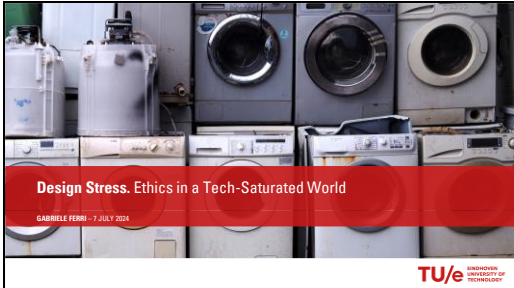
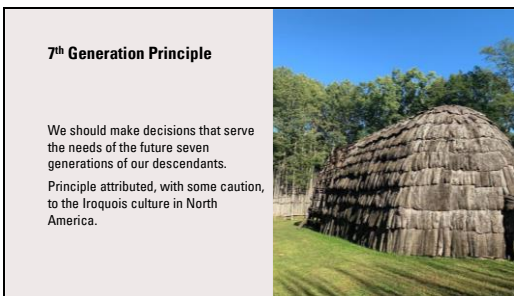


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Slides: Design Stress. Ethics in a Tech-Saturated World. Eindhoven Stadslab, 4/7/24



Welcome everyone, very happy to be here



My objective is to do research and educate students to become aware of the impacts and consequences (good, bad) of their work.

I believe that a combination of critical thinking, design ethics, and community practices is fundamental.

I have a history of being dissatisfied with the courses / programs I was teaching and then managing to change them to match my vision.



I do this because I'm very anxious about the state of our planet.

This picture is not pretty, and visualizes my anxiety: all the stuff we produce, all the things we create, all the resources we use.

Some things are useless, some others are disposable, some other have planned obsolescence.



Some types of design and design industries are part of this problem. Think about the seductive features of many phones, the marketing, and the subtle push to get a new one every year.

This is almost a textbook definition of **product hype, drive to consumption, and planned obsolescence**



Pentax MX (1976)

Durability
Openness
Repairability
Tactile qualities
Against planned obsolescence

Let's compare the previous slide – just to make a quick and necessarily imperfect comparison – to my old analogue camera. You see different values at play here.



People are often willing to make **drastic changes in the way they live to accommodate technological innovation**, while resisting similar changes on political grounds.

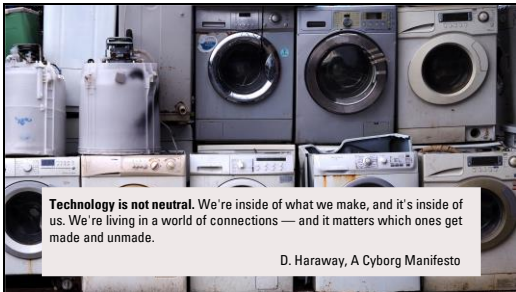
L. Winner, Do Artifacts Have Politics?

Langdon Winner put it nicely into focus: some people are well disposed to bend over backwards to include the latest gadget in their lives, and maybe the same are against environmental regulation.

Why is technological innovation so seductive?



As designers working with new technologies, we might try to dodge this problem by focusing on the technology itself and not on the context



But many thinkers remind us that technology is not neutral and cannot be neutral. We are inevitably entangled with what we make, and with the ecosystems around us. There's no way we solve this focusing on technology alone.



This is me on a bad day.

On bad days, I think that some types of design (the Apple example that we saw before) is **complicit with consumerism, planned obsolescence, resource depletion, and all sorts of rather nasty stuff.**



But then, how do I reconcile my role as an educator in design with my concern that the world is **OVERSATURATED** with technological artifacts?



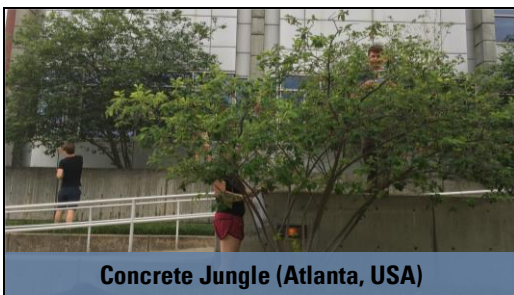
But there is hope! I want to contribute to make this situation better by articulating my research & practice along three main strands. The first one is about the politics of design – recognizing that design isn't politically neutral, and that every object we produce embodies the worldview that generated it.



Think about, for example, the current space race and the NewSpace industry – there's a enormous (latent) capitalist/consumerist ideological push under the idea that, once the resources of planet earth are exhausted, we might move somewhere else to look for more



Second research/practice strand. Also this seems abstract, but the **Repair Cafés are actually a great example.** **Planned obsolescence is a specific injustice** – if you own a device, why should you be forced to throw it away instead of repair it?



Think about bottom-up self organization initiatives like...



And this is also connected to repair, but from a different perspective.

I see a lot of value in informal repair practices, and **I want to learn from them and see how they could travel to other contexts** – what could designers learn from them and apply to different domains?



The “repair” of neighborhoods and their social relations. The maintenance of ways of living that are necessary to preserve



And, of course, we can also loop back again to repair cafes – which are very important research loci for me



Let's take a breather with this amazingly cute dog



Takeaway #1

Takeaway #1. **People will inherit the stuff we design.**
Like it or not, the materials we work with will stick around.
We might as well make it worthwhile!



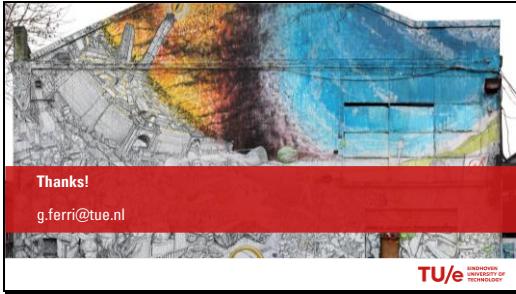
Takeaway #2

Takeaway #2. **Question the ideology behind what we make.**
Some degree of capitalist economics is almost inevitable today...
...but the possibility of a radical reimagination exists!



Takeaway #3

Takeaway #3. **Repair, repurpose, upcycle, recycle, hack, maintain.**
These practices are part of a push against consumerism.
Why aren't they perceived as cool? **This** is where we can intervene!



Thanks!

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