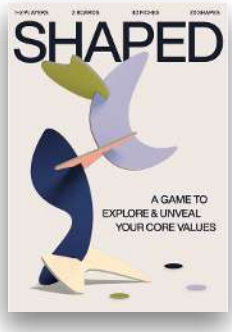

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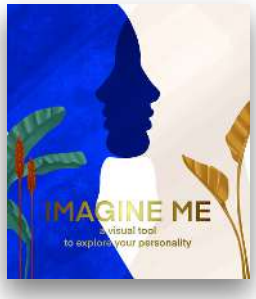

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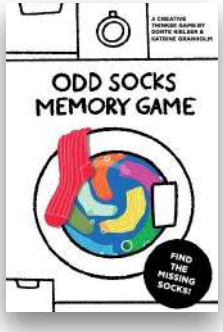

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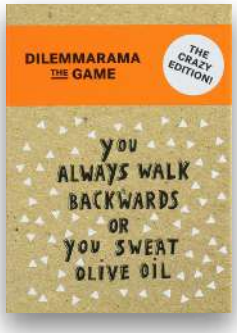

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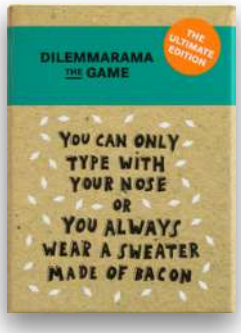

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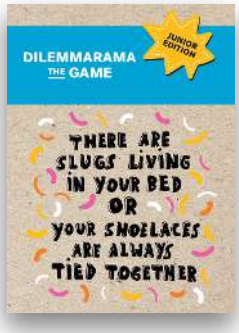

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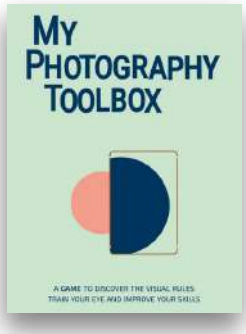

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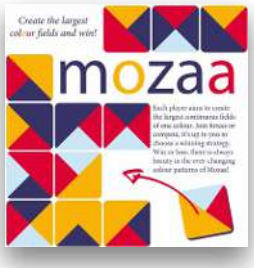

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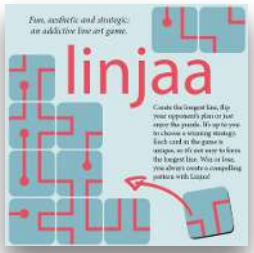

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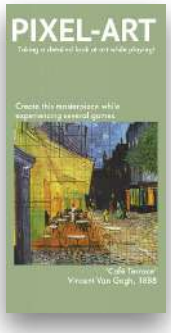

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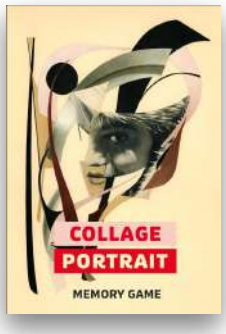

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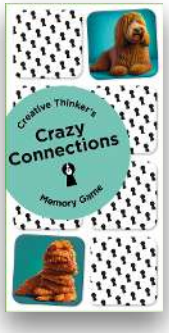

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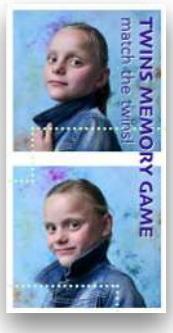

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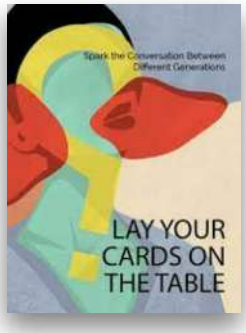

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