The most beautiful and terrible moment of failure occurs when you realize, whichever direction you choose is wrong. This is the moment of humility. It's the moment you see who you really are.
LIVD is a semi-annual publication produced in the Pacific Northwest, dedicated to the intersection of art, design, culture and how these influence lived experience.

LIVD pays homage to the inspiring and idealistic efforts of the early twentieth century avant-garde, balancing the academic with the personal and experimental.

Issue 15.2 includes contributions responding to the following prompt: screwing up, messing up, vulnerability, shame... that sort of thing. Why isn't the prompt simply failure? Because something strange happens when you ask people to talk about failure; they start talking about something else entirely.
A WORKING DEFINITION OF FAILURE

Failure is the difference between what is expected and what actually occurs.

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Deep Ruts: The Impact of Stigmergic Mechanisms on Cigarette Design
Nick Kuder
Subject: Path Amplification
Type: Academic

Optimistic Failure
Roz Crews and Caleb Misclevitz
Subject: Taking Risks
Type: Interview

Not-So-Final Fantasy, Game Over, Insert Credit to Continue, National Treasure, We All Knew Winter Was Coming
Doctor Kobra
Subject: Existential
Type: Poetry

How vs. Should
Meredith James
Subject: Ethics
Type: Criticism

A WORKING DEFINITION OF FAILURE

Failure is the difference between what is expected and what actually occurs.
I studied under Elliott Earls and I think he's brilliant. If you spend even the smallest amount of time around him, you realize he has a very keen mind. I knew this before I studied with him and so I spent a great deal of time listening intently to what he had to say. More than once he told us that really powerful work asks questions rather than answers them. Such a statement was difficult for me to comprehend. As a practitioner, I had been trained to always solve or answer something, and here was this man asking me to withhold a deeply ingrained impulse and live in the realm of the tricky. I mulled this idea over for years. I could see it articulated clearly throughout his own work. And I found that to a large degree Elliott's right. Most of our social ills, like racism, sexism, and privilege can't be eradicated. If we've learned anything in the last few years, it's that these sorts of problems don't even seem to be improving. Beyond which, working with these themes has its inherent benefits — you already have an audience and a controversy waiting for you.

As it turns out, Elliott's perspective gave me access to all the major players of the twentieth-century art world, as well as guidance for making design work situated completely in an artistic space. This little kernel of knowledge was definitely worth knowing.

But with time, I've also found the flaws in his statement. Perhaps it's because I wish us to be in a fully non-capitalist society, or perhaps it's because the tremendous errors of industrialization feel inordinately heavy. After all, we do have a lot of garbage floating in the ocean, we've made too many things that we've arbitrarily deemed disposable, no one knows how to emotionally regulate themselves, and an angry planet is responding to us with natural disaster after natural disaster. I see all of these things as failures. For some of which, the responsibility lands squarely on the designer. My problem-solving impulses can't help but want to respond.

But... what if first, some time was taken to really examine what exactly failure is and how exactly it occurs. This is the basic premise for Volume 15.2.

It might be relevant to tell you that I have researched (and experimented with) failure for years. Many examples land upon my desk. I would be hard pressed to find a person who hasn't been shaped in some manner by failure, but few people sit in its uncomfortable space and look around. Here are a few starters for thought, all of which come from a longer look at what failure is.

#1. Atul Gawande wrote this compelling commencement speech, reprinted by the New Yorker in 2012, titled "Failure and Rescue." In it he tells us of an 87 year old woman, a holocaust survivor, who faced a highly fatal surgical complication but due to her doctors' failure response, ended up walking away alive and recovering. In his narrative and subsequent reflection, Gawande offers one of the true gems in learning to deal with consequences: "A failure often does not have to be a failure at all. However, you have to be ready for it — will you admit when things go wrong? Will you take steps to set them right? — because the difference between triumph and defeat, you'll find, isn't about willingness to take risks. It's about mastery of rescue."

#2. Henry Murray was a college professor who developed interrogation techniques and tests related to extreme stress and mental fortitude. He brought his experiments back from WWII to Harvard, escalating them by severely manipulating and shaming his students. One student in particular had a very rough time with Murray's abuse, a young math prodigy named Ted Kaczynski.

#3. Pruitt-Igoe is one of the first subjects I introduce when I teach courses on failure. The modernist housing complex has been saddled with all sorts of accusations. It has been called an exemplar of: the failure of modernism; the arrogance of architecture to ask, attempt, and suppose that social issues can be solved through architecture itself; a failure to understand how economic policy shapes cities; and a failure of local government to empathize with the people who lived in Pruitt-Igoe. Yet, one of the most remarkable statements made about the complex, comes from listening to the people who lived there. Our perceptions of them, of their experience, of the building itself, the failure becomes ours. Who are we — who were we ever — on the outside to define or dismiss what was a significant part of anyone's life experience, condemning it as failed? Hated, loved, suffered through, complex, endearing, heart-breaking, yes. But failed? That categorization is an arrogance I can't muster.
Abstract: Do self-amplifying mechanisms shape individual and institutional thought and behavior?

Where there was once reason, logic, and intent behind a form, it now repeats the past as residual ornament.

Keywords: stigmergy, skeuomorph, ant mill, path amplification, behavioral / cultural momentum, incestuous amplification, belief perseverance

See also: path dependence, confirmation bias, irrational primacy effect
...I have never seen a more astonishing exhibition of the limitations of instinct. The ants' biological programming makes it nearly impossible for them to stray. The ants aren't committing ritual suicide — Ants: Their Structure, Development and Behavior, 1910: p.265

A stigmergic system is one where an individual's actions leave signs in the environment, which other individuals sense and act upon. In reference to social insects, it readily applies to the contact odor sense of their antennae kept palpating their uniformly smooth odoriferous bodies. The acts of unfriending, unfollowing, and hiding when you're dealing with a stigmergic system that has finally broken by some more venturesome members of the colony.

Google “ant spiral of death” and you’ll find videos of thousands of ants dutifully marching in a circle for hours, even days, until they eventually die from exhaustion. Entomologists prefer to use the less melodramatic term “ant mill” to describe the strange phenomenon.

The ants aren’t committing ritual suicide en masse. Ant mills occur when blind army ants, who navigate by following the pheromone scent trails of other ants in their foraging party, cross over their own previously laid trail and begin to follow it. Now a closed circuit, the trail becomes amplified with each successive lap. The ants’ biological programming makes it nearly impossible for them to stray.

Theodore Roosevelt, in The Ants: Their Structure, Development and Behavior, 1910: p.265

Harvard professor William Morton Wheeler recorded witnessing one in his laboratory: “I have never seen a more astonishing exhibition of the limitations of instinct. For nearly two days these blind ants continued to lay signal paths. The contact odor sense of their antennae kept palpating their uniformly smooth odoriferous bodies. The acts of unfriending, unfollowing, and hiding...”

In 1959, the French zoologist, Pierre-Paul Grassé coined the term stigmergy to describe the mechanism by which social insects self-organize and appear to operate as a unified organism without receiving orders from a leader. The word is a combination of the Greek words stíge, sign, and ergon, work, action. A stigmergic system is one where an individual's actions leave signs in the environment, which other individuals sense and act upon. In reference to social insects, it readily applies to the contact odor sense of their antennae kept palpating their uniformly smooth odoriferous bodies. The acts of unfriending, unfollowing, and hiding when you're dealing with a stigmergic system that has finally broken by some more venturesome members of the colony.

In countless ways, stigmergic mechanisms also play a significant role in shaping our political and world views. Here too, they make us vulnerable to self-amplifying patterns. A staggering number of American adults today get their news from Facebook and Twitter. In 2012, the cork was replaced with asbestos wrapped in a cork graphic signifier, letting the user know what the signifier, letting the user know what the...
If stigmergic mechanisms are driving so many parts of our lives and have such a profound impact on our thinking, systems, and culture, what can we do to negate — or at least offset — their control over us? The most important thing is to identify when such systems are in play. The quickest and surest way to do this is to critically examine the "givens" or fundamental assumptions we hold. What things do we think are "beyond questioning?" What seems like it has always been and will always remain the same? Then, we must test these basic assumptions and evaluate their merits and implications in light of their current context.

In designing a product from the ground up: would we choose to make it the same as it currently exists? In developing systems: are we thinking about how they can best meet their objectives? Or, are we relying too heavily on existing models and precedents?

We must resist easy answers, instead we must embrace disruptive processes. From time to time, we must venture from well marked paths, even when they seem certain to lead to success — especially when they seem certain. It isn’t enough to will ourselves to ‘think different.’ Cultural inertia cuts a deep rut that is to critically examine the 'givens' or fundamental assumptions we hold. What things do we think are "beyond questioning?" What seems like it has always been and will always remain the same? Then, we must test these basic assumptions and evaluate their merits and implications in light of their current context.

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References


Notes:

"Tiptoe Through the Tulips." Popular song by Al Dubin (lyrics) and Joe Burke (music), 1929

New York Times professional curmudgeon, Paul Krugman, devised the term "Incestuous Amplification" to describe the particular kind of stigmergic groupthink commonly found in political and financial circles.
"Protagonist Smith: this is the Day I get out of here."
WE ARE NOT BETTER

but flawed

IF WE KEEP ON

the same old
We All Knew Winter Was Coming

The Bad Dog (Bad Dog!) growled up, poked up a rabbit into a red lake upon the Welcome mat, made a shoe stick, overturned the trash, slunk outside all night wrapped in badger sounds, struck a pact by dawn.

We all knew winter was coming.

Watching tech reviews on devices he'll never own, but no time for electronics, no videogames, no space age television about crystal meth; only the rent, the phone, the gasoline, lunch, and student loan.

We all knew winter was coming.

A rented car, across the country no distance she couldn't run, but the message, the calls home, the hospitals and schools, collapsing apartments and cranky cars, trees, streams, and streams carry a song she used to know.

We all knew winter was coming.

Children gather the snow and make Ash-men in the front yard. They stick a deed in his pocket, on his lips they set the name of a god, in his mouth a diploma written in an idea of nothing, and add two rusted shovels for arms as the snow begins to fall.

D.K.

Not-So-Final Fantasy

Be Protagonist Smith, down on your luck, getting by with odd jobs on the wrong side of the tracks (as if your world had trains) while looking at the scars instead of the rusted out sci-fi/fantasy vehicles in this pinprick town. Your town is so pathetic that only low-hit-point-having slimes or other common creatures camp out in the surrounding forest because they get nowhere going to go— and you either get the hand-me-down call to adventure from the weird old guy who lives down the road or your boyfriend or girlfriend gets captured and in any case you decide, "Protagonist Smith: this is the day I get out of here."

And then you are, on, taking your licks from bigger and badder slimes and manticores level up with gold and experience, picking up those sweet-ass +5 weapons and accessories, do the whole "The Journey is the Destination" business, and eventually meet the Big Bad at the End of Everything and keep them from breaking the World. Or You COULD be lazy and grind forever in the opening world against those no-effort slimes and be at an advanced level BEFORE you tackle the first dungeon, let alone any boss, breeze through it AND be as advanced as if you were to progress normally. Your evolved attributes would compensate for your meager toils and you'd be an overpowered "End-Welder" in rags at the beginning of the tale and rush your way through the story to surprise the Big Bad.

But what you don't know is that The Big Bad often mirrors the hero's journey. You slay monsters to save a town, he or she tramples upon innocents to fulfill an agenda... and when you periodically encounter them, they are just a few levels of experience out of reach to provide a sufficient challenge. When you're busy solving a puzzle in Weird Ice World, they're getting their spell components in Mount Final level together to bring down the Moon and crash into the Earth. Fuck around for a while doing side-quests or just farming for gold and when you do meet for the final battle, you always come upon them RIGHT BEFORE they perform the ultimate step of their ritual. Every time. Are they watching you the whole game, checking in on your progress, and instead of smacking you down, say to themselves, "Oh they'll be at my secret Lair next Tuesday. I can golf off until then."

Before you decide which path to take, which path you will spend your life on, you have to ask yourself, "Is the Big Bad, being my doppleganger, as lazy at evil as I'd be lazy at good?"

Before you decide which path to take, which path you will spend your life on, you have to ask yourself, "Is the Big Bad, being my doppleganger, as lazy at evil as I'd be lazy at good?"
An interview with Caleb Misclevitz on taking risks.

ROZ CREWS • OPTIMISTIC FAILURE • LIVD • 15.2

keywords:
childhood
intentional failure
trying
not trying
choosing your own path
conversations
art and design
growing up
The following is a conversation about growing up, taking risks, questioning ourselves, and failing. In this interview, Caleb Miskievetz and I talk about the blurry line between being a child and being an adult, and we consider the value of failure in relationship to responsibility. How can failure be contextualized as a positive part of life? When is failure humiliating? When is it empowering? What is humility? How and why do we feel failure? Is it humbling to others? Is it empowering? What is importance of society. I feel guilty about that.

RC: At this stage in our life, we go for the free beer.

Well, I go for the event, too. I think it’s cool to be really risk to do something, but if the only reason you’re doing something is “to be on stage,” it’s kind of problematic. I don’t think the stage should be a pedestal. It should be more natural, where you’re doing something and people start to gather around you because they’re interested in what you’re doing. That could happen on or off stage.

RC: After you did badly on stage, would you get off stage and think, “That was great!”

I didn’t understand being on stage in the first place. I don’t think the stage should be a pedestal. It should be more natural, where you’re doing something and people start to gather around you because they’re interested in what you’re doing. That could happen on or off stage.

RC: Your example of performing badly brings up a question about transference of shame. You get up on stage and think “whatever happens, happens.” Maybe as a kid you didn’t necessarily have an awareness of the social constructions around what it means to be on stage and what it means to do badly on stage, but your parents, grandparents and siblings are all watching you, cringing as you’re up there on stage failing. It’s like right now, I’ve never experienced the shame for you.

What do you think about that?

CM: I definitely didn’t try to make them feel shame on purpose. I just thought the idea of a guitar recital, to show off how much you’ve learned, was sort of stupid.

RC: How do you feel now about the thought of your parents feeling embarrassed about your kid failing on stage?

I feel worse about it now. As you get older, you start bringing the connection between a kid and being an adult. I’ve realized the division between the two is not really there, there’s no difference. I think, related to that, going to community college was a real eye opener for me. I saw older people coming back to school, and they didn’t have any power over me even though they were older. They were my peers even though there was a difference in age. I’ve realized that age doesn’t matter as much as it did before. I’ve gained perspective that has helped me empathize with how my parents might have been feeling at my recital. I started to understand how bad it would feel to support somebody a bunch, and for the person I supported to not show off what they had learned.

I never thought of the recitals as failures because I was having a lot of fun. Just because I was not playing “Brown Eyed Girl” correctly or I forgot the lyrics, I was still playing guitar. I went on to play in bands and go on tour and do things that I consider successes. I like to re-frame my failures to be successes. I think failure is rigidly defined and constructed by society. You can only fail if there are certain established checkpoints for success. If you ignore those checkpoints and just do what you want to do, then you aren’t really failing.

I also think there’s an obvious importance to pushing your own limits and making achievements in life, it doesn’t make sense to be a blob and have fun and not care about things. There’s a lot to be said for going to college, applying for jobs you aren’t qualified for. I’ve been lucky in those areas. All of the cool jobs I’ve gotten have been through connections with people.

RC: It’s nice to think about creating your own benchmarks of success. I’ve been using this method for a long time, and I think about it a lot. I’m working on designing a newspaper right now, and I’ve never designed anything before. One of my mentors, an established graphic designer, is guiding me through the process, but each iteration I make is very bad. When she sees the end-product, she might think, “This is a complete failure.” Whereas to me, I think, “This is a great success. I produced something to show you, and now you can help me refine it and make it better and better.” It can be really hard and paralyzing if you always consider the things you do as failures. I think that is part of what’s so great about art; as a designer, you are constantly producing new iterations of things and going back to the drawing board. I think that is something art education is lacking. Because of how art is taught, people become very attached to whatever product or idea they have, and there is a preciousness to the object or project that makes it really hard to critique work. Whether or not the process is lifelong or a class or a project, it can be hard to tell people, “No, it’s not a failure, it’s actually just a step in the process.”
be really discouraging for making things. Sometimes I ask myself, "Why am I making this nicely typeset poster if it doesn't matter?"

This relates to the struggle I have with being proud of myself and owning my identity as a person who makes stuff. If you have a talent to make art and be paid for it, I think it's waste-ful to neglect it so you can be a "better person." If there's any way that you can spend your time doing something that you are excited about and it can pay your bills, do it! You also have to be responsible about it. I'm on the fence... would the extra time earned by making a lot of money at an agency that was causing gentrifying development and making garbage collateral be worth it?

RC: In life, it seems important to try to make your list of val-ues and your list of actions match. Reflecting on whether or not your current actions are mirroring your current values is a nice way to talk about failure. Are you failing your own val-ues? What do you think when I say the phrase optimistic fail-ure?

CM: I'm really optimistic about everything, almost to a fault. People always point that out. In my personal life, I have a re-ally hard time getting passionately critical or negative about things. I think that is associated with a certain amount of privilege that I have. I haven't experienced anything super devastating that would give me the backbone to have pas-sionate, critical reactions to things. I tend to be very passive, like nothing matters. Obviously, there are things that do mat-ter, but I am really optimistic about failure because I've al-ways been able to climb out of it.

RC: It sounds like you've had safety nets and not a lot of strug-gle. My life has been similar in that way. I'm really com-fortable with failure because I've never had to actually deal with the consequences of failing. This lack of experience gives me a place out of where I can talk about the exciting realities of optimistic failure, but a more interesting topic of conversa-tion might be, "Who has the opportunity and privilege to re-ally have that conversation?"

CM: There's the Wieden+Kennedy installation that says, "Fail Harder." I can imagine a lot of people who are really failing or being failed by the system saying, "Ick."

RC: What do you think "Fail Harder" means?

CM: This kind of phrase easily loses its meaning. You can learn a lot from failing, so it's good to fail, but maybe you shouldn't aspire to fail.

RC: What should you aspire to do?

CM: My biggest goal is to have enough money to live pseudo comfortably and responsibility without having to punch-in and directly work for forty hours, play for ten hours. This year I'm working towards finding a way to fit something together. For me that is such a broad aspiration that failing at it is not real-ly possible.

RC: You are defining your aspirations through money. When you really think about what you aspire to and how could you fail at that, does it go beyond money? What do you really want to get from this process? Do you have safety nets for that, too? Are those things more risky?

CM: My real task is that I just want free time. I think every-one wants that — to spend with family, friends. I want to feel productive and proud of things I'm making.

RC: I want to be able to teach experiential learning, and I don't want to be required to sit in a classroom as a teacher. I like the notion of being able to ask questions as a teacher, and for the students to also be asking questions. I want to create an educational environment where we're all learning from each other and we're doing experiential activities. That's one of my aspirations. Another would be to have an equal amount of time to spend on my artistic projects. Clearly, there is a relationship to finance, but not necessarily. There's lots of ways to think about achieving those goals. Maybe it is that I'm moving from residency to residency where there's a housing component that allows me to not pay for housing. That frees up money and time.

I also want fulfilling relationships and friendships. I think it's so important, and often not part of the equation when I'm talking with people about success and failure. Personally, I have failed most at having friendships. I have lost a lot of friends because of my career ambitions.

RC: I wouldn't say that I've lost friends, but sometimes I'm not a good friend. I get wrapped up in whatever I'm doing.

RC: Failing at being a friend is not something I want to fail harder at. There's a difference in how I feel about failing in my art where I might say, "I want to optimistically fail in my art so that it gets better," and failing with friends. I'm the kind of person who is working on seven projects at once, so that at least one of them turns out okay. The rest of them can fail, and I'm not dependent on the failed ones as self- esteem motivators because one of them was okay. At least one out of seven will probably be fine, and I'll feel proud of it. With friends, it's not the same because it's people! Sometimes I do fall into the same kind of mindset where I feel like it's okay that I just have one friend, but more recently, I've been thinking a lot about how to not fail at friendships. What does it require? It requires optimism in a totally different way. It requires me to believe that people are good and that they are there for me.

RC: That is so hard. You always read things in 'zines or on the internet about how if your friends aren't supportive of you putting yourself first, then they're not your friend.

Where is the person that is going to be chill with me not talk-ing to them for two weeks because I'm busy? Where is the person who is going to not be totally upset and break up with me if I decide I want to move to a different city?

RC: Those people are far and few between. What really mat-ters is the quality of our friendships and making that a prior-ity. I've had experiences where I've been a person feel cared for even if you go about it in untraditional ways. Maybe it's about not think-ing of relationships in terms of time because sometimes you don't have time, and you have to figure out other ways to show your affection. I'm only now starting to think about this because I have so many friends who aren't in my life any-more. This brings up the spectrum of failure and success. I wonder if losing touch with a friend is actually something we would put in a failure category on a spectrum or maybe it would be in the "just something that happened" category.

RC: I want to go back to the idea of defining failure under a certain construction. If you stop hanging out with some-one or they're mad at you and you don't want to hang out with you, you could consider that a failure, but it's only a failure if friendship is defined by a specific set of rules. You would have to ask yourself, "What is friendship?" Maybe if ending that relationship means that you can focus on something else or it's weight off your chest, maybe that isn't a failure, maybe it's just what was supposed to happen. That could be a way to be optimistic about that failure.

RC: I'm not religious, I'm not spiritual, and I wasn't raised with a particular overabundance of ideals or values. I often think, "is everything supposed to happen for a reason?" I remember my mom saying that a lot. "It's just supposed to happen. Every-thing has a reason." Remembering that is how I get through many of my times of failure. That is the mindset that has really helped me because I don't think of those events in a nega-tive way. I see them as parts of a larger chain of events that I don't have control over but do. It's a funny kind of relief.

RC: I think that you've probably taken more risks than me. I'm accomplishing things, but I also feel like there are a lot of things I haven't done. I've always lived mostly in Portland, I've only been in two long-term relationships. I don't take a lot of risks. I let things come to me. I don't ever aspire to things in a way that risks failure. That's the part of why I don't have many failure stories. At some point, I'm going to get bored and unfulfilled by not having tried to do something out of my comfort zone.

RC: You wouldn't say you do anything out of your comfort zone?

CM: Yes, but it's always somewhat begrudgingly and by ac-cident. I think I have a lot of social anxiety, but other people tell me I'm really great at navigating social situations. Right now I'm an intern at a high-profile ad agency. I got the intern-ship because of my connections. It's a weird map of stuff that got me to that point. I'm faking a lot of things. I don't think I would be a very attractive candidate for that intern-ship if I just came out of the woodwork.

RC: I have never gotten a job that I applied for. Most of the oppor-tunities I've had do not come from personal connections I made by simply showing up. I actually haven't taken a lot of risks, either. The only risks I've taken are not doing things. I had this strange opportunity to go to grad school, and so I did it. It feels like it's just happening, not like I'm taking a big risk. Looking back on it, it's a risk because I had absolutely no idea what I was getting into with grad school, and I had no idea where it would take me. I had no plan at all.

RC: Do you think it's possible to teach people how to take oppor-tunities without feeling like they're taking a risk? I think that would be a great skill to teach.

CM: I definitely do think it's possible. I've always wanted to be a person who does that and I didn't realize I was until right now. I try not to be too self-confident. I try to purposely be grounded because I don't want to be an asshole. I learn a lot by watching people I admire. A lot of people I know in the graphic design community are good at hacking the system of jobs and careers. I'm interested in working at a place that is very structured and ladder-climbing oriented.

RC: Could you talk about "scraping it together?" Maybe this is sort of an alternative approach to having a traditional ca-reer path. Scraping-it-together might mean you are mixing things together until they work. I think a lot of artists work that way because there's no other way. Whatever normal ca-reer trajectory has been laid out doesn't make sense for an artist. They have to invent their own way. It's possible that some people consider the "doing it your own way" way to be a type of failure. This path is full of moments of failure.

RC: I do think some people see the "doing it your own way" way as a form of failure. Whenever I go back to the grocery store where I used to work, it becomes really clear that my old coworkers see what I'm doing as failure. I quit my job af-ter working there for four years, and they asked, "Did you get a new job?" I didn't have a new job, I just didn't want to have that job any more. When I told them, "I just do whatever hap-pens." It seemed like they saw it as a default... a non-career opportunity. Sometimes I work at the newspaper, or sometimes I do really boring freelance jobs. My old coworkers see that as not hav-ing a job. I'm making the same amount of money that I made at the grocery store, but I work less and it's more fun.

RC: Sometimes I feel like non-freelancers project onto free-lance people some idea that we are lazy or that we are doing something wrong. Sometimes I wish everyone could be a free-lance person, to experience the freedom of following your own path. I know the world doesn't work that way because of
CM: I have a really limited worldview in that regard. If I had two kids all of the sudden and I had to support a family, it really wouldn’t work to not know what my job is next week. I can live on $2,000 of savings and make sure I refill that every once in awhile, and that works for me now because my rent is so cheap in a house with seven people. I have a specific set of parameters that allow this lifestyle to work for me. I can’t talk about that being the right direction. If I did have a situation that required more stability, this probably would be a failure.

RC: What is the purpose of having a word like failure? What does it do?

CM: In school, I didn’t care if I failed. I literally failed, especially in middle school. I had an awful teacher who was an evil person. He was obsessed with Marvin the Martian, he had a lot of Marvin the Martian garb in his classroom. He was abusive. He would kick chairs and stuff. He told me that grades don’t matter at all until you’re finishing high school because of the way standardized testing works. I took his words to heart. His words freed me, and I was able to just learn things without the pressure of thinking about grades. I would not do the assignments, and I would invent my own assignments and do those. I think I did them really well. Then I would fail because it wasn’t the right set of parameters. Everyone always told me this wouldn’t work in college, they’d say, “You need to jump through hoops, do things you don’t want to do.” Obviously, I realize now that it would have been better if I had followed the rules more closely. I would have been further ahead in my life. I could have graduated two years earlier if I would have just jumped through the hoops.

I was kind of on to something to think, “It’s stupid to measure everyone by the same standards.” But I think failure does exist, and it might be necessary. Unfortunately, sometimes the concept of failure is abused to assign value to people who might not deserve it.

RC: I want to talk more about building your own assignments and making your own parameters at a really young age. Disregarding the system and doing your own thing, being anti-establishment. Maybe if you had done the assignments you would have somehow become better, you wouldn’t have failed in those moments, but maybe you were actually doing yourself a favor, setting yourself up to make your own decisions and make your own parameters as an adult. It’s important to have the skills to know how to navigate the system and make your own path even though people might make you feel like you’re cheating the system. People frequently make me feel like I’m doing something wrong when I’m just following my own path. “Why do you care what I’m doing? It’s my life.”

RC: What makes you keep going? Why did you quit your job at the grocery store to become a graphic designer?

CM: Because I have to keep going. For me, the life of graphic designer was the more attractive path to follow. There were parts of that job that I really liked, like being forced to talk to people I would never talk to on my own volition, but for me, I could see myself getting trapped in that job and feeling stuck. There was not going to be a better time to try something else. If it was five years later, I might have obligations that would keep me from taking a risk to be a freelancer. It was less about having an aspiration to “be something,” and more about not being the other thing.

RC: That seems like a pretty big risk.

CM: I think it is, but I knew I could come back if it didn’t work out. I had a safety net. That’s a big thing to remember. For a lot of people, it’s possible to just put something on pause and come back to it if you need to.

RC: That’s a nice way to think about it.

Life is tenuous and short. Because of that, it is scary.
Introduction: Nimi and Tamar have never met in person. Nimi is currently a student at Portland State University, Tamar is a professional designer and creative director based in Los Angeles. Nimi created the piece you see on the facing page, entitled "Release." After which, Tamar wrote Nimi an elegant and endearing letter, "An Answer, A Plan." Nimi’s statement of intent and Tamar’s response are included below.

Keywords:
- xenophobia
- Israeli-Palestinian conflict
- call and response
- honesty
- global citizens
- shame
- fear
- acceptance
- release

and I’m working on it.
Dearest Nimi,

Thank you for being brave like this in the hope that you can grow beyond what your family narrative has passed on to you. You are not alone in this burden of bigotry. The presence of hate and prejudice and suffering is as common as it is horrible. Popular stories are rife with the handed-down legacies of hate that even find their ways into popular culture, i.e.: The Iranians and the Puerto Ricans in West Side Story; The Montagues and the Capulets in Romeo & Juliet. No culture is a stranger to inherited hate. Nor how love can overcome it. It is what wars are made of. Our Tribe vs Their Tribe. There is comfort in numbers. Someone has your back. If you drown, you will not drown alone.

Life is tenuous and short. Because of that it is scary.

Fear resides in that most primitive part of our brain, right in the center, well-positioned to protect against most head injuries. It is this Old Brain that houses the fight or flight response necessary for our survival. My Mother had a stroke eight years before she died and was left with this primitive brain intact. She was left without humor (destroyed by the stroke) and without the cerebral tissue of emotion and empathy that was our connective bond. She was left without knowing how to feel about anything. It was a nightmare filled with unending anxiety for her. A Mother lost in a stream of incessant fear. (Which direction are we going? Where is my purse? Where are your children? Why are you crying about me? Should I be sad? What can I do? She would ask.)

Fear is natural. Survival is a biological imperative.

There is survival of the species but then there is also survival of the Tribe. It is easy to slip into the comfort of Narratives that have been passed down from our particular parents. They wanted us to understand that people, throughout history, have hated Jews. They needed us to know there are real dangers to our existence because of that hate. Our families wanted us to stay safe, to see the warning signs before it was too late. They didn’t/don’t know how to secure our safety. No one does. And so I feel a protective cloak of fear was instituted. It happens everywhere when the Tribe is threatened. Fear and hate become more powerful than love and meaning. It is happening in America and Europe as we write.

Our parents just need to keep us safe. When one becomes a parent, it is understandably paramount.

In my Jewish family, it was the Holocaust and the German people. I couldn’t stand to hear German spoken. I wouldn’t even think of buying a German car. I wouldn’t ever visit Germany. For you, it was Arabs. Through both media and your parents, the Arab language was sculpted to seem angry and anti-Semitic. It was in the Arab narrative. It happened everywhere when the Tribe is threatened. Fear and hate become more powerful than love and meaning. It is happening in the most prominent (and the most permanent) way, in our right to be in our “Now.” I am going to visit Germany with my daughter. She will hold my hand and weep with me at Auschwitz. Weep not because of what Germany did. But because of what the human race is capable of.

Your actions can transform fear into understanding.

I leave you with this, Nimi. Being afraid of Arabs will not keep you safe. Arab’s hatred of Jews has not kept them safe either. So, start somewhere. Take an action. Take an Arabic language class at your local University. Take an Arabic Studies class. Go to visit an Arab Mosque. Befriend someone in a hijab. It will be hard. Painful even. There may be tears of fear and even tears of loss. Losing a long-held prejudice still leaves a hole that needs to be filled with something. Maybe take someone with you on your journey. The road won’t be so steep if you have someone by your side. It won’t make it less scary, but it might make you more brave.

You were given this legacy burden of hate by the accident of your birth. You can reject it by the purposefulness of your actions. It is your choice and yours alone.

Life is tenuous and short. Because of that it is scary.

At its worst it is cruel and devoid of hope.

At its best it is meaningful and full of love. I’ve got your back.

From Strength to Strength, Tamar

Nimi’s Abstract: Exploring the power of written language and graphic format as mediums of direct communication to force us, as global citizens, to look directly at the things we hide due to shame and fear.
Game Over, Insert Credit to Continue

Doing work, winding your way through cutscenes,
Tried to call my gun, but it wouldn't be found.
Tried to remote into my gun, but it wasn't found.

You're an old folder of fantastic stories on the computer
next to the videos they made of a happier time,
tossed off, not even backed up to the cloud.

I run hot, toes and turn, kick the blankets off,
stretching fully and itch my toenails on a cold, brass bed frame,
watching the alien glow of my phone: #94 AM
SLEEP CANNOT BE FOUND

And all you have to do is press
///boxing glove Heart crammed in a tub of crunchy peanut butter
SQUARE to call out
///scared of mutes, packed in a couch on a schoolbus
SQUARE for name
///either a warrior nor a newspaper
SQUARE for beer bottle
///raining stones raining bones
SQUARE to breathe --

The House's dandruff daubs through the blinds,
the Hollywood sign of a leading scream over your bed finishes,
and the killer who didn't even get a chance to work your home.

"All of the movies available on celluloid never made it to VHS.
All of the movies available on VHS never made it to DVD
and not all of the movies available on DVD are streaming --
It's not even close."

D.K.

National Treasure

The President's daughter says she's on the dark side,
close to the frozen borderline.

"You're drunk. Enjoy it." The playboy smiles
and settles back into an amphibian stare.

"You're not sick.
This is how you're supposed to feel."

Her green eyes listen to the music.
"I'm going to go to the washroom put some water on my face."

The President's daughter crashes
on a postcard of the mountains' shadow
under a murder of crows writing
their light bleeding intestine paragraphs
with duct tape flashbacks.

"Molly, she come out? Are there people back there?"
The Detail rushes in checks every stall himself.
Molly doesn't respond; he notices an exit.
He keeps asking Molly if she come out back.
Molly still doesn't respond. He runs through the alley
and there's Molly's body in a pool of blood --
the map of the world.

"Bookbag's been taken. I repeat:
Shade been taken."

D.K.
A short, critical essay on ethics in design.
of bottled water is going to offset the damage done by Flint’s problem. It’s getting a band-aid on with very little effort, and that comes a very relevant question, one that 3

In Our Field

So it seems that with material production, we can easily identify ethics in graphic design, are quite another matter entirely. Our interaction with people, with processes, with the built environment, with systems, and the interior and fashion designers center around material and aspects that are difficult to recognize.

A quick survey into our discipline’s ethics finds that the issue content: It’s one thing to demand everyone stop printing different than what it is a declaration that our work, what we do exists and that should be a cradle to what we do, and we can mine the earth to make just about anything. A doubt to keep our efforts on a trajectory of how, we will inevitably get to all

But what are the consequences? It’s asking thing to note that collective human errors is so powerful that the problem of how as an inevitability. We can extend it implicitly asks why. Not if, but why

If we keep our efforts on a trajectory of how, we will inevitably get to all

by design both solve problems, but between them, the context includes demands from the community, culture, the resources of this planet, and any other affected entity. Designers edge the valleys of being on a little planet with finite resources. All over the last several decades, have begun to acknowledge that we’ve been confronted quite directly with the fact that the way we design has extended, for example, at IDEO (a well-known global design firm) speak about what they designed had washed up on it too

The most recent incarnation of sustainable design has evolved into “moving upstream” design. Moving upstream means for designers to intervene at earlier decision points in a causal chain. If an intervention is made sooner, greater change and impact occur. In large part, this effort aims to address a system, like there are in interiors and architecture, definitely by consequences for violating them. Other designers who

other professions are fair to their clients and stop killing the environment? Shouldn’t all professions be fair to their clients and stop killing the environment? Are we proficient enough to be able to direct our professions towards solving the large scale lead contamination. Carting in more bottled water isn’t solving the problem, it’s getting a band-aid on with very little effort, and that comes a very relevant question, one that

so it is the singular question of engineering. As a matter of fact, is the non-material

The second major sustainability effort involved a modification of the concept of "grave". In the "cradle-to-grave" design process, designers who used this method tracked their products paths: social justice paths, design for well-being paths, artistic paths. All approached through the lens of engineering. Not being to fly,

In many respects, the manifestos are a stronger ethical compass than the AIGA’s. They posit some ethical responsibilities into categories such as social justice, design for well-being, art. They also recognize that something they designed had washed up on it too.

The grave of this planet is the ocean, and widely documented. Thomas Overthun, the Design Director for FTF, challenged us. The challenge remains largely unanswered. In our defense, it’s gone unanswered because so

If of bottled water is going to offset the damage done by Flint’s problem. It’s getting a band-aid on with very little effort, and that comes a very relevant question, one that

as a matter of ethics as much

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Material ethics are non-material ethics. Working with cradle-to-cradle awareness and design thinking, designers are in a privileged position to make upstream decisions that are beneficial to the environment. For us, these are ethical business practices because we are making a conscious decision to use sustainable materials and processes. We are not only making a decision to use sustainable materials, but we are also making a conscious decision to use sustainable processes. This conscious decision-making can have a significant impact on the environment and the people who live in it.

There are many guidelines and protocols that are in place to ensure that designers are making ethical decisions. However, there are many ethical issues that are not addressed by these guidelines. For example, designers may be making decisions that are not in the best interests of the environment or the people who live in it. This is a problem because designers are often making decisions that have a significant impact on the environment and the people who live in it.

In identifying the various functions of design, there is also an implicit assignment of responsibilities. If a designer chooses to take on the role of assistance, the consequent responsibility is to assist. If a designer chooses to take on the role of informing, then the responsibility is to inform, meaning the quality of the information matters. When a given designer chooses to work within the function of assistance / informing / social betterment, then we better hold their title to the function of assistance / informing / social betterment.

Ethical Dimensions

As far as I can identify, there are essentially three dimensions of graphic design ethics we must consider: Material (natural resource availability and sustainability), Non-Material (standards related to research, ideas, and content in our work) and Functional (what the intended function of our work is, and how decisions are aligned with it)

Material ethics are obvious. Working with cradle-to-cradle awareness and design thinking, designers are in a privileged position to make upstream decisions that are beneficial to the environment. For us, these are ethical business practices because we are making a conscious decision to use sustainable materials and processes. We are not only making a decision to use sustainable materials, but we are also making a conscious decision to use sustainable processes. This conscious decision-making can have a significant impact on the environment and the people who live in it.

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Ethical Criteria

1. Material
   a. Consider the material, both natural and non-material, that is used in the design process.
   b. Avoid using materials that are harmful to the environment or to human health.
   c. Consider the environmental impact of the materials used.
   d. Use materials that are sustainable and renewable.

2. Non-Material
   a. Consider the research and ideas that are used in the design process.
   b. Use research and ideas that are current and relevant.
   c. Consider the ethical implications of the research and ideas used.
   d. Use ideas and research that are shared and distributed.

3. Functional
   a. Consider the intended function of the design.
   b. Consider the impact of the design on the environment and on human health.
   c. Consider the ethical implications of the design.
   d. Use designs that are both functional and ethical.
Just Because

BIGGER

AND Badder

doesn't mean

you aren't allowed

a good cry

every now and then

<< Alas Doddo Kobra
Failure is only success waiting to happen.

The biggest influences in my life have been my failures.

If someone ever says this to you, tell them to put the shut to the up.

Failure is humiliating, painful, often public, and can alter or damage a life permanently.

This is me, frowning.

This is me, turning my frown upside-down.

In reality, this thing started in 2014. Just another #failure.