

DESIGNING HUMANITARIAN FUTURES FOR..... VIOLENCE AGAINST HUMANITARIANS

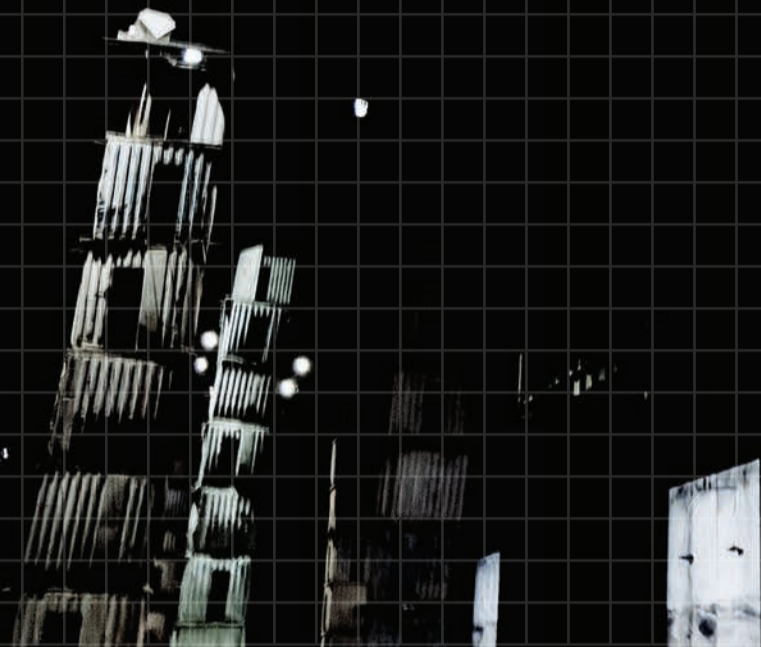


PHOTO CREDIT: ALBERTO TRENTANNI

PASTS

Where necessary, relief personnel may form part of [the humanitarian] assistance provided in any relief action... *Such personnel shall be respected and protected.*

- Article 71, Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions.

PRESENTS

- Between 2017-2020, attacks on humanitarian workers rose 50%;
- Humanitarian workers thus increasingly:
 - Live in isolated and quasi-militarized aid compounds;
 - Inhabit elite social spaces, distant from beneficiaries;
 - Deploy remote monitoring (e.g. satellite & other) technologies.
- This distance between humanitarians and beneficiary populations creates a vicious cycle of socio-political alienation and a lack of trust.

FUTURES

CRITICAL

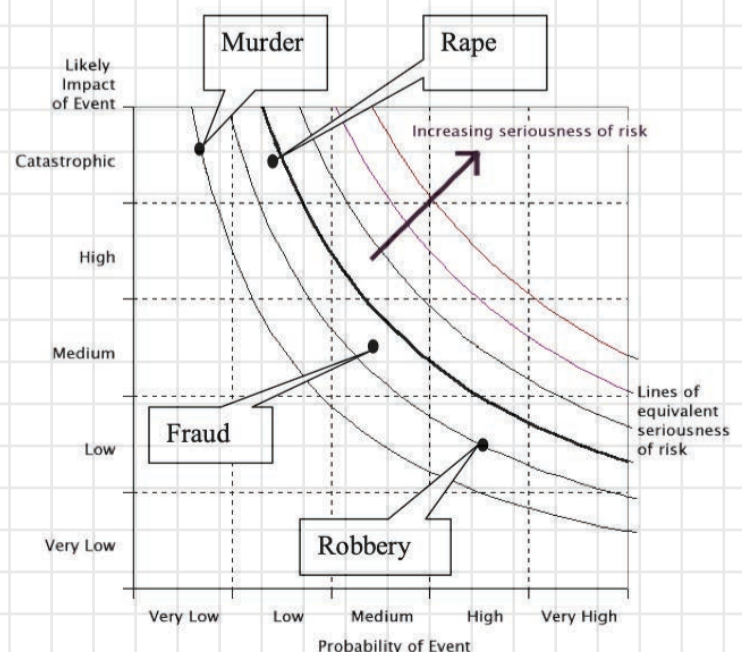
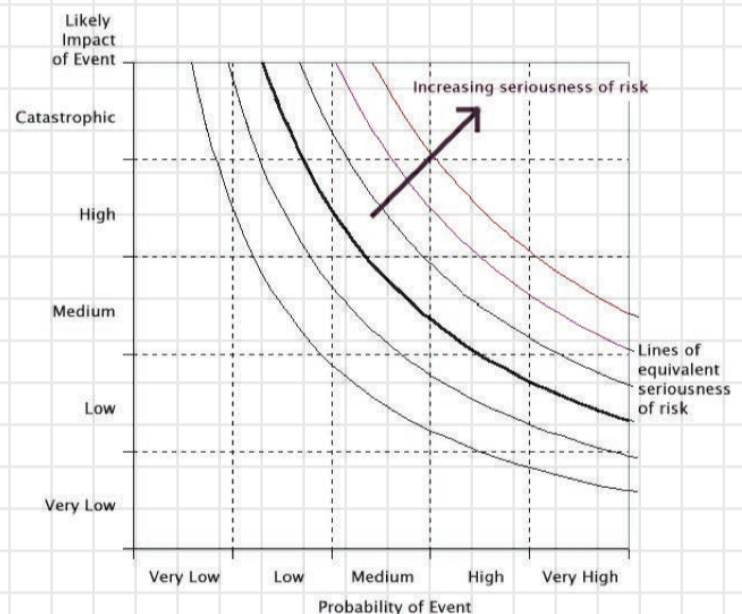
Can technological interventions reconnect humanitarians to beneficiary populations? Can aid compound architectures be re-designed to avoid alienating beneficiaries? Can new aesthetic strategies for communicating the goal of humanitarians be developed that do not reproduce north-south divides?

PRAGMATIC

How can humanitarians reconnect with beneficiary populations without neglecting the real security risks they face? How can novel technologies or architectural designs provide *both* security and human connection? How can the needs of local humanitarians be reconciled with those of 'internationals'?

SPECULATIVE

The growth of humanitarianism is a political failure. Ultimately, a world without the need for humanitarianism is a better world. Is it possible to design a future without humanitarianism? Is technology a hope or hinderance in imagining that future? And is it desirable, dangerous, or even naïve to do so?



ABOVE: THREAT IMPACT CHARTS DISTRIBUTED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTION.

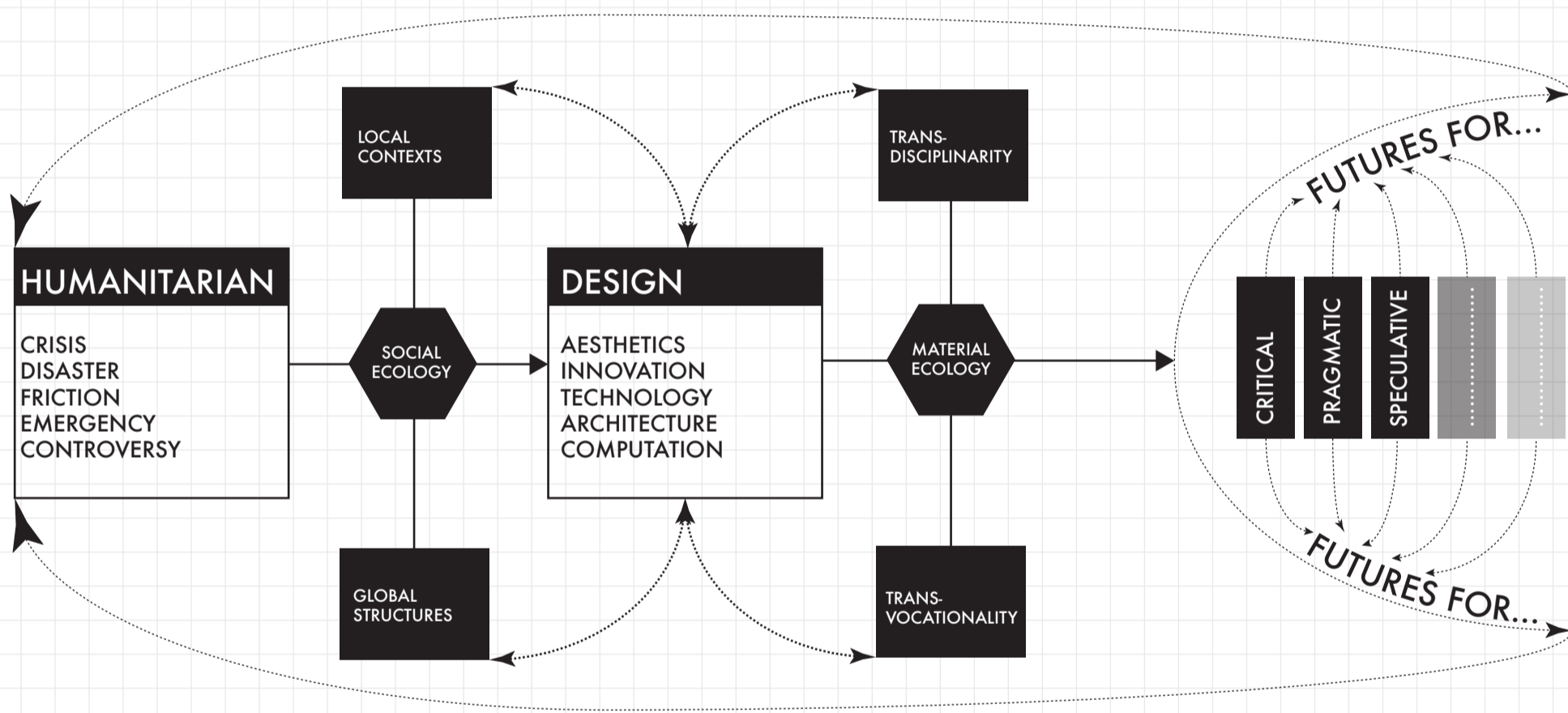
WHAT'S THE FUTURE OF HUMANITARIAN DESIGN ?

H U . D

THE FUTURE OF HUMANITARIAN DESIGN (HUD) IS A RESEARCH PLATFORM EXPLORING CRITICAL YET PRAGMATIC MATERIAL, TECHNOLOGICAL, AND ARCHITECTURAL INTERVENTIONS FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION ACROSS GLOBAL AND LOCAL HUMANITARIAN SPACES.

WHY?

Humanitarianism is in trouble. The crises it addresses are now more complex, protracted, and politicised. But political forces are increasingly unsympathetic, failing to adequately support humanitarian actors. Within this context, humanitarianism is undergoing a dramatic shift as it accelerates the integration of technology and 'design' practices into its work. This also faces difficulties. The integration of — for instance — machine learning techniques into humanitarian action is criticised for further distancing humanitarians from beneficiaries, reducing human beings to data-points, simply pixels on a satellite image. Equally, partnerships with commercial actors to improve — say — the architectural design of refugee shelters are criticised for subjecting humanitarianism to market logics. Nonetheless, humanitarian design is here to stay, especially as a tactic for mitigating the socio-political challenges the field faces. The demand of the day is thus simple: to excavate a series of hidden — critical yet pragmatic, speculative yet functional — futures for humanitarian design.



WHAT?

HUD explores humanitarian design through a radical trans-disciplinary and transvocational ethos, synthesizing the insights of social scientists, architects, development engineers, and practitioners. We focus our research on violence prevention in three contexts: detention settings; situations of forced mobility, and aid compounds. We do so with a global perspective but conduct core collaborative research in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Colombia.

HUD's ultimate goal is to design material, technological, and architectural interventions that transcend the binaries that currently divide humanitarian design. Namely, we seek to develop interventions that are neither entirely critical nor entirely pragmatic, neither entirely politicized nor entirely depoliticized, neither entirely global ('one size fits all') nor entirely parochial. Instead, HUD seeks to open up different futures that disrupt such binaries in humanitarian design.

WHO?

HUD's core research is led through a collaboration between the Geneva Graduate Institute, the University of Copenhagen, HEAD - Genève, and the EssentialTech Lab at EPFL Lausanne. HUD's work also integrates humanitarian practitioners from leading organizations and key partnerships with research institutions in Colombia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Our work is supported by a Swiss National Science Foundation Sinergia grant.

HUD is also cultivating a wider research collective drawing on the insights of scholars, practitioners, and civil society groups who push the boundaries of humanitarian design. Indeed, HUD is an open and experimental initiative. We embrace an agile approach to integrating the needs of diverse, sometimes conflictual, stakeholders, as well as an openness to taking risks and shifting directions to better explore the many possible futures for humanitarian design.

WWW.HUMANITARIAN.DESIGN