BRICOLAGE WITHIN THE IMPERIAL DIVIDE: INTRODUCTION TO IFTIKHAR DADI AND ELIZABETH DADI'S *JUGAAD*

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Each of the prints collected in *Jugaad* consists of two distinct formal elements—a realistic image of what appears to be a piece of industrial machinery, and an abstract geometrical shape that wraps around and looks like a mathematically reduced lace or web, one of those Möbius inversions in which a plane is turned inside out in three-dimensional space. These patterns are based on harmonic geometric shapes, and their abstract forms also evoke the long European tradition of *guilloche* engraving on metal surfaces, according to the artists who crafted these arresting images, Elizabeth Dadi and Iftikhar Dadi. *Guilloche* patterns are often overlaid on bank notes as an imprimatur that guarantees their authenticity and value. The delicacy, even ephemerality, of these swirling structures offers a sharp contrast to the heaviness and solidity of the pieces of machinery. But what exactly is the relation between the physicality and concreteness of the latter and the abstraction and airiness of the former? Each of the prints also comes numbered (in Indo-Persian numerals) and is identified as a "plate," the English word being written in Urdu (or, rather, Indo-Persian) script. What exactly is the relation of the textual element to the image itself? Does the text merely point to the image from the outside, or is it located inside the image's frame?

Jugaad is a north-Indian word often translated as "hack" or "workaround," and it refers to a frugal, nonstandard innovation or solution to

a problem posed by a standard (and, by implication, foreign) technology. It is now actually a concept in management theory, a way of talking about vernacular and makeshift solutions to specific economic or technological problems, both in the developing world and beyond.[1] Claude Lévi-Strauss once argued that, unlike the modern scientific attitude toward nature, the "mythical thought" of premodern societies should be understood as a kind of "intellectual bricolage," a mode of thinking about the world that, while clearly less successful than science in the manipulation and control of nature, could nevertheless "reach brilliant unforeseen results in the intellectual plane." Like the bricoleur, a tinkerer and jack of all trades, this mode of thought makes do with "whatever is at hand" to offer provisional and makeshift answers to the mysteries of the world.[2] In contrast to modern science, among whose basic procedures is conceptual abstraction, myth as bricolage is, Lévi-Strauss asserted, "a science of the concrete." *Jugaad*, we might say, is bricolage on the "practical" plane itself. It offers vernacular and provisional solutions to technical problems with the aid of objects readily at hand, rather than with repertoires acquired tailor-made for a specific purpose. Abjuring standardization, regulation, and abstraction, *jugaad* is thus in a strong sense a science of the concrete.

What, then, does it mean for the artists to assemble these prints alongside this specific set of associations? They seem to highlight *improvisation* as a basic orientation within and toward contemporary capitalism, as well as the play of concreteness and abstraction within it. In contrast to just a half century ago, much of the world's manufacturing now takes place in the countries of the Global South—broadly conceived, the very places once defined by the absence of modern industry. Frantz Fanon even argued that in the colonies, the manufactured commodity embodied the process of colonization.[3] In the contemporary, postcolonial world, commodity production is no longer linked in that way to the metropolis, but its logic is defined as much by *jugaad* as by rationalization. This *jugaad* economy inhabits vast swaths of urban landscapes in these formerly colonized nations, spilling out into the street from a million shopfront workshops. The prints reproduced here draw our attention to these social and economic worlds. They raise the fascinating question of the manner in which precapitalist modes of life

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1   The idea actually has a Wikipedia page of its own.

2   Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966), 17.

3   See Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press), 69–98.

exist within and alongside advanced capitalism. Branding, trademarks, and regimes of intellectual property remain largely vested in the advanced capitalist world, even as manufacturing has moved to regions where formal and informal modes of production are mutually imbricated. In the images of the Dadis' Project, the digitally generated abstractions seem to hover ethereally above and around the machines —whose images here are taken from hand-painted shop signs in Karachi, Lahore, and Mumbai—articulating the uncanny relation of the digital economy to industrial manufacturing.

Among the compelling questions of our times is whether and to what extent we now inhabit a fully integrated world. At its core, this is an economic idea based on the existence of a single world market. In addition, the SARS-COV-2 pandemic now has raised once again the old idea of the "microbial unification of the world."[4] But the response to the pandemic has also exposed the contradictions and conflicts of this supposedly integrated world—globalism versus nationalism, East versus West, rich versus poor, Global North versus Global South. The imagina-tive works presented here, which look like pages taken from some lost catalog of industrial machines written in a South Asian language, bring our attention to their ghostly digital specters, inviting us to confront the social and economic fissures of the contemporary world, the relation between the "advanced" and "backward" zones of global capitalism.

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4   See Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "Un concept: l'unification microbienne du monde (XVIe–XVIIe siècles)," *Revue suisse d'histoire* 23, no. 4 (1973): 627–96.
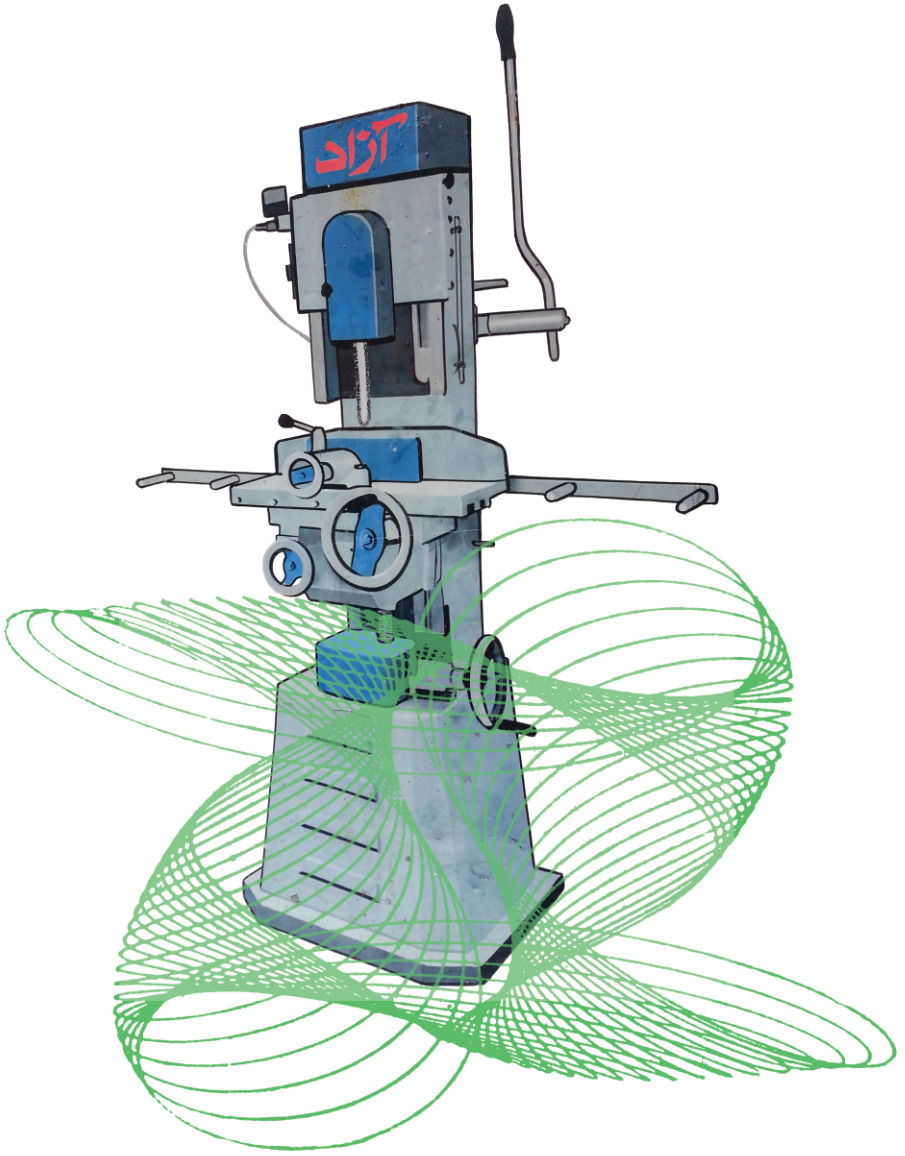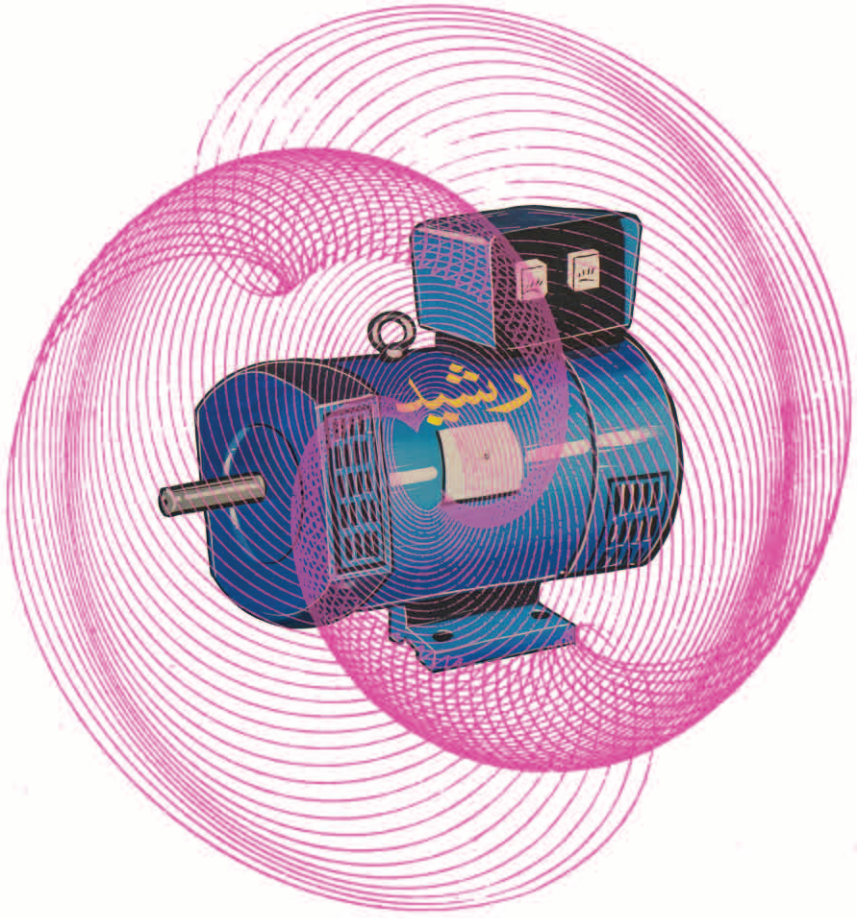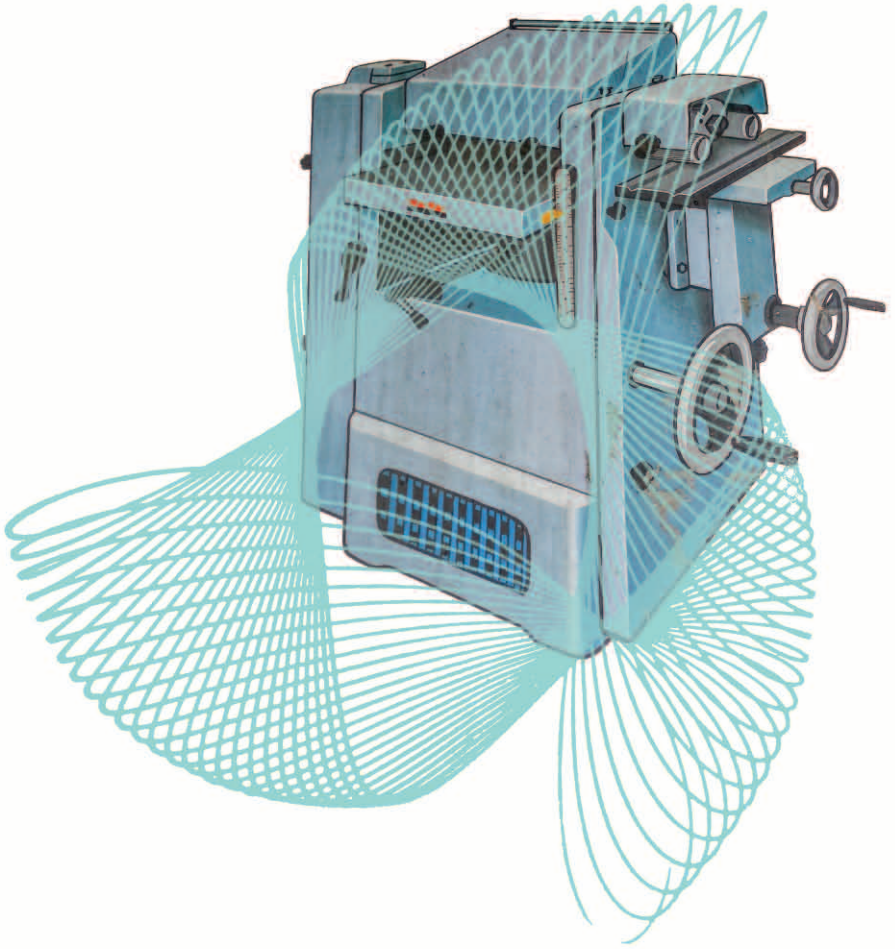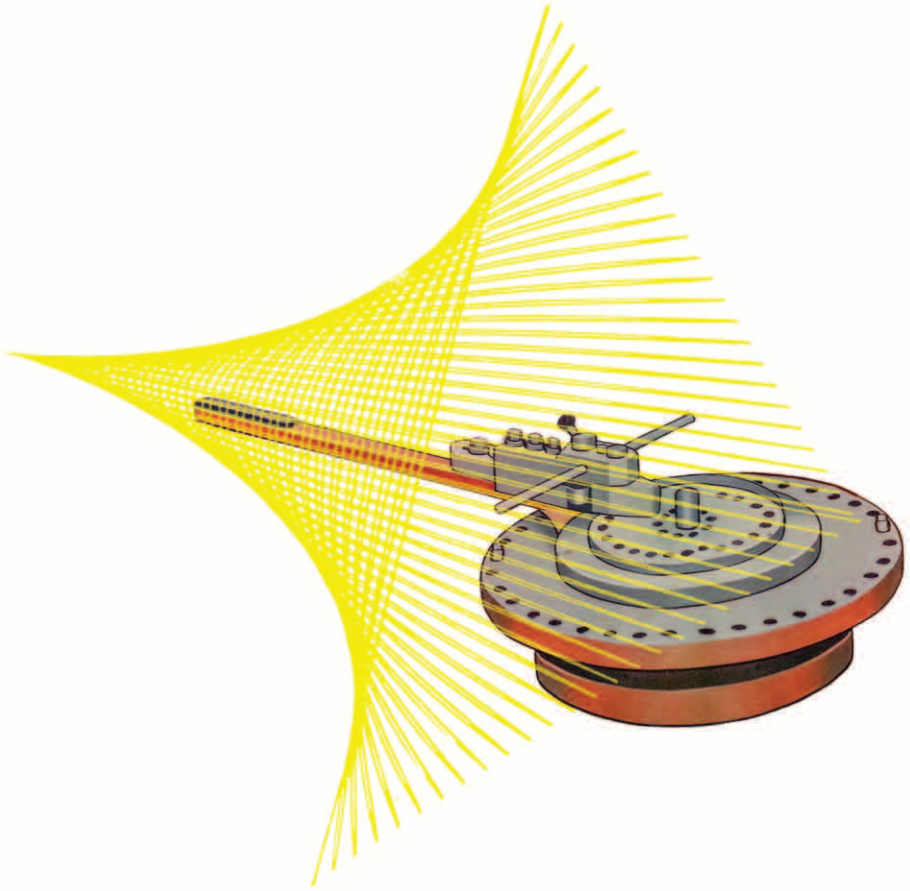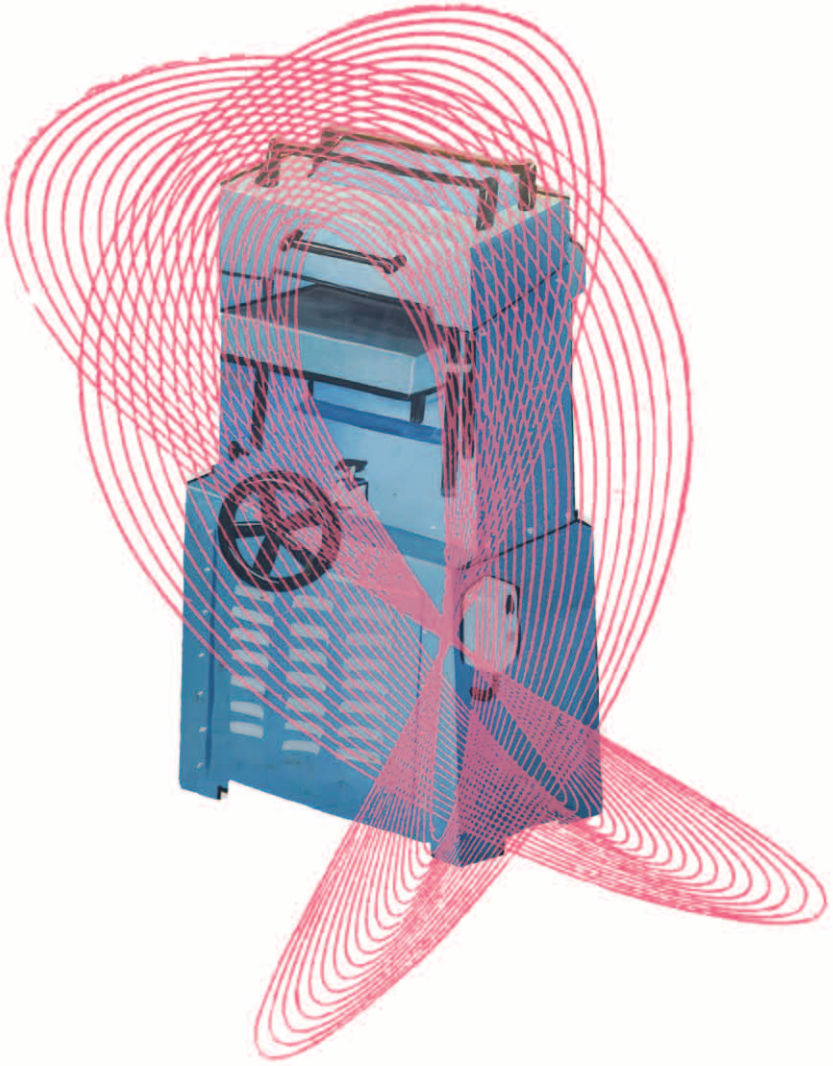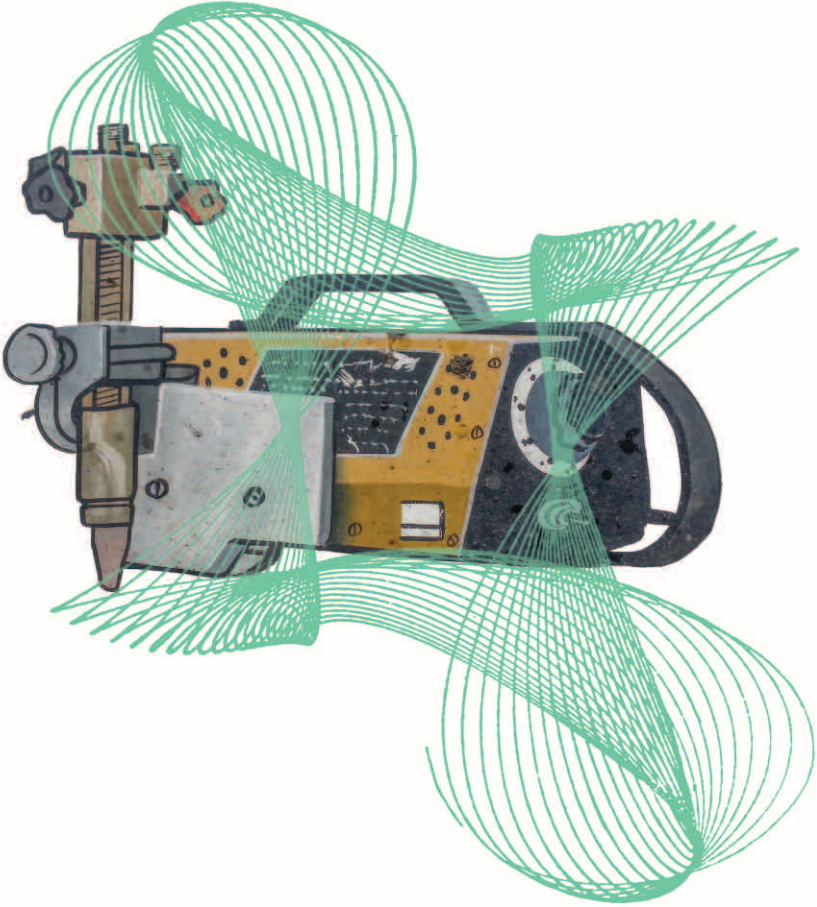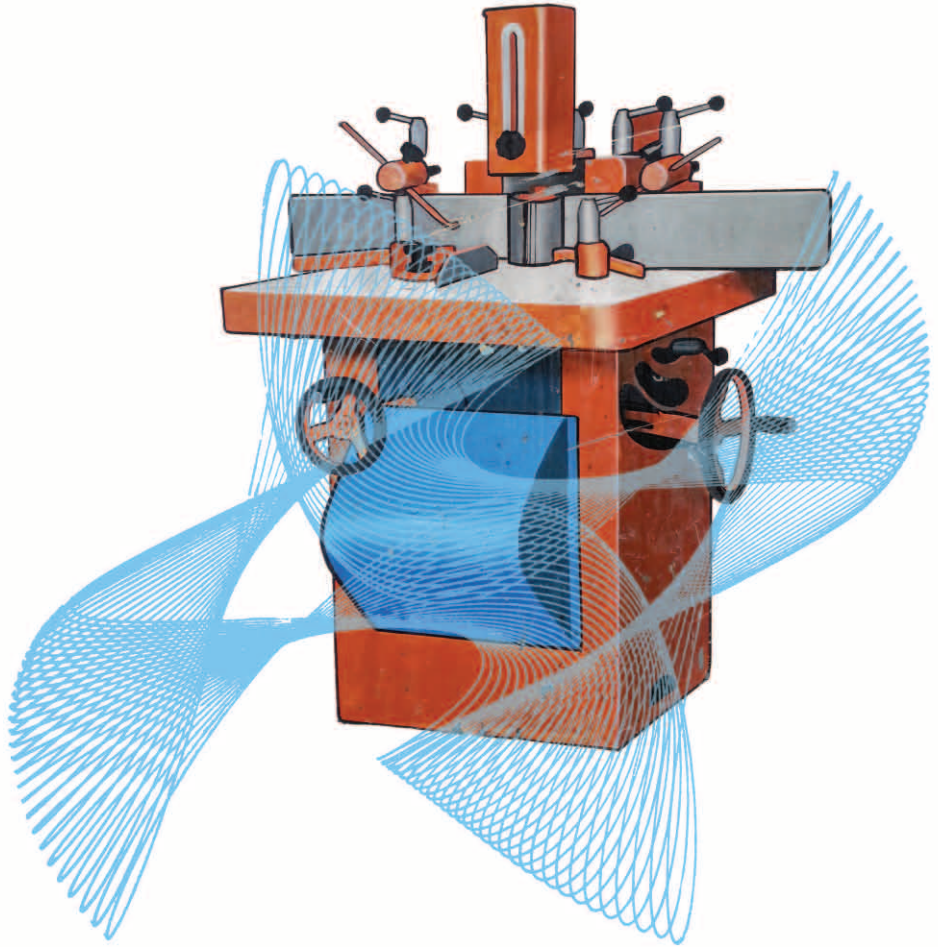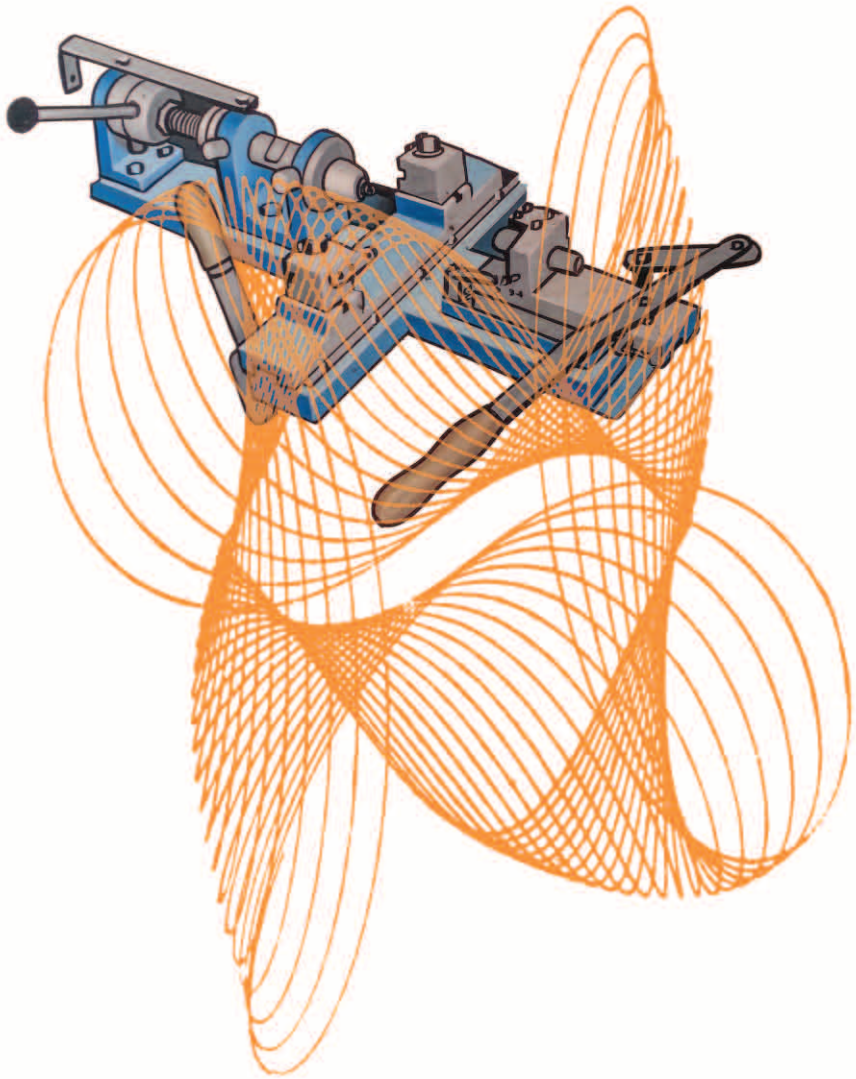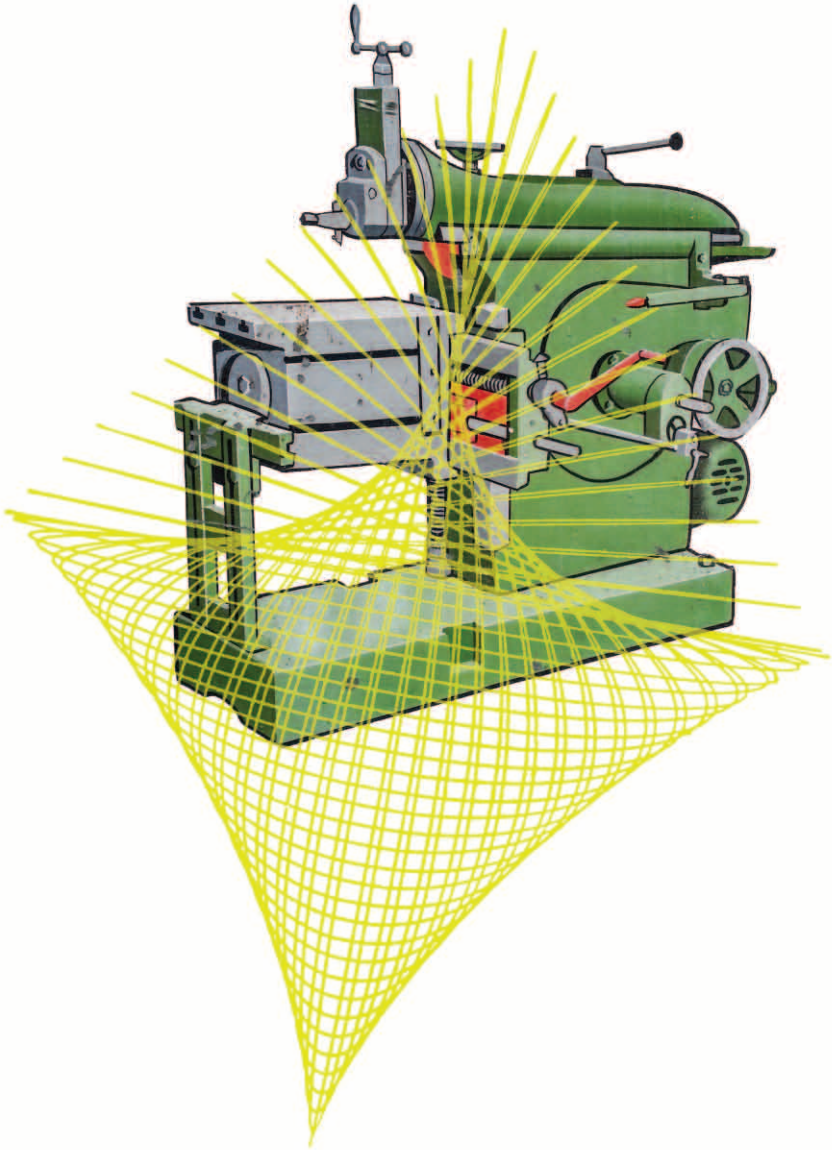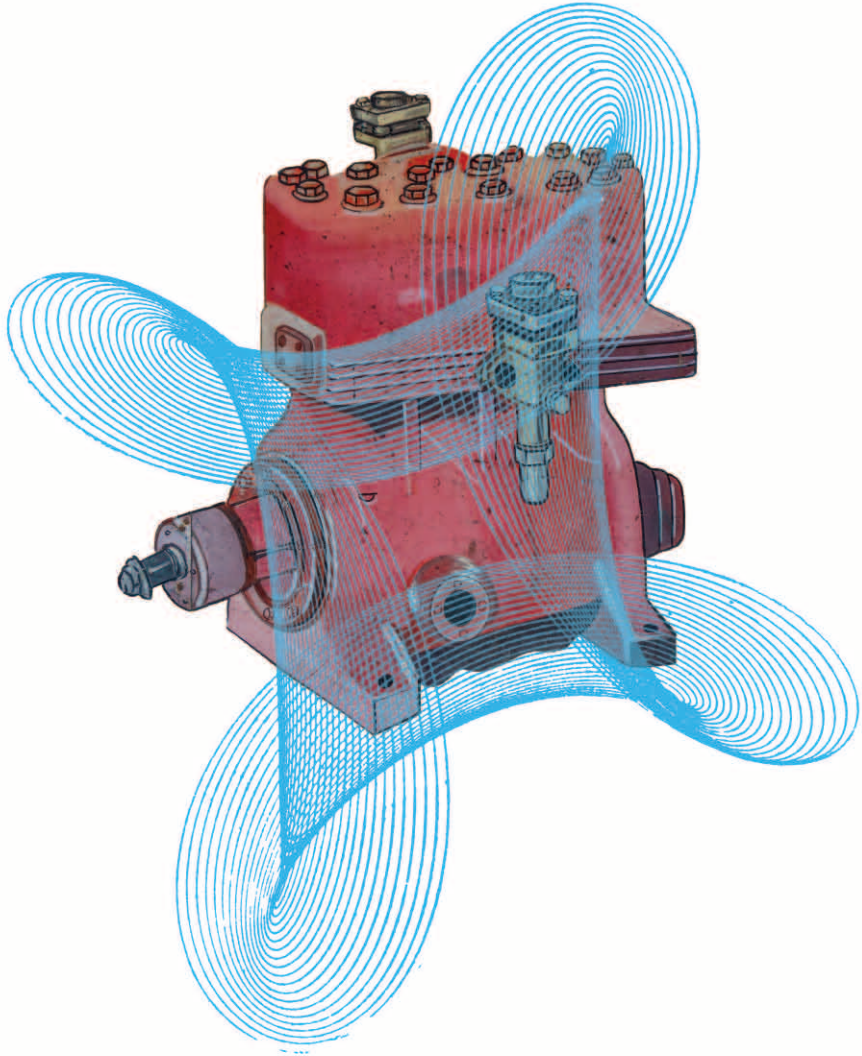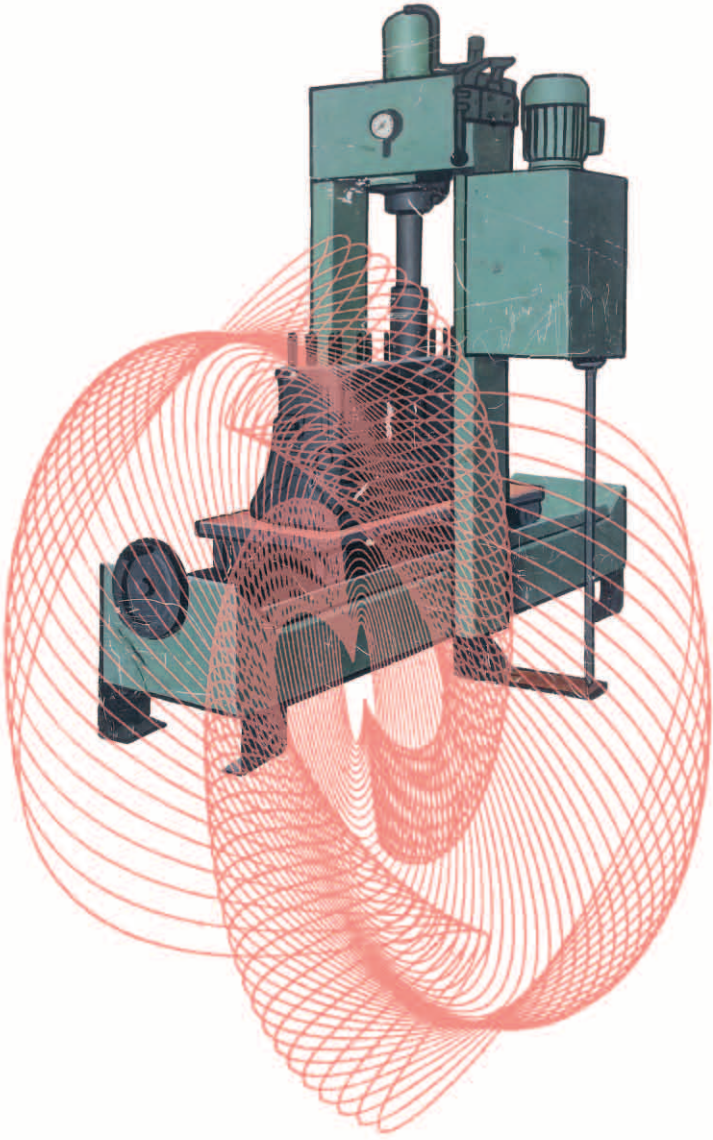
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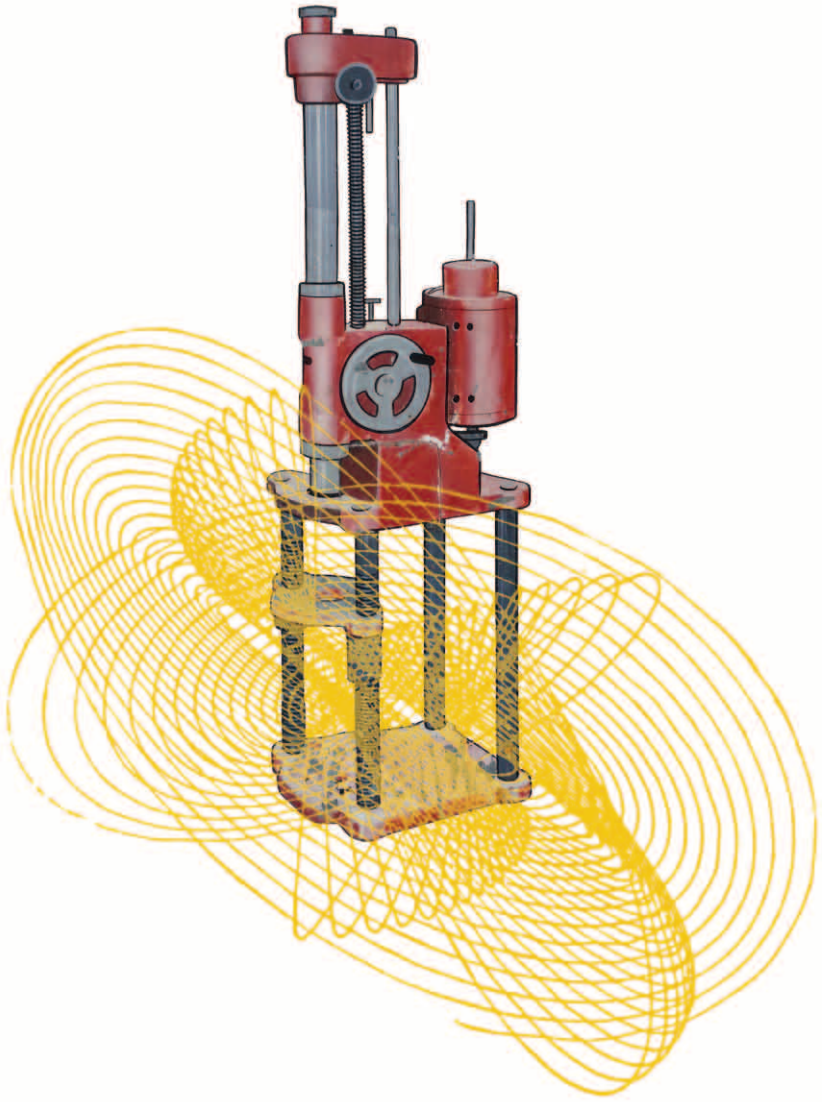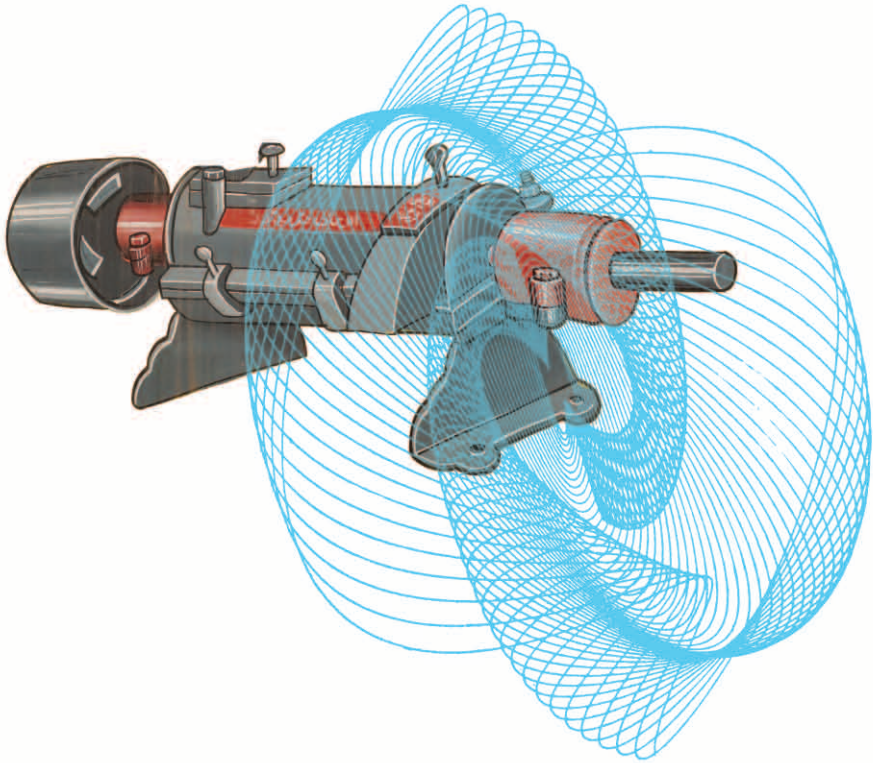
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