

Design for This Century

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The Manifesto of Non-Human-Centered Design

i. We are living in an era that overly stresses the importance of human-centered design or HCD, a design practice that engages human perspectives in every aspect of the problem-solving process. The motivation for such design is to create an environment where people will maximize their user engagement by including the human perspective in every aspect of the design process: researching, contexting, brainstorming, conceptualizing, developing, and implementing the solution. For the past decades, corporations have exploited such practice to maximize profits for organizations while creating an isolated, invisible, and often times insidious bubbles for users to keep buying into their products. Such distortion of reality and conveying of a false hierarchy which places humans on top of any organic or non-organic creatures have been proven to be unsustainable not only for the human race, but also for the Earth. Pollutions, depletion of resources, and declination of animal diversity are all consequences of this very design philosophy. While people may argue that dethorning humans from the apex of ecosystem shares no interest with themselves, the results of 2016 US presidential election, an example of our own lives can serve as a great example of the effect of human-centered design.

Social media, Facebook, Twitter etc., have greatly affected the final result of the election and people's perception of issues through their content sharing algorithms and news bots. Facebook's Newsfeed algorithm optimizes users gratifications by curating the contents you see on Facebook for maximum user retention, regardless of the fallacy of those contents (Campbell-Dollaghan). The result is that users are shielded from the reality and truth that Facebook AI determined users won't readily re-share. As a result, online conversations and perceptions are much more polarized than the reality, where supporters for both pro-Trump and pro-Clinton parties deeply believed that their party would win the election. Until the revelation of election results, people started to realize that the information that they received on social media are unrelated to the reality and detached the majority of the country's opinion. Our actions are based upon the worldviews we have, and worldviews are built on the information we receive on a daily basis. HCD places the monetary profits at its priority and is not suitable for either a sustainable future or an society where the freedom of thinking is highly valued.

ii. However, to create an alternative to human-centered design, designers must stand at the frontier of such responsibility. Corporations would never act on themselves due to the fact that HCD will continue to maximize their profits. Designers, instead, sharing a non-human-centered approach could incorporate this kind of thinking into their corporate tasks. It is impossible for users themselves to bridge and discriminate the contents generated on the Internet, as they will always opt for the ones that are most cater to their existing perceptions and interests. The current problem is that designers lack the time axis in their design practice. The time axis in design resembles the fact that

humans are not permanent rulers of our globe. From the Cretaceous period, to Ice Age and now the *Anthropocene Age*, some scholars already argue that our ecosystem is going to be completely different in the next centuries. Stephanie Wakefield mentioned in her essay "*Field Notes from the Anthropocene: Living in the Back Loop*", what we are seeing as ecological apocalypse might be just one stamp of the timeline of the Earth. The global trends in temperature and sea level are not fundamentally steadily, rather a nonlinear process. The current rise in atmospheric temperature and sea level is merely the Earth's shift to its next ecological cycle (Wakefield). As the temporary occupants of the Earth only for a given time, we do owe the responsibility to create sustainable ecosystem whichever phase the Earth is in at a specific period of time.

iii. In order to shift to non-human-centered design (NHCD), we have to first reach equality within our human society. It is impossible to employ a new approach of living without an unified effort. To reach the consensus, however, we have to eliminate all the inequality in our society. The discriminations in our society takes forms in racial inequality, where the phenomenon of *white fantastic imagination* -- African Americans are ridiculed and seen as simpletons -- still portrait them detached from their living realities (Invisible Universe Documentary Channel). Women are depicted as sexual simpletons on the big screen, where man have to in a way of educating them about how to perceive the world (Pop Culture Detective). Unless we reach the equality within the human society first, can we start looking at and respecting the surrounding organism and non-organism on Earth. Plants, which are regarded as depleted from emotions and needs, can actually communicate through electromagnetic waves. Until we start to realize that there are other

equal residents in this blue globe, it is impossible for humans to yield the power of exploiting endless resources and caring about other species as a consensus.

iv. It's our designers jobs to convey the sense of uncertainty in our futures and help humans imagine various possibilities. In *Black Quantum Futurism Theory*, the author argued that time can be created and events in time reside in a circular relationship, where past events can affect the future and future events can will move backwards to past dimensions. Even though I do not agree to this type of circular relationship of events in the *Black Quantum Futurism Theory*, I do believe in the fact that our future resides in quantum states, where the exact form or experience of the future can not be envisioned, yet the possibilities of which can be juxtaposed and analyzed from its current states. Adopting non-human-centered design does not mean completely disregard human factors in our design process. The focus of NHCD is to emphasize the fact that humans are not the only or dominant audience in the end product of our makings. Non-human-centered design recognizes the states of our ecosystem by assuming humans will not be the permanent actors in the future (Node Center). In fact, humans are not the only actors in our current world either. Successful examples of NHCD practices would be incorporating multiple layers of clients in our existing consumerism culture. For example, furniture companies like IKEA started multiple initiatives to help preserve our environment and care for the whole planet. While still in the capitalism frame, IKEA strives to produce furnitures and appliance that help reach the sustainability of the Earth, such as water-saving faucet, solar-powered warehouses, etc. (IKEA). One thing to note is that the shift to non-human-centered design is a gradual process, and we have to educate people

about the possibilities of future and truth of our current state prior to establishing a new mentality of non-human-centrism. By offering consumers NHCD possibilities within the current consumerism culture, we can help jumpstart and help stimulate the process.

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