# DESIGNING HUMANITARIAN FUTURES FOR ...........

# VIOLENCE AGAINST HUMANITARIANS



PHOTO CREDIT: ©ANNA LEANDER

## PASTS

Where necessary, relief personnel may form part of [the humanitarian] assistance provided in any relief action... *Such personnel shall be respected and protected.*

- *Article 71, Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions.*

## PRESENTS

- Between 2017-2020, attacks on humanitarian workers rose 50%;
- Humanitarian workers thus increasingly:
  - Focus on their own security, rely heavily on security technologies and adjust their activities to it.
  - Limit their contact to and interactions with the local humanitarian system;
  - Deploy, operate and withdraw paying scant attention to local humanitarian priorities.
- The lack of integration with the local system renders the continuity of care unsustainable when internationals withdraw feeding dissociation from and resentment of the internationals.
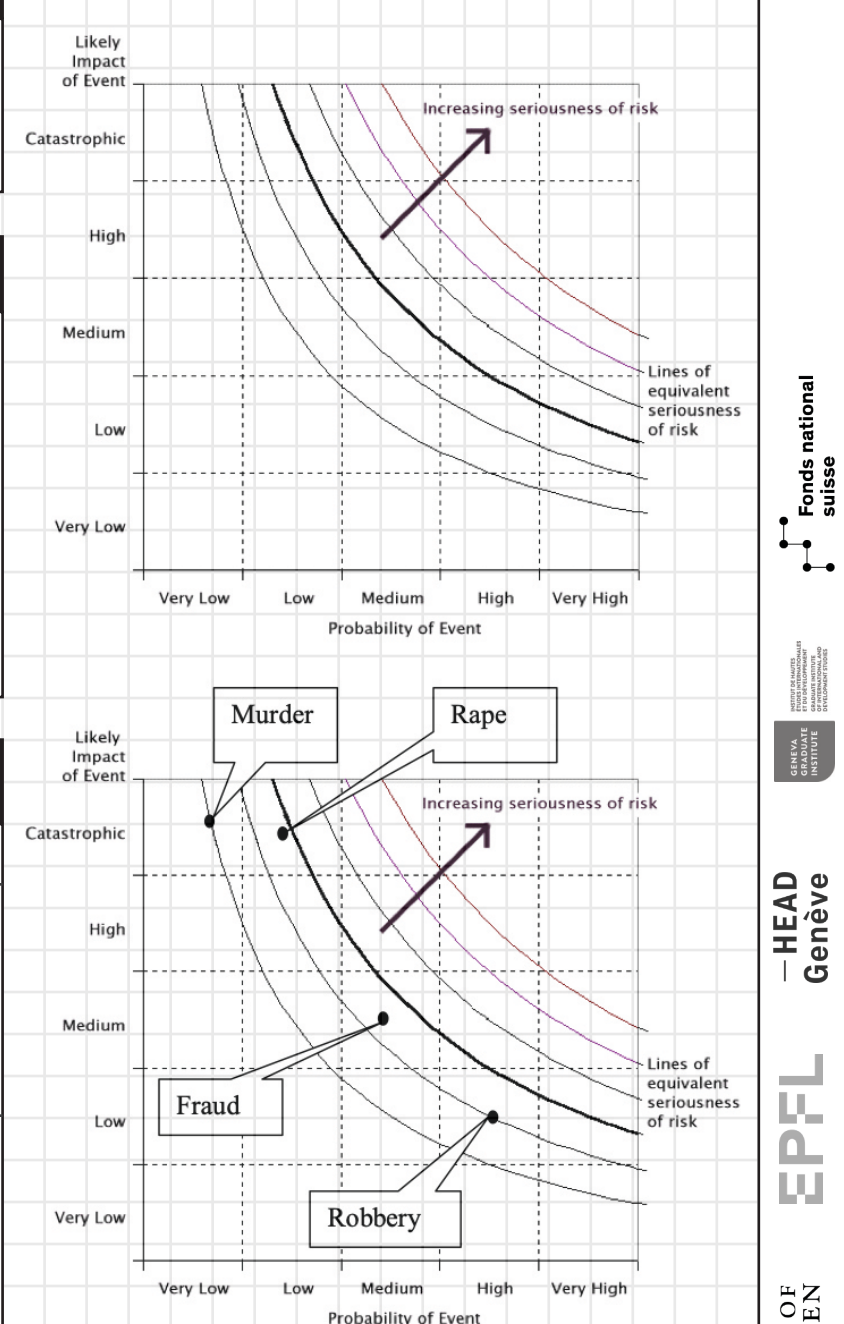
## FUTURES

### CRITICAL

Can technological interventions reconnect international and national humanitarians? Can they reduce the resort to alienating security? Can humanitarian technologies be sustainable after the internationals withdraw? Can a new aesthetics of humanitarian technologies lessen the significance of North-South divides in Humanitarianism?

### PRAGMATIC

How can humanitarians focus on technological alternatives to security when they face real risks and violence? How can technologies fostering a continuity of care create security through solidarity? How can care technologies reconcile the needs of national and international humanitarians? How can they be sustainable for the vulnerable populations they care for?

### SPECULATIVE

The growth of humanitarianism is a political failure. Ultimately, a world without the need for humanitarianism is a better world. Is it possible to design a future without humanitarianism? Is technology a hope or a hindrance in imagining that future? And is it desirable, dangerous, or even naïve to imagine it?



ABOVE: THREAT IMPACT CHARTS DISTRIBUTED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTION.
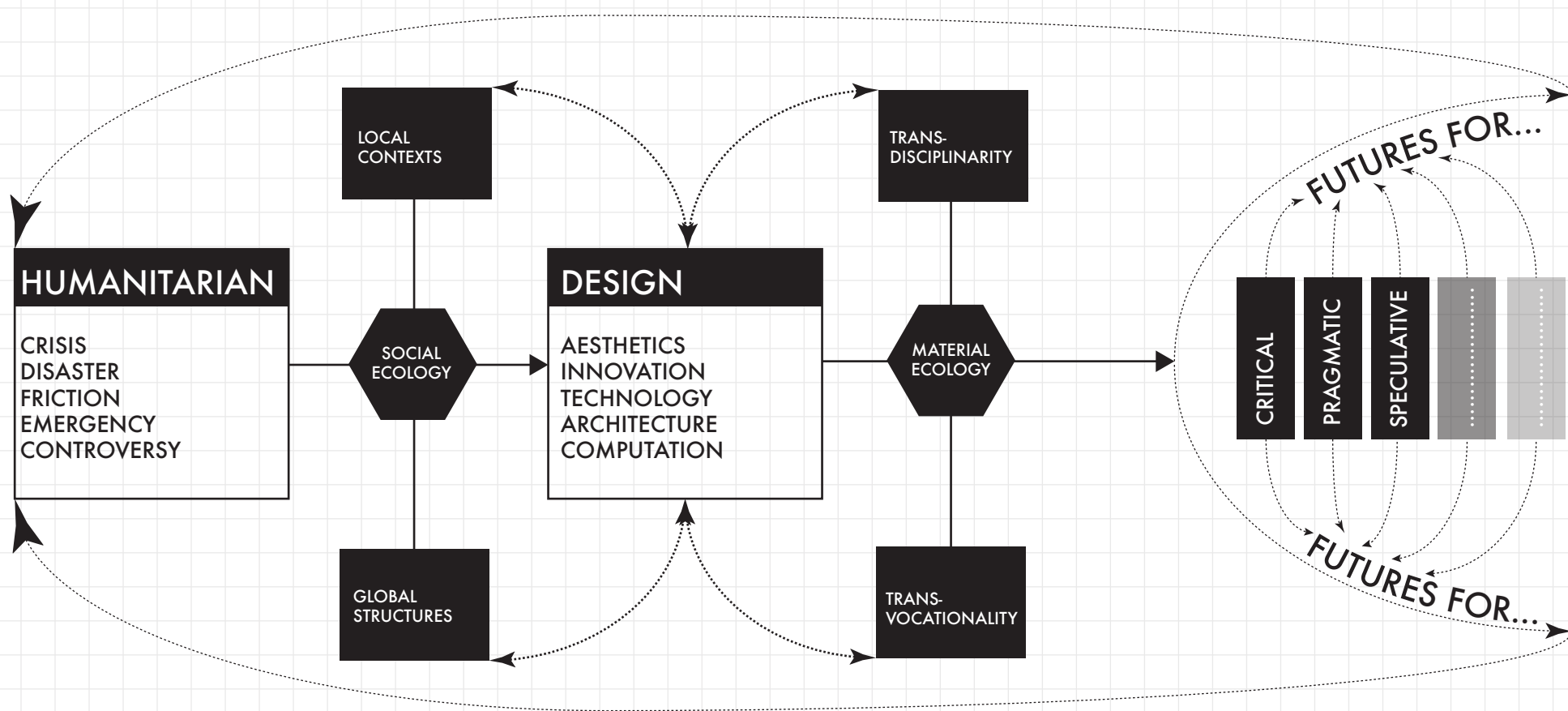
# WHAT'S THE FUTURE OF HUMANITARIAN DESIGN ?

## H U ———————————— D

THE FUTURE OF HUMANITARIAN DESIGN (HUD) IS A RESEARCH PLATFORM EXPLORING CRITICAL YET PRAGMATIC MATERIAL, TECHNOLOGICAL, AND ARCHITECTURAL INTERVENTIONS FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION ACROSS GLOBAL AND LOCAL HUMANITARIAN SPACES.

## WHY?

Humanitarianism is in trouble. The crises it addresses are now more complex, protracted, and politicised. But political forces are increasingly unsympathetic, failing to adequately support humanitarian actors. Within this context, humanitarianism is undergoing a dramatic shift as it accelerates the integration of technology and 'design' practices into its work. This also faces difficulties. The integration of — for instance — machine learning techniques into humanitarian action is criticised for further distancing humanitarians from beneficiaries, reducing human beings to data-points, simply pixels on a satellite image. Equally, partnerships with commercial actors to improve — say — the architectural design of refugee shelters are criticised for subjecting humanitarianism to market logics. Nonetheless, humanitarian design is here to stay, especially as a tactic for mitigating the socio-political challenges the field faces. The demand of the day is thus simple: to excavate a series of hidden — critical yet pragmatic, speculative yet functional — *futures for humanitarian design*.



LOCAL CONTEXTS

TRANS-DISCIPLINARITY

**HUMANITARIAN**
CRISIS
DISASTER
FRICTION
EMERGENCY
CONTROVERSY

SOCIAL ECOLOGY

**DESIGN**
AESTHETICS
INNOVATION
TECHNOLOGY
ARCHITECTURE
COMPUTATION

MATERIAL ECOLOGY

FUTURES FOR...

CRITICAL
PRAGMATIC
SPECULATIVE

GLOBAL STRUCTURES

TRANS-VOCATIONALITY

FUTURES FOR...

## WHAT?

HUD explores humanitarian design through a radical transdisciplinary and transvocational ethos, synthesizing the insights of social scientists, architects, development engineers, and practitioners. We focus our research on violence prevention in three contexts: detention settings; situations of forced mobility, and aid compounds. We do so with a global perspective but conduct core collaborative research in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Colombia.

HUD's ultimate goal is to design material, technological, and architectural interventions that transcend the binaries that currently divide humanitarian design. Namely, we seek to develop interventions that are neither entirely critical nor entirely pragmatic, neither entirely politicized nor entirely depoliticized, neither entirely global ('one size fits all') nor entirely parochial. Instead, HUD seeks to open up different futures that disrupt such binaries in humanitarian design.

## WHO?

HUD's core research is led through a collaboration between the Geneva Graduate Institute, the University of Copenhagen, HEAD – Genève, and the EssentialTech Lab at EPFL Lausanne. HUD's work also integrates humanitarian practitioners from leading organizations and key partnerships with research institutions in Colombia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Our work is supported by a Swiss National Science Foundation *Sinergia* grant.

HUD is also cultivating a wider research collective drawing on the insights of scholars, practitioners, and civil society groups who push the boundaries of humanitarian design. Indeed, HUD is an open and experimental initiative. We embrace an agile approach to integrating the needs of diverse, sometimes conflictual, stakeholders, as well as an openness to taking risks and shifting directions to better explore the many possible futures for humanitarian design.

## WWW.HUMANITARIAN.DESIGN