



Gambiarra | Repair Culture | Desert| Futures

SallehLab.

by Felipe Fonseca
and the MFA in Design @ VCUQatar
March 2015



This PDF is an outcome of Felipe Fonseca's period as designer in residence at VCU Qatar (november 2014).

Everything in this book is released under Creative Commons License CC-BY-SA. All pictures were made by MFA VCUQatar.

This PDF was completely edited and designed with free and open source software: GNU/Linux, Focuswriter, Libreoffice, GIMP, Scribus.

<https://is.efeeffe.me/stuff/vcuq-residency>

INTRO

Felipe Fonseca | March 2015

Last year I spent two weeks as a designer in residence in Doha, hosted by the MFA in Design program at VCUQatar. The focus of the residency was working with the idea of a "repair culture" that first occurred to me while talking to members of the Bricolabs network during Pixelache Festival 2013, in Helsinki. Of course, repairing broken things is nothing new. But it seems to become less fashionable everyday in many parts of the world. Lots of economic as well as cultural issues contribute to that, at the same time as there are significant experiences resisting the disappearing of repair.

One specific concern I had was the way people are adopting the so-called "maker culture". Back in 2009, some of us were excited with the renewed interest in making and the promises of defying industrial capitalism - proposing alternatives to its heavy environmental impact, logistic costs and the fundamental drive to alienate people from the inner workings of the products they buy and discard. Currently, though, digital fabrication technologies seem to be increasingly turning into mere tools for new sorts of commercial entrepreneurship that can instead give new breath to the industrial age.

Qatar was a meaningful context to expand those thoughts. The country's economic development in high speed exacerbates the worst implications brought about by practices of contemporary post-industrial capitalism. Most people there are able to buy things and shortly throw them away. And being a country in which recycling is hardly viable, "away" may as well mean "somewhere in the desert". Or "somewhere abroad where we can't see".

During my days as a resident we visited craftsmen and

repairmen whose individual futures are currently threatened by overproduction and throwaway behavior. We set out to visit a graveyard of discarded tires and a place where broken cars are sent. In order to engage with problematic aspects of consumerist culture, we organized a two-day repair cafe - Salleh Lab - in the university's premises. People were urged to bring over broken objects and we would try to fix or else repurpose them. Some of the paths we took can be seen in the next pages.

It was a remarkable experience to work with such a fantastic composition as VCU. Not only did I find an open-minded partner in Thomas Modeen, coordinator of the MFA program, but other members of the staff were also eager to exchange and collaborate. Professor Marco Bruno and a group of ten bright MFA students - Ozi, Malaz, Sultana, Noha, Yasmeen, Faisal, Barbara, Hawa, Hadeer and Sameer - made an amazing team to help turning ideas into concrete experiments. I hope we can work together again in the future.

I want also to thank (again) Thomas Modeen and Marco Bruno, as well as VCUQ and QMA for the invitation, welcoming attitude and infrastructure. And John Thackara for performing the old art of connecting people who have similar interests.

This book is an attempt to document those days in and around Doha. Enjoy it!

HANDS AT WORK

In order to learn the conditions of handiwork in a contemporary context, we visited a number of craftsmen and repair guys in Doha. From woodworkers to watch repairers, some traces were common.

Most of them were immigrants from South Asia - Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and other countries. Hand skills are fundamental. They've learned their trade decades ago from older professionals - but few if any of them are training newer generations. Their kids are not interested, and they are proud of it. The machines they use are durable, often following them for decades. Most of them don't care much where their waste goes - it's easy to find dumpsters filled with discarded materials.

A portrait of the vulnerability of this kind of work can be seen on shoe repairers. Today, people replace their shoes instead of repairing them. Exceptions are the military and police - soldiers



receive a pair of boots and are required to keep them fit for as long as possible. If they start replacing boots more often, most of the remaining shoe repair guys will be out of business.

A medium shot of a man in a white shirt working at a vintage-style sewing machine. He is looking down at his work. To his right is a shiny, modern-looking iron. In the background, there's a light-colored wall and a shelf.

"I've been working with
this sewing machine for
35 years... since I
moved to Doha."

AUTOLUX







150851
3216
X

Timeless tools...







