



I'M GABE HONGSDUSIT, AND I'M A VISUAL DESIGNER AT *THE MARKUP*, AN INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM NONPROFIT THAT CHALLENGES TECHNOLOGY TO SERVE THE PUBLIC GOOD.

MY JOB HERE IS TO FIGURE OUT HOW WE CAN BEST USE VISUAL IMAGERY TO TELL OUR STORIES.

TAKE THIS STORY ABOUT A SCORING SYSTEM IN LOS ANGELES THAT DETERMINED WHO GOT **SUBSIDIZED HOUSING**.



BRIAN BRITIGAN

THIS ILLUSTRATION TIED TOGETHER LOTS OF ABSTRACT CONCEPTS THAT DIDN'T NATURALLY HAVE VISUALS:

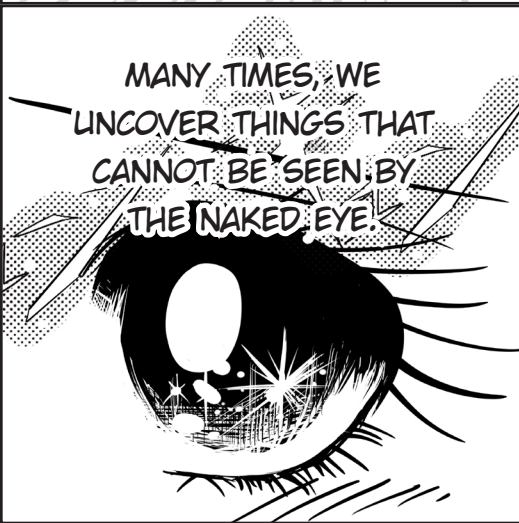
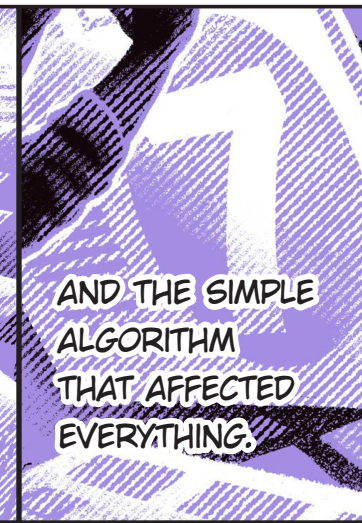
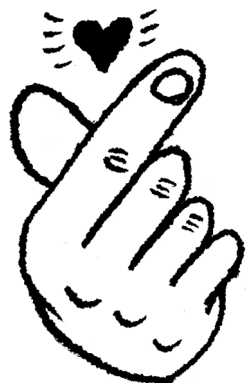


ILLUSTRATION
HELPS US
COMMUNICATE
THE UNSEEN...



TO HELP PEOPLE UNDERSTAND OUR STORIES,
WE USE FOUR THEMES AND MOTIFS:

HANDS



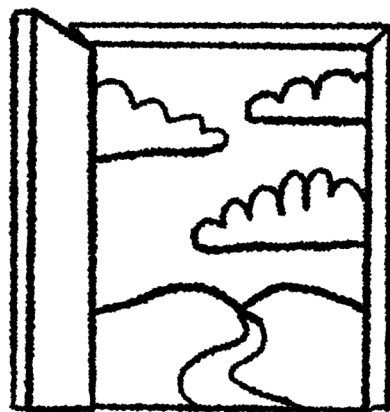
HUMOR AND
POP CULTURE



CHARACTERS

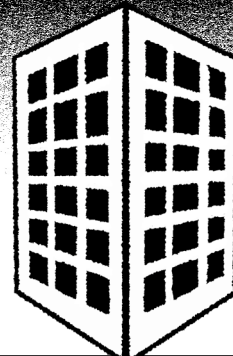


WORLD-BUILDING



THERE AREN'T A LOT OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR
PHOTOGRAPHY WHEN YOU REPORT ON TECH...

GRAY BUILDING IN
SILICON VALLEY



SENATOR/
TECH OLIGARCH
(USUALLY WHITE
AND MALE)

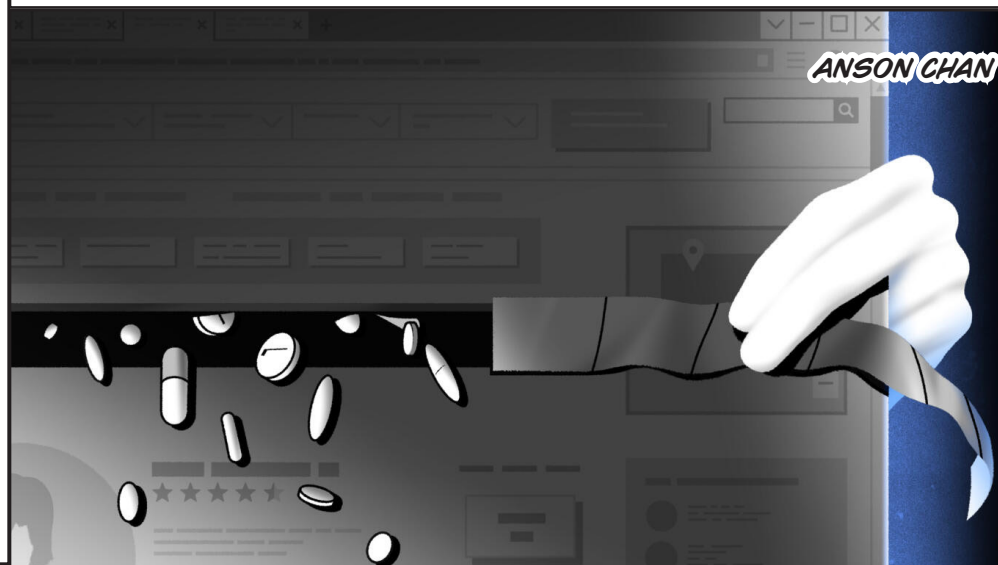


WHISTLEBLOWER
WHO DOESN'T
WANT TO BE
PHOTOGRAPHED



HANDS HELP US SHOW THE PEOPLE BEHIND INSTITUTIONS,
COMPANIES, AND TECHNOLOGIES. THE TECH DOESN'T EXIST
WITHOUT THEM, AND IT'S THE DECISIONS MADE BY PEOPLE
THAT WE WANT TO HOLD ACCOUNTABLE.

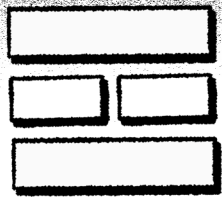
ANSON CHAN



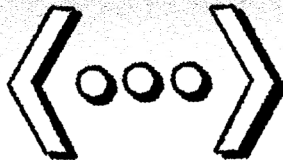
OTHER TIMES, THE SUBJECT MATTER IN OUR STORIES ISN'T THAT VISUALLY COMPELLING.

SOMETIMES WE INTEGRATE DIGITAL ELEMENTS INTO OUR ILLUSTRATIONS AND IT WORKS WELL.

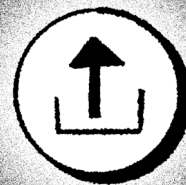
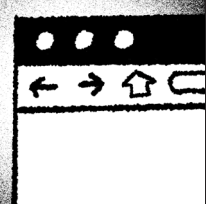
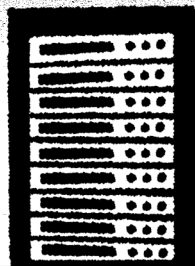
USER INTERFACE
(UI) FORM



BACKEND CODE

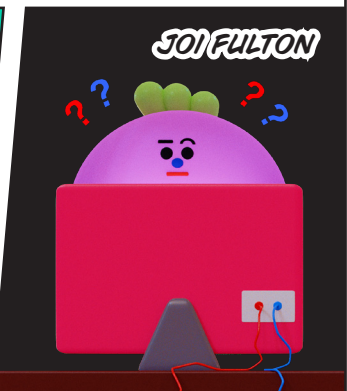
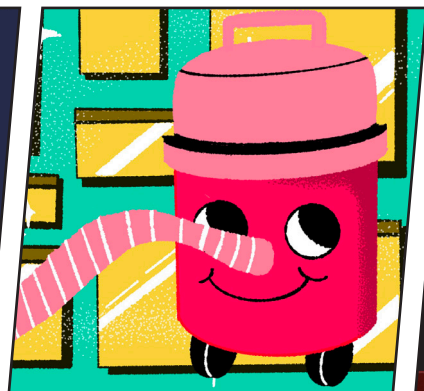
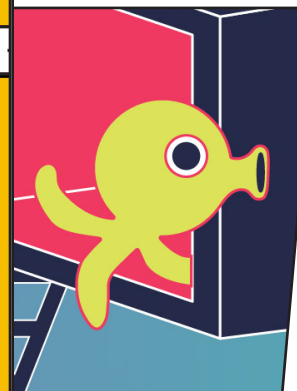
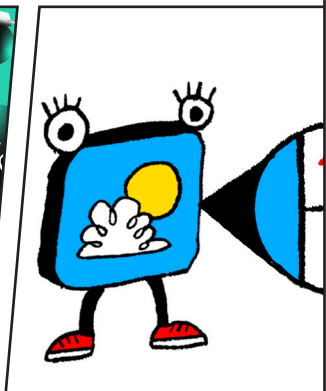
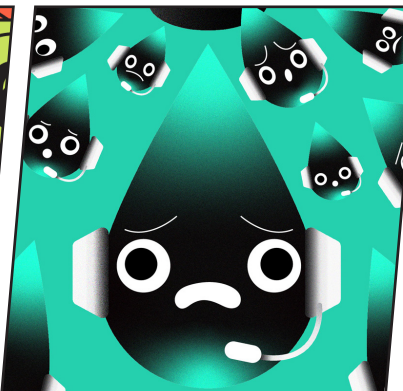
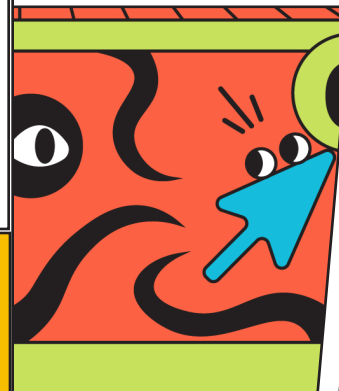
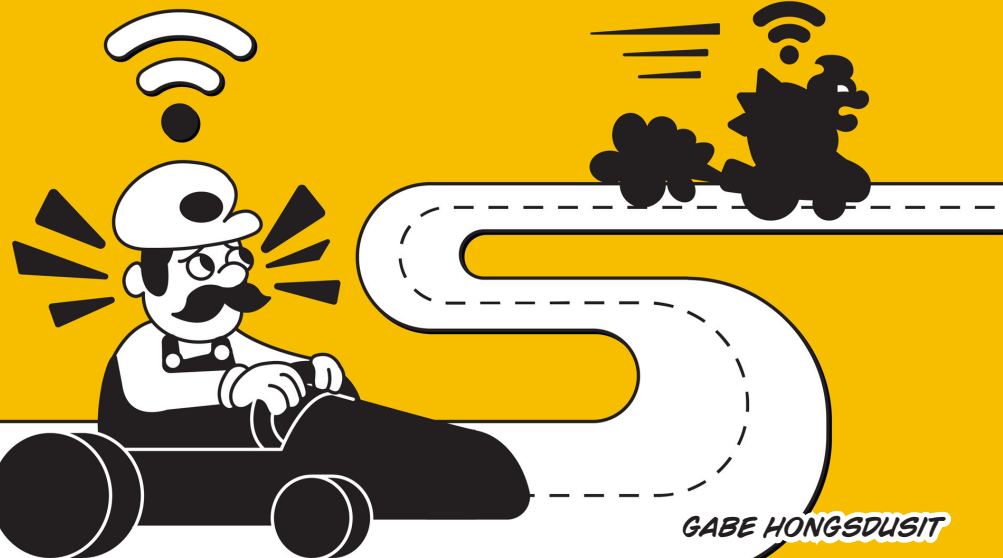


COMPUTER
SERVERS



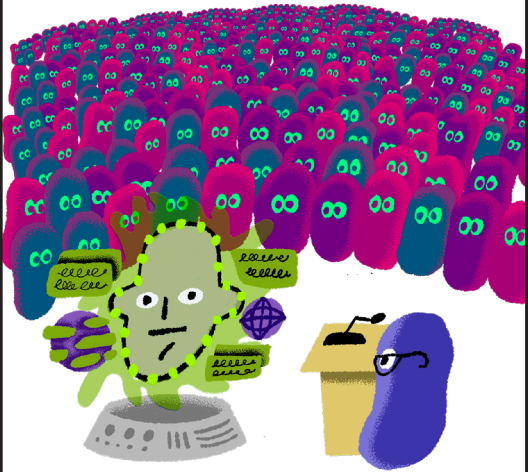
A STRAIGHT-UP IMAGE OF ANY OF THOSE THINGS WON'T MAKE YOU WANT TO CLICK ON THE STORY. SO, WE OFTEN USE HUMOR AND CULTURAL REFERENCES TO MAKE ART THAT'S INTERESTING. OUR FOCUS ON TECH ACCOUNTABILITY DOESN'T MEAN THAT WE CAN'T HAVE FUN.

BUT REPEATED ILLUSTRATIONS OF BROWSER WINDOWS GET STALE REAL FAST. CREATING CHARACTERS HELPS FRESHEN UP OUR AESTHETIC (AND LIKE HUMOR, CAN MAKE OUR WORK MORE FUN AND ACCESSIBLE).



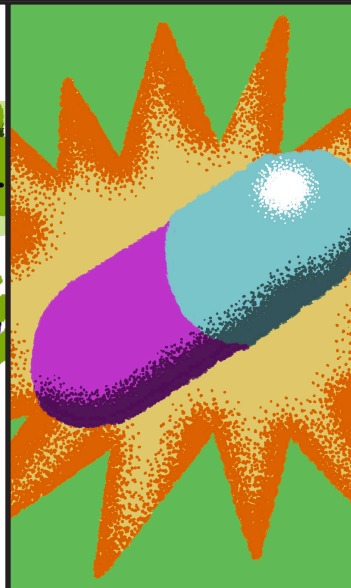
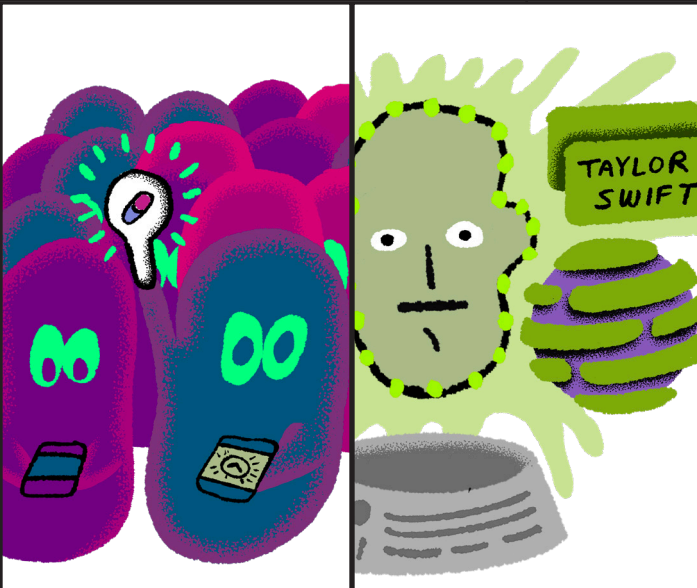
WE REPORT A LOT ON PRACTICES THAT HAPPEN ON A SCREEN.

TAKE THIS STORY ABOUT DIGITAL AD AUCTIONS, WHICH HAPPEN ONLINE WITHIN MILLISECONDS.



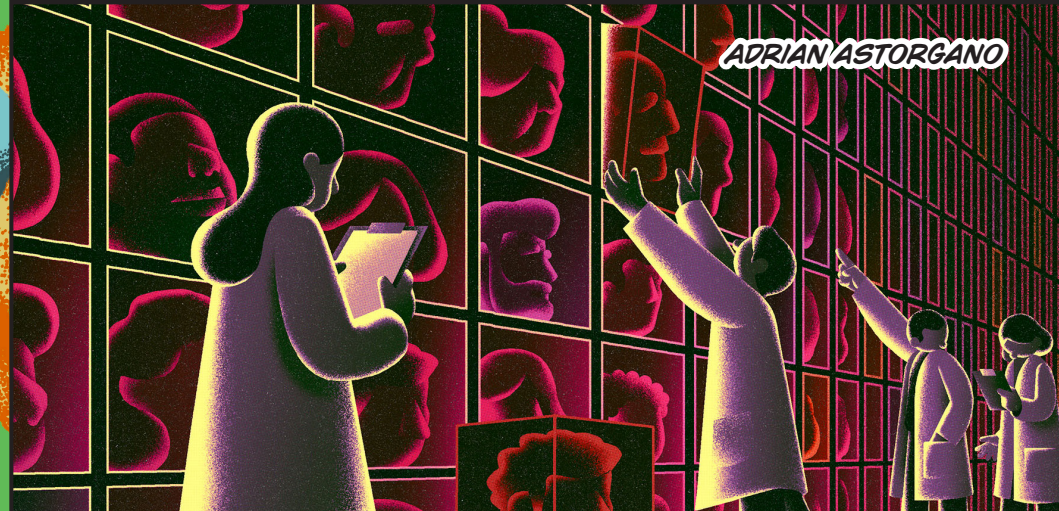
ILLUSTRATIONS FOR TOPICS LIKE THESE ARE OFTEN CONCEPTUAL STOCK IMAGES. *BORING.*

INSTEAD, WE USED ILLUSTRATIONS TO CREATE A NEW WORLD THAT HELPS YOU SEE THE NARRATIVE: A CROWD OF JELLY BEAN CHARACTERS BIDDING IN AN UNDERGROUND AUCTION.



THE POWER OF ILLUSTRATION IS THAT YOU'RE NOT LIMITED TO THE PHYSICAL WORLD...

YOU CAN CONJURE NEW SURROUNDINGS THAT HELP COMMUNICATE A NARRATIVE.

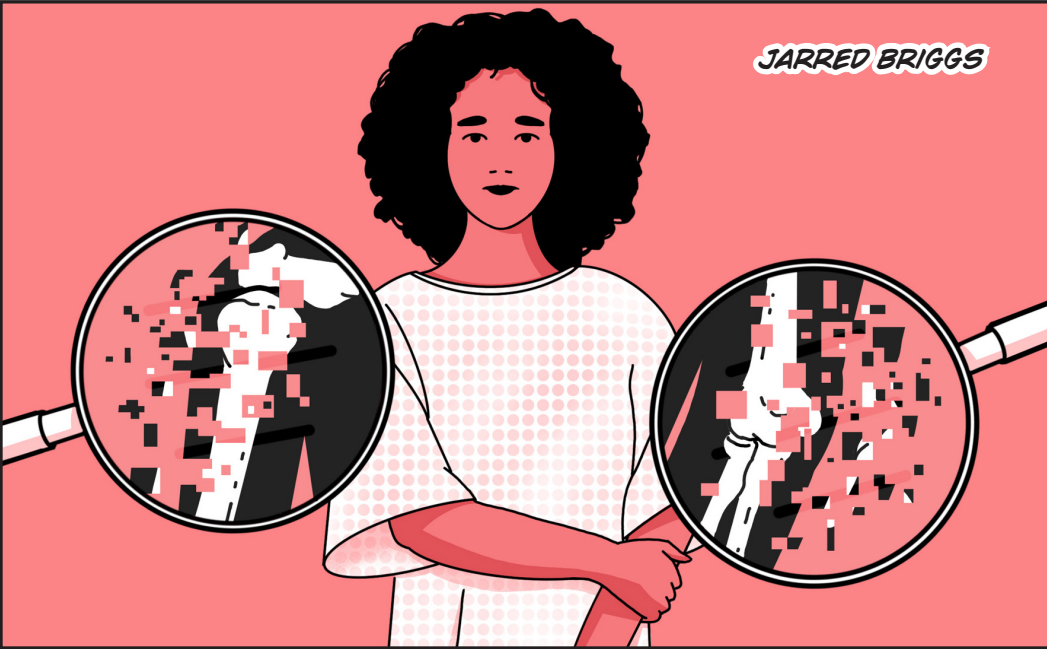


THIS APPROACH ALSO APPLIES TO AI. WHEN WE THINK OF ILLUSTRATING AI, ROBOTS IMMEDIATELY COME TO MIND...



BUT ROBOTS OBSCURE THE FACT THAT AI IS CREATED AND USED BY *HUMANS*.

JARRED BRIGGS



JULIEN POSTURE, WHO WRITES A WEEKLY NEWSLETTER ON VISUAL CULTURE, WROTE THIS SPOT-ON QUOTE:

"FROM ABUSE OF UNDERPAID LABOUR IN POST-COLONIAL SETTINGS TO THE OBJECTIFICATION OF PEOPLE'S LIVES AND WORK AS 'DATA' TO THE EXTRACTION OF RARE MINERALS TO POWER INCREASINGLY DEMANDING COMPUTATIONAL NEEDS, AI RUNS NOT ON SCI-FI FUTURISTIC UTOPIA BUT ON THE APPROPRIATION OF TODAY'S WORLD'S MATERIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES."

IT CAN FEEL LIKE WE'RE LIVING IN END-TIMES FOR ARTISTS WHEN AI, TRAINED ON IMAGES WITHOUT CONSENT FROM THEIR CREATORS, CAN CONJURE UP NEW IMAGES WITHIN SECONDS.

BUT OUR HOPE IS TO USE ILLUSTRATION TO HOLD *PEOPLE* AND THE DECISIONS THEY'VE MADE THROUGH AI AND OTHER FORMS OF TECHNOLOGY ACCOUNTABLE.

