

Towards Henkaku

Research Report for a
Future Design Philosophy

March 31, 2022
Pentagram Design

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Introduction

About this Document

This document is a report summarizing research completed in the pursuit of a new design philosophy for Henkaku. Its purpose is threefold: First, to “define” Henkaku, overviewing its mission, vision, and tenets that sit at the center of all its work; second, to “design” Henkaku, thereby articulating a unified design philosophy, both conceptual and visual, for Henkaku, and outline the various inspirations or antecedents that have informed this philosophy. While directly inspired by external references, this philosophy is intended to be “ownable” for Henkaku and distinctly its own; and third, to provide a directional understanding of how this design philosophy can be implemented in the future via a “creative sketch.”

While this document represents the end of our research process, in a sense it is also a beginning. Our hope is that the ideas and insights included here will serve as a foundation or conceptual north star for Henkaku’s future projects, guiding design, communications, and programs in a unified way. Throughout the document, consideration has been given to the practical implications of the research, to demonstrate how our findings can be given form in real-world applications.

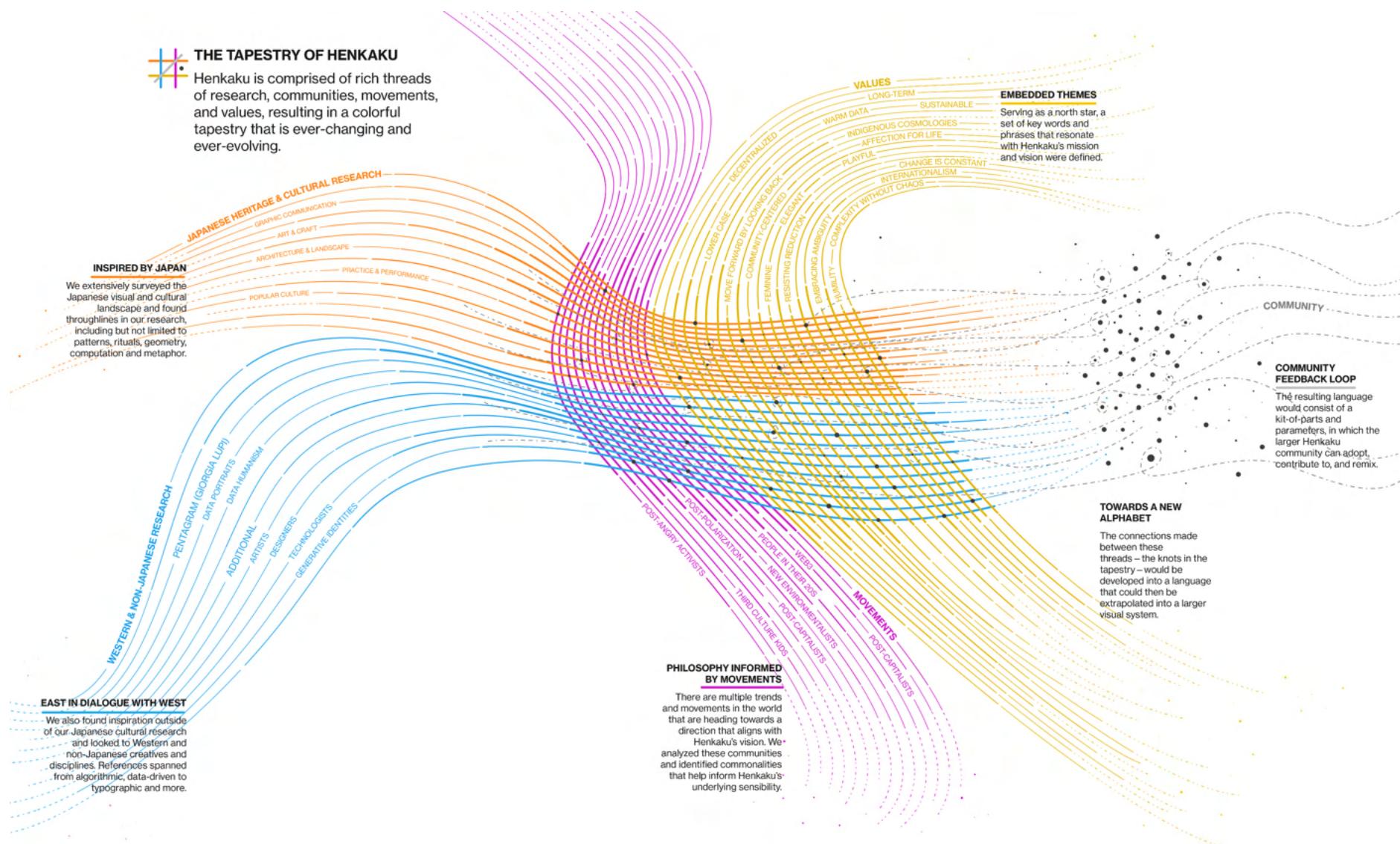
Scholars and researchers are well adept at describing the world’s systems and problems in economic and technical terms. Yet, what is both important and missing from much

of the current discourse is the lens of philosophy, aesthetics, and culture as the drivers for what we want for our future. In the academy, the liberal arts have been mostly employed to criticize the systems created by technology and economics. But should they not help us understand how, and more importantly what, to design and deploy so as to achieve our shared vision for the future? This report begins to sketch out what such an approach might look like.

Research Process

This report is the product of a collaborative and iterative research process between the Henkaku team, Pentagram Design, and outside advisors. Methodologically, our approach was both inward-looking and outward-facing, with the goal of sharpening our internal vision for Henkaku, and then dimensionalizing it with external material that could link this vision to a larger cultural context. The result is a uniquely multivalent articulation of Henkaku’s design philosophy.

To begin the project, we surveyed broadly Japanese history, society, and visual culture to locate individual artistic practices, philosophies of thought, societal trends, and social movements that could inform how we think about Henkaku’s future visual manifestation. Examples were found intentionally from across time, from the deep past (for example, ancient Shinto spiritual practices or artistic



Our research process demonstrated through the metaphor of disparate threads – our research, references, inspiration – woven together to create a “tapestry” of Henkaku.

techniques dating back centuries) to the immediate present (for example, web3 communities or digital art). We collected extensive images and examples in an archive, and then analytically mapped them against the core tenets of Henkaku.

To augment this foundation, we also looked beyond Japan at other references from other purposefully international sources across art, design, technology, society, and more that embody various aspects of Henkaku's value system. These additional references were compiled and synthesized with our previous findings to create a rich, layered compendium of ideas that, in different ways, spoke to Henkaku's sensibility. Key outside advisors, who hold subject matter expertise on specific topics relevant to the research, also weighed in, providing new references or threads for us to follow. This report represents the final synthesis of all these inputs.

While the spirit of our process was scholarly and open-ended, it's our intent for this document to also include actionable guidance that can be of real use in the following phases of work. To start to give shape to the ideas uncovered in our research and inform forthcoming design work, a "creative sketch" is also included here that overviews how some of these conceptual ideas could be actualized in a real design deliverable. This sketch, presented as an un-designed wireframe, is explained with text and relevant examples. It is our intent that subsequent phases of work

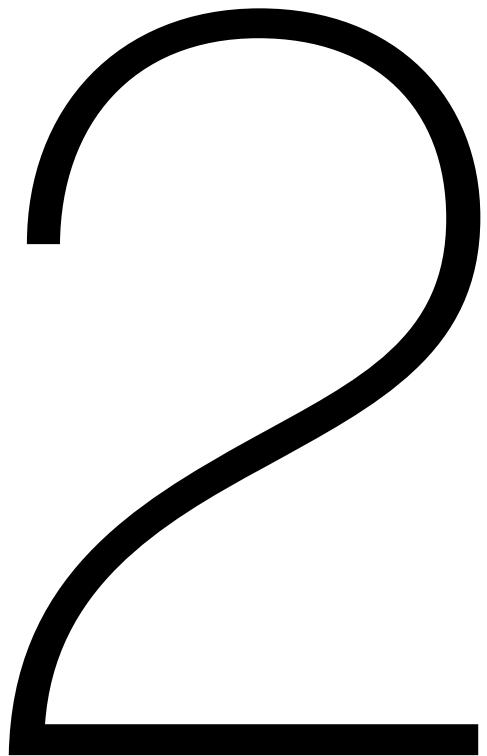
will use this creative sketch as a launching pad for the design of tangible applications for the Henkaku Center (logo, collateral, reports, websites, etc.) and other related initiatives.

Understanding Henkaku means starting with its literal definition. Hen (変) is a Chinese character meaning "to strike the vessel that contains the vow to God." Kaku (革) means "the skin of a beast that has been opened (processed)," or more broadly to change something's form, or to describe a revolution. Taken together, henkaku (変革) means "to change the current situation."

As a word, Henkaku is a beneficial one to unite all of these ideas in a single sphere. It refers to a new sensibility growing in the world, and a concert of activities to promote and amplify it. (Though there will be organizations, projects, tools, and products related to this vision that may adopt the word as part of their name, they are not Henkaku proper.) However, Henkaku is also an imperfect word, with various meanings and connotations in Japanese that may not appeal to everyone. For the purposes of this report, we are using the word "Henkaku," yet we envision replacing this word with a new one that is more accessible to all. While the specific word will change, the goals and the aspirations behind it will not.

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Defining Henkaku



Today, society is being confronted with massive cross-sectoral problems. Climate change, financial recession, inequality, digital transformation, even war – we live in a particularly acute moment of disruption, with no easy answers or straightforward solutions. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought this instability into even greater focus, vividly illustrating the scale and highly-connected nature of such problems, which span policy, economics, science, media and communication, and the environment.

At the same time, the world's systems are also becoming increasingly complex. The traditional frameworks for understanding and coordinating change have become woefully inadequate, both in terms of how deeply these frameworks can engage with the full scope of a problem, and the speed at which they can help us respond to rapidly shifting conditions.

Against this context, Henkaku proposes a new paradigm to negotiate our increasingly complicated reality. This paradigm necessarily rejects our society's current definition of success (the accumulation of wealth, profit, and control) in favor of new metrics focused on increasing human flourishing – an indication of health, vigor, and happiness for all, not just the few. The idea of flourishing, borrowed from the fields of moral philosophy and positive psychology, is in many ways the antithesis of the cool quantification

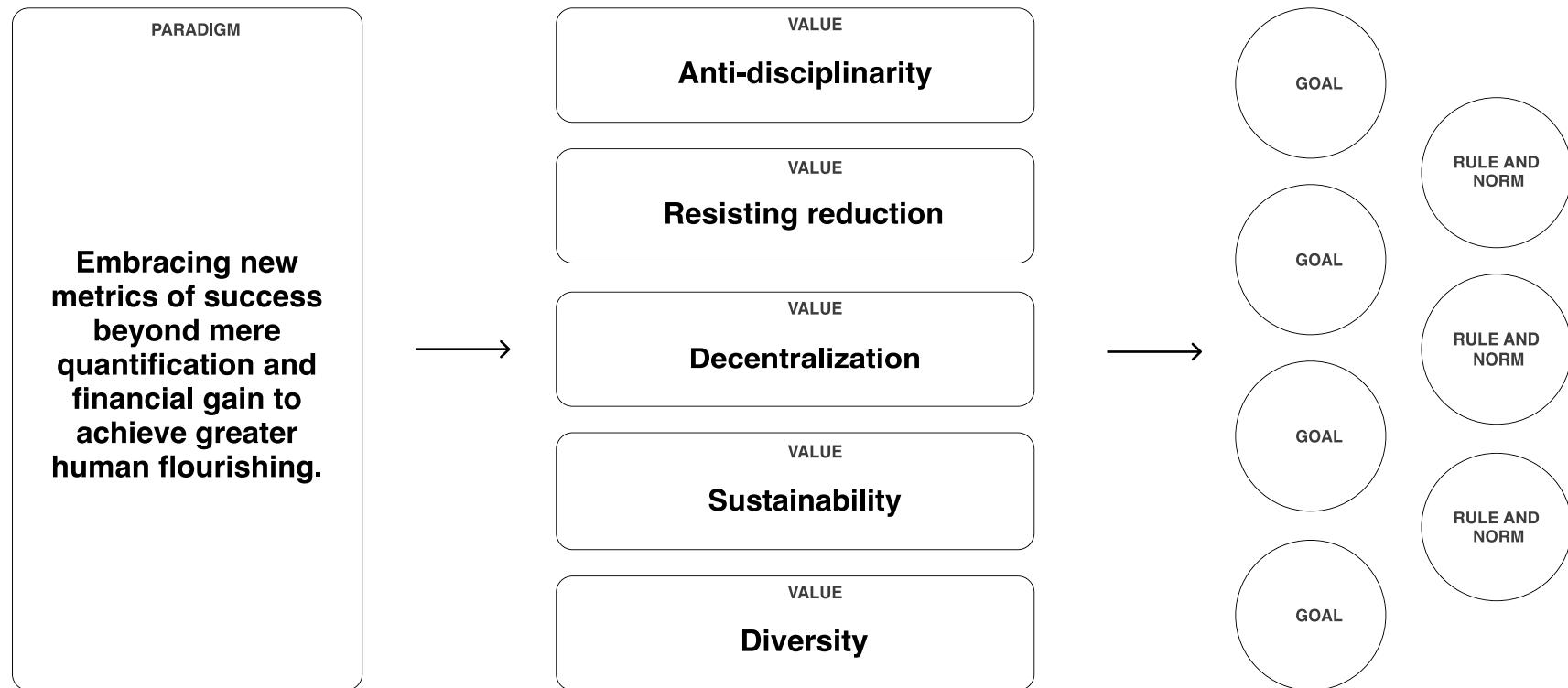


Love by Alexander Milov

championed by our current power structure. Indeed, it is a very humanistic and qualitative way of looking at change management, and one rooted in a different value system than our current hyper-individualistic, capitalistic culture.

Theory of Change

Henkaku's theory of change begins at the paradigm level. This paradigm shift – away from financial measurements, and towards human flourishing – is then informed by a series of values that permeates all of Henkaku's activities. These values are described on the following pages.



Resisting reduction

The world is a complex place, and this has never been more true than today. Society's problems are not in silos; they are highly interconnected and adaptive to changing contexts. To respond, we must resist the impulse to reduce problems to easy answers or suspiciously straightforward solutions, and instead move forward with a mindset that acknowledges, embraces, and even helps to amplify the natural complexity of the world.

Part of resisting reduction means resisting the impulse towards quantification, a tendency of modern capitalist societies that comes to us from the Industrial Revolution and the rise of large-scale corporations. By considering everything as countable, and therefore monetizable, previous mindsets have rendered reality down to ones and zeroes, smothering over variation, nuance, and ambiguity that is not so easily simplified. By contrast, Henkaku imagines an approach that welcomes complexity of meaning, to give a completist (but still cognizable) view of reality.

Diversity

Resisting reduction on the one hand means also prioritizing diversity – of people, ideas, modes of engagement – on the other. We are living through a singular moment of social upheaval, where established hierarchies on the basis of class, race, gender, sexuality, physical and cognitive ability, and more are being re-examined and retired in favor of inclusion, open-ness, and a radically democratic sense of participation.

Decentralization

Part of this turn towards inclusion entails moving away from a small group of gate-keepers, powerbrokers, and walled gardens and moving towards more open, decentralized platforms and power structures. Most tangibly, for now, this is epitomized by the philosophy of web3 and, by extension, the philosophical underpinnings of cryptocurrency, or currency exchanges backed not by a central bank but instead by a decentralized network of computers and individuals.

Sustainability

The old paradigm prioritized vast consumption as a means of monetization. Going forward, to achieve greater human flourishing for all, we must embrace more sustainable and circular modes of production, with an eye to long-term implications on both people and the planet.

Antidisciplinarity

To achieve the above, a new, “antidisciplinary” approach to research and innovation will be necessary. While the word defies easy definition, antidisciplinary can describe someone or something that doesn't fit within traditional academic disciplines – a field of study with its own particular words, frameworks, and methods. Working together on big projects will help bring researchers together across disciplines, creating a single science instead of fragmented disciplines. While individual disciplines are still necessary, the demands of our highly complex problems will necessitate more people working in the wide-open white space between disciplines: the antidisciplinary space.

These values are fundamental to Henkaku. They are intended to undergird specific standards, tools, products, or initiatives that will be created by various institutions across society that seek to promote Henkaku. Immediate areas of opportunity include:

- Government digital transformation and virtual governance
- Cryptocurrency and Blockchain, including the metaverse and NFTs
- Knowledge management and the future of academic publishing
- Free and open-source software, including probabilistic programming, Mathesar, and open-source software programmer capacity development
- Cybersecurity and privacy, including probabilistic computing and synthetic data
- Various learning initiatives, including the turn towards neurodiversity and online/connected learning

Sensibilities

Helpful to explaining Henkaku is also identifying its “sensibility” – the manner in which it approaches change management at the societal level. As part of this research initiative, several so-called sensibilities have emerged that can help describe Henkaku’s point of view.

Indigenous cosmologies

As contemporary society undergoes rapid transformation triggered by digital technology, humanity has repeatedly entered antagonistic relationships with the planet, seeking to control and profit from our natural world. Yet the world’s indigenous cosmologies provide an alternative path to understanding the universe and our place in it, promoting instead a philosophy of thought which inseparably connects nature and humanity in a single, harmonious story. The project of Henkaku is to harness the potential of digital transformation in service to these enduring ideals.

It is notable that Japan is the only modern nation that still counts an indigenous cosmology, Shintoism, as its primary belief system, and the Shinto tradition holds countless metaphors for Henkaku’s aims. A feature of Shinto shrines is the empty space they provide for kami, or spirits, to enter and inhabit. To guide the kami along their way, sandō, or paths, lead to the temple, passing through ritualistic torii, or gates. In its own way, Henkaku functions like these paths



Sandō and torii at Fushimi Inari Taisha in Kyoto

and gates: thoughtful architecture to gently guide a new zeitgeist in pursuit of a new era of human flourishing.

Data humanism and warm data

Another so-called sensibility relevant to Henkaku relates to the impulse towards “resisting reduction” in our data-driven, tech-enabled world. Today, data is ubiquitous. In every moment, every event, every transaction or interaction with someone else, data is present. From the global scale of financial markets to the smallest moments of personal observation and social connection, data is generated, analyzed, and shared at a velocity and volume once inconceivable. As we move through the world, we are unconsciously surrounded by invisible ecosystems of data humming all around us.

At the same time, the existing mainstream definition of data – numbers and statistics – is quickly becoming unworkable to describe our complex reality. Data visualizations can attempt to help us find clarity in the confusion, but if the fundamental meaning of data is no longer applicable, more bar graphs or pie charts will do little to remedy the situation.

Instead, what is necessary is to reassess conventional wisdom about where numbers come from, what they mean, and what role they play in the ways we think and make decisions. A more humanistic approach – “data humanism” – may offer more optimal ways of seeing the world of data,

and the world through data. Such an approach places humans, rather than numbers themselves, at the center of our conception of data. Just as the humanist movement during the Renaissance sought to emphasize individuals, rather than God, as the ultimate source of meaning, data humanism underscores the foundational role of people – us – in how data is collected, analyzed, and visually communicated. Despite how they may sometimes appear, data is always the product of human hands.

Like Henkaku, data humanism calls for a radical shift in our perception of quantification. It focuses our attention away from the individual data points, but to the spaces between them, the so-called “warm data” that is rarely visualized in a chart. It is the context and circumstances between data points that are fundamental to understanding the critical, often causal relationships between disparate entities. This context is anathema to the mainstream definition of data as clear, straightforward, and inalienable. Warm data is nuance-filled, ambiguous, even messy.

DATA HUMANISM

~~SMALL~~ big data
data bandwidth ~~QUALITY~~
~~imperfect~~ infallible data
~~SUBJECTIVE~~ impartial data
~~INSPIRING~~ descriptive data
~~SERENDIPITOUS~~ predictive data
data conventions ~~POSSIBILITIES~~
data to simplify complexity / ~~DEPICT~~
data processing ~~DRAWING~~
data driven design
data is numbers ~~people~~
data will make us more efficient ~~HUMAN.~~



@giorgialupi

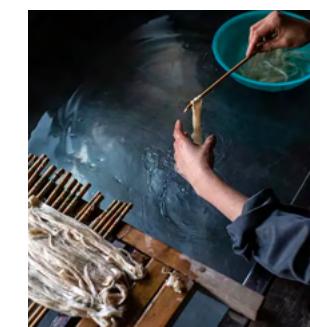
Hands and craft

A humanistic philosophy of data also raises critical and necessary questions about the methods of data creation: the ways in which numbers are collected, handled, and transferred, and most importantly the individuals who are engaged in this labor of translation and analysis.

By forefronting the human behind the numbers, something rarely done in our digitally automated world, we see that data is physical material. It is shaped and formed by human agency. The hand (along with the biases) of its creator is always present.

This sort of material “thinking” – the tacit exchange of information imparted through construction, form-making, shaping – is of course present in the oldest forms of Japanese craftsmanship. From washi papermaking to kagome weaving to boro patchworks, the unique identity of an object is expressed not only through what it is, but how it was made. These are process-intensive arts, with an emphasis on indexical imperfection that conveys the indelible presence of a human maker. A particularly evocative example of this is kintsugi, the Japanese tradition of re-assembling shattered pottery with lacquer. Kintsugi vessels, shot through with veins of gold or silver, are wholly functional, yet continue to express their broken-ness and subsequent repair by a skilled artisan. Process is made product.

In a similar way, the communication of knowledge and experience, both tacit and explicit, through human hands is central to the practice of conceptual artist Christine Sun Kim. Born deaf, Kim speaks with her hands in sign language. She creates work, often using her own body as a canvas for creative expression, that critically engages in the dialectics between vision and voice, word and image, meaning and metaphor. In Kim's work, the hand of the artist and the resultant work merge as one intrinsically communicative act.



CLOCKWISE: Kintsugi pottery; boro patchwork textile; “Time Owes Me Rest Again” by Christine Sun Kim; washi papermaking

Activism redefined

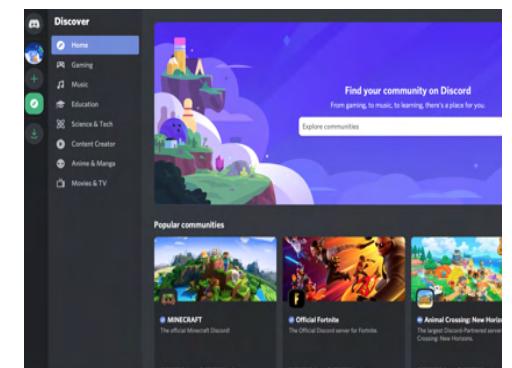
An additional set of sensibilities identified relates to change. Change is a continuum of existence, both constant and inevitable, with no fixed beginning or end. According to Buddhist teaching, all parts of life are involved in a circle of life, death, and re-incarnation, meaning the world lives in a perpetual state of transformation. How we engage with this ongoing flux, negotiate with it and even redirect it, is key to achieving positive outcomes for our shared future.

Today, change is in the air, with an emerging class of activists, and activist movements, calling for the adoption of new paradigms in various aspects of society. Many of these movements are driven by young people, who are increasingly running towards the future and leaving behind the polarized ideologies and attitudes of their parents' societies. The examples at right are diverse in the causes they relate to, or the change they wish to spark, yet they are united in several key areas that Henkaku shares, namely:

- A belief in the value of equality, diversity, equity, and access, for all people in a globally-minded society.
- A future-oriented optimism, rooted in the notion that change itself is both inevitable and a positive development to be engaged in.
- An aversion to conflict or outright antagonism with those they disagree with.



Neurodiversity: Activist
communities championing a more inclusive definition of neurological and cognitive norms.



Third Culture Kids: Individuals who grew up in multicultural households, communities or circumstances, giving them a more global outlook.

Web3 communities: Vast online communities that hold discussion through consensus and equitable distribution of power.

Designing Henkaku

3

Now that we've established the definition of Henkaku as a vision for change, what should Henkaku "look" like? It is clear that the visual manifestation of Henkaku should incorporate its theory of change, its values, and its distinct sensibility. But what should be its recognizable aesthetics, and how can we codify these aesthetics so that they can be described, realized, and perpetuated?

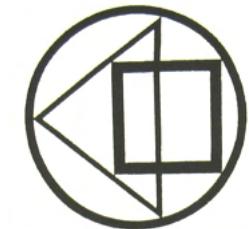
Towards an "anti-Bauhaus"

On an aesthetic level, Henkaku's aim is to be a catalyst for a whole new design movement that can help us both mark this new moment of radical change, and visualize its complexity with a new or expanded set of graphic tools. If Henkaku as a philosophy is a revolt against the ills of the Industrial Revolution, then its design aesthetic should also be oppositional to the prevailing visual style, mainly the language of modernism created by the Bauhaus. Originating in Germany in the shadow of the First World War, Bauhaus design was a direct outgrowth of the commodification of scale preached by the Industrial Revolution. As such, Bauhaus-influenced design is characterized by rationalism, pure geometry, standardization, and minimalism, summarized in the famous Mies van der Rohe edict, "less is more." Already, these attributes feel opposite to the values of Henkaku, specifically complexity and diversity. If the Bauhaus is defined by its rules, Henkaku could instead be defined by its emotions: joy, vitality, spirited, energetic, warm.

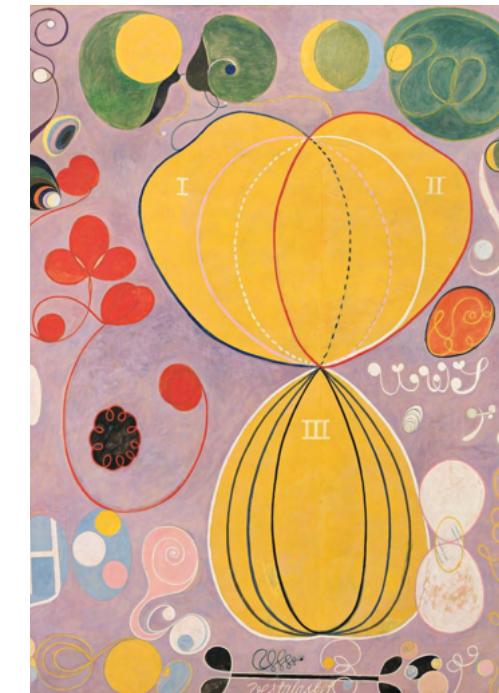
Paradoxically, these emotions are also seen in the historically unsung female artists connected to the Bauhaus, such as Annie Albers, Sophie Tauber Arp, Benita Koch-Otte, and Ruth Asawa. In their work shown on the following page, we see key elements of organicism, movement of form, an acknowledgment of materiality, and handiwork.

In thinking about how to "design" Henkaku, it is also necessary to establish who is doing the "designing." As a design movement, the Bauhaus was dogmatic and strict. It required absolute adherence to its core principles and a sophisticated understanding by trained designers of how to implement them. Its principles were centralized – literally – in traditional educational institutions such as the first Bauhaus in Weimar, and then later, in schools like Chicago's "new Bauhaus" (now ITT Institute of Design) run by Bauhaus expats.

By contrast, it is the intention of Henkaku to forge a far more decentralized model, one that invites and even welcomes the input and ownership of a much broader user base. In this sense, the notion of even "branding" Henkaku in an overtly singular way becomes misguided. The design field's current, top-down approach to branding hinges on the standards manual, a comprehensive guidelines document that outlines the proper (and improper) ways a brand's visual identity should be implemented out in the world.



FROM TOP: Bauhaus Press logo by László Moholy-Nagy; New York City Transit Authority Graphic Standards Manual; Bitcoin logo, an example of a "headless brand" with no central ownership or governance

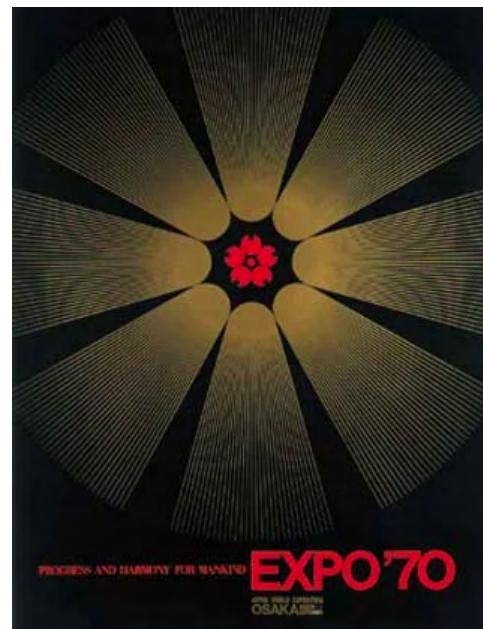


CLOCKWISE: *Untitled* by Ruth Asawa; *Composition* by Sophie Tauber-Arp; *Tapestry* by Annie Albers; *Group IV, The Ten Largest, No. 7, Adulthood* by Hilma af Klint; *Bauhaus Design for Tapestry* by Benita Koch-Otte

Instead, for Henkaku what can be explored is what has been referred to as a “headless brand,” meaning one without any single, centralized source of truth like a guidelines document, but rather one with a truly shared graphic lexicon that can be deployed, adapted, and remixed at will. While some level of standardization may be necessary, a “headless brand” is ultimately both governed and perpetuated by the community of users.



CLOCKWISE: Apple iPod; Expo '70 poster by Kamekura Yusaku; MUJI wall mounted CD player

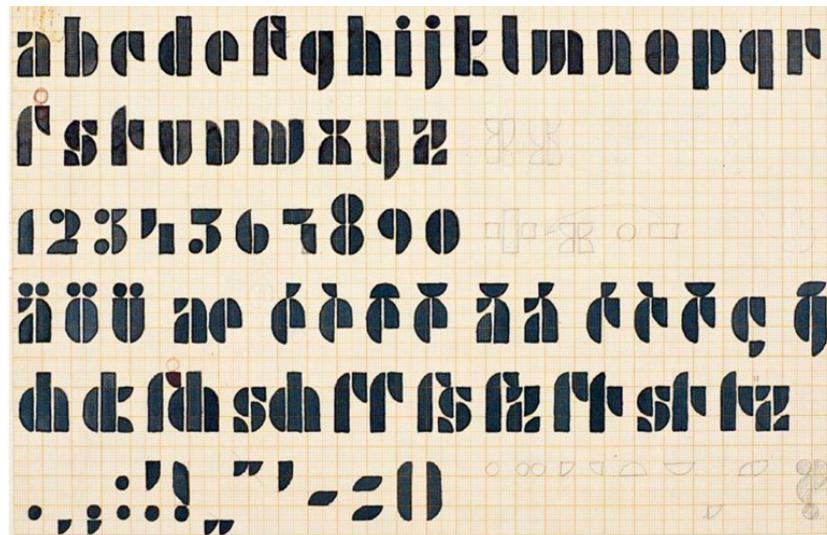


Forging a design language

Despite these shortcomings, the Bauhaus as a design movement is still a useful corollary for understanding the aims of Henkaku for several reasons. First, Henkaku aspires to the enduring, long-term, and near-universal significance that Bauhaus has achieved over the past century. We see the enduring influence of Bauhausian design all around us today, from graphic design to architecture to products to even the most contemporary UX/UI design. By just looking around at the design of everyday life, one can quite easily follow the lineage of Bauhaus principles going back from its founding to the present. For example, one of the most emblematic designs of the 21st-century, the Apple iPod, was directly inspired by the pared-back minimalism of Braun appliances, themselves a mid-century evolution of the pure, geometric forms visible in Bauhaus product design. The influence of the Bauhaus is also strong across Japan, evident in the grid-based graphic design of 20th-century masters like Ikko Tanaka, to the recent design aesthetics of global brands like Muji and Uniqlo.

Second, what the Bauhaus pioneered was the articulation of a *unified* design philosophy, which is Henkaku’s aim as well. Espoused by individuals like Walter Gropius, Josef Albers, and László Moholy-Nagy, and codified through writing and teaching, the Bauhaus unified philosophy encompassed all aspects of creative and industrial production, by many

practitioners. It was not just an aesthetic, but a worldview that was both expansive and specific. This ideal of a unified philosophy, which has the power to drive multiple areas of creation across sectors in harmony, is also the intent of Henkaku.



Typography design by
Joseph Albers

Third, core to the Bauhaus project was the notion of a “design language,” a term that is today common currency in graphic design, but at the time was a radically new way of approaching aesthetic choices. This concept of a design

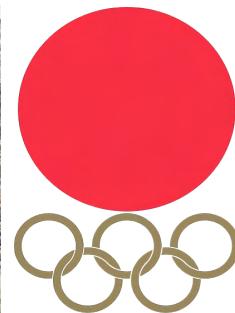
design language was codified by Wassily Kandinsky in 1923 when he proposed a “universal correspondence” to Bauhaus students of three elemental shapes: the triangle, the circle, the square. In this formulation, everything – logos, typography, patterns, furniture, even buildings – could be designed with only these three simple geometric shapes as building blocks. They form the nucleus of Bauhaus aesthetics. For Henkaku, the goal will be to define a similar, theory-based “language” – albeit rooted in new values, and attuned to a new sensibility – that can instruct a multiplicity of applications.



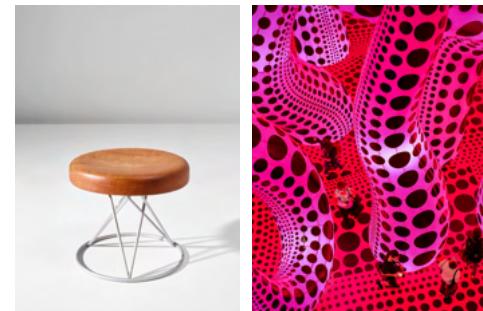
Wassily Kandinsky's triangle, square, and circle.

Research Threads

While the Bauhaus is in its way a forerunner for Henkaku, its intellectual aims are very different, as should be its conceptual and aesthetic foundations. To describe Henkaku’s visual philosophy in ownable terms, it is necessary to look at a whole range of different inputs that can begin to give visual form to its theory of change. Critical to this investigation is understanding the ideal emphasis of an identifiably “Japanese” style in Henkaku’s aesthetic. To explore this, we conducted a visual survey across six broad territories of Japanese history and visual culture, which are listed on the following pages:



TOKYO 1964



Graphic communication:

The ways in which individuals express meaning through graphic devices, from pure color and line to typography, symbols, and branding programs.

Art and craft:

Significant examples of Japanese creative production, from traditional arts like suibokuga and pottery to contemporary practitioners such as Yayoi Kusama, teamLab, and Issey Miyake.



Architecture and landscape:

The construction of physical space, both interior and exterior. This includes examples of Japanese architecture, ancient and contemporary, along with elements of domestic living.

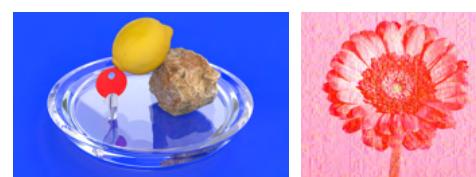
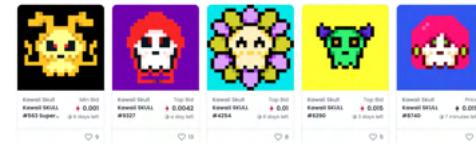
Practice and performance:

Various instances of public “acting” of ritualized process, from religion, to theater, to sport.



Popular media:

To capture more contemporary sensibilities, we researched various, often youth-driven elements of society today.



Digital culture:

Japan has long been at the forefront of digital communication and expression, and this continues in the shift to web3, with an exciting cadre of Japanese creators producing digital art and illustration.



Philosophy and religion:

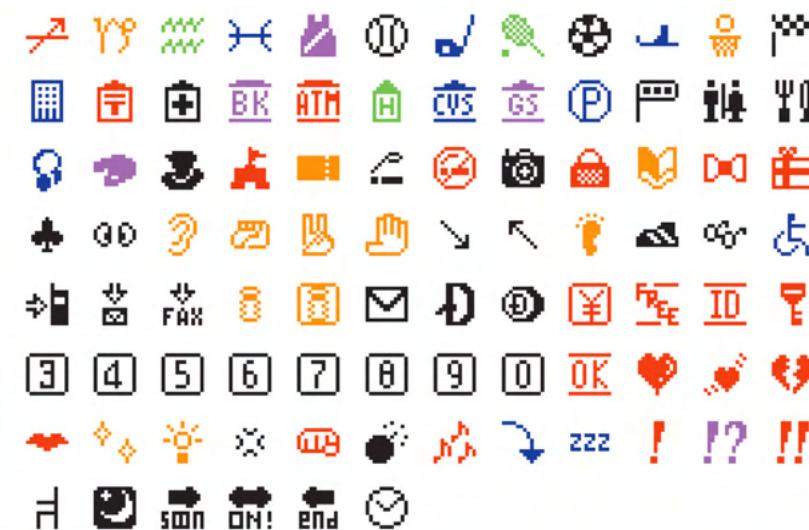
Schools of thought and spiritual practice, primarily Buddhism and Shinto, which continue to influence Japanese identity.

From all this research, a few common “threads” emerged that are worth noting.

Logographic communication

The first points to the very nature of representation, and how meaning is conveyed through pictorial-based communication systems. The most obvious example of this is written Japanese. As a logographic language, Japanese is a highly complex, ornate symbology merging three classifications of characters (kanji, hiragana, katakana) that requires sophisticated decoding to understand in real-time. Its morphology is modular and component-based, a characteristic that is also seen in other forms of communication across Japanese culture.

Pure graphic devices, like a choice of color or a certain pattern, convey context and heritage. Families, institutions, regions, and other groups of people represent themselves with iconography that is an extension of their collective identity, as do individuals with personal seals (hanko). It's no wonder then that the emoji, the ubiquitous logograms of the internet age, were created by a Japanese designer, Shigetaka Kurita. The branding for the 1964 Olympics, held in Tokyo, was also the first to introduce a purpose-made icon set to communicate the games' event visually to international attendees.



FROM TOP: Japanese writing; a series of personal seals; family emblems; emoji by Shigetaka Kurita



Simplicity versus complexity

A second thread identified from this research is the relationship, if not tension, between simplicity and complexity. To be sure, an aesthetic of pure minimalism is endemic to Japanese culture, informed by the spiritual essentialism of Zen philosophy. Today, this minimalism is one of Japan's most recognized cultural exports the world over, exemplified by the glassy solemnity of a SANAA-designed building, the wabi-sabi austerity of a Minoru Niizuma sculpture, or the determined "unbranded" nature of a plain Muji notebook.

Yet at the same time, there is a secondary current of maximalism, exuberance, color, and even chaos that can't be ignored. This turn towards visual excess can be seen in the "superflat" style of artists like Takashi Murakami, or the congested interface design increasingly favored in web3.

Ritual and process

Finally, a third thread is the concept of ritual or, more broadly, the systemized performance of a process, repeated over

time. In the Shinto tradition, these rituals are ancient and spiritual in nature, such as the rebuilding (shikinen sengū) of the Ise Shrine every twenty years, or the periodic restoration of twisted rice rope (shimenawa) that conjoin the twin islands of Meoto Iwa nearby. Ritual is present in other areas of Japanese culture as well, from the traditional sadō tea ceremony to the pre-bout performances of Sumo contenders.



LEFT TO RIGHT: New Museum of Contemporary Art, SANAA; "A Panda Family Against the Blue Sky" by Takashi Murakami; the ritualistic rebuilding of the Ise Grand Shrine

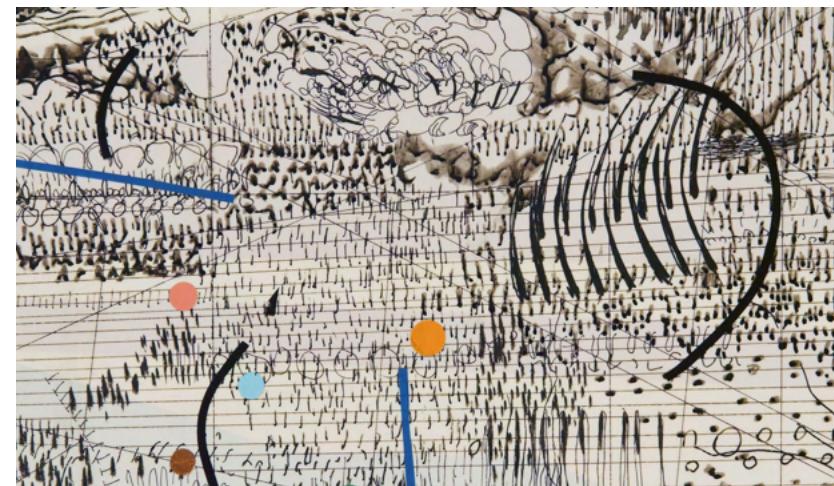
Design Pillars

These threads, along with the values of Henkaku and many other insights gleaned from our research, have informed the development of a series of what is referred to here as "design pillars." These pillars lay out the objectives for the future Henkaku design philosophy, and represent a sort of litmus test for future design work to be graded against.

Design Pillar 1:**Create a new aesthetic for a new movement**

We are negotiating a moment of radical change, in opposition to old paradigms borne out of the past. The Bauhaus was the design manifestation of this old mindset: simplicity, rigor, rationalism, starkness. Instead, our aesthetic should embody our new values: diversity, richness of information, humanism, complexity, and more. We can embrace bottom-up, community engagement, and co-creation rather than being overtly didactic or dogmatic as the Bauhaus was.

While the specifics of this aesthetic are to be defined, the intention is clear. One immediate inspiration is the work of contemporary artist Julie Mehretu. Her layered, swirling paintings represent imagined, utopian spaces and evoke the impact of globalism, migration or changing climates. elegantly encapsulate many of the conceptual binaries discussed in the previous pages – simplicity and complexity, geometry and organicism, abstraction and representation, local and global – in singularly striking images.



Works by Julie Mehretu FROM
TOP: *Looking Back to a Bright
New Future*; *Promises: Through
Congress*

Design Pillar 2:**Embrace complexity while maintaining clarity**

“Resisting reduction” means finding ways to accentuate, not gloss over, nuance, ambiguity, and context. This means visually representing diversity, dynamism, and exuberance of spirit. Some level of abstraction is always necessary to maintain clarity, but we must be mindful to not flatten out the nuance too much.

Here, the work of Leslie Roberts may be of influence. Her practice is focused on the translation of words into abstract data visualization, creating drawings that she calls the “illuminated manuscripts of the everyday.” The works are highly complex and detailed, and rich in meaning – yet maintain a level of immediacy and emotional impact.



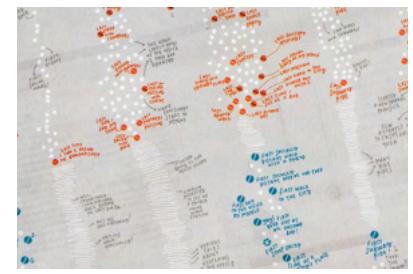
Works by Leslie Roberts
CLOCKWISE: *Your Photographs*
Must Be, Instructions; Dear,
Manhattan Avenue

Design Pillar 3:

Take a humanistic approach to representing numbers

Because Henkaku's paradigm shift is about prioritizing new measurements of success that aren't predicated on sheer quantification and monetization, any visualizations of numbers should embrace a richer, more humanistic view of data, acknowledging them for what they are: abstract representations of humans, stories, and events. Because Henkaku's paradigm shift is about prioritizing new measurements of success that aren't predicated on sheer quantification and monetization, any visualizations of numbers should embrace a richer, more humanistic view of data, acknowledging them for what they are: abstract representations of humans, stories, and events.

Here, the philosophy of data humanism is an example of how to actualize this paradigm shift. Artistic and commercial works by the information designer Giorgia Lupi represent a different approach to data visualization, and even point to a new definition of data itself. Eschewing traditional visual models of dataviz, such as pie graphs or bar charts, which often drain data of emotion and human resonance, these works underscore the potential for an expanded lexicon of graphic data to capture the fullness of human experience.



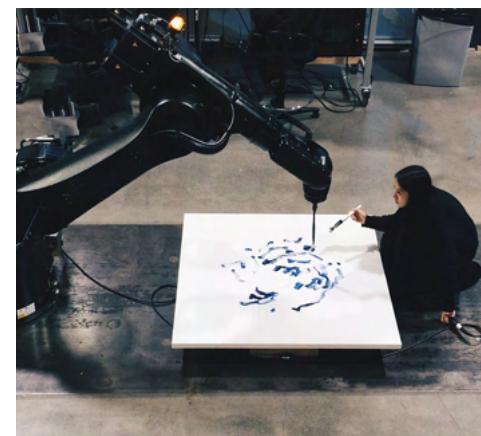
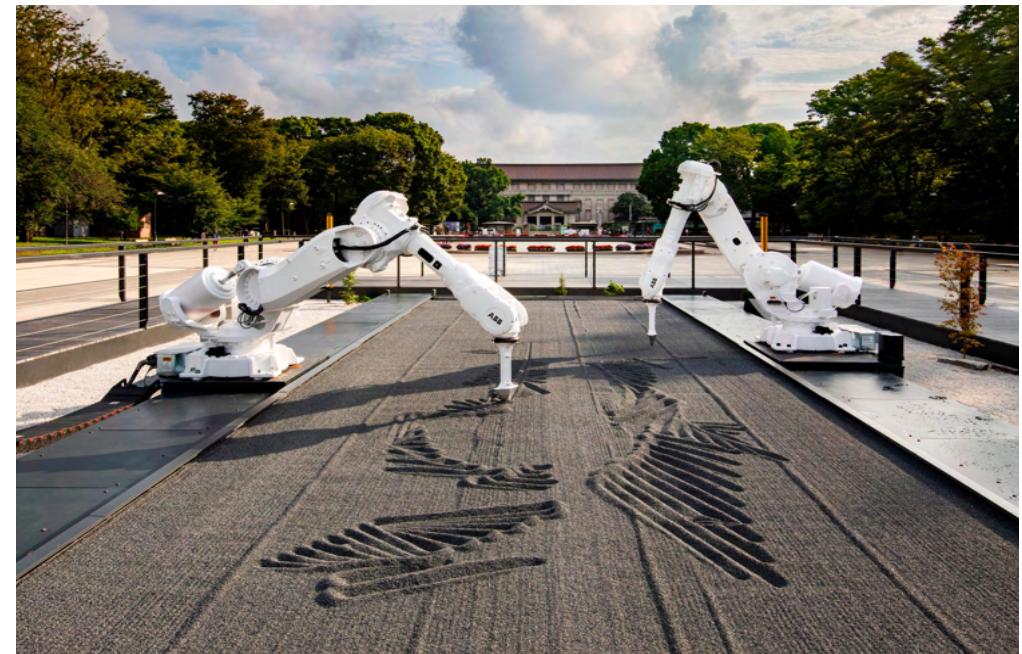
Works by Giorgia Lupi/Pentagram
CLOCKWISE: *Brusies: The Data We Don't See*; *What Counts*; *My Year in Data (So Far)*; *Book of Life*

Design Pillar 4:

Bridge East and West, old and new

The Henkaku aesthetic should be a cross-cultural one, cutting across borders and legible to contributors of all nationalities. While we are influenced by Japanese philosophies of thought and creative production, Henkaku is not explicitly “Japanese.” It is a global, shared vision for the future. This new visual language will look forward by looking back; inspired by contemporary digital expression and web3 sensibilities, but philosophically, through a lens of ancient cosmologies.

Today, contemporary artists and artisans are exploring these fault lines in creative, poetic ways. “The Constant Gardeners” by Jason Bruges Studio presented four robotic arms hypnotically raking a traditional Japanese dry garden in algorithmic patterns. Similarly, the Chinese-Canadian artist Sougwen Chung employs robots as co-creators in her paintings, blurring the “hand” of the artist and the machine. “Quasicrystal – in search of textiles through code” is a project mounted by the textile fabricator HOSOO, demonstrating how digital technology can enrich the design of a centuries-old practice.



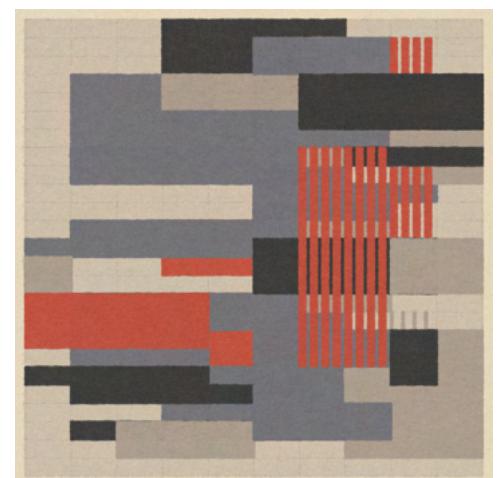
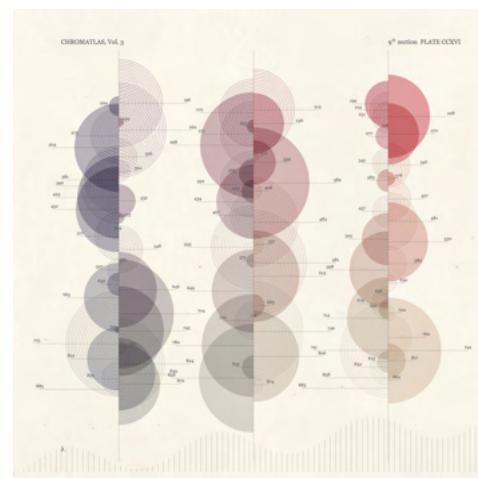
CLOCKWISE: *The Constant Gardeners* by Jason Bruges Studio, *QUASICRYSTAL* by HOSOO GALLERY, and *Drawing Operations* by Sougwen Chung

Design Pillar 5:

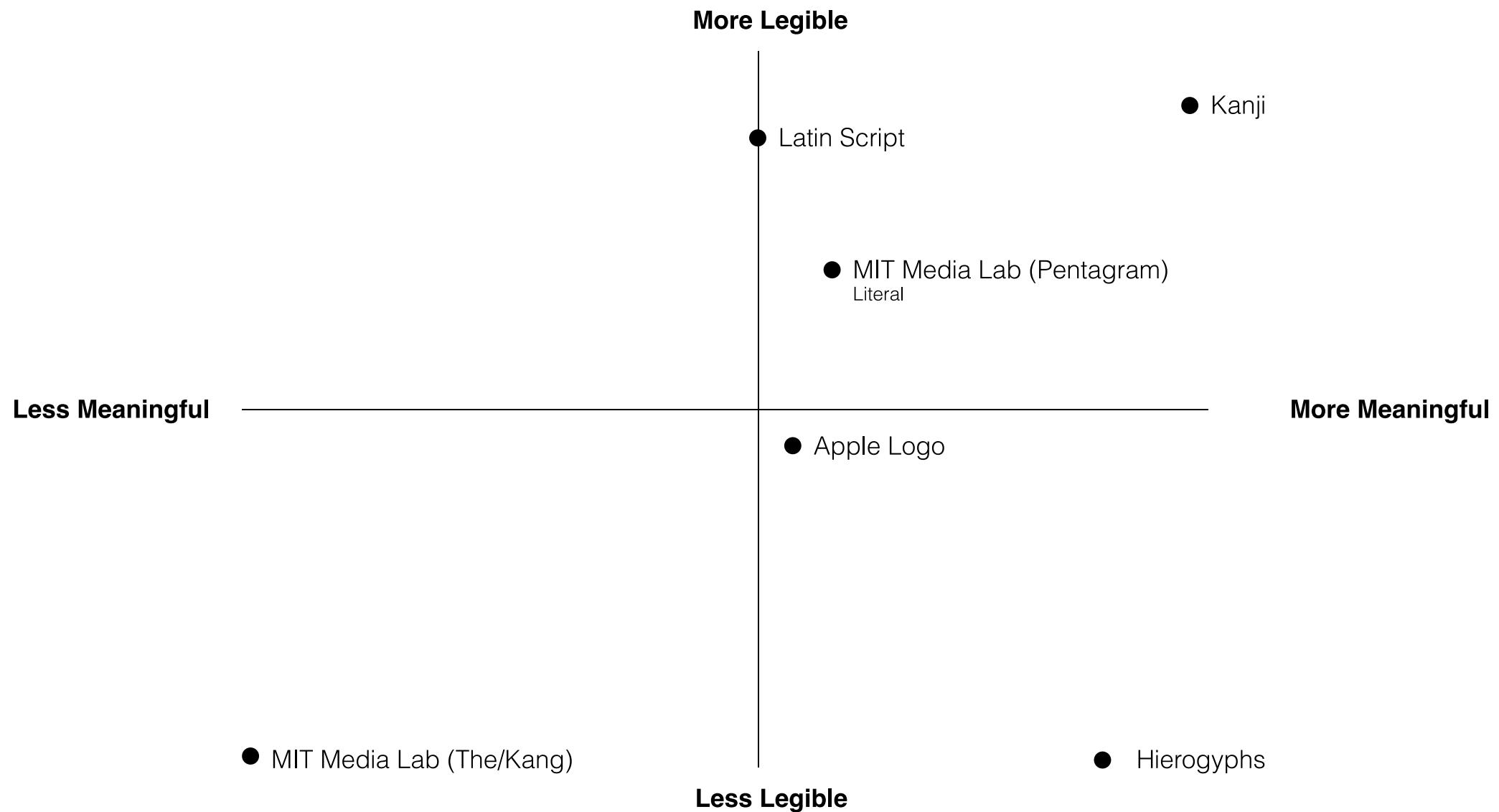
Create a new symbology

Inspired by Japanese kanji, we can create a new symbology or “alphabet” as the first, tangible manifestation of the nascent Henkaku design philosophy. The alphabet can be the composite of various symbols of meaning, that then can be combined, remixed, and mashed infinitely. The alphabet can serve as a “headless brand” for the Henkaku community, one owned, used, and evolved by all members. The alphabet will provide a structured framework for graphic communication while leaving ample space for unstructured personal creativity and dynamism.

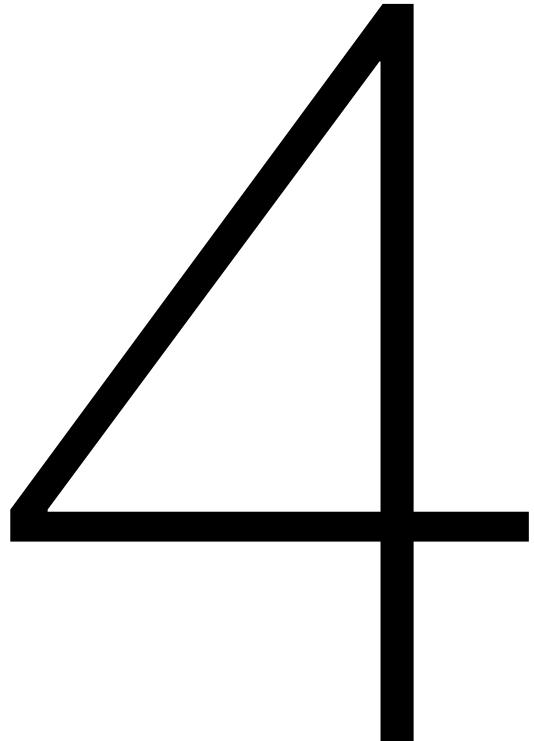
There is a spectrum of “alphabets” that could exist, based on legibility and meaningfulness. Examples ranging from generative identities, iconography to languages are plotted on the next page.



CLOCKWISE: *Winter Jacket* by Lisa Orth, *Garden, Monoliths #19* by Michaël Zancan, *Loom* by Andreas Rau, and *CHROMATLAS, Vol. 3* by Aleksandra Jovanić



Creative Sketch



To begin to activate the Henkaku philosophy in a real design project, we are exploring the idea of creating a “new symbology” that can begin to communicate all that Henkaku stands for to the world.

The following pages overview current thinking, along with detailing landscape research that has informed the creative process. Please note that all creative concepts are directional only, and intended to demonstrate the potential of this idea for further development.

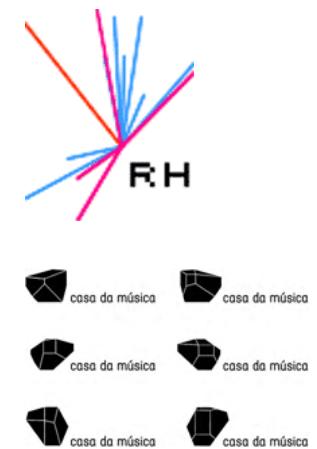
Opportunity

In the spirit of open-source communities, a “new symbology” could be comprised of a generative “kit-of-parts” that the Henkaku community and broader world can adopt, contribute to, and remix to create their very own personal data portraits. This variable visual language could then be extrapolated into a larger visual identity system that can be applied across various physical and digital spaces.

The alphabet would function as a “headless brand.” While we would provide some level of structure to define the “architecture” of the alphabet, the heart of the design will be determined by user input. Visually, the alphabet will articulate the aesthetics and sensibilities aforementioned in this deck. Tactical applications could include logos, profile pictures,

personal badges, event branding and collateral, NFTs, environmental graphics, and physical products. This idea of a new symbology holds several opportunities. First, it can be a potent metaphor for Henkaku’s values, and thereby a calling card for a larger paradigm shift – in effect, defining the word through its physical manifestation and the potential it presents. For instance, as an inherently decentralized graphic framework – a “headless brand” – the symbology is not owned by any one governing entity as are most brands. Its layered presentation can organize complex inputs in an intuitive and system-based way, thereby resisting reduction while still maintaining clarity.

Second, a new symbology as described here represents a meaningful innovation in the world of generative brand design, a growing sub-field of corporate identity design over the past two decades. Generative branding is the use of computer algorithms to create patterns that serve as the logomark for an entity. Paradoxically, generative logos poke at the very purpose of a logo – usually, an iconic and inflexible mark that can identify a company or organization, now and forever. Instead, a generative logo is ever-changing based on certain data parameters. There is not one logo, but infinite. As a communication device, it can effectively articulate dynamism, change, and technological innovation. Two of the first examples of generative branding, both from the early 2000s, did just that. The logo for Rhizome, the digital art non-profit, “refreshed” every time its website was visited, and its form changed based on the previous IP



Rhizome logo, designed by Markus Weisbeck and Frank Hauschild; Casa da Música logo by Stefan Sagmeister

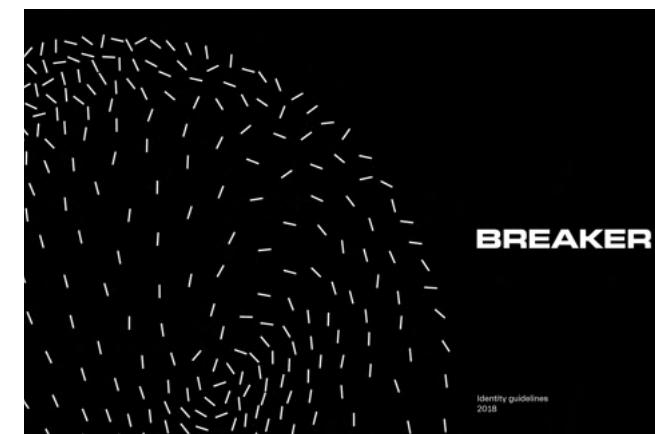
addresses that visited the site. The logo for Casa de Música, a performance hall in Portugal, changes shape and color to illustrate the diversity of music it presents.

Algorithmically-driven

Today, the concept of a generative logo continues to hold sway, blurring the boundaries between graphic design and creative technology in intriguing ways. There are several types of approaches worth noting. The first stems directly from the example of Rhizome and Casa da Música: a generative logo that features infinite permutations as defined by an algorithm. The MIT Media Lab logo was designed by Richard The and E Roon Kang to be the graphic embodiment of a bustling, ever-changing innovation lab. 40,000 versions of the logo exists, each re-situating three colored bands on a seven by seven grid.

The logo for COP15 by design studio NR2154 takes a similar tact, although injects an element of narrative befitting the organization it sought to represent. It visualized a swirling planet based on data-driven parameters, so to represent connection and negotiation. The model featured 192 threads, one for each United Nations member state at the time.

The visual identity system for Breaker, a blockchain entertainment rights platform, uses “flocking” line segments to evoke the technology behind the company’s product. The logo used Processing, a creative coding programming language, to mimic randomized movement through code.



FROM TOP: MIT Media Lab logo by Richard The and E Roon Kang; COP15 logo by NR2154; Logo for Breaker by Order Design and Zach Lieberman

Community-informed

While visually interesting, these types of generative identities use data in ways not always completely meaningful to what they are trying to represent. For instance, how each of the 40,000 Media Lab logos looked was completely random, decided by a line of code. However, other recent examples of generative logos, some using data and some not, show how a variable graphic can also communicate story and emotion, particularly as a window into a community of users.

For instance, the logo for Playwrights Horizon, a writer-centered theater house, consists of the word “Playwrights” written by whomever is the season’s lead playwright. The logo is refreshed on posters, collateral, and the website each season, thereby “branding” the theater for that period of time with the artist’s own signature.

The logo for Clubhouse, the social media platform, stretches the notion of what even a graphic expression should be. Instead of a vectorized mark, the brand is communicated by photographic portraits of users making the letter “C” with their hands.

The history of an organization can also be fertile ground to express visually. For the Walt Disney Concert Hall, artist Refik Anadol used AI to analyze and then visualize concert video archives. The result was an abstracted “dream” of the institution’s life, projected onto its facade for passerbys.



FROM TOP: Playwrights Horizon logo by Pentagram; Clubhouse logo by Collins; WDCH Dreams by Refik Anadol

Frameworks for customization

These examples also raise the issue of how necessary it is to define a certain level of structure for the design system, so to provide visual consistency and unity, even while allowing for variability.

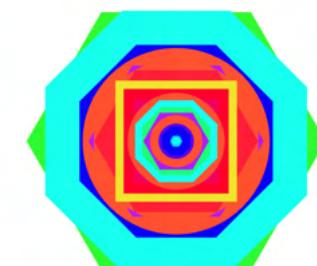
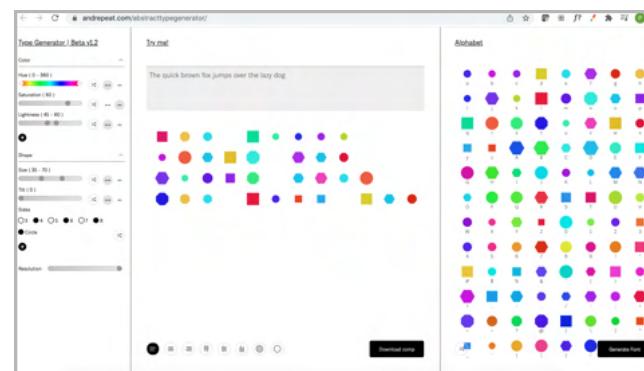
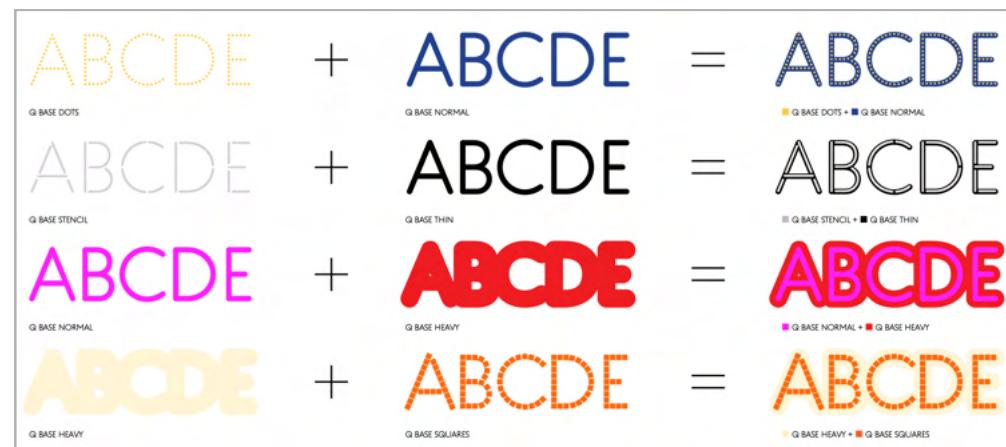
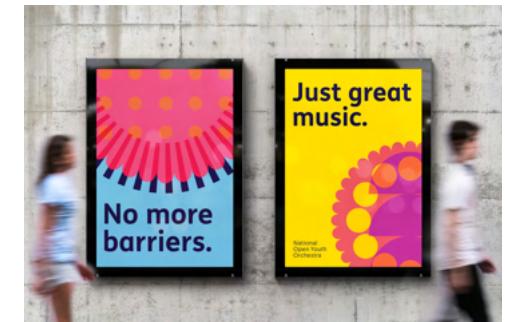
The National Open Youth Orchestra represents one approach. The orchestra created a design framework of standardized shapes, colors, and symbols, and then invited each of its instrumentalists to create an icon by remixing these elements.

This idea can also be extended to typography. The Q Project, by designer Peter Bi'lak, formulated a “modular” typeface with seemingly infinite combinations of form, stroke, and symbols.

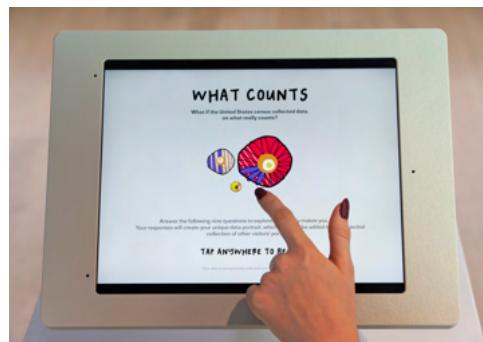
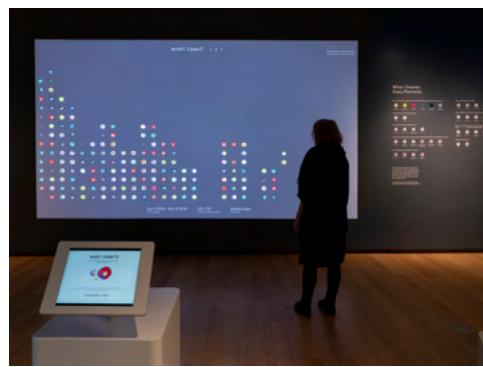
The potential of custom software to generate these modular lexicons is exemplified by the “Abstract Type Generator” by the creative studio And Repeat. The generator allows you to map geometric shapes to the twenty-six letters of the English alphabet, thereby creating quite literally a new alphabet. The platform allows you to customize the look of the alphabet, changing colors, resolution, and more.



National
Open Youth
Orchestra



FROM TOP: National Open Youth Orchestra logo by Fiasco Design; Q by Peter Bi'lak; “Abstract Type Generator” by And Repeat



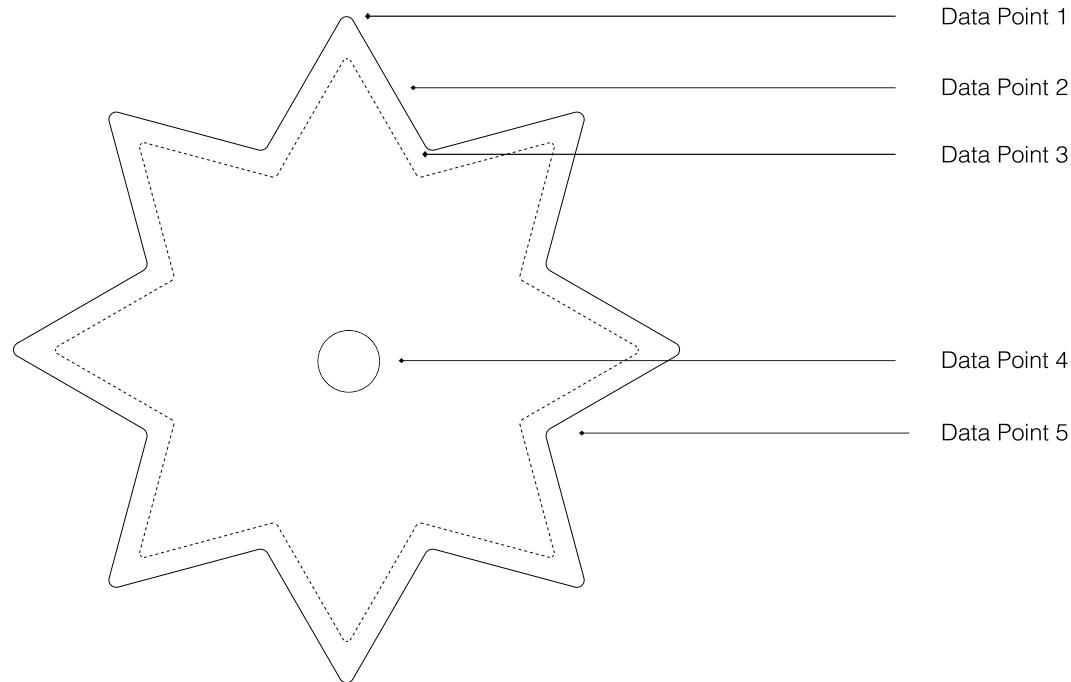
Data portraits

Finally, there is another model of generative branding that can speak well to the Henkaku ideals of diversity, reducing reduction, and new aesthetics. The “data portrait” is a composite image of personal data, with individual layers representing specific aspects of identity. In the interactive installation “What Counts,” at the Museum of the City of New York, data portraits were used to reimagine how personal data can be gathered and communicated. Museum visitors were encouraged to answer a short questionnaire on an iPad to contribute to the dynamic graphics projected on the gallery wall. Answers created an ownable “data portrait,”

within which the multiplicity of discrete graphic elements – and the nearly exponential combinations possible – underscores the intersectional nature of human identity.

In a similar way, at the TED conference in 2017, personalized data visualizations prompted connections among conference attendees. Attendees answered a survey about their vision for the future, the answers to which resulted in a data portrait representing personal aspirations and predictions. The color and position of every element indicated a different response, creating a work of art from the analog data to spark conversation.

LEFT TO RIGHT: “What Counts” by Pentagram; TED Data Portraits by Accurat



Potential data inputs

Demographics

- Age
- Nationality/location
- Employment/experience
- Education
- (...)

Qualitative survey

- Personal questions about personal definition of henkaku, vision for the future, fun facts, etc.
- (...)

Community role

- Discord badges
- Tokens
- Quests completed
- Community service
- (...)

Probabilistic computing

- Randomized visuals generated based on above factors

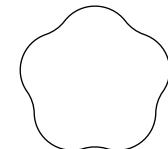
Prototype Wireframes

To dimensionalize the idea of a new symbology in an early prototype, the following pages detail one potential direction we could explore. This concept is in the same vein as the “data portrait”, but specifically related to Henkaku community members.

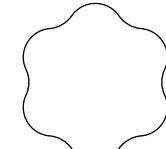
Community members could create their “data portraits” that would be generated via defined inputs and parameters. Although these inputs would be pre-determined, users could render uniquely individual portraits – be it through probabilistic computing or other means of randomization – while still preserving the integrity of the data.

The data portrait would be comprised of graphic elements that each relate to a single input. These inputs would inform how each user's overall portrait would look.

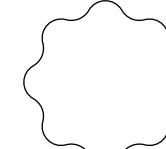
I consider myself to be a(n)...



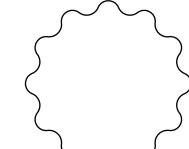
Technologist



Designer

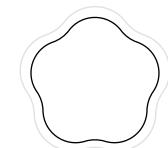


Artist

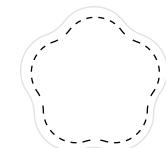


Educator

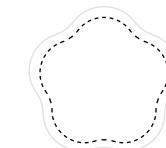
When it comes to collaboration,
I like to work with...



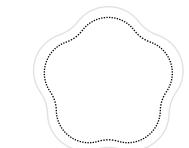
Myself



A large collective where
I have anonymity



One other
partner



A small, tight-
knit group

My medium of choice is...



Pedagogy



Pixels



Data



Paint

My creative process is...



Collaborative



Agile

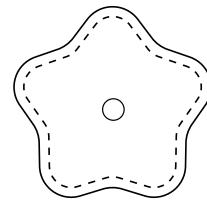


Iterative



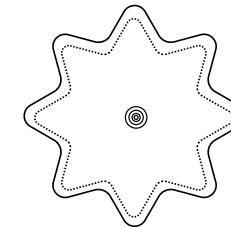
Linear

PERSON 1



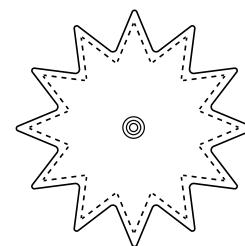
A technologist
who likes to work with a large collective
where they have anonymity
when creating with pixels
and has a collaborative creative process

PERSON 2



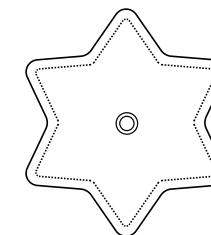
An artist
who likes to work with a small, tight knit group
when creating with data
and has a linear creative process

PERSON 3



An educator
who likes to work with one other partner
when creating with paint
and has an iterative creative process

PERSON 4



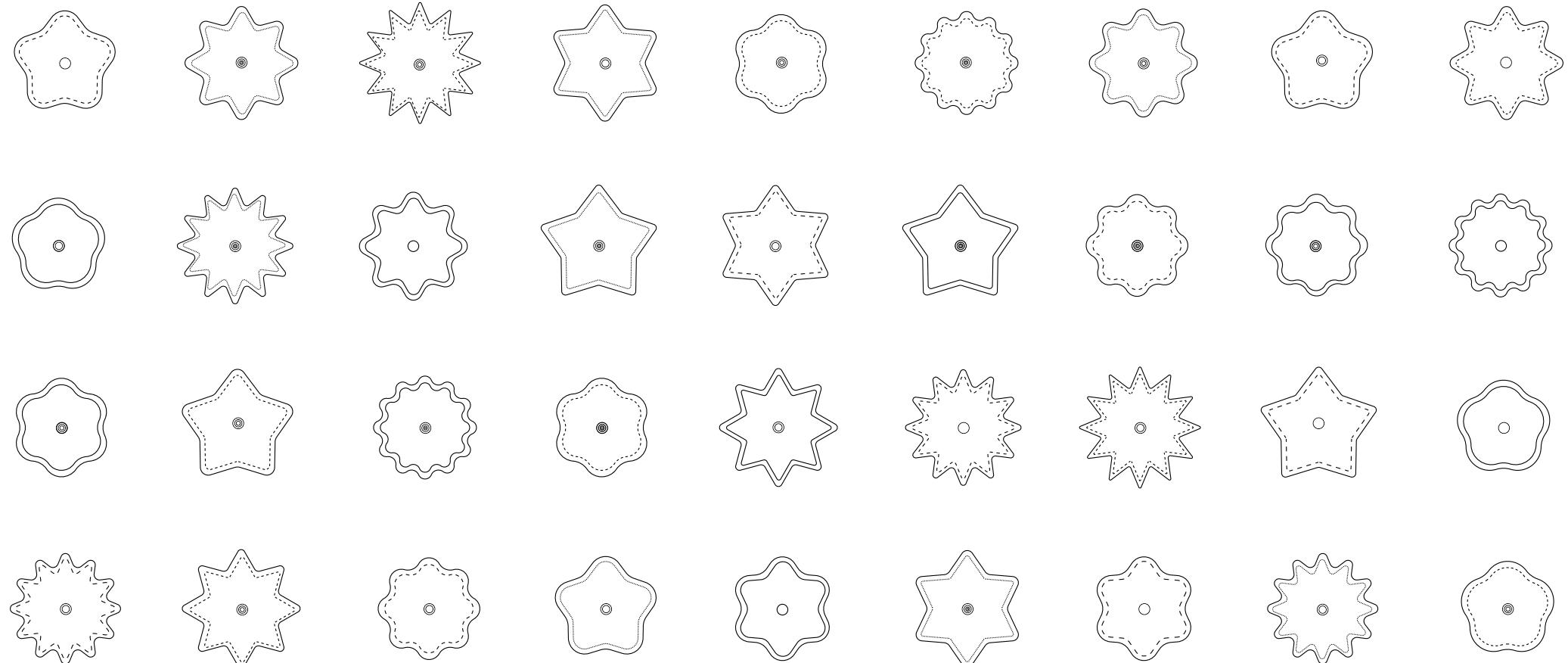
A designer
who likes to work with a small, tight-knit group
when creating with data
and has an agile creative process

When the layers are assembled, rich portraits – rendered in a standardized but extensive graphic lexicon – of individuals emerge.

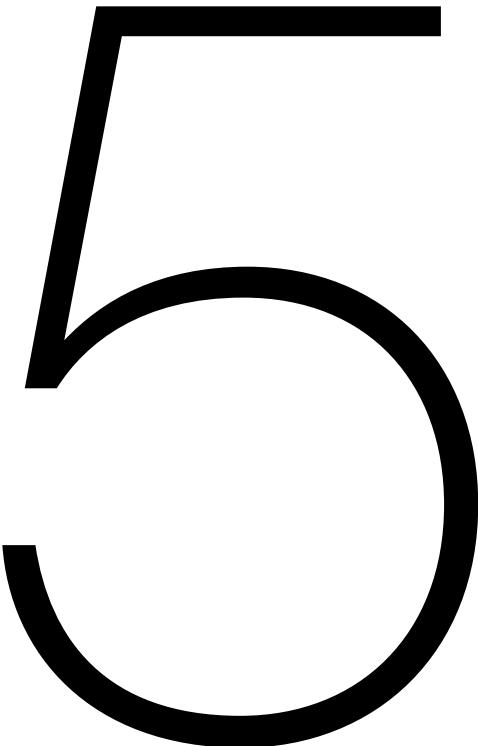
Community members share a common symbology to uniquely identify themselves, affording the opportunity for these portraits to be identifiable in various spaces.

These data portraits can be carried across both digital and physical spaces and collateral, such as conferences, stickers, NFTs, and more. Together, they represent a rich image of the community.

In line with “headless brands”, these portraits and their “kit-of-parts” could continue to be used, remixed, and evolved by community members.



Conclusion



Henkaku is a new paradigm for understanding, negotiating, and directing the radical change that society is undergoing now. Guided by values of resisting reduction, diversity, anti-disciplinarity, decentralization, and sustainability, Henkaku aims to center human flourishing as the most optimal measure of societal success.

Aesthetically, Henkaku stakes out new territory in opposition to the Bauhausian visual languages that Western society has continuously positioned as “modern.” It embraces warmth, visual complexity, and humanism. As a design philosophy, it looks forward by looking back, embracing the worldview of enduring, indigenous cosmologies alongside the inclusive, generative potential of digital technology.

Next steps

Where does Henkaku go from here? As stated at the beginning of this report, this document represents both an end and a beginning. While research and reference gathering will continue as this working group continues to hone Henkaku’s aesthetic, it is our intention for this report to serve as a launch pad for several new creative endeavors as Henkaku proper is introduced to the world. These endeavors may include tangible design projects, such as the one overviewed in the previous chapter. This type of project,

created with and for the emerging Henkaku design community, can be a site to prototype the ideas presented in these pages, and pressure test them in a wider context with a larger number of contributors and collaborators.

Beyond this, one can imagine many other, diverse applications of the Henkaku aesthetic, from branding programs for Henkaku-aligned organizations, such as the Henkaku Center for Transformational Change at Chiba Institute of Technology, to collateral, social media, and digital design for Henkaku-informed initiatives by a larger constellation of partners and collaborators beyond academia. A consistent aesthetic approach can gently link all these efforts as related but not identical, maintaining a spirit of bottom-up, grassroots change which is aligned with Henkaku’s values.

However, the aspirations of Henkaku are broader than any one application. Like a seed which puts down roots and grows to bear many fruit, the full potential of Henkaku will be realized in its broader societal impact across and between sectors and disciplines. We dream of a generative – and generous – movement in which all can participate.

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