DESIGN DIRECTION

Human by Design

As flawless, AI-generated aesthetics spread across industries, human-made content is gaining value. Meet the creatives embracing messy, nostalgic and kinetic design that reflects the human touch



KFC and Fiesta by PS21, Spain

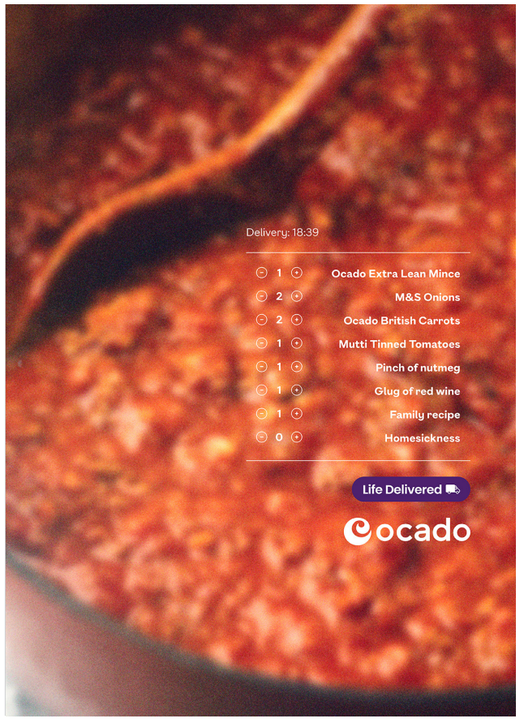
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At a glance

: **Context** – To counterbalance the race for AI-generated design outputs, creatives are reintroducing human values, characteristics and imperfections into the narrative

: **Sectors** – Design, Advertising & Branding, Packaging, Retail, Health & Beauty, Technology

: **Treatment** – Nostalgic soft palettes, organic tones, lived-in colours, childlike strokes and stitching, cartoonish fonts, uneven and organic edges, purposeful flaws and glitches

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01 mud™, UK; 02 Pastane Bakery, Azerbaijan; 03 Ocado, Life Delivered, UK; 04 Polaroid The Campaign for Analog Life, US

Introduction

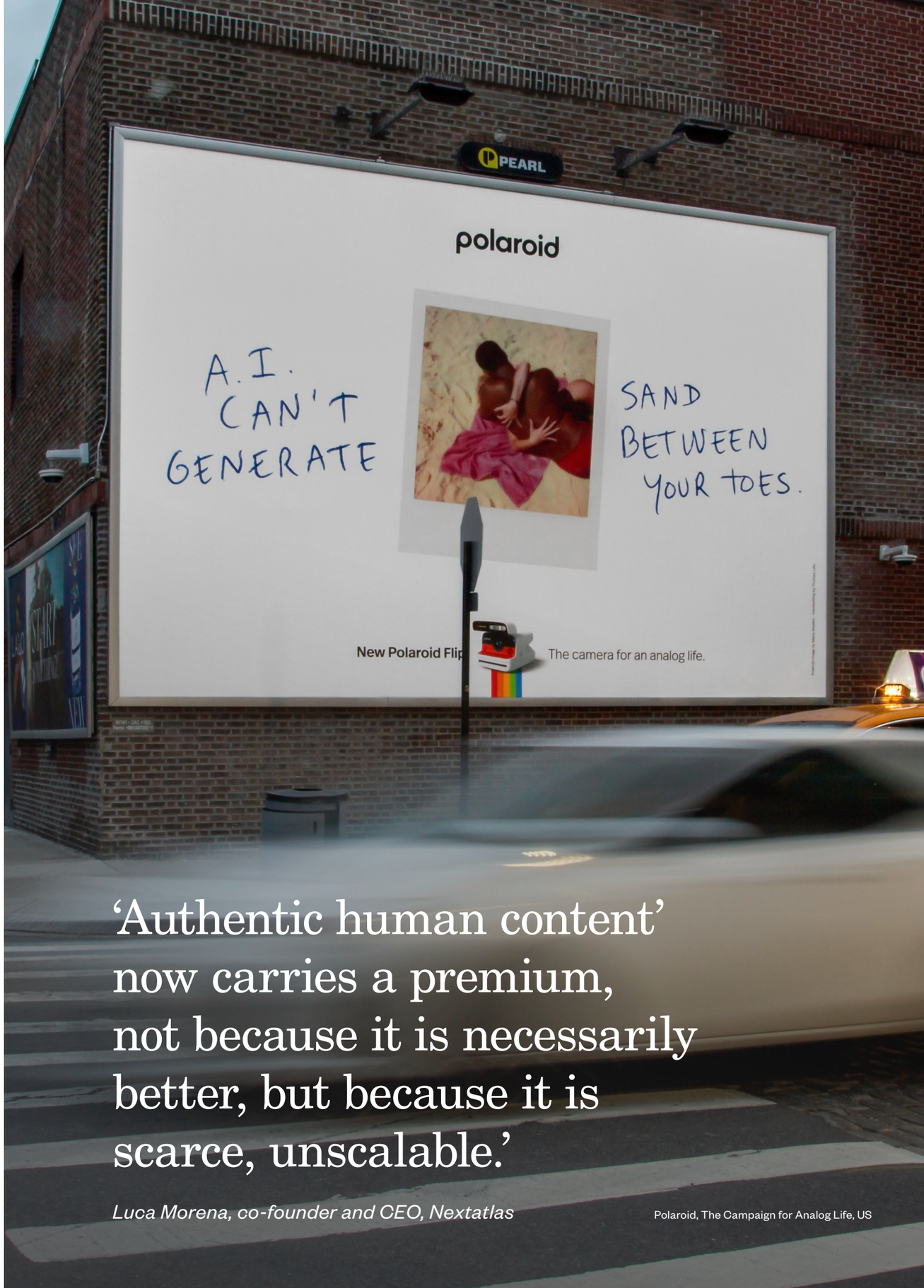
As we step into The Synthocene Era – a near AI-powered future where the lines between what is natural and what is artificial are increasingly blurred – creatives will cut through the AI noise by channelling what makes and keeps us truly human.

Pop culture is already hinting at this paradox. In May 2025, Reddit announced ‘various third-party services’ would now be tasked with verifying a user’s humanity to preserve the emotion of human interaction in spaces increasingly shaped by bots. Audiences are also seeking moments of authenticity. The internet obsessed over Timothée Chalamet arriving at the London premiere of the Bob Dylan biopic A Complete Unknown on a Lime bike (and being fined). British Vogue also applauded singer Charli XCX’s ‘low-key town hall wedding’ for being ‘undeniably cool’. In entertainment, the serendipity of street interviews on TikTok and crowd work stand-up comedy on Netflix have shown how media consumption has shifted towards relatability over scripted aspiration.

But this isn’t just a cultural shift, it’s also a creative one. “Authentic human content’ now carries a premium, not because it is necessarily better, but because it is scarce, unscalable,’ writes Luca Morena, co-founder and CEO of insights platform Nextatlas. ‘The signature of a living hand, the imperfections of process, have become selling points.’ As a result, creatives are translating inherently human characteristics such as imperfection, messiness and emotion into design principles.

To counterbalance the flawless aesthetic popularised by the rise of generative tools, the design sector is embracing a more kinetic, messy, nostalgic and tactile design language. Clumsy compositions, crafted texture, wonky wording and visual scribbly cues mark human presence.

Brand identities are now in movement and tuned to their purposes and audiences. Marketing, no longer a pursuit of perfection, now leans into the human touch – while consumer experiences are designed to evoke human feeling and the joy of imperfection.



Brand Identity: Alive

Moving on from sterile fonts and redundant brand identities, audiences now expect brands to breath. Designers are responding by embedding stories into identities, replacing static logos and rigid guidelines with kinetic systems that morph and evolve.

Pastane Bakery's fictional concept by designer Mubariz Yusifzade features a type that puffs like rising dough, making the identity feel tangible and an extension of the craft behind the baking process. Similarly, the Slide Tackle font from Colombian creative duo Los Crises is inspired by stray marks on football pitches. The result is a typeface that feels raw, dynamic and emotionally charged, like the culture around it.

Dog wash brand Mud takes this further with a flexible identity reflecting play and imperfection. Co-founder Karina Zhukovskaya describes it as a metaphor for the rinse-and-repeat rhythm of dog life. She tells LS:N Global: 'The brand needed to breathe and be organic, just like the mud itself. It had to feel alive, reactive and a little unpredictable.' The tactile thinking extends to packaging with ink that vanishes when wet and reappears as it dries – turning the wash into a sensory experience.

To reimagine QR code management platform Uniqode's brand identity, design agency Koto leaned into the tactile act of scanning to connect the physical and digital worlds. The design language features imperfect ASCII-style stitches, kinetic patterns and a bespoke typeface, Uniqode Sans, with subtle stitch-like forms. The master grid driving these patterns dictates layouts, icons and motion paths, creating a visually consistent and distinctive system.

Across these individual identities, colour plays a quieter role with earthy hues and textures – softer tones reminiscent of something more human. Interestingly, Mud's browns, greys and blacks are inspired by different shades of dirt to emphasise the messiness of life with a dog.



Pastane Bakery, Azerbaijan



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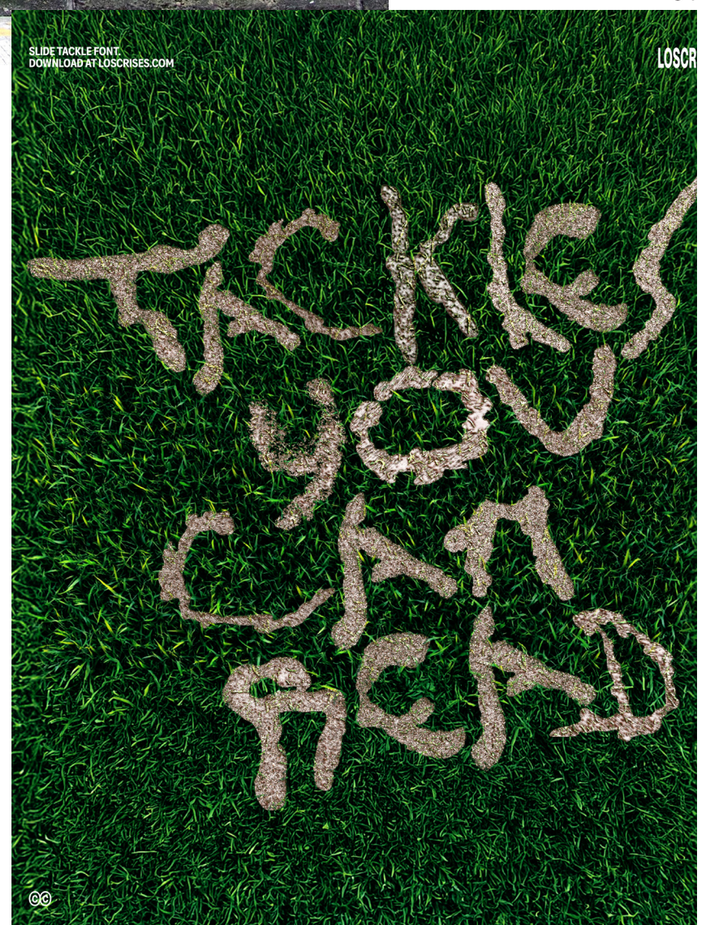
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Key Takeaways

: **Type** – Organic and uneven shapes stand out in homogenous branding. In a world of Helveticas, be the Wingdings

: **Motion Design** – Consider how to experiment with motion on digital assets. How can brand identity flex based on user engagement, environmental data or local relevance?

: **Colours** – Moving away from rainbow gradients synonymous with AI, colour palettes now favour organic tones and earthy textures



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01 Pastane Bakery, Azerbaijan; 02 Slide Tackle Font, Columbia; 03 mud™, UK;

Brand Expression: Authentic

With major brands now publicly using AI in advertising, including AI-generated models at Guess and Levi's, making the human touch more visible becomes a refreshing point of view.

In July 2025, Polaroid's The Camera for an Analog Life campaign sought to celebrate the moments created away from screens and algorithms. The visuals featured nostalgic ballpoint pen scribbles and lo-fi captures of touching moments. The messaging also mirrored the sentiment with slogans such as 'AI can't generate sand between your toes' and 'Real stories. Not stories and reels'.

Similarly, in Madrid, the KFC x Fresquito OOH campaign covered billboards and bus stops with crayon and marker drawings made by children. Agency PS21 gave the kids creative carte blanche to promote the limited-edition, chicken-drumstick-shaped lollipop designed especially for them, showcasing how expressive and emotional storytelling can leave a visible imprint on a city.

The authenticity of minimalist drawing extends beyond in-real-life activations. For instance, luxury brand Hermès declared Drawn to Craft as its 2025 theme. On Instagram, a series of videos showcases illustrator and animator Kyutae Lee (aka Kokooma) drawing the history of the brand with a simple blue ballpoint pen. The animated footage celebrates the brand's heritage – 'inspired by our first client: the horse' – and even invited the public to draw in the open air over the summer at its touring event in Bordeaux and Biarritz, France.



Polaroid The Campaign for Analog Life, US

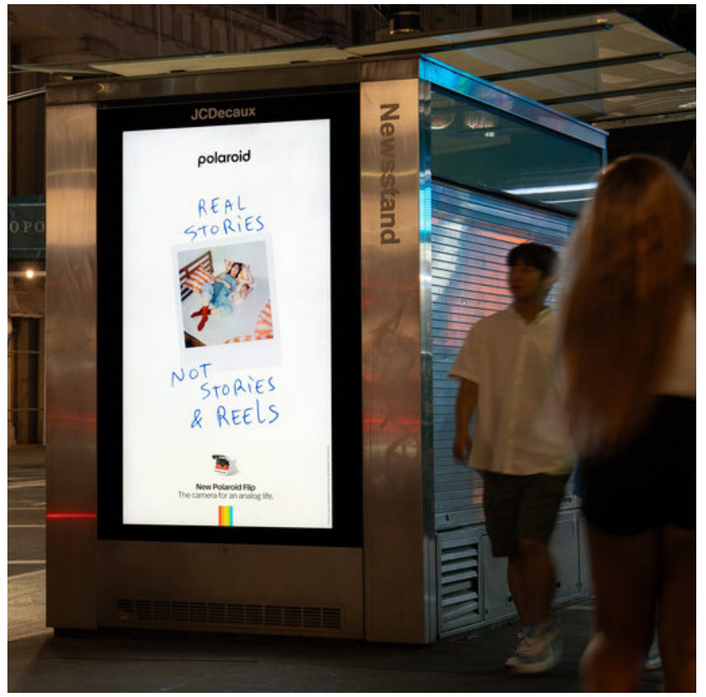
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‘The more we lose ourselves in digital algorithms, the more we drift away from empathy and real connection’

Patricia Varella, brand and creative director, Polaroid

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Key Takeaways

: **Texture** – As analysed in our Kidult Craze report, nostalgia and healing their inner child are top of mind for adult consumers. Consider how imperfections such as scribbles, childish marks and naïve art can add warmth and tactility to your design to signal a human presence

: **Digital** – Even on platforms such as Instagram, hand-drawn or analogue-inspired visuals can cut through the digital noise and signal craft

: **Brand Messaging** – Give audiences (children, communities, customers) creative freedom to build authenticity and shared ownership

01 KFC and Fiesta by PS21, Spain; 02 Polaroid The Campaign for Analog Life, US; 03 Mushu by Maxime le Grelle, is a physical AI companion designed to foster curiosity among children, Belgium & US

Brand Experience: Emotive

As explored in our Culture-coded Retail macrotrend report, brand experiences are shifting from transactional to emotional.

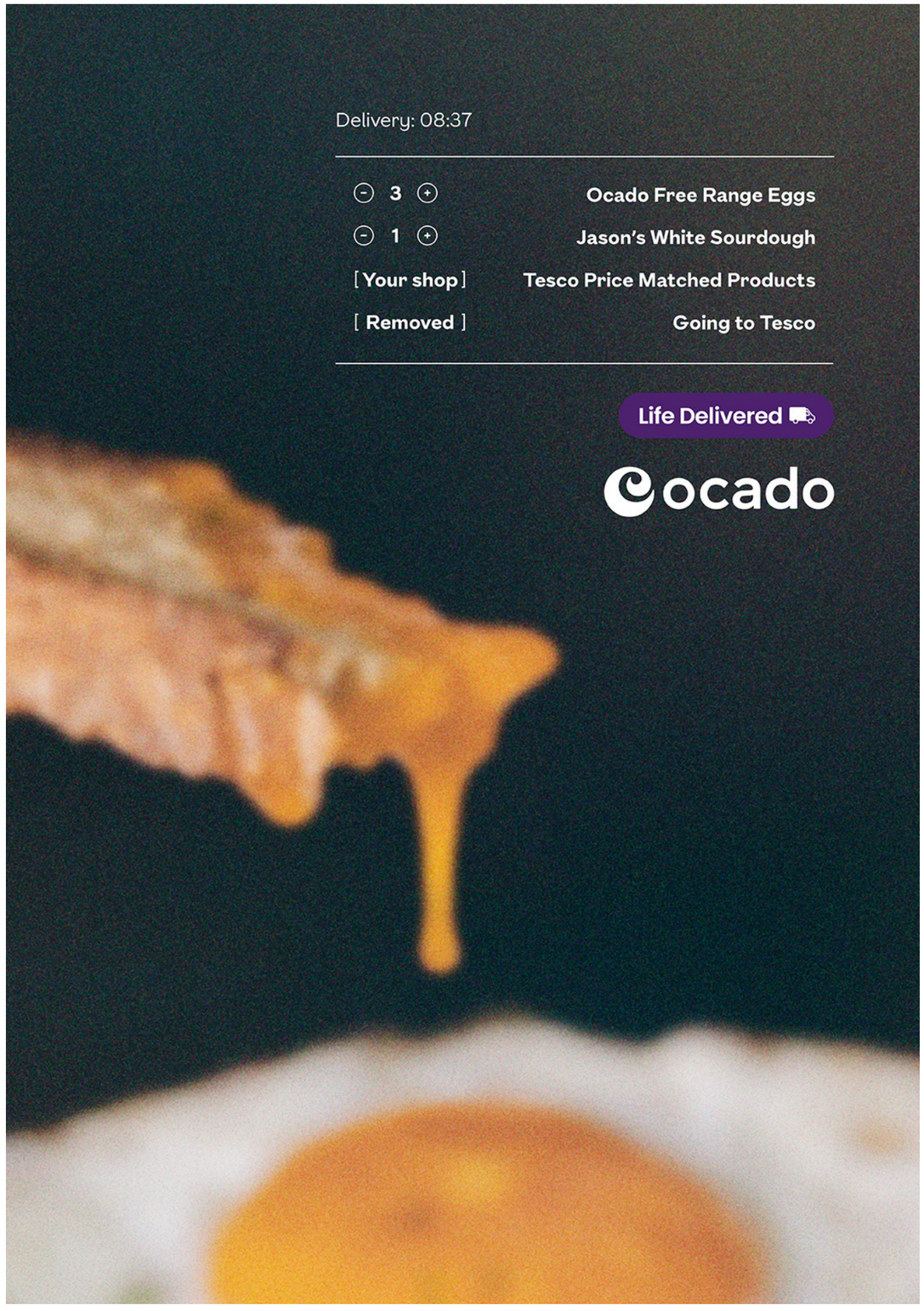
Inspired by LS:N Global's Scent Retail Futures report, Glossier's Fleur fragrance launch by Random Studio in early 2025 channelled AI while keeping the physicality of scent as the main story. Each visitor triggered a unique and personalised poem generated by AI.

While made possible through digital, the interaction remained focused on the physical, with text projected onto soft fabric walls. At the same time, thousands of pastel lilac petals scattered across the space created a dreamlike atmosphere.

Sportswear brand On presented the same emotional layering at Paris Haute Couture Week 2025 to select guests. The sneaker specialist commissioned designer Tom Ducarouge to create a heat-reactive dinner table. When touched, the furniture and matching stools made from raw steel captured traces of hands, warm coffee cups and sunlight. For a few seconds, the design immortalised the unpredictability of the human touch in a dinner setting, before the marks disappeared.

Emotive experiences don't exclusively apply to physical spaces. In July 2025, Ocado's Shopping List Stories by Uncommon Creative Studio focused on meaningful human moments, instead of price cuts and product shots. Each ad paired a lo-fi, off-centre and nostalgic photograph with a short, emotionally charged shopping list. One execution read simply: 'one tin of Ocado Gold Roast Instant Coffee, zero words', accompanied by a blurred image of a comforting handhold.

To better connect with humans and put them front and centre, designers are creating spaces that feel alive and intimate to turn emotion into the interface.

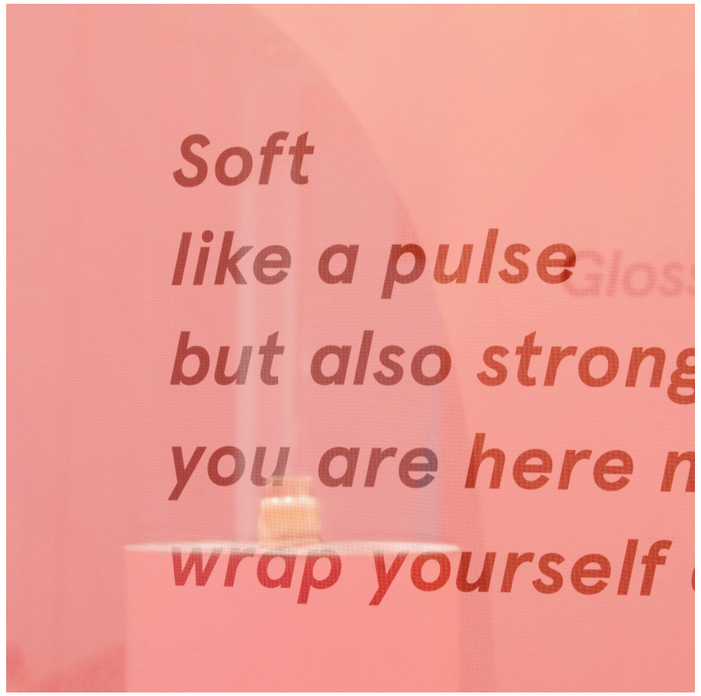


Ocado, Life Delivered, UK

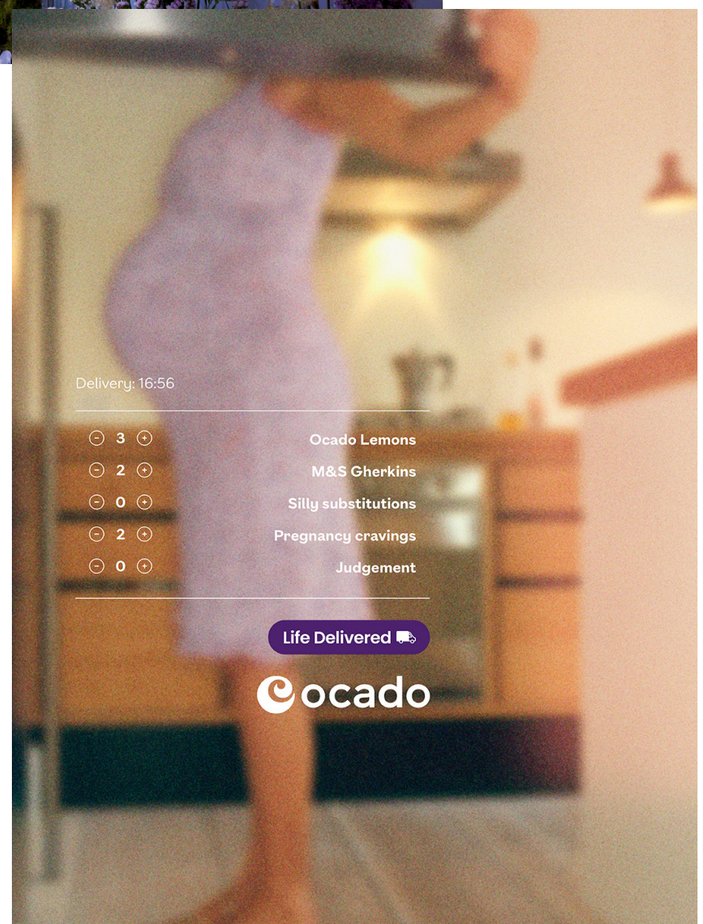
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Key Takeaways

: **Emotive Outputs** – Nostalgic mediums and imperfect compositions communicate more than goods and services – they evoke feeling

: **Spatial Design** – Raw textures and organic materials reflect a state of transience, placing consumers in living and breathing spaces in movement

: **Phygital** – Consider how AI and other technologies have the potential to enhance human narratives. Can you use gesture, motion, mood and expression to create a harmonious synergy between people and the digital realm

01 Glossier, Fleur fragrance by Random Studios, France; 02 Glossier, Fleur fragrance by Random Studios, France; 03 Ocado, Life Delivered, UK

‘Exchanges can no longer just be about a brand anymore: now, we see spaces turning into theatres where consumers can become actors and play with a brand’

Daan Lucas, founder, Random Studio

Toolkit:

: Brand identities need to breathe and move. Create kinetic logos, typefaces and assets that flex, shift and evolve – bringing the brand to life rather than remaining rigid and static

: Generative tools are levelling the playing field. With so much mass production, the imperfect and personal will set brands apart. As a designer, experiment with mess and irregularity, and define what is visually authentic to you

: Design for feeling rather than solely for function. Whether it's the warmth of raw textures, the intimacy of ambient sound or the nostalgia of analogue formats, the most memorable experiences are those that make people feel something

: Consider how to embed narrative in typography. Can you craft typefaces inspired by everyday marks, scratches or cultural references to tell emotional, human-centred stories?

: Layer tactility into campaigns with ballpoint scribbles, lo-fi photos, stitching or glitches to introduce sensory cues that digital-first branding often lacks

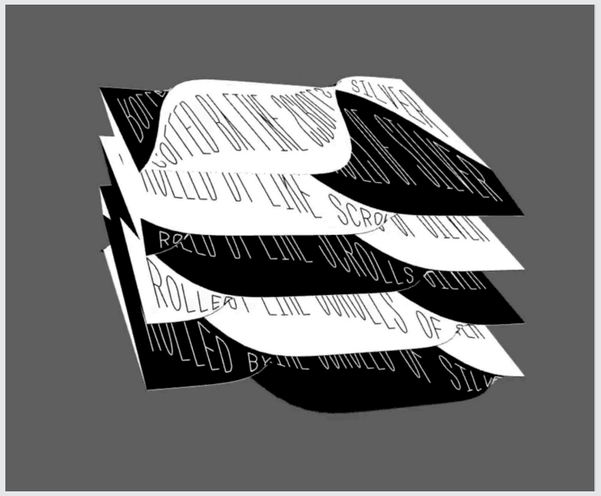
: Turn packaging into an experience by exploring reactive inks, heat-sensitive surfaces or textures that change with touch, water or light to centre human interaction



Talent

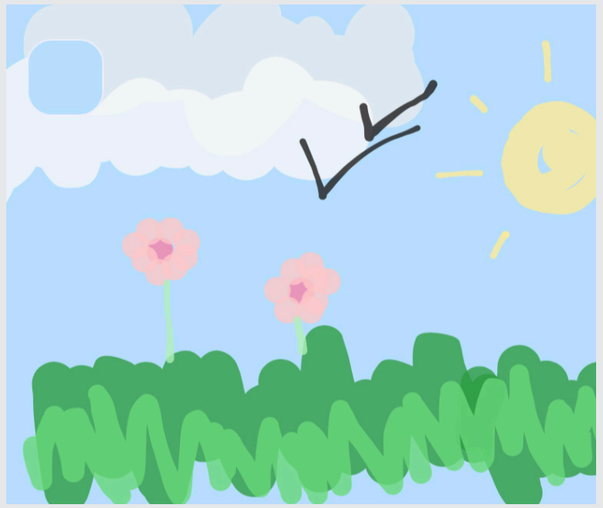
Kiel Danger Mutschelknaus

Created by motion and generative designer Kiel Danger Mutschelknaus, the Space Type Generator is a playground for kinetic type. With multiple parameters such as shape, size, pattern, wave and radius, the possibilities to create animated text and type in real time are endlessly customisable. Designed for both beginners and experienced designers, the platform helps them bring identity and typography to life across branding, motion graphics and interactive installations



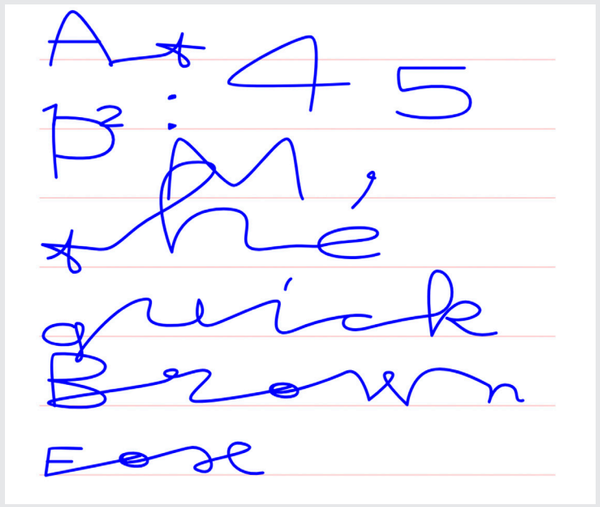
Excalidraw

Making hand-drawing more digital and collaborative, Excalidraw is an open-source virtual whiteboard that embraces imperfection through its ‘sloppy, hand-drawn’ aesthetic. Elements such as customisable stroke style allow designers to experiment, replicate and export expressive scribbles and doodles for their own creations or virtually paint entire canvases. The platform invites the spontaneity and expressive marking of hand-craft over polished precision



Schultzschultz

German design studio Schultzschultz opens some of its custom browser-based tools to the public for free. Tangents helps build custom letters and patterns, while ScriptScript allows users to generate their own unique script style with customisable size, height, space, stroke and slant. The precision and random toggles introduce elements of digital



Left to right: Space Type Generator by Kiel Mutschelknaus, US; Excalidraw, Global; Scriptscript by Schultzschultz, Germany