



TORONTO
AUSTIN
SANTA CLARA
ATLANTA
CHICAGO

4 PROMPTS
80 DESIGNERS
COUNTLESS THEORIES,
INSIGHTS &
PREDICTIONS

THIS IS
FUTURE STATE



STATE

July 27
4pm-7pm

You are invited to be a part of Future State—an immersive exploration of how design is shaping our lives and transforming the world around us. Join Herman Miller and your fellow designers for this hands-on event, where you'll help influence what's next.

Herman Miller
462 Wellington St W #400
Toronto, ON M5V 1E3

FUTURE

FUTURE

STATE

PROMPT 04

ADAPT

ADAPT

The title of "designer" is broad, often requiring a qualifier to understand an individual's focus: Interior, Product, Graphic, etc. How will the role of interior, spatial, and experiential designers change in the next 15-20 years?

Demonstrate what a "designer of the future" might look like.

DISRUPT

Today, companies topple and industries are transformed—seen in an instant. See: Netflix, Uber, Tesla, Venmo. Disruptive innovation turns the world of industry darlings upside down overnight. What will stand in the way of interior architecture and design? How can you be prepared to respond proactively?

Sketch or diagram a few possible solutions.

STATE

August 16
4pm-7pm

You are invited to be a part of Future State—an immersive exploration of how design is shaping our lives and transforming the world around us. Join Herman Miller and your fellow designers for this hands-on event, where you'll help influence what's next.

Pivot
3355 Scott Blvd Ste 110
Santa Clara, CA 95054

FUTURE

Santa Clara

WELCOME TO THE FUTURE STATE

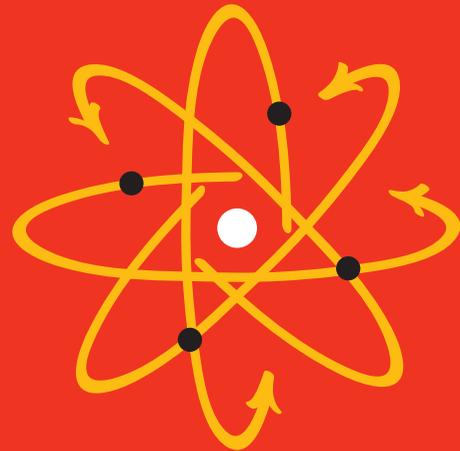
As a company positioned at the intersection of product design, architecture, graphic design, and art, Herman Miller is always looking toward the new developments and emerging ideas that will shape the future of design. With that spirit in mind, we convened a series of events across North America that brought together more than 80 of the most innovative and accomplished young minds from across the fields of architecture and design.

We started the conversations with four prompt topics: Adapt. Evolve. Pace. Disrupt. The goal was to launch a wide-ranging discussion and creative collaboration on the future of design, where each of the participants would bring their own experiences and opinions to the table. How will the industry change? How will designers respond? What are the promises and challenges that the next 50 years will bring? And most importantly, how do we continue to create human connections in a world increasingly driven by technology?

We found that, in city after city, the young designers we talked to were all wrestling with what technology would mean for the future of design. We observed a wide range of feelings on the topic, from passionate defenses of the opportunities it will present to anxieties about the challenges and changes new tech will usher in. Regardless of what our participants feel about design and technology, they're all ruminating on what tech means for their professions, the nature of the workplace, and the communities they inhabit.

Here we present a window into the Future Staters' conversations, sketches, and big questions about the future of design. Think of this document as a time capsule—a collection of thoughts, theories, and speculations to be examined for years to come. Some of these concepts may be years away from coming to life, and some may appear in your workplace in the next year.

TECHNOLOGY SHAPES THE WORKPLACE



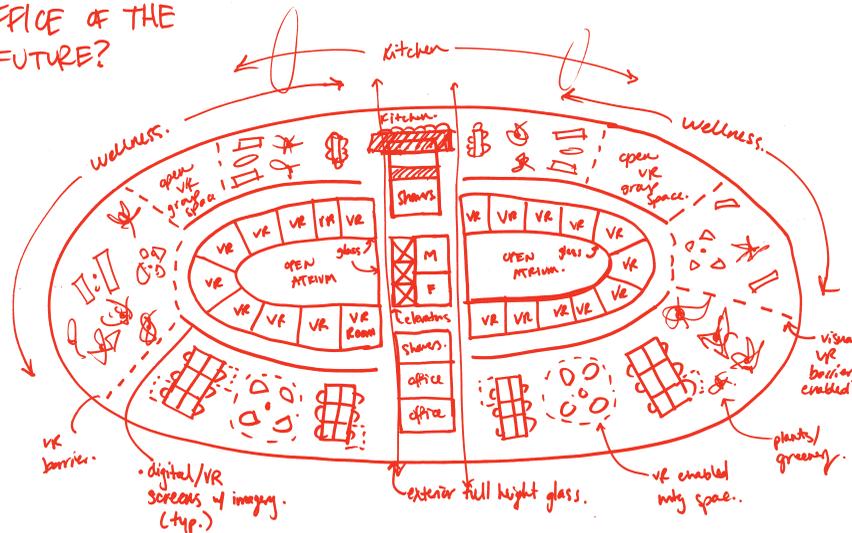
Technological advancements have long been key drivers in office design. But as the conversation at several of our events suggested, the Future State designers are considering how to design for a workspace that may not actually exist.

The flexibility and sense of independence that working remotely offers are already reshaping the way we interact with coworkers, for both better and worse. But technological advances may start to bridge the gap between being on-site and being free to work anywhere. For example, some of the Future Staters pointed to Virtual Reality (VR) as a way to help on-site workers escape from the feeling of being in the office. When we asked our participants to sketch floor plans for the office of the future, many included VR pods that allow employees to work from anywhere, without actually going anywhere.

“As technology makes it even easier to connect and interact digitally, designers need to look for ways to help employees forge authentic, personal connections with their coworkers.”



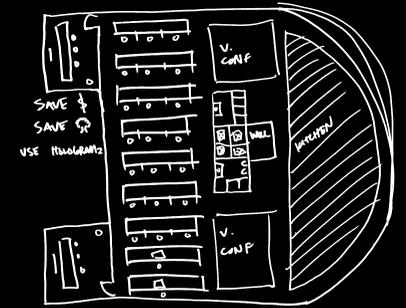
OFFICE OF THE
FUTURE?



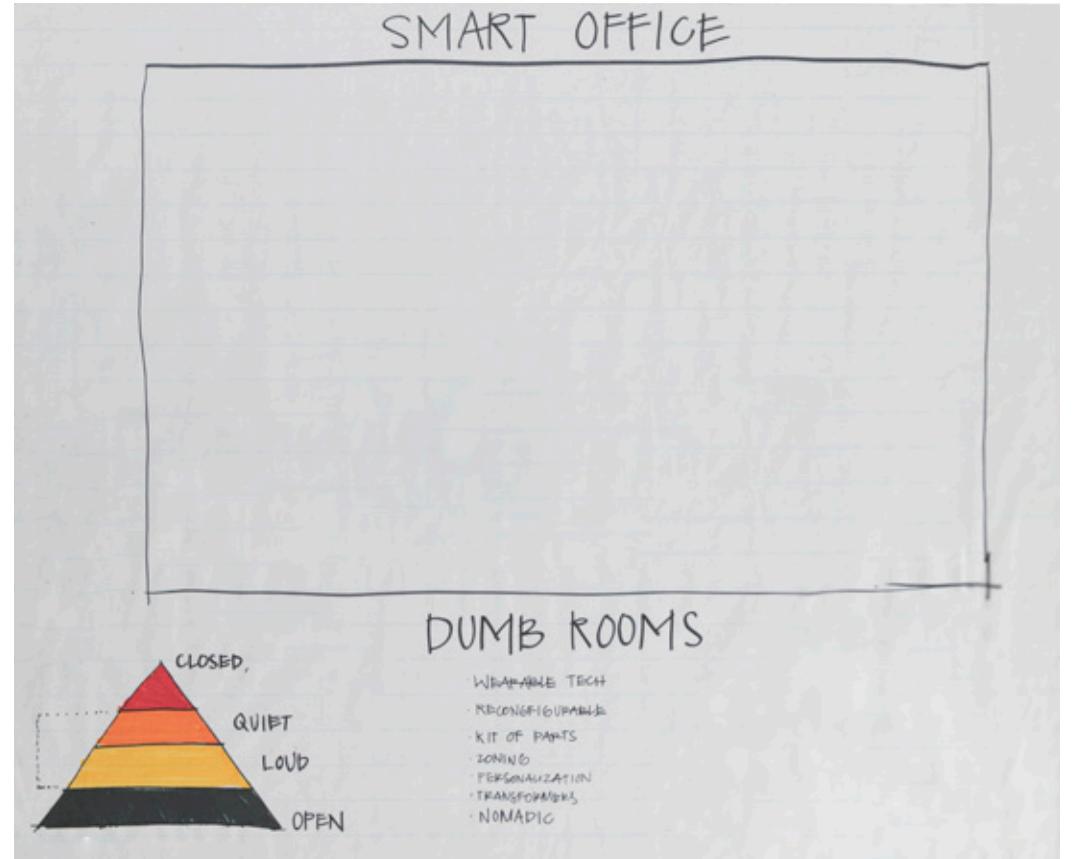
Designers pointed to one key application of VR technology, as it advances in the coming decades: It could be offered in virtual spaces, where workers can interact remotely. This would create the potential for richer collaboration between off-site workers—but it isn't as simple as creating virtual rooms. An interior designer in Toronto noted that “we will always be human and will always need to use all of our five senses. Touch is the sense most absent in a virtual world. Being able to touch a material, or being able to sit in a chair, being able to feel how you would feel in a space is really important when working.”

Time and again, a key idea that surfaced around the topic of VR was maintaining human connection and relationships. As a Future Stater in Atlanta noted, “One issue with technology is that people, because of technology, are much more okay with being isolated individually.” As technology makes it even easier to connect and interact digitally, designers need to look for ways to help employees forge authentic, personal connections with their coworkers.

The conversations also encompassed the increasing presence of smart offices. While many of these are currently limited to atmospheric control of temperature and lighting, it's easy to imagine that rooms will become more customizable, more personalized, and more intelligent. Event after event, our designers continued to come to the same types of questions. Will walls rearrange themselves to suit the number of people in a room? Will floors swap materials between a client meeting and an after-work party?



Several Future Staters imagined what floorplans will look like in the near future, exploring the balance between virtual spaces and static rooms.



collaboration
war room
cafe / dining
social zones
creative lab
De-stress
Play space

Focus
Downtime
Destress
Rejuvenate
Socialize

One team explored how smart offices can quickly flex to support a range of activities, allowing organizations to better support their people.

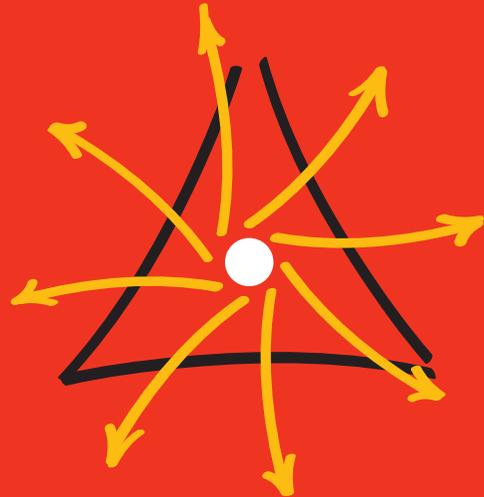


We also saw a tension between the work that interior designers and architects do and how smart offices will reduce the need for their input. As one architect told us, “We’re talking about the future of design, and it’s mainly that people want to flip a switch to be transported out of the workspace, when our job today is to design the best workplace, one people would want to be at.”

But a key anxiety that came up time after time was the need to be intentional with forward-looking design. According to another architect, in Chicago, “I think in the end people are going to realize, ‘Whoa. We just let this whole movement overtake us.’ We need to continue to think about what’s important—the connections formed between people being around each other. It’s a mistake trying to be futuristic for the sake of being futuristic.”

While there were divergent views of how the future workplace would evolve, the recurring theme that our participants surfaced was building human connections. How do we continue to create spaces that connect us to our coworkers, even as technology becomes more deeply embedded in our lives? Or, as another designer asked, “What levers can we pull, digital or analog, to help keep humanity in the workplace?”

REIMAGINING PUBLIC SPACES THROUGH TECHNOLOGY



Beyond just changing how we work, technology has also changed where we work. Third spaces—coffee shops, parks, coworking spaces, and more—have become increasingly integral parts of many people’s workdays.

A group in Atlanta worked to unpack the relationship between the workplace and the third space. One designer told us that “the third space really speaks to the up-and-coming generation, with the idea that ‘I want to co-opt an existing public space’ in a very non-office environment. ‘Hey, I’ll meet you in a museum so we can look at art while we work.’”

“How does the interior space of a building create a net positive impact on the environment and community around it? That’s not always something that interior spaces touch on.”



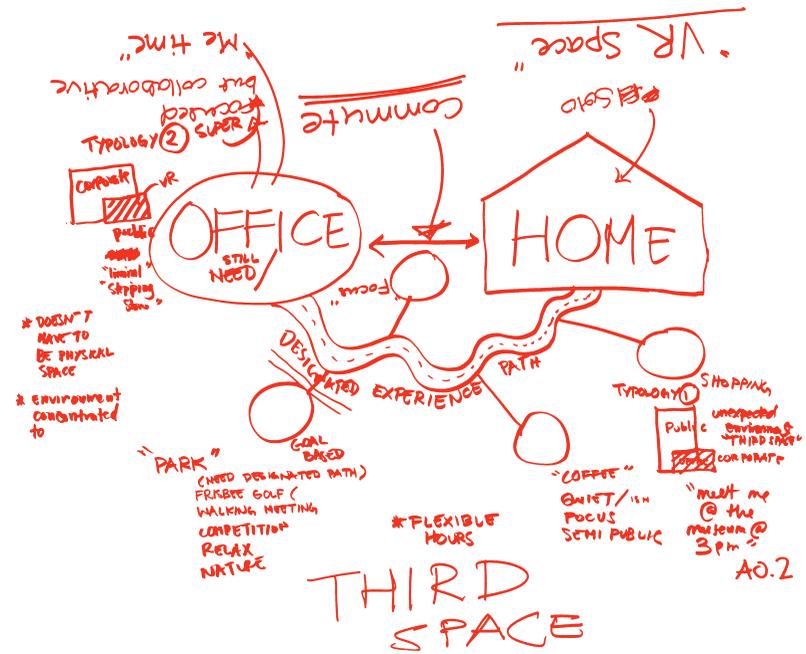
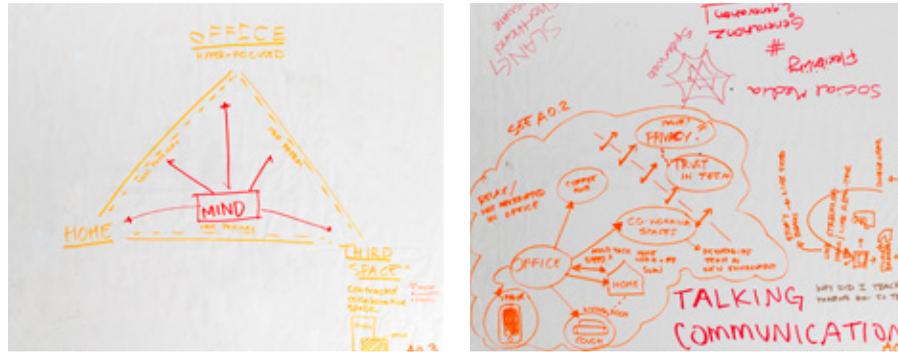
As public spaces are adopted as part of the workplace, designers also need to focus on incorporating the public into its surrounding private places. As another group member observed, “I think it’s bigger than just the building now. How does the interior space of a building create a net positive impact on the environment and community around it? That’s not always something that interior spaces touch on.”

There are other disruptive innovations on the horizon that could fundamentally change the way we use public spaces. An issue that was at the top of many participants’ minds was the rise of autonomous vehicles. In Santa Clara, a graphic designer raised a pointed question: “What’s going to happen to workspaces and public transportation when the self-driving car becomes the new third space?”

VR may also change the way that employees interact with public spaces around the office. If technology offers the potential to have digital interactions that are virtually indistinguishable from physical ones, the consequences will extend beyond just the presence of employees in the workplace. As one interior designer asked, “How is it going to affect our urban city centers when more people are able to telecommute and still have real interactions with all their co-workers?”



Above is a sketch showing the thought process behind adaptable VR spaces. These modular environments can be redefined, rearranged, and repurposed with programmable virtual elements that optimize the spaces for public or private use, for work or for pleasure.



One group envisioned the workflow of an individual navigating between VR spaces, third spaces, and home/office environments, reimagining the notion of work-life balance.



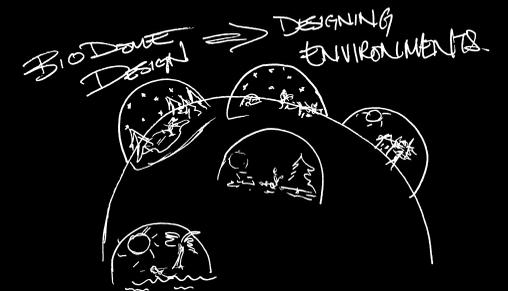


“I think that within 10 to 15 years, design in general isn’t just going to be on Earth. I think we have to think about design on other planets, designing the spaces that take us to those planets.”

The adoption of VR raises a concern about how technology could further erode the need for and use of public spaces. If, as we heard at the Chicago session, “VR rooms can be such an immersive reality that you might forget what’s around it,” will workers hold a meeting at a local coffee shop when VR can re-create it exactly in their own office? What does it mean to be in a public space if you are completely embedded in a digital world?

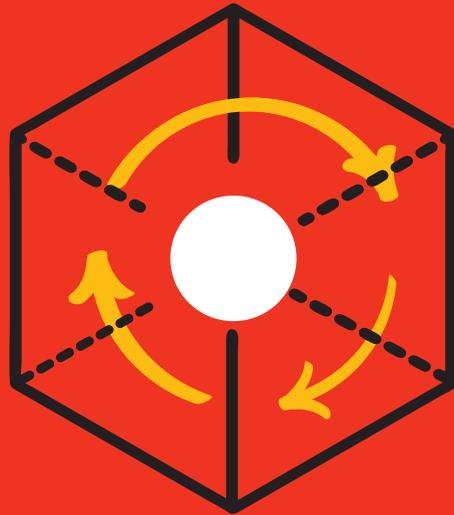
Finally, one memorable presentation interpreted the concept of designing for a public space in a very different way. “I think that within 10 to 15 years, design in general isn’t just going to be on Earth. I think we have to think about design on other planets, designing the spaces that take us to those planets.”

We again saw that, while technology was the driving force behind the topics our participants discussed, what they're struggling with is the larger theme of human connections in the face of an increasingly isolating digital world.



Designers exchange ideas of what design will look like outside Earth.

DESIGNED BY TECHNOLOGY

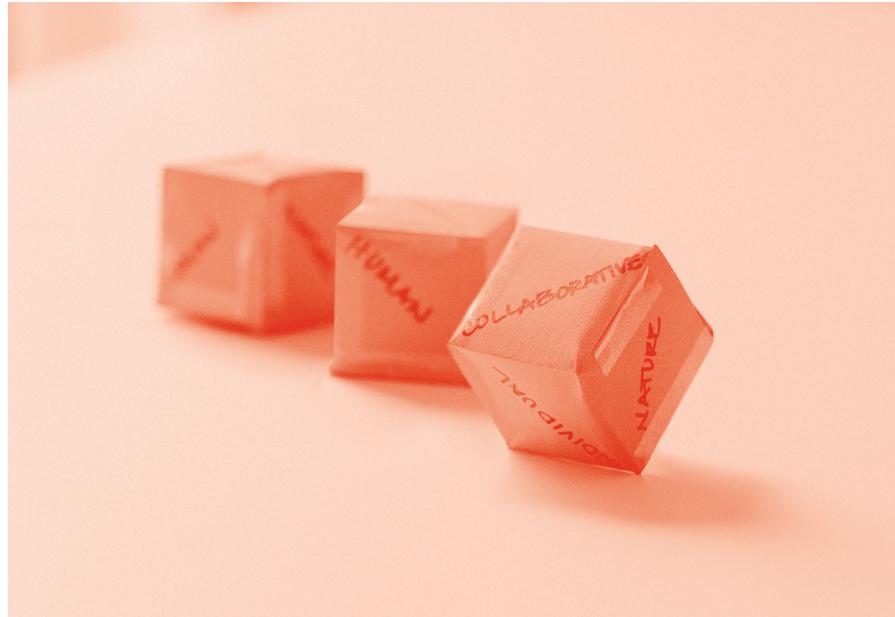


What happens to designers when computers start handling the rational work of design?

One prominent theme that emerged in our discussions was the influence that tech will have on the creative process. Participants noted that artificial intelligence could free designers from the minutia of creating and allow them to focus on bigger ideas. But great design doesn't just solve problems, it evokes feelings and responses.

So, if computers begin taking over the work of design, what's the role of the designer? One Future Stater offered a response: "The question is not will robots take over and design an office for you, but what is the unique value that designers and design teams continue to bring in a world where design is increasingly intangible?" One way that designers can provide that unique value to clients is to be "the bridge between technology and client interaction."

"It's truly holistic design. It's not just interior design. It's not just graphic design. It's not just people design. It's looking at everything as creating an experience."

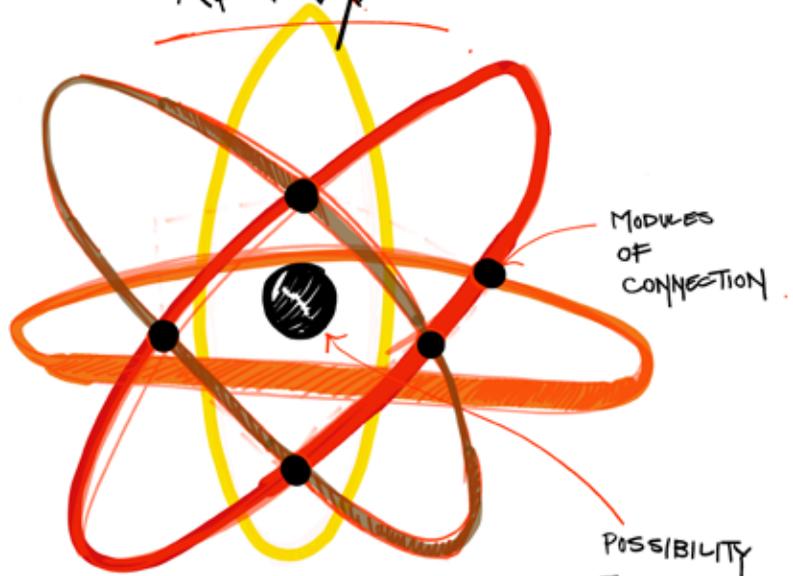


As computers fill more roles in design shops, humans will still need to assess the larger concept of experiencing a space. A sentiment we heard consistently that echoes the larger theme of human connections was that “technology should not remove the human element from space and design.” Because the output of design, even when purely digital, is a sensory experience. We experience objects and spaces by seeing, touching, feeling, and more.

As a group leader in Austin proposed: “Our role will shift to being more than just the interior designer, to look at the brand as a whole and how what we’re doing turns into something that brings in employees. It’s truly holistic design. It’s not just interior design. It’s not just graphic design. It’s not just people design. It’s looking at everything as creating an experience.”

Another question that came up was whether greater access to technology and tools would help designers become more creative or if it would simply level the playing field so that the inexperienced could approximate the acumen of the professional. When the requirement for specialized skills is removed, a much wider range of people can participate in the design process. But our participants generally agreed that what would be lost is the expertise of a true craftsman—the understanding of detail and implications of design decisions that can only come from years of practice and practical experience.

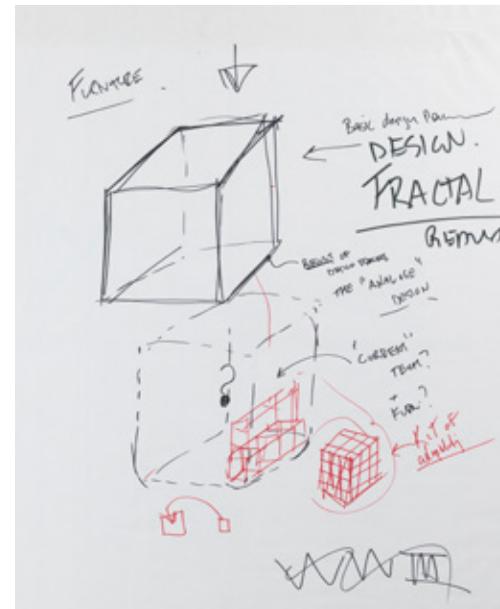
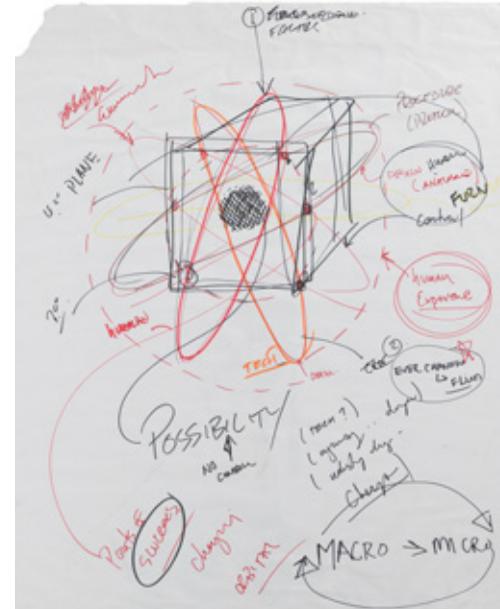
FIXED PROPONENTS OF DESIGN
THE DESIGN PROCESS
REDUX



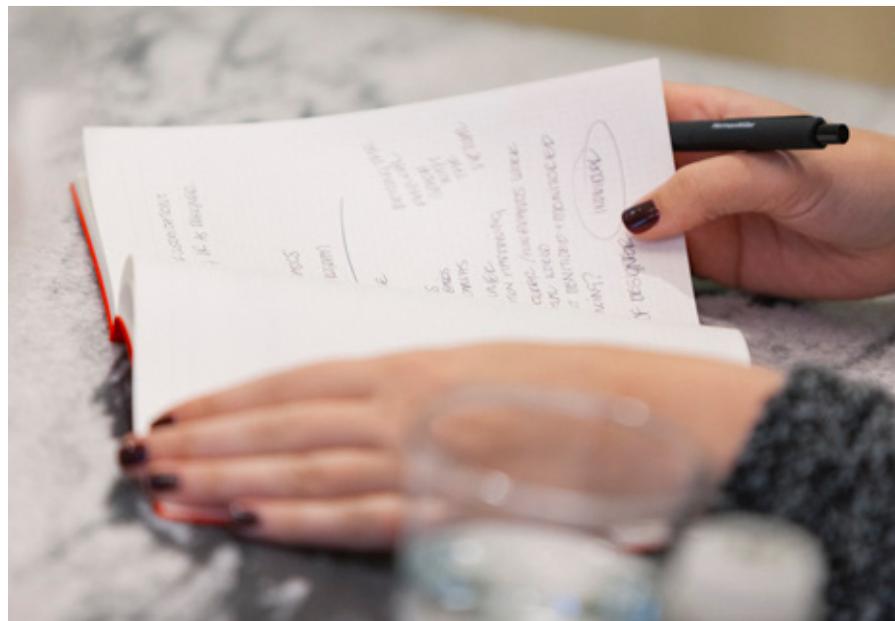
- POSSIBILITY
- TECHNOLOGY.
 - CORPORATE STRUCTURE
 - INDUSTRY
 - ETC

FACTORS.

1. HUMAN █
2. PROGRAM █
3. PROCEDURE █
4. ENVIRONMENT. █

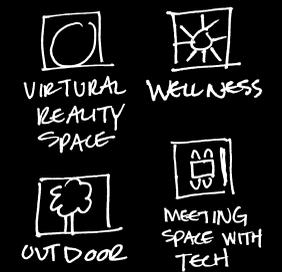
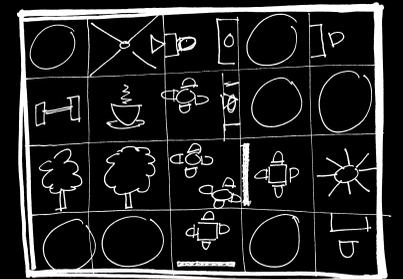
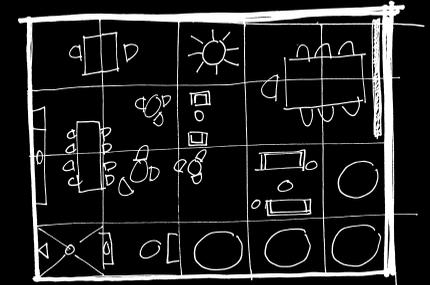


Sketches show the progression of some Future State participants' reimagining of the design workflow. The group was exploring the intersection of human and computer processes within the contexts of emerging technologies and shifting organizational structures. The human element is a crucial component of emotional experiences.



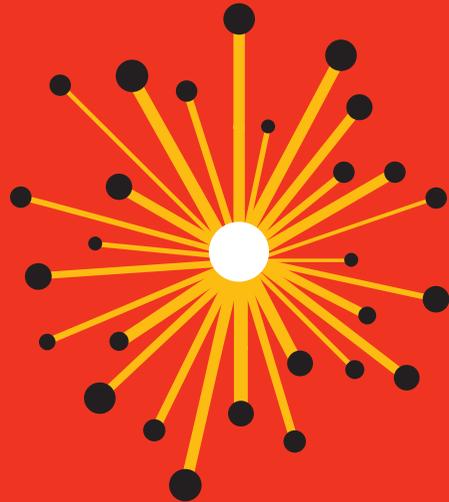
But what we heard most clearly was that designers see a future where they're creators of an emotional experience. A graphic designer with a UX focus gave us a clear example of the way the designer's role can evolve in the future, saying, "How does this make you feel? How does that make you feel? You can't Google that. There's an anecdote about Henry Ford saying, 'If I would have listened to what people wanted, I would have tried to give them a faster horse.' But instead he built the first automobile. What great designers can do is understand people's needs, even when they can't articulate them."

Though technology is changing the nature and method of how designers work, a core tenet of the profession remains the same: Create an emotional response. And as technology becomes powerful enough to take on more basic design tasks, our Future Staters agreed that it was critical they continue to bring a human element into the design process.



The above sketches detail how a modular office floorplan allows physical environments to adapt to the evolving needs of the people who utilize the space. Modularity allows for designers to directly address people's ever-changing professional, social, and emotional needs.

FINDING MEANING IN TECHNOLOGY



We've seen how digital spaces might impact the places we inhabit. But what about the objects that occupy those spaces?

In Santa Clara, one team kicked off a group presentation with a different interpretation of the prompt: "We talk about three physical spaces: the office, the home, and the third space. But there's also a nonphysical space, which is more internal and is going on constantly in our minds." The nature of the spaces we occupy can have a direct effect on our thoughts and emotions. One key challenge that future designers face is understanding how the design of virtual spaces can affect the experience a person has in their internal, mental space.

This leads to a discussion about the nature of objects in virtual spaces and how we form attachments to digital items. The spaces we inhabit are imbued with emotional and sentimental significance, sometimes more than we realize. Do virtual objects have the permanence to let us develop a connection to them? An interior designer in Toronto commented on the way that our relationships with objects help create an emotional connection to spaces. "A house is kind of like an empty shell of a thing, but then you layer people, furniture, and memories into that space. And that's when it becomes a home and develops an identity and an authentic sense of place."

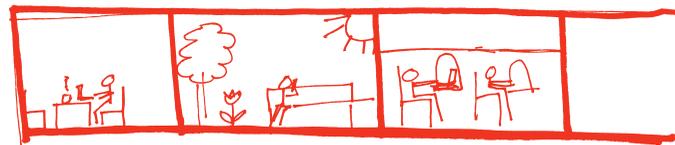
"A virtual TV on a virtual piece of furniture with virtual art on the walls begins to question the notion of 'stuff.'"



OFFICE OF THE FUTURE
(REMOTE/VIRTUAL)



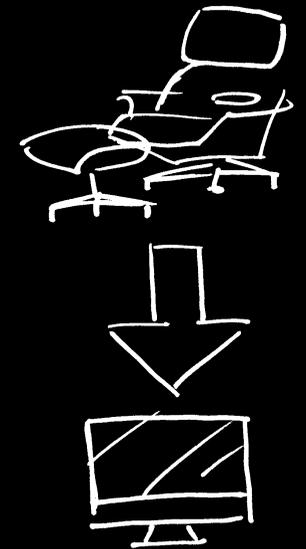
OFFICE OF THE FUTURE
(PHYSICAL)



OFFICE OF THE FUTURE
(REMOTE)

Another key issue that our designers identified was the idea of owning a digital object. An industrial designer in Atlanta noted several ideas that were already affecting his field, saying, “The concept of ownership has been evolving: People are getting rid of their cars; they don’t physically own the music they purchase. As more items like televisions and screens become virtual, is the concept of ownership going to go away? And will manufacturing suffer because of that? A virtual TV on a virtual piece of furniture with virtual art on the walls begins to question the notion of ‘stuff.’”

Time after time, we see that when designers talk about the future of technology, it inevitably leads back to themes of emotion and human connection. Even if technology can virtually create an object that is indistinguishable from its analog counterpart, our minds still differentiate between the two. And as these technologies continue to evolve, the challenge facing designers (and humans in general) is to evolve how we think as well. Because even the most powerful devices are only as useful as the ideas they foster.



When workspaces are more digital than physical—able to change with the click of a button—the concept of ownership becomes cloudy. Several Future Staters discussed the implications of choosing furniture solutions for a workspace that is entirely virtual.



tech embrace
exploration

VR

tech resistor
basic tech/traditional
new dinosaurs

balance
leather jacket
tech statement
games
VR
tech resistor
tech statement
VR
tech resistor
tech statement
VR

LOOKING AHEAD

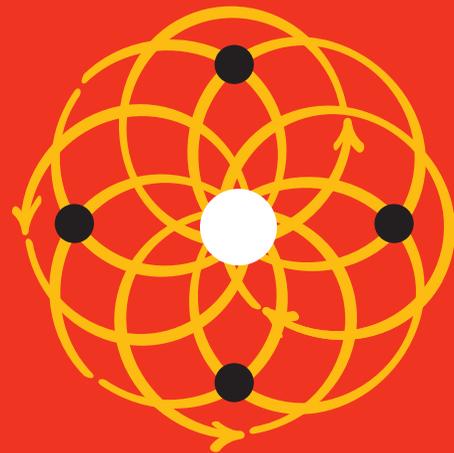
As our conversations with designers drew to a close, we found ourselves with more questions than answers. The Future Staters we talked with showed us that, in the coming decades, designers will face complex issues, from building authentic human connections in a digital world to speculating design for outer space.

But these aren't simply idle discussions. These are the issues that every workplace will have to address, and the ones that succeed will be asking themselves (and their clients) the right questions about tomorrow, today. The next generation of leaders and visionaries isn't waiting for these problems to manifest before seeking solutions.

These conversations are just the start. There will be an even greater need to have these discussions as technology continues its persistent march. The designers that will lead the way into the future are the ones who are already working to understand the Future State.



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