



99 MONTHS

F A B R I C A

99 Months

A Fabrica Workshops project with thomas.matthews
directed by Sophie Thomas

Edited by Omar Vulpinari

F A B R I C A

FORWARD

By Sophie Thomas, [thomas.matthews](#)

As a designer and an individual I have been actively involved in the movement trying to halt global warming for many years, but when I began the research for this brief it really scared me. Climate change is not stuff of science fiction. It is very real and we are running out of time before the consequences of our actions become irreversible.

And so, armed with this research twenty seven design students and tutors embarked on a five-day journey that pushed us out of our comfort zones and threw up questions that were hard to answer. We collectively grappled with difficult science and depressing truths and came to conclusions that were almost too scary to face.

But then came the point, a true 'Eureka moment' where the group realised the collective energy and power they had. And with this came the understanding of the pivotal role the designer can play in the movement of massive change.

This collective output is the beginning – the first steps towards a very exciting call to action that we hope will get picked up and repeated around the world.



"Get on Board"
A thomas.matthews project.

ESSAY

Collecting Butterflies, By Max Bruinsma

“How much green-standing can we stand? It’s enough hot air to melt Antarctica. In no time, an inconvenient truth has become an obnoxious one. But from what I can see, there’s as much selling as thinking going on. Even when the issues are green, things are rarely black or white.” Bob Morris, “Global Yawning”, NY Times May 6, 2007.

We, the world, have agreed that climate change poses grave problems and therefore we have pledged to start thinking about what can be thought up to save the planet. Check back on our leaders in 2009, and they’ll let us know what they’ve been pondering so far. Oh, and it should be clear that raising the standard of living of the upcoming middle classes in the new economies of the world is an even more pressing problem, and, now that you mention it, we won’t, of course, jeopardize the old economies. But we’ll plant trees, lots of trees.

This is the gist of the last word on climate change and the environmental crises as of the Bali conference in November 2007. This high-profile political event was declared a success because all countries assembled, including the once contrarian USA, agreed to start mulling things over. For the representative of Tuvalu, a tiny atoll state in the middle of

the Pacific Ocean, it was too little too late. He gives his country another decade – at the most. Say, ninety-nine months. After that, its population of around 10.000 souls will have become part of another problem-statistic, that of immigration in countries like New Zealand and Australia. Tuvalu’s atolls, and inhabited islands like them, will become unlivable or simply disappear below the rising oceans, a fact that is one of the few certainties in the debate about global warming, and one that is beyond repair.

For the rest, the debate is open. Two responses to the problem seem to prevail: “too bad” in cases like Tuvalu’s, and “we’ll see” in all other cases. The notion of actually doing something about it seems to baffle all but the sturdiest optimists. One of the reasons for this bewilderment is no doubt the extreme complexity of the matter. If – as the story goes – a butterfly flapping its wings in one of the last untouched corners of the Amazon forest can unwittingly cause a hurricane over the rising seas around Japan, then what can we do to purposefully influence this rhizomatous process? Should we contain the butterflies?

Trying to fight or even compensate for the causes of climate change seems to

be just that – trying to contain butterflies. We can’t, of course, control the zillion of them flapping about the earth. We regard them as, well, a force of nature. Which is one of the strongest metaphors for the few things that exceed our own might. Even at a time when we control, or pretend to, many aspects of nature itself, we still hold a deep awe for its powers, once unleashed. This rare display of modesty compels us to acceptance in the face of natural disasters. When a volcano erupts, all we can do is evacuate. When a tsunami hits the coast, all there remains for us is bury the dead. There is no way of preventing such catastrophes and very little room even to warn for them.

If we thus characterize both the complexity and the overwhelming scale of the climate problem, what on earth can we do about it? In the face of an exponentially growing mount of evidence for the human factor in the causes of climate change, we feel like the sorcerer’s apprentice; we have set free forces and processes we cannot control. Between the standard reactions that a panic-struck human may have when faced with events that seem to overpower him – denial and resignation – is there an alternative? There is and it’s called: resilience. The French enlightenment

thinker Pascal compared man to a reed, structurally rather weak but flexible enough to survive the fiercest storms. In French, his metaphor suggests a link between this flexibility and man’s ability to think: “l’homme est un roseau, mais un roseau pensant”.¹

Flexibility of thinking, mental resilience, is needed to face the challenges of the climate crisis. We need to be thinking ‘what if’, not only in terms of worst-case scenarios, but more importantly in terms of practical actions. I am avoiding the word ‘solutions’ here, because no one solution will be sufficient to turn the tide. There are no quick fixes for complex problems. If, on the other hand, we accept that small events can seriously influence large processes – a notion that is symbolized by the popular story of the butterfly sparking a hurricane – we should take a ‘small measures approach’ seriously as contributing to the bigger picture of fighting the causes of climate change. For it is not just about reducing your personal ‘ecological footprint’ with 0.008 kgC by turning down your washing machine’s temperature. Small measures like this amount to much more: a change of mentality, a break of habit. Which in turn will help foster the kind of awareness

that is politically effective. Obviously, it is there, on the level of politics, government and global economics, that the real answers to the problem lie. But without a constituency that pushes politicians and businesses into action, nothing will move. And in this case, the constituency will have to be global.

The success of Al Gore's documentary 'An inconvenient truth' is not merely the merit of the facts he presented, but also a sign that he struck a chord with an audience that needed this summary as a catalyst for their own more or less repressed worries. An audience moreover, as it turned out, that was big and global enough to move politicians to at least admit they shared these concerns. Gore's movie was consciously designed as center-piece of a campaign that aimed at a much more lasting effect than the proverbial 15 minutes, and incorporating all media necessary: book, movie, website, TV-exposure, canvassing and intense networking. And although the movie paints a grim picture of what can happen to our planet – and to us – when we don't act quickly, the follow-up of Gore's message in the media that he and his supporters employ stresses the notion that we can indeed do something about it, from small

personal measures to large-scale political decisions. Gore addresses his audience as part of the solution.

All of this is underpinning the importance of awareness, not just of the problems, but of the measures that each of us can take to help solve them. Catching one butterfly at a time, so to speak, without losing sight of the bigger picture. People who know they're doing what they can or at least make an effort, will be more inclined to hold their representatives up to the same standards. And voters who translate their own awareness of and commitment to environmental issues into guidelines for their political choices will, by force of their number, influence political programs and agendas. Here also small measures matter: every vote counts, as any politician will confirm. Similarly, any businessperson will acknowledge that at the basis of every turnover statistics are individual purchases.

Thus, raising awareness can be counted among the more effective activities to stop the rest of the inhabited world from undergoing the fate of Tuvalu. Since the coral reefs that make up the atolls barely rise above the current sea level, even with radical measures against global warming this tropical paradise

will have disappeared from the face of the earth roughly 99 months from now. According to scientists like climate expert James Hansen, a global tipping point beyond which we will not be able to prevent the oceans from rising even further, will be reached around the same time if levels of greenhouse gases such as methane and CO2 are not reduced. Global warming at this point will become irreversible, and we, in Venice, Amsterdam, New York, San Francisco, London or Tokyo, will have to do what the Tuvaluans are facing now: move to higher ground.

It doesn't have to come to that. Instead of becoming bored with the umpteenth disaster documentary on Discovery Channel that sketches out our doom in great detail before concluding that a super-human effort is needed to avert the danger, we need to rise up like the vulnerable but flexible and thinking reeds that we are. For designers this resilience means first of all to rethink their role in terms of functionality: environmental issues like the amount of energy needed to realize the design and the amount of waste it produces after its functional life span, and social issues such as embedding environmental awareness into everyday routines of product usage need

to be 'designed into the product'. Not as an extra feature but as a basic function. For communication designers, there is the challenge not only to raise awareness, but to do so in a way that empowers people to make a difference within their own environment and without disturbing their ordinary habits to the point that they turn away either in shameful resignation or in contrarian denial. There is no point in spelling out doom when it leaves the audience paralyzed before the vision that after them there will be the deluge. Raising awareness also means fighting what New York Times columnist Bob Morris described as 'global yawning'. The best way to do that is connect reliable information with feasible options for action and feedback on the results of those actions. This is what the 99 months project envisions. Like Al Gore's website, it aims at building a resilient community, where information can turn into action. This project, an initiative spawned by a Fabrica workshop led by thomas.matthews, deserves to be realized.

1. "Man is a reed, but a thinking reed."
Pascal's dictum is a word play – pensant (thinking, pensive) and penchant (flexible, bendable) sound very alike in French.

BRIEF

99 Months - the brief, by Sophie Thomas

**Read the information. Research the facts.
Realise the state of emergency.
Refocus your life.**

As citizens we have a massive responsibility to rise up and start pushing for a mind shift. As designers and practitioners we can be the social agents that can clarify the issues, cook up the energy and begin the movement.

The issue - global yawning.

A “huge gap” has been identified between what is understood (by scientists) about global warming and what is known by the public. In short the climate crisis is a far more dire and present danger than most of us like to think. “We are closer to a level of dangerous, human-made interference with the climate than we realise. We are rapidly approaching a series of climate tipping points that will set in place an accelerated rush into huge global change.

In the face of this catastrophe are we panicked or hysterical? On the contrary - we seem to be in a strange limbo where people are becoming immune to the science, bored of the pledging and deaf to the advice to change their light bulbs.

“We tell them the truth - that an ecological collapse is on its way, and that avoiding it demands widespread transformation - and then we suggest that they take some small steps whose meaninglessness in the face of massive crisis is self-evident. We ask them to care about everything, and do almost nothing.” Alex Steffen

Climate change is exploding into the mainstream — social, political, economic, industrial, commercial. But there is still a strange disconnection between the grim reality as set out by people who have studied the subject and the other reality, the everyday one: working and living patterns, people’s aspirations.

The middle classes rebrand their lives, congratulate themselves on going green, and carry on buying and flying as much as ever before. It is easy to picture a situation in which the whole world religiously buys green products, and its carbon emissions continue to soar. Even the well intentioned, informed citizens feels helpless in the face of looming global calamities and they respond by circling the wagons and focusing on family-size problems. The end result is that most of us practice denial, which appears in the culture at large as indifference.

The brief - social agents

Climate change is an entirely new challenge. Its nature and scale reveals that existing commercial structures and social mechanisms just aren’t up to it. Everything we do must be scrutinised and potentially re-designed.

Over the five-day workshop we will create a one day launch event that show-cases a new global campaign highlighting the now scientifically agreed **99 months left to the tipping point** and the call for heroic actions to combat climate change. We have five days to think and create something that tackles communication on a global scale. Whatever is produced must live and grow beyond the workshop.

Stage 1 - Following on from an intro session we will split into 10 groups. Each group will be allocated a different area:

potential areas of focus: energy, transport, water, housing/ shelter, waste, consumption/ stuff, governance/politics, cities and communities, work/ business, nature/ planet.

Each group will research and brain-storm concepts that have the potential to be developed into a part of the umbrella campaign. The group reforms for a crit and help is given to develop these ideas.

Stage 2 - Once all concepts have been developed and approved the whole group will discuss the vehicle that the campaign will be launched. A smaller group will be put in charge of making this happen. All methods must stand up to sustainable scrutiny and will be documented and added to a growing database of methods that will be made available to other students and professionals at a later stage.

Areas of creation: identity/ voice, rules of action/ rolling structure, campaigns/ actions/ demonstrations/ tools of empowerment, visual/ radio/ viral/ audio/ digital, interaction and knowledge banks.

Stage 3 - The launch. An event is publicised (beforehand) and the campaign begins. This brief demands a new visual language to help begin in earnest the massive change. The solutions could/will involve: invention of new answers, changes to the systems (and the building of better ones), running for prime minister, writing books, shooting films, teaching, protesting, being arrested, mobilising your communities, redesigning your cities, getting up off the sofa, making it happen. It is time for clarity and action.

“Put another way: Don’t just be the change, mass-produce it. We need, through brilliant innovations, bold enterprise and political willpower, to make sustainability an obligatory and universal characteristic of our society, not an ethical choice. We need to remake the systems in which we live. We need to redesign civilisation.”

adapted from Alex Steffen, worldchanging.com

99 Months – the science

According to expert sources we are now rapidly moving towards a tipping point in the state of the world’s climate. This is the point of no return where the climate’s reaction to the man-made creation of greenhouse gases will take over and we will not be able to avert the consequences. A NASA team, led by scientist James Hansen now predicts that we have in the region of 99 months to radically change the way we run our world and live our lives in order to avoid the ultimate global disaster.

“If human beings follow a business-as-usual course, continuing to exploit fossil fuel resources without reducing carbon emissions... the eventual effects on climate and life may be comparable to those at the time of mass extinctions. Life will survive, but it will do so on a transformed planet. For all foreseeable human generations, it will be a far more desolate world than the one in which civilization developed and flourished during the past several thousand years.”

Scientists reported that we may have less time to combat global warming than we realised. Measurements of carbon dioxide, a main greenhouse gas, taken from the Mauna Loa Observatory,

12,000ft up a mountain in Hawaii in 2004, suggested atmospheric carbon dioxide levels had risen sharply and inexplicably in the two years before, prompting fears of runaway global warming. Though it is too early to confirm that it is a definite upward trend, the results came as an unwelcome surprise to climatologists.

The increase in the temperature of our atmosphere is now undisputed in the scientific world but there is still a lot of discussion as to how much this increase will be. The last time that the earth was five degrees warmer was three million years ago, when sea level was about eighty feet higher.

Eighty feet! In that case, the United States would lose most East Coast cities: Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, and Miami; indeed, practically the entire state of Florida would be under water. Fifty million people in the US live below that sea level. Other places would fare worse. China would have 250 million displaced persons. Bangladesh would produce 120 million refugees, practically the entire nation. India would lose the land of 150 million people.

Hansen is particularly concerned about the timeframe within which we must act.

There is increasing evidence that we are rapidly approaching a series of climate tipping points, where feedback loops in the environment (the march of forests pole-wards and melting glaciers and sea ice, meaning the earth's darkening surface retains more of the sun's heat; melting tundra releasing increasing amounts of methane as it thaws; etc.) began to contribute to a galloping greenhouse effect brought on by our actions. (For a particularly elegant discussion of the concept of climate tipping points, I highly recommend the "Real Climate" post on the subject.) If we wish to avoid crossing these thresholds, we need, Hansen (and others) say, to try to restrain global temperature increases to two degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial norm.

Because we have already committed ourselves to a certain amount of climate change (temperatures have already risen about a degree, Hansen says), and because the emissions we are now putting into the climate will be there for a long while, time is not on our side here: since no matter how great our resolve, our emissions will not cease immediately, and many decisions being made now (power plant construction, urban planning, forest clearance) will continue to have climate

implications in the future, we really have run out of time to delay change. We need, Hansen says, to have to start acting like a climate neutral society within the next ten years. "We're really at the crisis point," Hansen says.

Today the climatologists at the Snow and Ice Data Centre in Colorado will publish the results of the latest satellite survey of Arctic sea ice. It looks as if this month's coverage will be the lowest ever recorded. The Arctic, they warn, could already have reached tipping point: the moment beyond which the warming becomes irreversible. As ice disappears, the surface of the sea becomes darker, absorbing more heat. Less ice forms, so the sea becomes darker still, and so it goes on.

Last month, New Scientist reported that something similar is happening in Siberia. For the first time on record, the permafrost of Western Siberia is melting. As it does so, it releases the methane stored in the peat. Methane has 20 times the greenhouse warming effect of carbon dioxide. The more gas the peat releases, the warmer the world becomes, and the more the permafrost melts.

Two weeks ago, scientists at Cranfield University discovered that the soils in the UK have been losing the carbon

they contain: as temperatures rise, the decomposition of organic matter accelerates, which causes more warming, which causes more decomposition. Already the soil in this country has released enough carbon dioxide to counteract the emissions cuts we have made since 1990.

99 Months - the definitions

Tipping point – the moment beyond which the warming becomes irreversible.

Albedo flip – Geological records suggest that ice at the poles does not melt in a gradual and linear fashion, but flips suddenly from one state to another.

Positive feedback – self-reinforcing effects which, once started, are hard to stop eg. the melting of the Arctic ice.

IPCC – The intergovernmental panel on climate change

James Hansen – lead climate change scientist at NASA.

John Schellnhuber – research director at the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research in Norwich.

12 tipping points where global warming could produce sudden and dramatic environmental damage:

1. Sahara desert
2. Amazon forest
3. Ozone hole
4. Greenland ice sheet
5. Tibetan plateau
6. Salinity valves
7. North Atlantic current
8. El Niño
9. West Antarctic ice sheet
10. Methane clathrates
11. The monsoon
12. The Atlantic circumpolar current

www.worldchanging.com

www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/hadleycentre

www.giss.nasa.gov/research/news/20070530

www.monbiot.com

www.climatecrisis.net

www.reusablebags.com/facts.php

OUTPUT

Manifesto

WE DON'T LIKE WAITING
AND DON'T ENCOURAGE
IT. IN FACT, WE NEED
YOU TO STOP WAITING
FOR THE END, WHICH IS
MORE THAN NIGH.

From the **99 MONTHS** online community, small and large environmental changes and actions are suggested, then carried out locally and globally.

99 MONTHS highlights a need for urgency, informs people on how to act quickly, effectively and continuously, and records who is doing what across the globe, reassuring those in doubt that progress is achievable, measurable and is happening. Together we've gained a sense of unity. Lovely.

THIS PROJECT WILL
EMPOWER HUMANITY
TO REVERSE GLOBAL
WARMING BY REDUCING
CARBON EMISSIONS
IN THE FOLLOWING 99
MONTHS BEFORE THE
CRUCIAL MOMENT OF
TIPPING POINT.

Nurturing an international community acting against global warming through the online participative environment **99 MONTHS.org**

Suggesting quick, effective and continuous actions world-wide through direct online calls. Each week **99 MONTHS** will send its community a suggested behavior of change.

Visualizing the actions through the dissemination of collected photographic documentation. Community members will send back to **99 MONTHS** a photo of their action and will be able to blog their experience and suggestions. **99 MONTHS** will host blogs for each community member.

Quantifying the impact in carbon emissions and other indicators of quality of life. Each action will be measured, evaluated through online software and shared globally. This feature will also measure the pushing back of the 99 months.

Communicating up-to-date relevant information and providing tools for action. The website will supply RSS feeds, podcasts, links, studies, statistics, calculators and networks.

Fostering continual collective advancement towards the goal of a zero carbon world through a constant dialogue.



99 MONTHS will create a socially conscious community by suggesting meaningful actions like... turn down your washing temperature, don't waste tap water, carpool, and use more public transport.

The people carrying out the actions will send 99MONTHS.org photos of their actions that will be viewable on the site along with their names, locations and footprint reduction value.



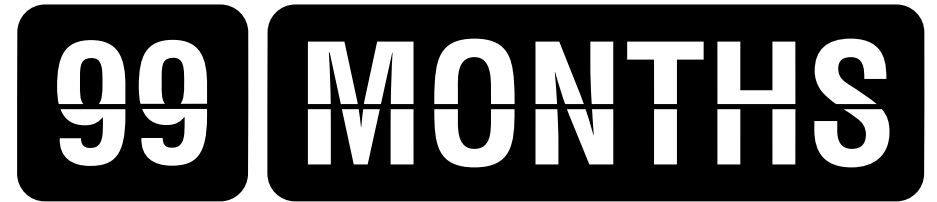
The reduction of an individual's carbon footprint as a result of performing the actions suggested by **99 MONTHS** will be measured in kilograms of carbon dioxide.

Each individual action and the sum of all actions, calculated using custom-made online tools similar to the one on climatecrisis.net, will push back in a quantifiable context the 99 month deadline.

Identity

Logotype

The logo-symbol is inspired by the Solari “flap” clock designed by Gino Valle still used in many train stations today. It’s fast flipping countdown instills a sense of urgency at the core of the campaign.



Colour

The colour scheme is made of twelve tones. Each colour is inspired by one of the twelve environmental tipping points that this project strives to avoid.



Typography

Akkurat is highly legible at all sizes, in special print applications and screen based media. Its simplicity aligns with the campaign's overall philosophy of sustainability.

Akkurat Regular

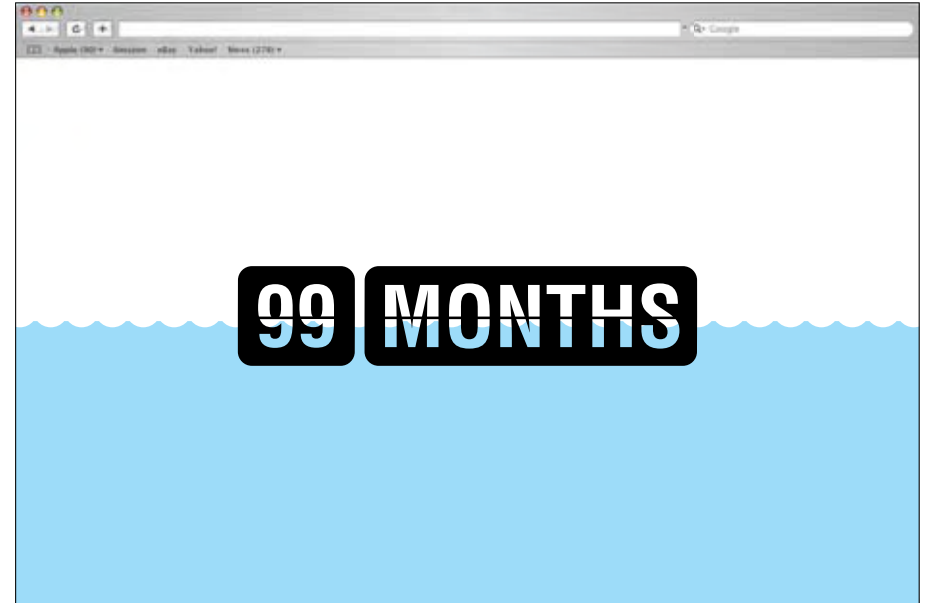
Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh
Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq
Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

Akkurat Bold

**Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh
Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq
Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz**

Website

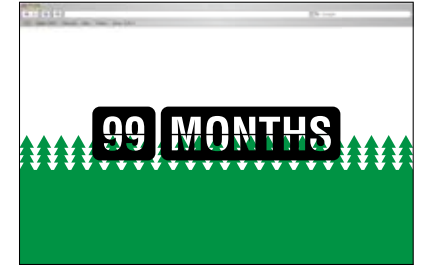
The web site opens with the logo on top of a graphic visualising the theme of the month. The animated graphic reacts to real-time statistics coming in through RSS feeds. The logo is the entrance to the web site.



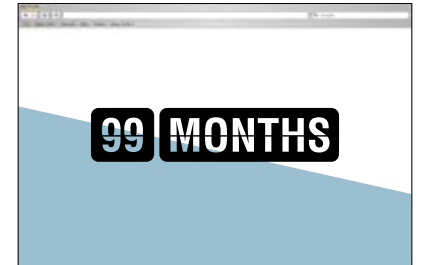
Visualising results

Every month new background graphic elements, related to the months theme, dynamically symbolize the statistics supplied by direct RSS feeds concerned with climate change.

This graphic represents global deforestation. The green background diminishes as trees are culled and grows as trees are planted.



This graphic represents the melting of the polar ice caps. The angle intensifies if the rate of melting increases and levels out as the temperature stabilises.



This graphic represents global air pollution. The smog cloud grows as air pollution increases and shrinks as we convert to greener fuels and technologies.

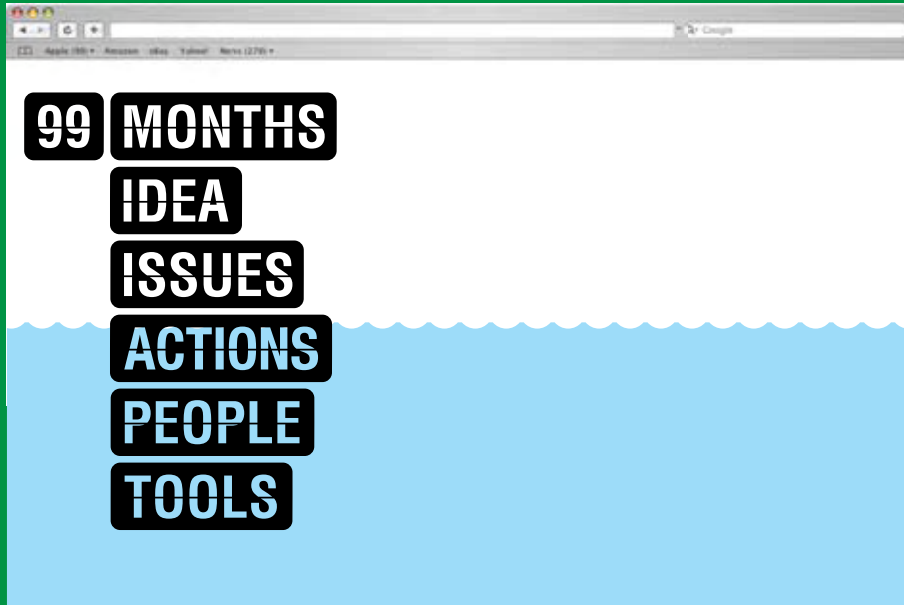


This graphic represents the hole in the ozone layer. The abstract red mass grows as greenhouse gas is expelled into the atmosphere and shrinks as we reduce our environmental impact.



Navigation

Here, the logo concept becomes the vehicle for the site's navigation menu. When clicked on, the site sections flip down and provide links.



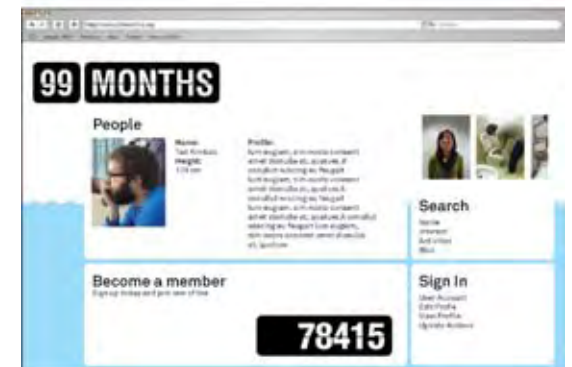
This is the “Idea” area, that communicates the project mission. It also contains the constantly updated community image gallery as on all the people/blog pages.



The “Issues” area will feature the facts and science behind the month's theme through various forms of media to present it in an interesting and easy way.

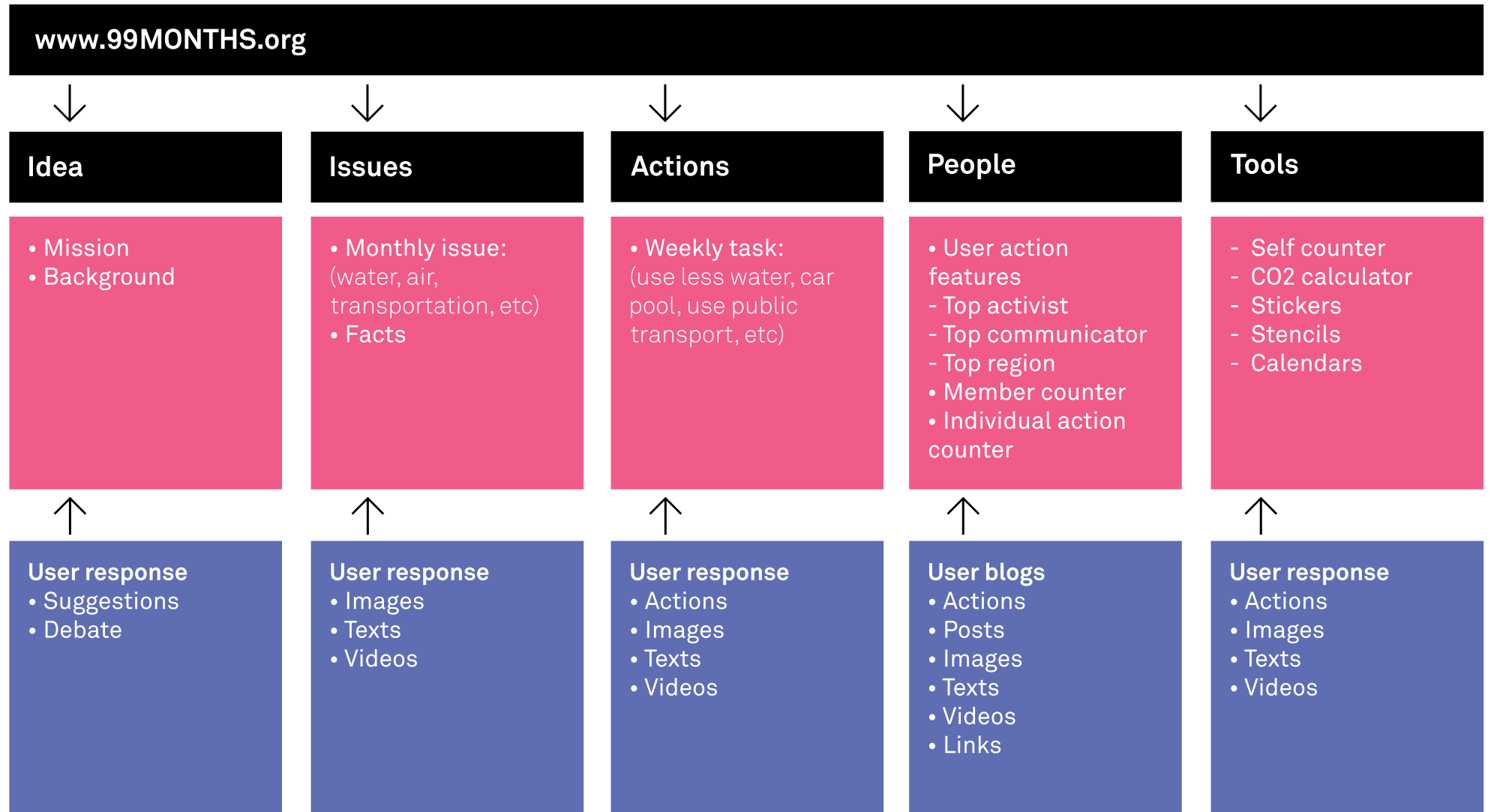


Every member of the 99 MONTHS community will have on the site a personal blog to communicate with other members and make visible their footprint reduction achievements.



Website structure

■ Editorial content ■ User generated content



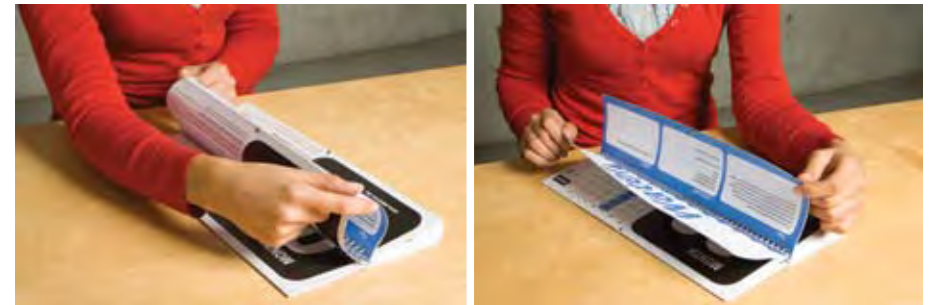
Monthly calendar

A 99 month calendar will highlight the regular issues and days of action, giving information and additional tasks.



Each page features one of the 99 months. The piece is printed using the minimum amount of vegetable based ink and post consumer paper stock.

The calendar is designed with a french fold binding. After the month has finished the user can tear perforated page fold to reveal additional information, spaces to write useful notes. The calendar becomes an eco-notebook and the use is extended.



Daily calendar

This calendar features 2970 daily pages. Each page recommends an action.

When the day is over the page becomes a post-it note that can be reused to suggest the actions to others.



Guerilla activities

Water rising

Certain cities could face dramatic water rising problems.

Simple, bold information graphics would be placed in strategic points indicating the predicted water level after the tipping point is reached. This would create awareness quickly and effectively.



Postcards

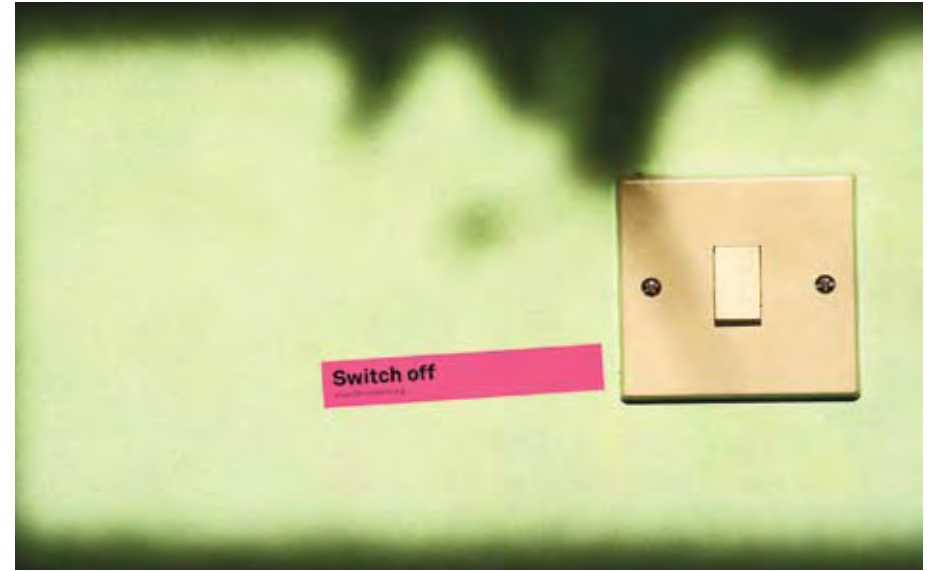
Traditional postcards with surreal disaster predicting visions will inform tourists in Venice of the consequences of their apathy. They would be covertly placed in postcard stands guerrilla marketing style.



Stickers

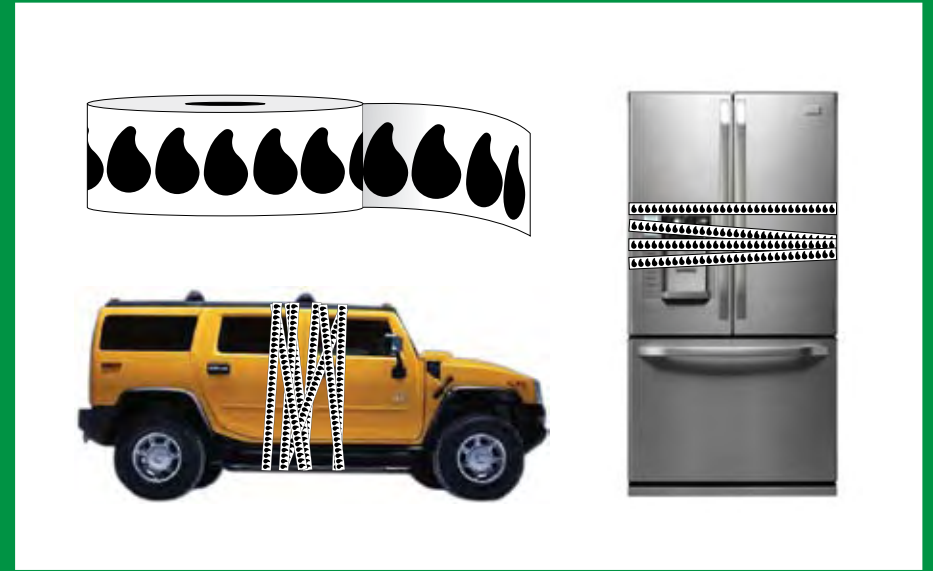
Simple downloadable sticker kits would enable guerrilla activities.

This would encourage people to make statements about the way we live and the sustainability of our lifestyles, in everyday environments.



Consumption tape

Rolls of 'consumption' tape, printed with black droplets, each representing 10kg of CO₂, would be used as a quick way of marking the carbon consumption of everyday things. Depending on how the activist choose to use this, it could be a friendly reminder or a disruption.



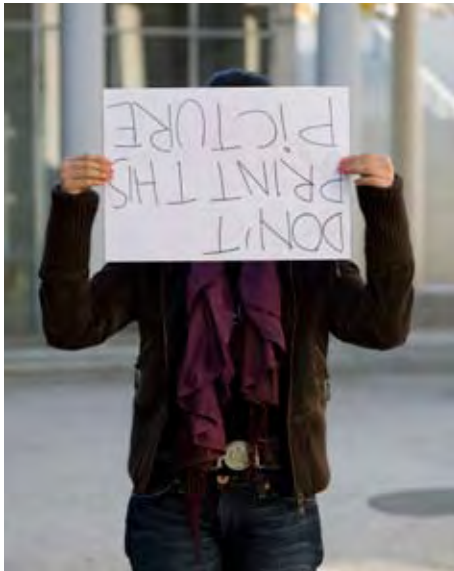
Buoys

Life-size buoys would be installed around Venice. They would indicate in words the tourist attractions lying beneath the water. This installation would remind us not only of the environmental impact but also what cultural losses would occur.









99 MONTHS
was conceived
and realized by
the students of
Fabrica in the
thomas.matthews
workshop, led by
Sophie Thomas.



Max Bruinsma commenting on the workshop results.



INTERVIEW

Sophie Thomas, interviewed by Károl de Rueda

thomas.matthews is a successful communication design agency established in 1997 that believes in good design and sustainability. As a graphic designer, what motivated you to take such direction?

I have always said that as a designer, this is something that I have always been passionate about. It was pretty much the way I was brought up: to be quite political, very vocal about my opinions and to understand and have the knowledge about them. When I was doing my degree, that wasn't part of my agenda so much. It became much more part of it when I went to college to do my MA and I spent two years thinking about what I really wanted to do with my skill set. Then I started collaborating with Kristine Matthews. We found out that because of our complementary skills and our very similar life agendas, we could do something really powerful. Then, our work and lives started to enforce sustainability.

You have ten years working with a sustainable philosophy. How hard was it at the beginning to deal with clients and the new idea of creating "green" design. How difficult is to educate them?

For the beginning, the clients that Kristine and I wanted to work with were very much

focused on sustainability, so, the first few projects we did were very much based on who they were. As we started to grow with the practice, we came up with certain rules about our work, like using post consumer papers, talking to our printers about how they use their processes, thinking about alternative materials as well. Those things became part of the way we work. But because we set the agenda in the first place with projects such as "No Shop," or "What comes around goes around," the clients came by themselves. What was harder for us was the fact that the materials we wanted to use were not necessarily available at that time; now it's much easier to say to a client: "use post consumer paper for this piece of print, it will save your carbon footprint" because now you can calculate your carbon emission footprint and also that paper has really good quality and there is not difference, particularly in price either. So it's much easier for us to persuade our clients, to talk and to re-educate them.

We find an incredible variety of materials and different technologies out there, but they are not necessarily pro-ecology. Is this, in any way, a limitation for a sustainable designer?



I have never seen that as a limitation. It has never limited our work in any way. What it does do is that it makes you think more naturally, more creatively about the solutions you want to present to the client. Also, designers become responsible to make suppliers to look for other materials and alternatives.

Once you decide you change your lifestyle and start to preach about sustainability, how do you deal with the public pressure in a world where it is not always possible to be ‘green’?

It's about degrees on what you can do, and making steps; what I intend to do in how I live and work. The two don't have a line between them, so I go home and yes, I recycle my rubbish, I have a bicycle, I live in a very heat efficient house, but then I don't want to go to work and do a very unsustainable practice. The two are connected, but you have to understand your limitations. You don't have the control over some things; there are other things you can do like putting pressure by writing a letter to your government. It's about levels of degrees and the fact that we all are humans as well. Its hard though, we get a lot of criticism, but thomas.matthews is very open about

discussion so at least we can voice our arguments.

A public voice that preaches about a cause needs to follow it. It's a big commitment because you represent an image.

There are people who are incredibly sustainable in their lifestyle. I try to be that. I am not incredibly sustainable. I do the best I can, I try to be very efficient, I try to be sustainable to the level that I can be but what I aim to do is to try better that every time, set myself targets and then try to succeed step by step, because I live in a city and there are several things I can't control in such a place.

Is it important to create a sustainable culture, for example, in schools?

Its incredibly important because I see future generations of designers as social agents of change. Graphic designers have to realize this responsibility. If they don't, or if they don't understand it, they can't change the way they work. People also have to understand that they need personal lifestyle decisions, what they want to fight for and what not. For me, sustainability is such a crucial issue and climate change is everybody's problem;

we have to start changing our patterns, the way we do things. We all, people and designers, have to make radical changes to the way that we work.

Designers and all professionals need to find a different way to work without the old wasteful technologies. I can only speak for communication design as an individual because this is my area of knowledge, but yes, everything, everybody has something they should change and they need to develop. New partnerships and collaborations need to be set up between chemists and philosophers and biologists and carmakers, all these people that create, all the industries, the corporations, the governments. All the design industries need to connect and find new solutions.

Sophie, do you believe in statistics?

It depends where they come from, but I believe in their power. When you look at them, for instance, somebody tells you we only have 99 months until the tipping point, your really don't understand, but I believe in the visual communication of that statistic as a vehicle for telling people what is going on. They are very useful tools for explaining positions.

What do you have to say to those young

graphic designers that are trying to work sustainable but they also need to make a profit?

I will say that there is not a fight between the two. If profit is about creating wealth for one person, then there is no connection. But if profit is about creating a community of designers or studio where the wealth can be spread out and it makes everyone happy, then I think there is not an argument between the two. There is a balancing scale. Our studio has been running for ten years and we don't make massive profits, but we make enough to pass it on to everybody, to support the studio and support the fantastic work that comes out of it. We do sustainable design and it pays very well. I think if you don't do it as a designer you will suffer because it is the future of design.

You have been around Fabrica for a couple of days now. Is there any suggestion for the people, the building, for everybody to follow and contribute for the green cause?

I think the designers here have a great opportunity, there are so many resources around them; library, technology, people with other skill sets, real life projects, so I am sure that students understand this privilege and they make the most

of it. To Fabrica, I will like to see some of the ideas we have been working on, put into practice, because there are so many good ones in the 99 months project, which was very hard; it asked for a lot of concentration for five days and I threw so many devastating statistics at you. Its really rewarding for me to see how, now as a designer, you can use your choices as your tools. Sustainability is getting there, and that is fantastic.

Sophie Thomas, biography

After completing an honorary degree in graphic design at Central Saint Martins in 1995 Sophie went on to study a two-year Masters degree in communication design at the Royal College of Art. It was here that she met Kristine Matthews and began to collaborate on communication design projects, the first being an installation of a week's worth of waste from the canteen and initiating a college wide recycling programme.

Following graduation Sophie went to work at The Body Shop design studio until 1998 when thomas.matthews was officially set up by the two partners. Since then the company has grown to be an award winning practice of ten people with a shared passion for bringing outstanding design and communication to important issues.

Over the past nine years, as a director and joint owner of thomas.matthews Sophie has led and delivered a vast array of projects across the world. These range from the highly acclaimed "No Shop" campaign for Friends of the Earth in 1997 to the £15 million interactive Space galleries for the Royal Observatory Greenwich which opened this Spring. thomas.matthews have completed in excess of 400 jobs over nine years for

a very wide range of clients. The most enjoyable work has involved interesting collaborations with artists, architects and engineers.

Throughout the ten years of experience in the communication design industry Sophie has strived to practice a number of core principles and to make sure that they are instilled in those that work with thomas.matthews. These include working to a set of highly ethical and sustainable principles and bringing elements of humour and innovation into all the work.

The company has been featured in numerous books and publications and was listed as one of the 40 top international design practices headed by principals under 30 years old in 2000. The work has been featured recently in this April's sustainable issue of Creative Review that highlighted our new mini- publication "ten ways design can combat climate change". In 2005 the company was selected by Japanese Esquire magazine as one of a handful of global companies producing original and thought-provoking work. Esquire dedicated the magazine to the subject of graphics as a weapon in the battle to promote ethical issues and thomas.matthews was given the front cover.

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Fabrica is the communication
research center of the
Benetton Group.

FABRICA WORKSHOPS

Environmental, Social, Relational

The title of this workshop and lecture program is rooted in Fabrica's heritage of cross-cultural creativity for social concern. Its precise definition however emerges directly from a recent debate between Fabrica's researchers that had the specific objective to identify common interest platforms for future studies.

Environmental, social and relational themes are central to human ecology, a transdisciplinary field using holistic approaches in the search for harmony between people and their natural and created environment but mainly between people and their societies.

Along these lines Fabrica wants to investigate, experiment, catalyze, document and disseminate how contemporary communication, design and artistic expression can contribute to helping people solve problems and enhance human potential, within near and far environments.

The workshop series will bring to Fabrica international creatives from all fields of communication, design and technology who share a common desire to apply innovation to social improvement.