

Airplane Mode:  
Design and Distraction in the Attention Economy

Vitor Augusto Bento da Silva

## Theses

### I.

The advancement of smartphones, mobile internet, and social media platforms have created the perfect breeding ground for the consolidation of the attention economy — a system in which attention is not only a scarce resource but a highly profitable one. Instead of giving corporations money, we pay them with our time. In this context, attention is no longer merely a personal or psychological phenomenon; it is also an economic asset.

### II.

The iPhone was not responsible for inventing the internet, mobile computing, or digital culture, but it was the catalyst that wove them seamlessly into the fabric of daily life. More than a gadget, it became the apparatus that centralized work, communication, entertainment, and identity. Operating as a foundation, the App Store provided a platform to support an entire ecosystem of apps. Furthermore, the legacy of the iPhone encompasses both technological innovation and behavioral change.

### III.

The architecture of the internet suffered a structural change with the rise of social media, from the slow disappearance of the open web and its replacement by a few closed platforms controlled by giant technology corporations. The internet has gradually become a system of surveillance, extraction, and behavioral control. We internalize the demands enforced by platform logic, and feel pressured to perform, to optimize, and to constantly engage.

#### **IV.**

Digital exhaustion is a consequence of exposure to a digital environment designed to exploit us. Before the rise and solidification of social media platforms, the internet felt like a new frontier: a place for freedom, exploration, curiosity, and wonder. As the internet became more accessible, it also became ubiquitous. We became familiar with the perils and cost of constant connectivity, entrapped in structures designed to take over all corners of our lives, unable to resist its pull.

#### **V.**

The attention economy positions users as products and laborers, tasked with performing visibility, cultivating personal brands, and complying with data extraction in exchange for connection and relevance. Platform dependency is embedded in our personal and professional lives. Resisting this structure is not merely a quest for self-discipline nor nostalgia for a pre-internet past, but about reclaiming agency over our time, attention, and creative expression.

#### **VI.**

With a special focus on typographic design and textual expressions within (and without) the digital realm, my artistic work considers the subjective dimensions of hyperconnectivity and the byproducts created by the attention economy. Through typographical experiments, I challenge established notions of typography as a neutral conveyor of meaning, rather regarding type as image, charged with multi-layered messages.