

# Design Reviewed



*Design Reviewed* is a new biannual publication devoted to experiential writing around design and its users. It is published by the team behind *Disegno: A Quarterly Journal of Design*. Each issue of *Design Reviewed* contains ten essays in which writers get hands-on with design and its various manifestations in the world. The texts are not qualitative assessments of their subjects, but rather personal reflections on design and the contexts in which it operates.

In contrast to *Disegno's* journal format, *Design Reviewed* is a smaller, more book-like publication, which takes its cue from publications such as field guides, jotters and technical manuals. It is a publication designed to be portable and handy, with a cream dust jacket to help protect it during journeys. While *Disegno* will be reserved for long-form reporting, in-depth interviews, and emerging project stories, *Design Reviewed* will be a space for reflection on design as its users experience it.

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I wonder who Affleck thought the audience for his film would be. I sparingly evoke the concept of "nostalgia" to begin looking for an answer. A longing to return to a better period, perhaps? Yet it's hard to see how the 80s and 90s were better than today, unless we see 1984 as a clear inflection point, forward from which everything slowly goes to shit. From this



Designing the Air Jordan (Image courtesy of Amazon Studios).

perspective, those were better times only when compared to the collective angst of today, amplified by hyperconnectivity and information echo-chambers. The more we know today, the greater our fear of a future of extremes grows. The 80s were a time of comfortable ignorance for the American middle class, a luxury they no longer have.

In order to grasp how a film like this could ever be made, I think it's important to look at the origin story of the script by Alex Convery. Written during lockdown and inspired by the Netflix documentary *The Last Dance*, about the rise of Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls, Convery thought that a story about the Nike company as an underdog who signs the Adidas-loving rookie, thus changing the face of sports marketing forever, would make for a compelling film. It is his first script to ever get produced and was modified by Affleck and Damon in the revision process. According to a *Hollywood Reporter* interview with Affleck, the original script didn't include two of the most important Black characters involved in the deal: the Nike executive Howard White and Jordan's mother Deloris. Affleck added these

characters and their stories to the script after discussing with MJ himself, claiming to significantly change the scope of the film.

Affleck contends that only after discussing with Jordan did he understand what the film was really about, that "it isn't about Nike," but about the Jordans themselves. Then nothing really explains why 90 per cent of the film is set in the Nike headquarters or else following Matt Damon's character Sonny Vaccaro, one of the company's marketing executives. Maybe Affleck wanted to make a movie about how Jordan's mother Deloris deftly out-negotiated three major corporations to secure a share of the profits – a truly disruptive event in the history of competitive sports. It essentially funnelled billions of dollars away from Nike to Jordan, and set an important precedent. Unfortunately for Affleck, that isn't the film he made. Deloris's character and the most important human drama of the story was completely omitted from the first version of the script, only to be unskillfully added during revision.

Instead of making a film that centres around the love and intelligence of a mother for a gifted son, Affleck and Damon made a film about Nike and its executives in the 1980s, casting themselves in the principle roles. Perhaps the duo saw an opportunity in reproducing "North America 1984" as a time when a couple of daring white men could really make a difference in the world – a buddy movie with corporate America substituting for the Wild West. The film glorifies risk taking, but only when the risk is potentially losing a cushy job and perhaps a couple hundred thousand bucks for a billion-dollar corporation. The plot rides on Sonny's obsession with choosing the right young athlete to bet on. It concludes by leveraging all of the marketing weight of a mega company to create an insanely profitable worldwide fashion phenomenon. In an important way, this could only happen in the 1980s. A unique moment in history – a confluence of Cold War driven consumer culture and raw American talent – that generated massive profits.

You have to admit that the 1980s were interesting. We were collectively on the brink of mutual nuclear annihilation and Nintendo was all the rage. The recent 80s revival film *Terri's* takes this seeming paradox to the next level. Unlike *Air*, *Terri's* does what it sets out to do. It tells the improbable and unknown story of the distribution wars for the famous video game. Instead of taking a promising premise and smothering it with uninspired writing like *Air*, it takes an unlikely premise for a film and

## IN PRAISE OF PUBLIC TOILETS

Words: Fûô Koshimura



Image courtesy of Satoshi Nagata and The Nippon Foundation.

SYSTEM The Tokyo Toilet

Food. Safety. Hospitality. Trains that run on time. Whenever I meet visitors around Tokyo, they invariably remark on the services and facilities that the city offers to meet our most basic needs. To my amusement, they also tend to mention the greatness of the public toilets here. We spoiled residents may take these restrooms for granted, but their abundance, cleanliness and design allow us to move about the city with ease, confident that there will always be a place to go when on the go.

In some ways, today's Tokyo echoes the 1985 experimental project led by famed architect Toyo Ito: *Pao 1 - Dwelling for Tokyo Nomad Women*. Working in conjunction with architect Kazuyo Sejima, Ito envisioned compact, tent-like residences that would provide basic shelter, while the city would then supply the infrastructure for the rest of our needs: eating, shopping, socialising, and so on. Minimal housing for the city had been discussed since the 1960s because of the intense densification of postwar Tokyo, with Kisho Kurokawa's iconic (and recently demolished) Nakagin Capsule Tower<sup>1</sup> for example, targeting the salarymen who would spend most of their time working at the office. Ito and Sejima's ideas, meanwhile, were a response to new roles that opened up for Japanese women in the bubble economy of the 1980s, enabling more significant female participation in the workforce and, also, in consumption. This concept of delegating traditionally domestic functions to the city still resonates. After all, Tokyo is a metropolis of tiny apartments with even tinier kitchens, of a transport system that is known for its dense capillarity, of 24/7 convenience stores, of inviting bars and restaurants, of a leave-your-purse-on-the-table-to-secure-a-seat level of safety. Why stay home if you don't have to?

Easily accessible public toilets are an essential part of this urban fabric, and Tokyo has no shortage of them. A ranking released in January 2023 by Q&S Supplies, a UK-based bathroom fittings and accessories retailer,

found that Paris allegedly boasts the highest number of public loos per square kilometre in the world, ranked among 69 of the world's most popular destination cities. I confess that I was a bit shocked not to find Tokyo at the top of the list. Taking a closer look at the study, I noticed that Japan's capital wasn't even mentioned. Well, given that Tokyo, technically, is not a city – it's a prefecture comprising 23 wards (or districts), each with its own city office – I searched for its most popular constituent "cities", such as Shibuya, home of the famous "scramble" crossing, or Shinjuku, which features the world's busiest train station. None were mentioned in the ranking. Considering that Osaka, Kyoto and Sapporo were all listed, Tokyo's absence almost hurt my feelings. As such, I decided to crunch some numbers myself and see how it compares to the Parisian toiletries. Based on Navitime, Japan's popular navigation app, there are 186 public toilets in the city of Shibuya, giving us an average of 12.3 bathrooms per square kilometre. If we broaden the search to Tokyo's 23 wards, we still have a solid score of 8. According to the toilet study, the French capital has 6.72. Touché.

Those calculations don't even include "off-street" toilets, as Clara Greed, a professor of urban planning at UWE Bristol, calls them. "Public toilets" may be defined as comprising both traditional 'on-street', local authority public toilets," she writes, "and 'off-street' toilets to which the public has right of access, for example in restaurants, shopping malls, and department stores, which, together, may be defined as 'away from home toilets'." In Japan, this second category covers train and subway stations, convenience stores, department stores, entertainment complexes, office buildings and so on. Their design varies from plain white walls, to marble countertops or New York-style tiling, but one can count on them being free of charge, safe and clean. Finding the flush button can be a challenge among the myriad functions of Japan's famous "washlet" toilets: seat heating, spray intensity and direction, dryer, noise cancelling, and emergency this last one turned what should

<sup>1</sup> See "Obsolescent Masculinity" in *Diogenes* #2.



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