

Merch on Demand

For the past seven years, the clothing brand *The Blank Traveler* has operated its manufacturing of garments semi-autonomously. Using three—and then, as of five years ago, four—T-Jet direct-to-garment printers, it has produced hundreds of individually designed products on a variety of hoodies, sweatpants, t-shirts, buttoned shirts, and other supplementary apparel items in a wide range of colors. This process thus far has been the result of equal parts machine labor and manpower, making it an operation that has not yet veered into complete dystopian automation. Many of the patrons of the brand are aware of this and, based on some guerilla research, find the process personable and endearing.

It has, however, simultaneously employed the invisible labor of hundreds to thousands of factory workers in a handful of countries in Central America and South Asia (as seen on the tags of blank apparel) who operate semi-industrial, pre-contemporary machinery in assembly lines. The human labor involved in this setting seems inconceivable to the average business owner and incomparable to the labor exerted while printing garments; unlike the process of operating a direct-to-garment printer, which is a relatively passive exercise coveted for its un-intensiveness, the factory manufacturing process involves a cyborgian relationship to where the machine can only output as much as its operator inputs.

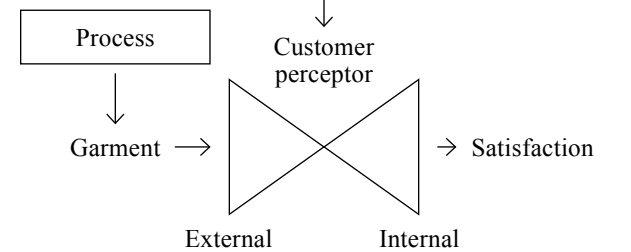
- > The art director ideates and moodboards, communicating with a designer who will execute their concept.
- > The designer sketches and revises the design (repeat steps 1 & 2 recursively).
- > The producer adapts the design for manufacturing.
- > The manufacturing lead delegates the work to the workers, creating a production line.
- > Finished garments are shipped to the brand.
- > The brand ships to the customer.

Empathy

These 3 steps are sometimes collapsed

Ignorance

After this cycle completes itself and the product has been chewed up and spit out, the customer is so alienated that they can't nor want to imagine the complete chain of labor. In this cloud of obfuscation, the "designer" thrives, perpetuating a certain complacency that is poisoning an industry plagued by laziness, aloofness, and ignorance.

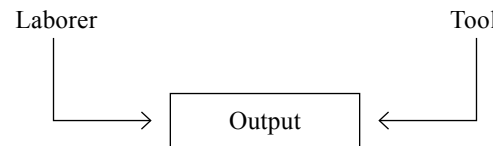


In Sol Lewitt's Wall Drawings, a series where Sol writes a number of instructions for somebody else to execute, the separation between artist and laborer is forefronted. He poses some fairly rudimentary questions: is it still the artist's art if their hand was not involved? How much of the piece should be attributed to the laborer? In a gallery or museum, without wall text, these pieces exist as any other artwork, the viewer forced to be generous in their presumption that the artist made the art. With the advent of cheaply employable painters and sculptors in places like China as well as the normalization of "studio assistants" (who are tasked with paint-by-number-ing artworks), this presumption is irresponsible of the viewer to make.

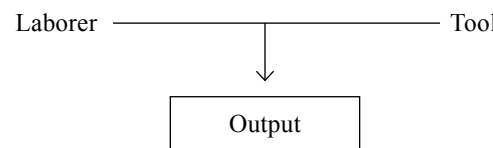
The discrepancy between Lewitt and Jeff Koons (who is well-known for using these aforementioned "studio assistants") is that the former embraces their outsourcing of labor, using it as a part of the artwork itself. When this

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Amazon

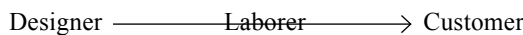
Semi-automated Manufacturing



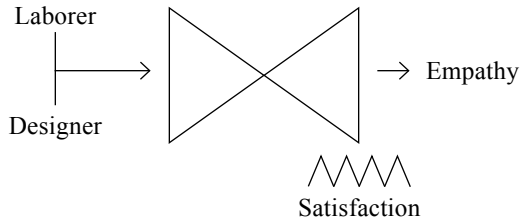
Cyborgian Manufacturing



Still, none of this can be seen by the naked eye. There are four—sometimes five or even six—degrees of separation between the purchasing of a garment and the delivery of said garment, all outside the customer's point-of-view.



distinction between artist and artisan is highlighted (and therefore weaponized) the viewer can establish grounds to reevaluate the work, typically resulting in a newfound empathy for the real, physical energy that was needed to make it. Consequently, the inverse of this—where the viewer is denied the understanding of labor—actively dislodges empathy, allowing the artist to take advantage of the viewer’s presumption of the artist-as-laborer.



Amazon’s print on demand service, *Amazon Merch on Demand*, employs the model of other print and fulfillment combination services like *Printful*. These services, unlike the traditional production line model of brand → manufacturer → brand, subtracts the final step (6) of returning the completed product to the brand and instead delivers the product directly to the customer upon completion. It’s easy to see why

the collapsing of manufacturing and fulfillment into one entity is beneficial and utilized by a slew of small, independent designers; not only does it provide convenience, it also provides assurance from a large, experienced company willing to usurp liability for any mistakes that might occur in the fabrication, shipping, or handling processes.

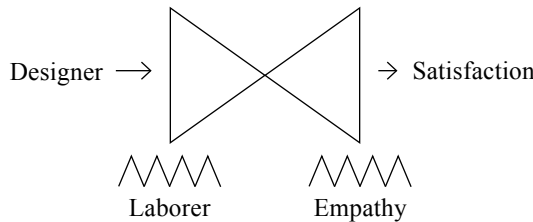
- > Finished garments are shipped to the brand.
- > ~~The brand ships the garment to the customer.~~

Conversely, based on the points made previously, it should be just as easy to see why this same collapse is not integrated by medium to large brands and corporations. Firstly, it would threaten the ego of the designer as it strips away the symbolic act of having ownership over inventory (typically justified under the guise of “quality control”). Similar to if a painter stripped the paint off their canvas only to reveal the dots and numbers beneath, this would put the designer’s already fragile authorship at risk. Secondly, and probably more importantly, the customer—having seen the return address being an Amazon fulfillment center in New Jersey—would be privy to the manufacturing process, eroding the facade of artist-as-laborer and therefore resulting in the customer

Manufacturing

developing empathy for the operation, holistically. Oftentimes, this realization replaces a certain percentage of satisfaction with a certain percentage of guilt, skepticism, and spite which would, in turn, hurt the profits of the brand.

Many designers and artists find comfort in the vagueness of outsourced labor which, to them, exists as a hypothetical space devoid of class and ethics. It exists solely as an idea, a cloud, a void awaiting projection.



I am constantly trying—alongside the principles of originality and the non-biodegradability of polyester—to reconcile with this unavoidable truth as I make my own clothes. In no way is *The Blank Traveler* a beacon of ethics nor is it anywhere close to being a sustainable fashion project. In fact, taking into account my unsolicited promotion and patronage of one of the largest and least ethical

blank apparel conglomerates in the world, it’s not far off to say that the brand may be a net negative to the planet’s environment and human virtue. As my brand slowly and very incrementally expands in both scope and material, this immorality will only exponentiate with the increasingly unavoidable transference of laborious tasks like sewing, printing, and shipping.

With all of these ideas in mind (and to further exacerbate these concerns), I’ve been juggling the idea of releasing a collection exclusively through *Amazon Merch*. No, this would not help my standing in the list of righteous brands; to realistically do that I’d have to transition from an appropriator of deadstock, readymade apparel to a knitwear line utilizing only self-sourced natural wool, which I’m not keen on. No—instead, the goal would be to isolate from a system that relies on the veneer of industry to sedate the consumer so that they can be unchallenged in their consumption. In order to dispute the collective NDA signed between customers and creators to never speak of the manufacturing process, the process itself must be apparent as Lewitt had made it. It must be like a wall text: exclamatory and combative enough to at least bust open the contract’s drawer and, twice over in sharpie, underline the terms and agreements.

Amazon

Fulfillment

Solid value T-shirts ★★★★★
By Solomon Kane

As seen on *amazon.com*

I recommend these T-shirts. I am 5’8” and 140”, I do not like tight T-shirts so I bought a large. I am happy with it, although I am sure that a medium would have worked.

I will compare the Gilden T-shirt with the Fruit of the Loom Platinum that you will see at Wal-Mart.

Pro - The Gilden appears to be better built and the sizing was consistent on the two T-shirts that came in the package. The neck was smaller, without being tight. I am guessing that fabric around the neck will not wrinkle up, unlike many Fruit of the Looms. There were no loose threads, unlike many Fruit of the Loom. Gilden has heavier fabric, which is better most of the year where I live (east Tennessee). I do not want a see-through T-shirt. Also, no one who sees me would want me wearing a see-through T-shirt.

Con - The Fruit of the Loom is much softer after a first washing. I washed the Gildan T-shirt in warm water with two minutes in the dryer on Energy-Saving. Gilden has a tag which is not as good as Fruit of the Loom (no tag). I cut the tag out without any problem and now the Gilden is fine. Gilden is slightly more expensive but both brands are inexpensive.

Neutral - Neither brand bleeds color. I have only washed the Gilden one time so I do not know whether it will fade. My Fruit of the Loom T-shirts fade but it takes many washes for that to occur.

I hope that this review is helpful to you.

Update - June 2, 2020. The Gildan T-shirts that I bought previously held up reasonably well for the money. They did not shrink. They did not fade. However, they did not get softer. Washing was on warm and drying was three minutes on energy saver.

I purchased some more Gildans to replace the ones that wore out. I have not washed them yet. I bought Galapagos Blue and Orange in Large size. Both are 100% cotton. The necks seem smaller than the Fruit of the Loom Platimums that I own. I like that because I have a small head so I don’t need a big neck. I am still 5’8” and 140 pounds and the Large is comfortable for me. A medium would probably fit me better; however, I like a looser-fitting T-shirt.

I will let you know how well the new Gildans do after

washing in warm water and drying for three minutes on energy saving heat. Notably, I have some old Fruit of the Loom T-shirts (like ten years or more) which are reasonably thick, reasonably soft, and still going strong after all this time. I wish that I had bought more of them.

June 10, 2020 - After one wash in warm water and three minutes in the dryer, the new Gildans did not shrink or fade. Also, the necks did not stretch. However, the T-shirts did not become softer. Therefore, three out of the four results were good and one result was neutral.

September 20, 2020 - After multiple washings in warm water and three minutes in the dryer on “energy saving”, the verdict is the same. Good - the T-shirts did not shrink or fade and the necks did not stretch. Bad - The T-shirts did not get any softer. One other note - the tags on the T-shirts would be very annoying to wear so I cut the tags out.

November 22, 2020 - The first thing to go bad on these T-shirts has been that the necks have stretched slightly. The stretching was not terrible but it is noticeable (at least to me). Nevertheless, I would give the T-shirts 4.5 stars. They do seem a little but softer or maybe I am getting more used to them. They do not feel scratchy to me. They have not faded or shrunk. I definitely like them much better than the ultra-thin Fruit of the Loom Platinum.

November 28, 2020 - I have purchased only Large-size Gildan T-shirts. I am very happy that the sizing has been very consistent. Gildan has much better quality control than Fruit of the Loom.

March 11, 2021 - I have revised the rating to a five stars. The T-shirts have gotten soft after probably 10 - 12 washings. The necks have stretched slightly but not very much. I am picky about that so I may notice that more than most people would. I dry the T-shirts by putting them in the dryer on energy saving setting for three minutes and then laying them on a bamboo drying rack. I do NOT dry them by putting them on hangers. The T-shirts still look great with no fading. I wear them frequently and enjoy the various colors.

September 16, 2021 - The T-shirts are still doing well. One note, I think that the 6.0 weight fabric is much better than the 5.3 weight fabric. I bought some 5.3 weight lime green T-shirts to try to make myself more visible when walking. The necks have sagged after four washes. They served the purpose for the summer. However, I would not buy the 5.3 ounce again. The 6.0 ounce T-shirts have maintained their shape with minimal neck sagging or crinkling.

A List of Recent Amazon Purchases Courtesy of Jeffrey Chen

- > Mielle Organics Rosemary Mint Scalp & Hair Strengthening Oil for All Hair Types
- > Worldwide Botanicals Organic French Chicory Root, 1 Pound - Brew Like Coffee, Blend Roasted Chicory Root With Coffee, Acid Free, Caffeine Free, Kosher
- > Nutramax Laboratories Dasuquin Joint Health Supplement for Small to Medium Dogs - With Glucosamine, Chondroitin, ASU, Boswellia Serata Extract, Green Tea Extract, 84 Soft Chews
- > FLOITTUY {Loud Alarm for Deep Sleepers) 4” Twin Bell Alarm Clock with Backlight for Bedroom and Home Decoration
- > Queensell Play Money Suitable for Monopoly Board Game – 480 pcs of 60 Each Bill Denomination – Double Sides Printing Paper Money for Pretend Play Cashier - 480 pcs
- > Hobonichi Techo 2025 Cousin Book [English/A5/January Start/Monday Start/Planner]
- > BLACK+DECKER One Touch Coffee Grinder, 2/3 Cup Coffee Bean Capacity, Spice Grinder, One Touch Push-Button Control -150 Watts -Stainless Steel Blades
- > Yellow Mountain Imports Chinese Mahjong Set, Classic Ivory with 146 Ivory Colored Small Tiles, Vinyl Case, Wind Indicator and Dice - for Chinese Style Gameplay Only [經典象牙中國麻將]
- > Utopia Bedding Comforter Duvet Insert, Quilted Comforter with Corner Tabs, Box Stitched Down Alternative Comforters Queen Size (Black)
- > Srutirbo Giant Goose Stuffed Animal, 51.1 Inch Soft Goose Plush Pillow, Cute Duck Plush Toy Swan Plushie Doll Sleeping Hugging Pillows Gift for Girls Boys
- > BLACK+DECKER One Touch Coffee Grinder, 2/3 Cup Coffee Bean Capacity, Spice Grinder, One Touch Push-Button Control -150 Watts -Stainless Steel Blades
- > Hemp Oil Numbing Cream with 5% Lidocaine for Pain Relief Max Strength and Unique Formu-

la for Common Arthritis Pain, Muscle, Joint & Back Aches Ideal for Body Piercing Tattoos and Waxing (1)

- > Amazon Basics Waterproof Anti-Slip Silicone Pet Food and Water Bowl Mat, Solid, 18.5 x 11.5 Inches, Black
- > Keeps Extra Strength Minoxidil for Men Topical Aerosol Foam 5%, Hair Growth Treatment - 3 Month Supply (3 x 2.11oz Bottles) - Thicker, Longer Hair - Slows Hair Loss & Promotes Hair Regrowth
- > JohnBee Pill Cutter | Best Pill Cutter for Small or Large Pills | Designed in The USA| Cuts Vitamins | Includes Keychain Pill Holder (Blue)
- > Tattoo Aftercare Bandage Roll 10”x 2 Yard Transparent Film Dressing Second Skin Healing Protective Clear Adhesive Tattoo Supplies Roll
- > Slippery Stuff Paraben Free Water based Lubricant - 8oz. by Slippery Stuff
- > Natural Vitality Calm, Magnesium Supplement, Anti-Stress Drink Mix Powder, Gluten Free, Vegan, & Non-GMO, Cherry, 16 oz
- > Being Peace (Thich Nhat Hanh Classics) Paperback
- > Franklin Sports Ball Pump Kit -7.4” - Perfect for Basketballs, Soccer Balls and More - Complete Hand Pump Kit with Needles, Flexible Hose, Air Pressure Gauge and Carry Bag
- > Neck Ice Pack Wrap, Reusable Gel Ice Pack for Neck Shoulders, Cold Compress Therapy for Pain Relief, Injuries, Swelling, Bruises, Sprains, Inflammation and Cervical Surgery Recovery
- > Neck Brace for Sleeping - Cervical Collar Relief Neck Pain and Neck Support Soft Foam Wraps Keep Vertebrae Stable for Relief of Cervical Spine Pressure for Women & Men Blue (12.6-15.8 inch)
- > Eight Dates: Essential Conversations for a Lifetime of Love Hardcover
- > 3 Pack Satin Bonnet Silk Hair Bonnet for Sleeping, Sleep Bonnets for Women Large Wide Soft Band Sleep Cap

It was a long shot. Someone knew someone who knew someone who had worked with her on *We Bought a Zoo*, and after months of texts and emails and working through an army of assistants, representatives and shadowy figures that I can only really describe as “henchmen,” I found myself staring at a Zoom loading screen, waiting for Lauren Sánchez—TV news anchor, occasional actor, newly-minted philanthropist, future astronaut and Jeff Bezos’ bride-to-be. After a few minutes, she floated into view. Her background was blurred by a filter, but it gave the impression of a large, bright space. She had agreed to a ten-minute interview. Although we were supposed to spend that time talking about the recent publication of her children’s book *The Fly Who Flew to Space*, our conversation ended up covering a wide range of topics. It has been edited, lightly, for length and clarity.

MC: Hi Lauren. Thanks for agreeing to talk to me today. We’re here to talk about *The Fly Who Flew to Space*, which is about a fly who does just that. Can you tell me a little bit about why you decided to publish a children’s book?

LS: Yeah. Of course. Well, it’s a weird story, honestly. I have three kids and when they were little it was all “Mommy mommy mommy! We wanna go to space, we wanna be astronauts, we wanna see what space is like!” You know. So I knew that kids love outer space. And then, like, two years ago, I had just got back from Tulum, and I was in DC, and I had this dream. In the dream, I was standing in a big grassy field and looking at an enormous giant spaceship, like the size of a skyscraper. And I can see my youngest—that’s Ella—in it. She’s at a window, banging on a window, and I can hear her saying “Help! Help me! Get me out! Mommy!” But I was totally frozen; I couldn’t reply, but I could see that in the window, right next to Ella, was a fly—like a normal housefly. Just sitting on the glass. And even though flies are very cute or cuddly—I mean, a kid would probably want their dog on the spaceship, not a fly—I thought “Well, at least she has the fly. They’ll have to become friends.” When I woke up, all I could think about was that dream. I knew I had to write about it. So that’s how I wrote *The Fly Who Flew to Space*.

MC: Wow. Speaking of space, you yourself are actually scheduled to enter orbit. You’re flying on a Blue Origin spacecraft sometime this spring. How does that make you feel?

LS: Oh, I’m very confident about that. I must have done the simulation about a thousand times by now. I’m

not stressed about the flight. I’m mostly worried about what I’ll see when I get up there.

MC: What do you mean?

LS: A few years ago, the actor William Shatner went up in one of Blue Origin’s space shuttles. When he came back, everyone asked him how it was. Was it amazing? Did he love it? He was in Star Trek, you know. So everyone thought he would have loved it. Turns out, he hated the whole thing. He looked out the window and saw the earth surrounded by all the darkness and nothingness and it made him super depressed. So if possible, I want to avoid that. I think I’ll love it. I’ve been training a lot for it. I look at pictures and videos of the earth from space to try and get used to when I see it in person.

MC: Yeah, I don’t think I’ll ever go to space. Back on earth, you’ve had cameos in a number of successful films. Do you see yourself taking more of a starring role in any future productions?

LS: Actually, I’m developing a movie based on my life.

MC: Can you tell me more about it?

LS: I mean, it’s based on my life. It’s about a girl who comes from a tough place—daughter of immigrants, raised in the Central Valley—and she works her way up the ladder in the entertainment industry while also becoming a helicopter pilot. She starts the first woman-owned aerial film and production company, which is something I actually did. But that’s just like, the first third of the movie.

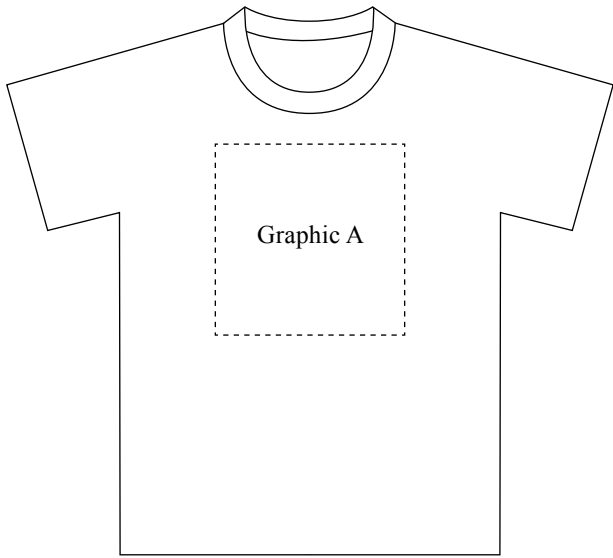
MC: What happens in the rest of it?

LS: Like I said, it’s based on my life. I meet someone who totally transforms it, who flips everything I knew upside down, and that’s what happened to me. It was incredibly romantic, and still is. So the movie is also about that, and about what happens to two successful, driven people when they start dating. Like, is there room for both people’s ambitions? Running a business, my dad told me this, running a business is one of the easiest ways to break a couple up. You’re stressed, you’re trying to lift yourself up by your bootstraps; you love your partner, but are you making time for them? Some couples have a date night once a week or whatever. Me and Jeff will do that but instead of a typical date night we do a sensory deprivation tank together: the tank is hooked up to a PA system so we can talk to each other while we’re there. I ask him, Do you feel your needs are being met? How can I refocus my attention on you in a way that feels nurturing? Where can we optimize our relationship? The movie’s asking those questions; which are questions everyone can relate to.

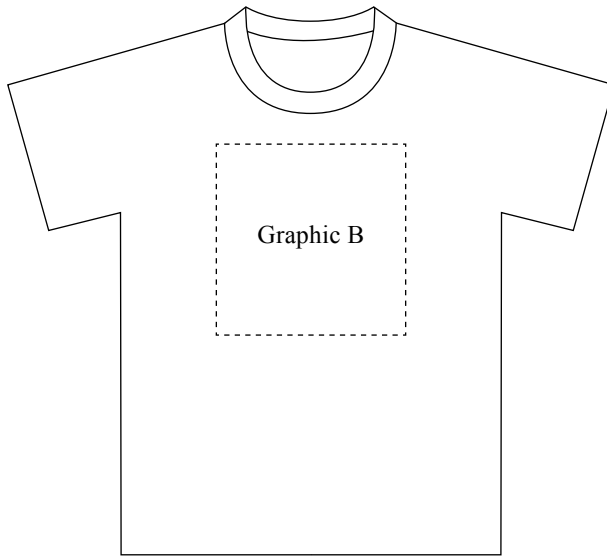
MC: I’m assuming you are talking about Jeff Bezos. I wanted to ask—and I know we’re running low on

time—about both of your philanthropic efforts. I know that last year you donated some 60 million to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to restore degraded landscapes. You have both pledged 400 million to make America’s cities greener. How do you balance these environmentally-minded charitable gifts with the Trump administration’s interest in opening up protected land for oil and gas exploration? And I hate to ask, but considering your fiancé’s increasing coziness with the White House, there seems to be a conflict of interest brewing here.

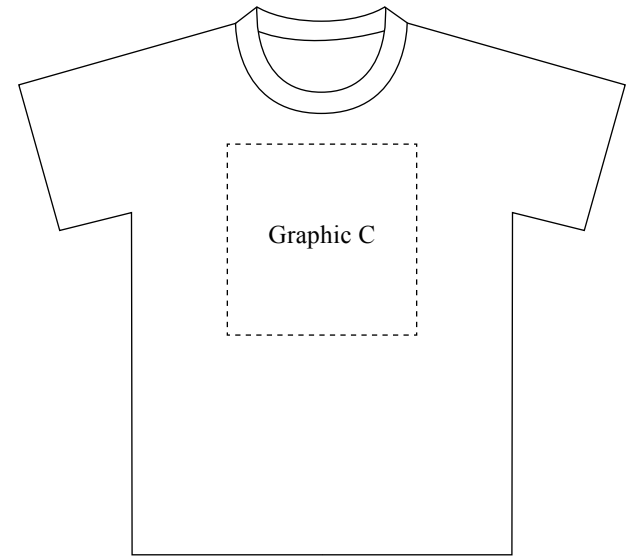
LS: Let me tell you a story that I think will answer your question. In 2012 I had a cameo in a movie called *Celeste and Jesse Forever*. No one saw the movie; it was a little indie thing, but it did star Andy Samberg and Rashida Jones and it was cute. I rewatch it every year. It’s a sweet movie. But what I remember from doing that movie is that first of all, Andy and Rashida were going at it every day. Fighting. Lots of fighting. They couldn’t be around each other once the cameras stopped rolling. Funny, ‘cause they were supposed to be playing something like soulmates in the movie. And the second thing I remember is that Andy—nicest guy ever—was really, really down on his luck that year. Like, basically homeless. We’d get to set at whatever time and Andy would roll up in his car and come out and he’d be unshaved and his hair was messy; he just looked a mess. You could tell something was going on. One day, I need to touch up my makeup before we shoot and so I go over to his car to use the mirror. I do my makeup, stand up, check myself out in the window, blah blah—but when I look in the window, I can see that the whole backseat of Andy’s car is covered in pillows and blankets. There’s socks on the floor, there’s empty bags of chips, there’s soda cans, there’s a phone charging cord—he’s got this whole setup in there and immediately I’m like “Oh, Andy’s been sleeping in his car.” So the next time I see him I walk up to him and without anyone seeing I give him this goodie bag I made. I put snacks and a water bottle and some gift cards in there; I really stuffed it with things that I knew he liked and might find useful. I tell him “This is for you. Don’t say thank you.” And his eyes just go big. Like, wow. He’s got this face of total shock. I just walked away. He never brought it up later, I never brought it up later, but what stuck with me from that is that I realized it only takes one person. Just one person to see you, maybe see you doing badly, and reach out and give you a hand. One person! And I really value moments when I get to be that person. So I’m not bothered so much by any conflict of interest, as long as someone is reaching out and giving a helping hand.



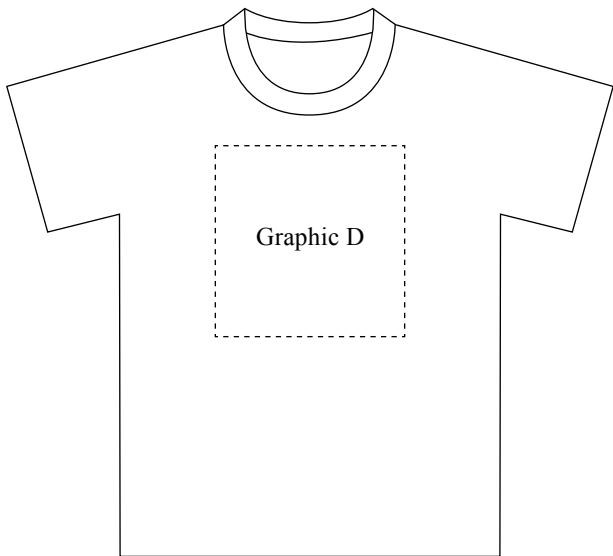
Everlasting Commitment



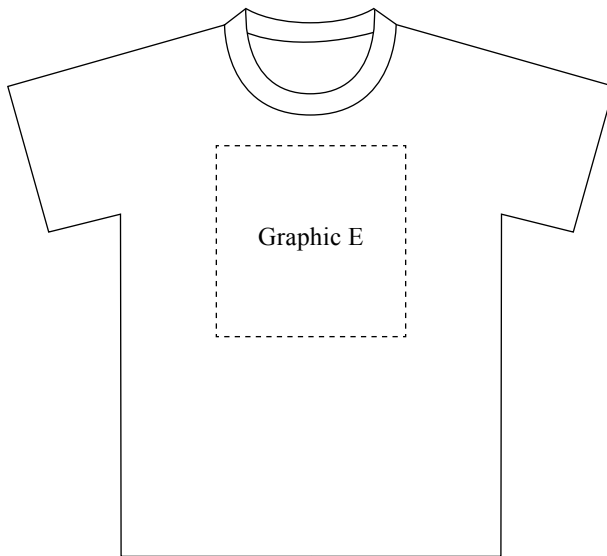
Workplace Disruption



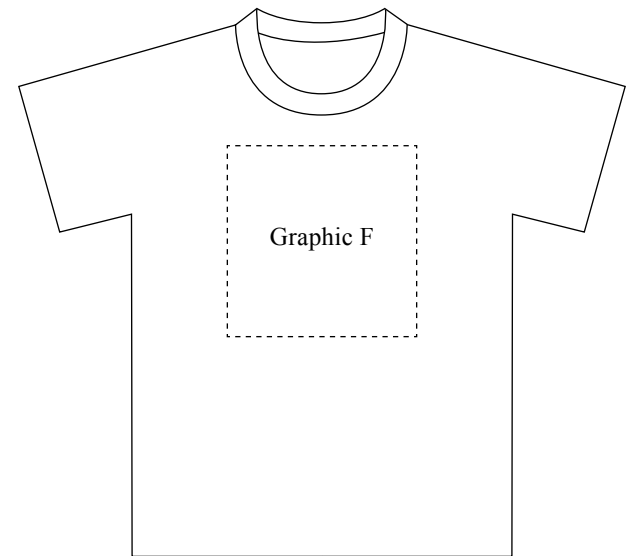
Radical Engineering



Effortless Monarch

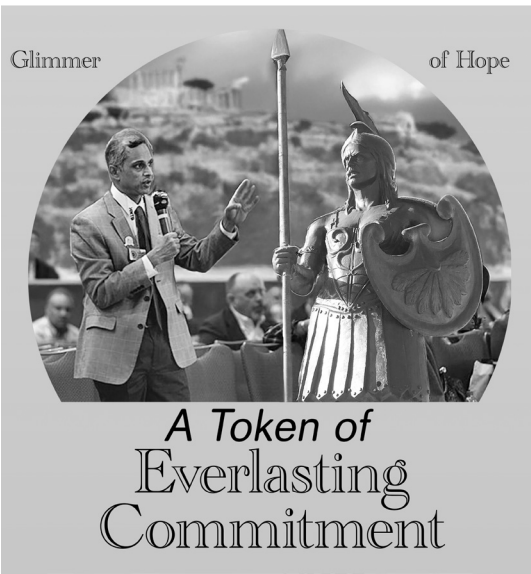


Collapsed Monument



Series of Revisions

A



B



C



D



E



F



