the topical testament
an exploration of modern anxiety through journalistic design.

Simeon H Goodwin
Master Thesis
Individual Study Plan in Design

KONSTFACK
University of Arts, Crafts and Design
abstract

“Because Chance delivers good and ill fortune to all, it is indeed the overarching deity which controls life.”
The Topical Testament (Deities [1.01])

In a modern, fast and interconnected world, the modern human has many stresses to deal with. The complete freedom to do, see and think whatever you like is a poisoned chalice. We pile pressure on ourselves to be successful, and we can only blame ourselves if we feel we don’t reach our potential. Anxiety spreads from human to human like an infectious disease.

The Topical Testament exposes the fallacies and frailties of modern life through a designed, fictional and journalistic religion in which believers follow, adore and find salvation from anxiety in Chance – accepting that as the great power of life it indiscriminately punishes and rewards humanity.
**Terminology**

N.B. These are not dictionary definitions per se, but defined by author.

**Critical Design**
Field of design originating ca.1999. Critical theory approach to design.

**Divine**
Of or from a god or greater power.

**Epidemic**
Widespread affliction of an infectious / contagious disease.

**Journalistic**
Pertaining to or having traits of journalism.

**Modern Anxiety**
Systemic & widespread anxiety that afflicts citizens of developed nations.

**Religion**
System of human norms & values that is founded on belief in a superhuman order.

**Topical**
Of immediate relevance.

**Wicked Problem**
A problem that is incredibly complex, difficult or even impossible to solve.

Bohermore Anglican Mortuary Chapel, Galway
Cathedral of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven and St Nicholas, Galway

contents

6 Modern Anxiety
12 Journalistic Design
20 The Messy Times
24 Sacred Symbolism
26 Celtic Religion
28 My Critical Pilgrimage
40 The Topical Testament
42 A Religion for Now
46 My Proposal
52 Exhibition
60 Reflections
64 References & Acknowledgments
There are certain values that we, as citizens of modern societies hold, which can lead to great anxieties. As time goes by, it seems our lives speed up, the world interconnects and the stresses and strains of the human race only seem to multiply - especially it seems in our most developed societies. Even though we live in times of relative peace, reducing poverty and growing prosperity, cases of mental health issues are rising across the globe. The media now calls this a 'Mental Health Epidemic' - a rather sensationalist term not used before 1989. An epidemic, of course, relates to infectious diseases, spread from person to person in a catastrophic manner, think of Zika, Ebola, and further back, the Plague. It is strange to think that mental health issues can form an epidemic, and yet, in this world, where suicide rates are steadily increasing, self help books are flying off the shelves and increasingly more people take time off work due to stress, this is the reality we now live.

Anxiety, depression, stress - these are the plagues of the developed world. Each year the self-help market grows over six percentage points\(^1\) - we want not only to solve our internal issues, but we feel that we should, we must, become better people, more learned, more refined, more happy.

The hardest hit by these epidemics are the burgeoning middle classes of western societies, who struggle with anxieties and stresses around work, life and love. I believe that many aspects of modern life - its politics and economics are pushing these people into increasingly stressful situations - we must get a promotion, we must buy a better car, we must live in a lovely neighbourhood, we should chat to our neighbours and have drinks at the weekend, we should refill our wardrobe once a year, we should travel and 'find ourselves.'

Whilst not a mental health 'disorder' per se, modern anxiety is extremely dangerous because of its prevalence - that millions suffer from the impact of our advancing civilisation. The brain of a Homo Sapiens cannot endure modern life.

We live our lives in such a rush to fulfill each of these norms, that we rarely spend time enjoying the present, accepting life as it is, at its rawest.

In these western civilisations, it is not war, famine, disease or cancer which kills young people. Especially for young men, the thing most likely to kill us is ourselves.

As such, the mental health epidemic is real - and it is incredibly deadly.

I describe this epidemic with the term 'Modern Anxiety' to differentiate from specific anxieties. Modern anxiety is an umbrella term for the stresses and worries we experience as a result of the phenomena of modern life.

Large amounts of the theory of Modern Anxiety were taken from two books - Status anxiety by Alain De Botton and The Paradox of Choice by Barry Schwartz. De Botton explores mostly social tendencies, that we all want to 'be someone' live a life of fulfillment - that the meritocracy of modern lives means we grow more and more anxious of how we are perceived by others. Anxiety, De Botton suggests, is a side effect of any democratic society.

'Thesis
-That status anxiety possesses an exceptional capacity to inspire sorrow.
-That the hunger for status, like all appetites, can have its uses: spurring us to do justice to our talents, encouraging excellence, restraining us from harmful eccentricities and cementing members of a society around a common value system. But, like all appetites, its excesses can also kill.
-That the most profitable way of addressing the condition may be to attempt to understand and speak of it.\(^2\)

Schwartz, in the paradox of choice, explores more economic themes - how our lust for freedom may be misguided, how the capitalist economy is pushing us into a state of constant stress. This book is more focused on political references, and drives the popular rhetoric that capitalism leads to a huge lack of not only happiness but also freedom.

These works built on my pre-existing hunches about the ills of society and had a large impact on quantifying exactly what I wanted to explore.

\(^1\) Market Projection. Marketdata Enterprise Inc.

\(^2\) Status Anxiety. 2004. (pg. 4)
The graph above shows references to certain words in English literature over the past one hundred years. Extracted from Google Book’s data, it provides an insight into how often these words are used in contemporary literature.

Notice for instance that at the outbreak of World War Two, in 1939, references for stress overtake references for the word ‘happiness.’ Only a couple of years later, references for ‘Freedom’ overtake ‘Duty’ and within ten years, references for mental health begin to grow at a steady pace. Freedom mostly correlates with stress and duty with happiness.

From this data, I can assert that Modern Anxiety grew out of the postwar era, when economies were growing on a massive scale and we all craved freedom.

Alongside this data I applied terms to different anxiety phases of humanity during this century - the pre-anxious - pre-war and pre-globalisation generation whose responsibilities, freedoms and independence were limited. During the postwar era and through the Cold War, we became more anxious - World War Two was a time when everyone knew the risks - the Cold War was a time of deep uncertainty. With the 90s came the democratisation of the internet as more and more people and places became inter-connected and individual stresses and freedoms peak.

When discussing political philosophy, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze states that 'There’s no democratic state that’s not compromised to the very core by its part in generating human misery. What’s so shameful is that we’ve no sure way of maintaining becomeings, or still more of arousing them, even within ourselves.'

---

The Fallacy of Freedom

The graph above shows references to certain words in English literature over the past one hundred years. Extracted from Google Book’s data, it provides an insight into how often these words are used in contemporary literature.

Notice for instance that at the outbreak of World War Two, in 1939, references for stress overtake references for the word ‘happiness.’ Only a couple of years later, references for ‘Freedom’ overtake ‘Duty’ and within ten years, references for mental health begin to grow at a steady pace. Freedom mostly correlates with stress and duty with happiness.

From this data, I can assert that Modern Anxiety grew out of the postwar era, when economies were growing on a massive scale and we all craved freedom.

Alongside this data I applied terms to different anxiety phases of humanity during this century - the pre-anxious - pre-war and pre-globalisation generation whose responsibilities, freedoms and independence were limited. During the postwar era and through the Cold War, we became more anxious - World War Two was a time when everyone knew the risks - the Cold War was a time of deep uncertainty. With the 90s came the democratisation of the internet as more and more people and places became inter-connected and individual stresses and freedoms peak.

When discussing political philosophy, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze states that 'There’s no democratic state that’s not compromised to the very core by its part in generating human misery. What’s so shameful is that we’ve no sure way of maintaining becomeings, or still more of arousing them, even within ourselves.'

---

DUTY AND HAPPINESS

The works of British artist L.S. Lowry accurately depict the ‘pre-anxious’ generation. Born and bred in the North West of England, the birthplace of the global industrial revolution, he captured cities and citizens of this working class area.

He became famous for his naïve depictions of ‘matchstick men’ moving around these bleak smoggy and undesirable landscapes.

Yet, the manner of the people depicted, seems to be in relative high spirits, these everyday depictions - leaving school, going to work, attending a football match, show that despite living in such industrial and depressing places, and bearing many hardships, these people were, generally, happy and content, but by and large good people.

These people were not connected to the greater world, and despite living in big cities, they felt fewer pressures around status and meaning, the atmosphere of the communities painted shows a relative calmness.

RELIGION AND MODERN ANXIETY.

When people began to abandon their faiths, their sincere beliefs, it very much affected the way people think - not just morally or ethically, but also their attitude towards their own life. People were promised through belief eternal lives - something to live for, to transcend this world and enter another, a better place, a utopia or heaven. With the growing understanding of the universe through science comes growing doubt about heaven and hell and people begin to realise that this life that they live on earth is the only one they will have - there is no afterlife, no resurrection and no reincarnation. As a result the intensity with which people live their lives increases. The phrase YOLO (you only live once) is well associated with impressive, dangerous or ridiculous acts - and yet as we do believe now that this one life is our only life - it pushes people not only to appreciate it deeper - but to enjoy all they can from it.

Without there being an afterlife we therefore feel immense pressure to enjoy and be successful in this, our only life.
A complex and frankly unsolvable issue requires a bespoke methodology.

I was inspired by the work of critical design studios such as Cohen & Van Balen, Dunne & Raby and the work of Thomas Thwaites, who rather than confront an issue, illustrate it, reframe it and in some cases expand it to create dialogue or a reworked perception of the issue itself.

Fiona Raby and Anthony Dunne, the so called parents of critical design defined critical design at its creation as ‘using speculative design proposals to challenge narrow assumption, preconceptions, and givens about the role products play in everyday life’ [4].

Perhaps a slight irony in this is that Dunne & Raby refer, rather narrowly, to products when of course the entire world around us, in this period of the anthropocene, is of human design.

Critical design also has its downfalls of course. As a primarily gallery focused branch of design, it can be argued that it fails to reach out to the ‘ordinary working man.’ It has an air of snobbery. It is also rather inward looking - it seeks to question design itself more than it seeks to question problems and norms in the world. It is all too often also incredibly future focused - a key ‘sub-method’ within critical design is design fiction, which is a storytelling methodology, but this is overly focussed on future scenarios rather than current issues. Indeed the design fiction group at Michigan Institute of Technology identifies it as ‘sparking discussion about the social, cultural, and ethical implications of emerging technologies through design and storytelling’ - In essence creating fictitious scenarios and solving as yet non existent issues. To me, there seems to be a clear niche in design for topical critical and fictional design.

Dunne and Raby’s project ‘United Micro Kingdoms’ is a work in Design Fiction, imagines a future where the England is devolved into four distinct counties, each holding a different politics - authoritarian or libertarian, leftist or right wing. Such a project, doubtless holds many values and as a project it enables us to future think - imagine, predict and therefore prepare for four different scenarios. However the appeal of this project is incredibly limited - what does it do for the average current citizen of England other than acting as some form of science fiction scenario? The two real strengths of this project - to develop and direct the field of speculative and fictional design and to question our own thoughts about contingent futures actually do very little for people living today, questions no norms that will make any immediate difference, and the project only talks to the intellectual, the elite, extremely limiting its validity to be anything other than a work of fiction.

The famous Toaster Project by Thomas Thwaites does more for people today. The project, and story of this project follows Thwaites as he builds a toaster from scratch, from mining the materials to making his first slice of toast. Despite it being a critique of design and holding extremely valuable but also philosophical views about globalisation and mass production, can still appeal to many people because of its execution - the use of an instantly recognisable object for one, but mainly because it is set in a very recognisable timeframe - today.

UNITED MICRO KINGDOMS. Anthony Dunne & Fiona Raby - 2013

CRITICISING CRITICALITY

The Toaster Project. Thomas Thwaites

DIALYSIS

‘Life Support’ by Revital Cohen and Tuur Van Balen explores the idea of life support machines.

This piece uses a sheep as a dialysis machine - by integrating the users DNA into proceedings before birth, the sheep is able to filter the blood of the user using its own kidneys - expelling impurities through urination whilst eating grass in the users garden.

After I shared this work on social media, it caused quite a stir - is it real? did it cause controversy?

Either way the lamb surely enjoys a higher quality of life than if it were reared for meat or wool.
I want to critique critical design a little - make it more open, more accessible and more topical whilst retaining its fantastic ability to create discussion and confront wicked problems. To do this, I envisaged my own methodology - Journalistic Design.

The key to Journalistic Design is very much in the name - topical issues can be spread and discussed through journalism and current affairs - through these discussions on a large scale, pressure can be placed on the real life decision makers - the judges, the politicians, the CEOs to make a change. I want design to become incorporated into this process and use it to tackle the wicked problem of Modern Anxiety.

The term ‘Wicked Problem’ here is important as it indicates a problem that is extremely difficult, complex or impossible to solve - take for example the arab-israeli conflict, climate change, global poverty.

In contrast to Critical Design, Journalistic design is rooted deeply in the present, reacting to ‘the facts on the ground’ and offering alternative viewpoints or different framings through which discourse on how to approach a problem might grow.

Journalistic design shares many traits of journalism. I see the existence of three key traits to journalistic design. It seeks to investigate, create a report on and analyse topical issues. Journalistic design faces issues of objectivity, and therefore should show also its reasoning for investigating, reporting and analysing in its chosen method.

Journalistic design must investigate - it must have a basis of research into the issue, and have found something novel which is relatively unknown - a journalist does not work with well known issues.

Journalistic design must create a report - similar to a story, but this can be in the medium of artefact - a report is something that engages people, and tells the story of the problem.

Journalistic design must analyse - it should pose questions as to why the issue exists, and potentially, but not necessarily proffer a solution.

**LESS JOURNALISTIC**

more future thinking
more ‘product’ focussed
solves problem

**MORE JOURNALISTIC**

more topical
more storytelling
spreads problem
“It is our job to seek the truth and put constant pressure on our leaders until we get answers”

HELEN THOMAS, PIONEER AMERICAN FEMALE REPORTER. 2006.

THE JOURNALISTIC POSITION

Below, lies the map of design practise and research as espoused by Liz Sanders - professor of design at The Ohio State University in America.

It categorises various design practices and research methodologies across two axes - one judging whether the method is of an expert or participant mindset (i.e. how important the designer is in the process as opposed to the power or influence of external participants) and the other being whether the method is led chiefly by design or by research.

I believe that there are possibilities where the white spaces occur, and that Journalistic design can fill one of these gaps - between and crossing over critical and user centred design - as journalistic design refers more to research than critical design, it is indeed still of an extremely expert mindset. Like user centred design it also focuses on real, rather than philosophical issues.

Across the page I have indicated my proposal for where journalistic design could slot into this matrix.
As a designer, I am quite conscious of how design is perceived by others, to the point that I am often hesitant to call myself a designer as it is one of the most poorly defined titles there is. Design in my eyes is essentially creation - anyone who creates designs - to create without design is to create unconsciously. Designers can make buildings, clothes, graphics, games, chairs, animations, anything. Even intangible concepts are designed, that is to say they are consciously created - governments, the concept of law, religion - all these things are designed, and as such to say that you are a designer is to say very little at all - other than you make or create things. Is design then solving problems? Many people believe that design is problem solving - making things easier - but this is far too narrow a definition and actually says very little at all without defining what a problem is, and what can be considered a solution. If a designer tries to solve a problem and fails, can they call themselves a designer?

Designers won’t solve the global economy, we won’t solve world hunger, we can’t stop war, or even help stop global warming. To this I can’t give examples, but point to the proof, that these problems exist - if designers could solve these problems, they would not exist. Veteran Welsh designer John Chris Jones sums up these thoughts quite adequately as ‘I think the failure of design research is a failure to change the world.’ - part of a speech he gave at the Design Research Society in 2016.

There are far too many question marks surrounding the field of design, that we could question its very theoretical existence - and yet it does exist, as some kind of amorphous and undefinable practice. Each designer should therefore define themselves a little further.

What I hope to achieve with design is not to directly solve problems or issues, but more to create discussion through artistically reframing issues - rewriting the stories behind problems, highlighting them in order that we may hold debate about their existence. Complex issues cannot be solved by one person - a designer should not be the saviour of the world’s most pressing problems. Instead we as humanity should combat these issues together, only through society can we challenge poverty, mental health and economic depression by realigning our values or pressing for change.

Design must acknowledge and reposition itself. The real world does not revolve around design and although it does have great power - it alone cannot ‘save the world.’ Design must renounce its responsibility if it is to progress and make sense of itself, and design must also be aware of its history, its incredible potential for evil alongside good.

Design might not save the world directly, but it can have power in influence, in its ability to reframe issues, to present things in new lights and to artistically and critically analyse.
DECISION DICE

I wanted to experiment with taking decisions out of peoples hands and giving it to nature - to chance.

I made two dice which could help people to make decisions and, if they wanted, to live their lives by. One die was a traditional six options, numbered one to six, the other was different in that it had only four options - two yes, two no, one roll again and one which instructed the user to make an impulsive choice - the idea being that maybe not even chance holds the answer.

The dice proved useful a useful conversation starter during tutorials and presentations and lead me to understand that chance and randomness could be a topic to explore further.

HEART RATE SHELTER

Other explorations were less successful.

This idea was an idea to test people's comfort with an extremely critical product - a pop up shelter which would expand when the users heart rate hits a high point.

This was not widely thought of as a good idea, and stimulated little conversation and discussion - perhaps due to it only being an illustration. A good example of how execution of an idea is key.

SLOWCIAL MEDIA

I wanted to prototype how I could design in the sphere of writing.

I thought a lot about modern interpretations of writing - where authors are paid by the word and endless content is created online with the sole intention of getting advertiser money based on the amount of visits.

I made these stamps to slow down the process of writing and allow the author to think clearer about each words that they produce.
sacred symbolism

There was a point when my project was no longer progressing, and I was getting frustrated with my inability to make sense of the larger problem of ‘modern anxiety,’ journalistic design and the objects I had made.

There was no sense of narrative or greater meaning to the objects I had created and I felt like I was tackling too many parts of a big problem. I spent many hours turning simple shapes on a wood lathe - a process which makes some lovely small wooden objects, but also allows the mind to wander. As I work the wood I enter an almost meditative state - as I am tied to this machine for at least thirty minutes per session. I was able to develop long trains of thought.

It was during these prolonged sessions of woodwork and philosophical thought that I developed my answer, an answer which actually already existed as a part of the issue of modern anxiety - that people no longer believe or have faith in a God.

I began to ponder how the objects I was shaping were part of these thoughts. They were all objects which could roll or spin around, and point at something. What if these objects were a God? A God from the object? These objects of chance reflect perhaps the ‘grim reality’ of life - that so many parts of it are not down to hard work, dedication and willpower - but instead to pure luck.
celtic religion

“The revolutionary would go there and say, 'This is all nonsense.' Just as he would pull the old woman away from the roadside shrine with the words, 'There is no God.' But among the aristocrats the atheist raises his hat on passing a church."

ADOLF LOOS. ORNAMENT & CRIME. 1911.

Luck of the Irish

Ireland is, the very first country many think of when they think of the descriptor - Celtic. For good reason too, so strong is its celtic culture and celtic identity that it broke away to form its own independence from a United Kingdom whose empire at the time covered much of the globe.

Something about Ireland spoke to me during this project, not only the wonderful nature inspired aesthetic and vernacular of stone bricks and simple lives, but also Ireland's undying connection with luck, one of the national emblems is, of course, the shamrock, the four leaved clover signifies good luck to those who pick it, since clover is far more common found with four leaves on each sprig.

Yet, to imply the irish are a lucky people is misguided. Ireland has suffered much throughout its history from famine, emigration, colonialism and loss of language and culture.

Alongside Ireland's connection with luck (or its lack of it) Ireland has a long and jagged connection with religion, specifically its peculiar balance on a tipping point between catholicism and anglicanism - which to this day divides the country particularly in the northern city of Belfast where large 'peace walls' separate the unionist anglican communities from the republican catholic ones - only twenty five years ago a brutal conflict claimed thousands of innocent lives.

For these reasons I felt like I had to visit this place, to explore its intrinsic connection with both religion and luck, to talk to the people and study their monuments.
“It is, with immense joy, and with profound gratitude to the most holy trinity, that I, set foot today, on Irish soil.”


Later that day, he celebrated mass in Phoenix Park, Dublin, with 1.25 million people - more than a third of the population of the entire country. 100 years earlier, the apparition of the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, St. John, Angels and the Lamb of God, representing Jesus Christ, occurred in Knock.
As I landed in Ireland, a country I had never visited before, I realized that I set myself a rather large task. To visit each of these places whilst not getting lost. I was stressed at the thought of finding transportation to each of these ancient sites. I checked car rental after car rental - five in total, and each told me I was not allowed to drive and was not covered under rental insurance. I began to realize that things which work well in theory are often chaotic in practice. For the duration of my trip then, I resorted to public transportation, trains and buses, to get around.

I decided to focus on spirituality and people rather than ancient sites - after all, these could be viewed over the internet, and I would likely not learn much from visiting them. I could instead learn more from people, churches, priests and modern ritual than from stone circles, holy wells and tourist monasteries.

LUCK & GOD

As I landed in Ireland, a country I had never visited before, I realized that I set myself a rather large task. To visit each of these places whilst not getting lost. I was stressed at the thought of finding transportation to each of these ancient sites. I checked car rental after car rental - five in total, and each told me I was not allowed to drive and was not covered under rental insurance. I began to realize that things which work well in theory are often chaotic in practice. For the duration of my trip then, I resorted to public transportation, trains and buses, to get around.

I decided to focus on spirituality and people rather than ancient sites - after all, these could be viewed over the internet, and I would likely not learn much from visiting them. I could instead learn more from people, churches, priests and modern ritual than from stone circles, holy wells and tourist monasteries.
my critical pilgrimage

St. Nicholas' Collegiate Church, Galway

The Catholic TV Guide

Vessels for collecting holy water

St. Thomas Malankara Indian Orthodox Church

The topical testament

The Claddagh, Galway

St. Thomas Malankara Indian Orthodox Church
my critical pilgrimage

Basilica at Knock Shrine, Co. Mayo

Basilica interior at Knock Shrine.

St. Mary's Pro Cathedral, Dublin.

St. Patrick's Anglican Cathedral, Dublin.
OLD AND NEW

HINTS OF MODERNITY

Throughout my trip, I was quite taken aback with what I expected I would not see in the catholic church - an ancient and sacred congregation. Modernity has impacted also on the church, and even in the often highly decorative catholic churches, there is plain painted wood, LED lights and IKEA door handles.

These pieces it seems are not made to attract new people, but like all things modern, made to streamline processes, make things generally more time or cost efficient. From this large metal cask of Holy Water - therefore allowing the priest to bless a large amount of water in one time, to these up-to-date confession booths which light up to indicate whether the booth is occupied or vacant.

These LED offering ‘candles’ are also extremely interesting - it seems as though the incredible bluntness or lack of poetry in this object does not really matter - it is actually the process of offering and creating light. candles are a traditional way of doing this, yet the smell of burning wick, the motion of lighting a candle, the sight of its flickering light - these are poetics which are not needed - even in an extremely traditional, sacred space.

A church does not have to be a space of tradition and decoration.
At one stage of my trip, in the western city of Galway, I was taken aback by a skull, carved into a ruinous church and I stood pondering its meaning - its purpose. The skull is there not as a sign of grief, a token mourning at the loss of a life - nor is it there as some grim marker of an old graveyard - rather it signifies something far deeper, more theological and more philosophical - it is a reminder that one day we all shall die.

Deep in the Christian tradition is this practice of reflection on mortality - for we are all so obsessed with the present, that to ponder one’s own death allows us to reflect on our lives as we have lived them - the codes that we have obeyed, the people we have loved and the things we have done - and think, if all that we have done, have satisfied us. This reflection can be seen as a ‘death before death’ and allows us to act on our insatisfactions before we are laid to rest.
In order to tie together what I hoped to create - a reli-
gion that tells the story of modern anxiety epidemics - I
had to write my sacred text.

Writing can cut deep down to the core of many issues,
yet its balance within the greater
field of design is perhaps a little undefined. Especially
in exhibition contexts, it can
be incredibly difficult to capture the attention of people
with words. I see writing as being a rather unengaging
medium - particularly in modern times, we have grown
accustomed to watching videos, listening to podcasts -
we try ever so hard to listen to any voice but our own.

I believe it is a medium under threat. Good writing is in
poor supply. With this rapidly accelerating lives that we
live, writers become content creators, spitting words
onto the internet to be consumed by anyone and every-
one and quality suffers. Meaning is lost.

Yet writing I feel has such a great power in design in its
sharpness - it can create meaning amongst the cloudy
subjectivity of design, it can be the bedrock on which
artistry is created, and I think in my project - some sort
of manifesto, sacred texts or testament is required.

**TOPICAL (adj)**
(of a subject) of immediate relevance, interest, or importance owing
to its relation to current events.

_Oxford Dictionaries 2018_

“Make your own Bible. Select and collect all the words
and sentences that in all your readings have been to you
like the blast of a trumpet.”

RALPH WALDO EMERSON
In his work, *Status Anxiety*, De Botton claims that one of the solutions to the problem of Status Anxiety is having faith, belief in a religion - specifically Christianity. To succumb to a God after all, can have many psychological benefits. It relieves one of the responsibility of life, can give one guidance on important decisions, enables one to live a more fulfilled life by abiding to a code of ethics.

And yet, it is interesting and questionable that De Botton discusses chiefly Christianity for many reasons.

Firstly, and perhaps most striking to me, is the somewhat perverse belief that religion has a place in societies of technology and science - where things are proven and science is the ultimate belief - to believe otherwise, in these times is seen as foolish and ignorant by many people - we as modern humans accept science as proven - something that is concrete, and if science can disprove the creation of the world in six days, then we must not believe it, the modern world has no place for ancient religions.

Why De Botton fails to discuss other religions is also interesting - it could be that it is because anxiety is seen mainly as a problem of western (and hence Christian or Christian dominant) societies.

Surely any type of religious belief or submittance enables grand theological and psychological thought which is capable of relieving anxiety.

I bounced off these thoughts and pondered about the position of religion in modern times - For instance does faith require some kind of doubt? does faith need to be placed in something unproven, something mystical? I believe it does not, although it can be argued that chance is all these things.
THE SYMBOL OF CHANCE

The symbol of chance is shown above - it resembles a teardrop - the symbol of sadness, anguish, frustration. It also has connotations of naturalness, like a water drop. This points to the natural nature of chance itself, that all of nature's forces are a product of chance, and that through these natural forces chance acts. Originally this symbol grew out of a woodturned object I made where I was trying to put a form to anxiety, that at certain angles it looks 'fine' i.e. spherical, yet from other angles there is a spike, a point of anger, of anxiety.

This merged with the idea of chance and of direction from a greater being, as this symbol can move, spin to point in a 'random' direction as dictated by chance. This symbol becomes the point of attention for the new faith in chance. Shown in temples, on the topical testament and, in three dimensional form, it can be used to gain divine insight.

Recycling Aspects of Faith

Within many asianic religions, including Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, and Hinduism, lies the concept of Dharma, which holds great significance to the followers of these faiths. Untranslatable in just one word to English, in his book Sapiens, Yuval Noah Harari describes Dharma as 'Suffering arises from craving; the only way to be fully liberated from suffering is to be fully liberated from craving; and the only way to be liberated from craving is to train the mind to experience reality as it is.' This concept holds great relevance to the idea of Modern Anxiety and acts as a link between it and faith. Modern Anxiety tells us that our addiction to freedom, growth and independence causes these frenetic anxieties.

To Buddhists, the concept of Nirvana is the ultimate goal - to reach a state of quietude, release from stress and unhappiness. Very few people ever claim to reach this state, and yet its symbology. In the topical testament, the concept of Nirvana is somewhat copied into a new state - of stresslessness, a state where one's concerns are non existent, one feels no needs and cares little for the consequences chance.

Within the book of Leviticus in the Old Testament there is the tale of the Scapegoat - a concept to which many people are aware - that one can lay blame on some thing that is innocent. In Leviticus, the scapegoat - an actual goat - owned by a community is burdened with the sins of the community and cast out into the desert to carry their sins away. This concept can be recycled into the new testament to create an object onto which people can burden their anxieties - much like a worry doll.

THE WORSHIP OF CHANCE

In Yuval Harari’s book Sapiens: A history of humankind - Harari points out that though many ancient religions - those of Greece and the Norse, were subject to rule of many gods, each of these gods were in turn ruled by fate. Fate of course is very much related to chance - the idea that probabilities rule the universe and that, in the end, it is chance that decides what kind of life you shall live.

Indeed chance has long been used as a source of spiritual guidance - in her book on Randomness, author Deborah J. Bennett states that ‘When primitive societies needed to make a selection of some sort, they often resorted to randomisers for three basic reasons: to ensure fairness, to prevent dissension and to acquire divine direction.’

Harari goes on to claim that monotheist religions are held back by their failure to explain evil - why bad things happen to good people. Especially in Christianity this issue, that a all loving and all powerful god can allow for such terrible tragedy to befall its creation.

Harari states that a simple solution would be to believe ‘in a single omnipotent god who created the entire universe - but he’s evil. But nobody in history has had the stomach for such a belief’

Whilst I am not claiming that to believe in chance would be the first one to worship an evil god, we must acknowledge that chance is indiscriminate - that it punishes and rewards without reason - no moral or ethical act reaps reward or punishment. Whilst humanity should be good to humanity and moral codes exist outside of this religion - in the end Chance is both good and evil.

I propose a new religion, a new belief system which embraces scientific knowledge, but at the same time allows its followers to have faith, the gain guidance and relief.

Designing a religion is of course a very grand idea - and questions in a way design itself - how far can design, specifically product or industry oriented design transcend an object?

Yet design does just this - design is human creation and even the most immaterial theoretical ideas are nonetheless designed.

Belief is good for one’s mental health - but if belief, or at least the religions which we know are not compatible with modern humanity and science. We should then worship chance - it is provable but mysterious, it dictates who wins and who loses, and to worship it and pray to it is as good as worshipping and praying to any other god.

The worship of chance is the Journalistic story that I wish to tell. This story both critiques and compliments religion - in that faith and belief are extremely powerful and beneficial ideas, yet that organised religion such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam et cetera are simply incompatible with our modern life.

Chance tells the story of anxiety this very current issue that plagues humankind - that in this story, people are so tired of responsibility, so bored of anxiety, so unhappy with their freedom, that they abandon all three to live a life of simplicity and worship probability as it dictates everything in life, from the gender of a baby, the chance that you miss the bus on the way to work and the probability of nuclear war.

There is also some relevance for real people in the worship of chance in that it is not just a purely dystopian idea, but that the acceptance of living a pretty much meaningless life can help some people overcome stresses and live a simple life.
AESTHETICS OF A MODERN FAITH

In order to relate to modern humanity, this new faith should be modern itself - including its visual form language. In order to achieve this I adopted an aesthetic of plain, smooth wood blocks, which are arranged to make each of the objects required.

Plainness is of course one of the cornerstones of modernism - whereby the removal of ornament allows the beauty of plainness to exude. Plainness, or the absence of ornamentation is also often well preached in religious circles - perhaps not so much in the catholic church, but especially in more niche circles - the shakers and amish for instance, refute the idea that grandiose splendour should admonish a church - the same view as Martin Luther who rebelled against the luxurious excesses of the papal catholic church.

Indeed since 1950, much ecclesiastical architecture has been ‘modern’ - that is to say that they have been inspired in large part by modernist ideals. One of the great modernist architects, Oscar Niemeyer once stated that the issue of creating a space for faith, for religion and for god, was simply too beautiful of a problem to ignore, despite his atheist views.

For these reasons I decided that chance too, must be a faith of restraint - of bareness and near emptiness, which must be reflected in not only the architecture of any associated buildings but also in the objects that define the religion - the holy artefacts.

For example, the prayer stool below requires a different body position from other prayer stools. It forces the believer to bend right down, knees on one cushion and forehead on the other, the body language reads fear and hope, submittance to chance, since it is an unpredictable deity who punishes and treats its followers indiscriminately.

The prayer balls - simple wood turned objects which resemble teardrops are equivalent to the rosary or prayer beads. These too encapsulate the idea of chance as they can be used to find direction by spinning them, allowing the immense number of probabilities behind spinning to choose a direction for the follower.
a follower uses a tool to communicate with chance. an alder beam is spun, and chance decides which in which direction and position it comes to rest – indicating to the follower which direction they should take. before spinning, the believer silently indicates which directions mean which outcomes.

the follower bends down into a small prayer stool, before the image of dying flowers and a human bone.

this allows the follower to discuss with themselves their own eventual death.

the follower leans over a stand holding two small glass vessels. as the follower repents and confesses to their own failings, tears are collected on the stand.

ritualism

confession

the follower leans over a stand holding two small glass vessels. as the follower repents and confesses to their own failings, tears are collected on the stand.
EXHIBITION

One of my main concerns going forward is the degree show exhibition at Konstfack.

For this I propose to build what is incredibly sacred for all religions - the holy house, the temple.

I want people to enter this temple to chance and feel a few things. I want them to be mystified and curious about objects and symbols which they do not recognise.

I also hope that they will be able to understand the greater message behind why this religion ‘exists.’ I plan on giving away copies of The Topical Testament to those who enter, alongside a small brochure explaining journalistic design, to enable a greater understanding of the exhibition itself, to enable this discourse which I feel, as the main aim of my work, would be the make or break of this entire project.

To achieve this I hope to take some of the prototypes I have made so far and bring them forward, increase their scale, build walls, introduce a more sensual atmosphere with smells and lights, and encourage those who visit to pause and pray, perhaps to chance, or perhaps to nobody, but at least reflect on the greater issue that I hope to have journalistically re-interpreted.
TENSION AND THE SPACE

Within Konstfack, I was given a difficult space in which to exhibit. Next to the entrance and the café, I knew that passing visitors would not be a problem, however with the amount of visitors, there grows a tension between what is supposed to be a ‘holy space’ and what is in reality, the busiest part of the exhibition. It was incredibly difficult to balance this tension, and still attempt to engage people.

In the end I decided that I would have to work against this space - by effectively freezing it. My exhibition was very static, and not so light, to try to capture this ‘spiritual’ feeling of a place of worship, and, surrounded by bright colours and the visually appealing craft department, I feel the simplicity of the space made it a sort of sanctuary.

FORM, IMPERFECTIONS AND MY DEFENCE

During my presentation, I felt like I was able to both defend and discuss my piece, its theory and the decisions which lead to its existence and exhibition.

One critique levelled at me though, I feel I would like to address and discuss further, that is, the aesthetics and general level of finish. On the banners, there are wrinkles, the holy objects lay almost randomly on the table. To which I responded that although not intentional, these ‘faults’ could better be read as signs of use - of authenticity, of a breakaway from the polished shiny and perfect aesthetic of a typical exhibition (especially design exhibition).

Holy spaces never have been spaces for perfect tidiness and reduction, but instead sanctuaries of peace, in whatever form that may be - and to argue that the material language of the unfinished diminishes the overall temple, I think, is flawed and only plays into this Instagram saturated design scene.

One of the most important lessons I have learned in formgiving is to never underestimate the beauty of honesty, and that lesson I remembered in these decisions.
HAVING CREATED A FAITH

Having created this fictional, designed, journalistic faith, I find it even more difficult to describe myself and my position in design.

Whether this piece is art, still life - a written fiction, a materialised theory, industrial objects or snobbish nothingness. What then can I call myself, having turned my back on Industrial design, yet not turning to any other way? Losing my interest in making, in manufacture, yet still wanting to communicate to others? In abandoning what I see and feel as the fickle materiality of traditional design. what do I become?

I feel extremely grateful to have studied at Konstfack, a school which led me to complete this project and set me up in the perfect position to develop myself further - not merely opening doors, but also pointing out doors I never knew existed, and most importantly I have found what I feel comfortable with, not design theory - but theoretical design.

I am happy to attempt to hammer myself into this earth, a fencepost of criticality. a theoretical designer in need of work.
Throughout this project, one of the toughest challenges has been that of juggling a variety of constituent parts. This has been routinely critiqued by some of my tutors throughout the process of the project who have urged me to "kill a few of my darlings" in order to focus more cleanly on the issue and outcome.

In my eyes I have been resolute, in the eyes of others perhaps a little stubborn, however I believe that all the constituent parts of this project are vital and fairly simple to understand - it is completely my own fault perhaps that I have so far been unable to convince others of the relative simplicity of these parts and the project as a whole.

My project rests in three neat piles - that of Modern Anxiety - the research and deeper discussion about modern ideals and norms which collude to create mass anxiety, stresses and this mental health epidemic. Journalistic Design, the methodology which arose rather naturally and became more designed as I realised that critical design was far from perfect for dealing with this complex issue. The Topical Testament - this religion, this story, this report of the issue of anxiety is the third constituent part, the combination of the issue and the methodology created this.

Since the result of my project is the result of the methodology and issue mixing together, and leading me to the result. I find it very difficult not to talk about these parts of the process in my presentations, and since both are rather complex and well worked on by myself, perhaps I find it difficult to concisely describe them.

Looking back at a years work, there are of course many areas where I feel I could improve. Mainly, I feel like I have not done real justice to Journalistic Design - whilst my pieces may be journalistic, the link to the story I want to tell could definitely be stronger. An interesting piece of critique I received was the juxtaposition between wanting to tell a story and using something uncomfortable for a secular society (religion) to do it. How on earth can I justify that my pieces therefore are actually speaking to people?

Before I started this project I was quite certain it would end with an installation, in fact I kept those thoughts as truths for a long time also - and I wonder how the project would be different if instead of creating a 'realistic' temple, I designed something more conceptual. Furthermore, I would also question my decision to focus this 'new' religion on aesthetics which are already connected to a religion - using no new materials.

I do, however, also have to argue my general happiness with the entire project - the people I have met, the things I have learned, the objects that I have made, I feel, satisfy both my education and myself, and for that I could not be happier.
reflections

the topical testament

ABANDON YOUR WORRIES
CHANCE IS THE LORD
REFERENCES


Loos, A. (1911). Ornament & Crime


IMAGES

PG. 12 ‘Coming out of School’ 1927

PG. 13 ‘The Pond’ 1950
Artist: L.S. Lowry 1887-1976. Licensed: The estate of L.S. Lowry. The Tate Group

PG. 13 ‘Dante and Beatrice gaze upon the highest Heaven’

PG.22 BIGERT & BERGSTROM RHINO

WITH THANKS

My family, in particular my Mother and Father, Cynthia and Brian Goodwin whose loving support kept me going through all parts of the project.

My teachers, in no particular order: Jenny Althoff, Martin Avila, Katja Petersson, Permina Glaser, Bo Westerlund, Erik Widmark.

The all knowing and supporting staff at Konstfack.

My incredibly talented, thoughtful and inspirational classmates.

To chance, it lead me this far and has so far, been kind to me.