

FS301
Seminar on **Designing Culture**

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Visiting Faculty
Feminist Studies Program
Serra House, 2nd Floor
723-2412

Tuesday, 7-10 pm
Building 250, Room 101

The far-reaching aim of this course is to provoke multi-disciplinary collaborations among humanists and technologists, cultural critics and new media designers, scholars and digital culture workers. Its aim is to facilitate discussion among members of diverse academic communities: those from the humanities, from various design professions, and from the arts. Each of these communities provides important insights about the process and implications of designing culture. Where one group offers a powerful range of critical skills and interpretive techniques that are useful as a way to understand how meaning is constructed, culture is lived, and the human relates to the technological, others embody the talents, skills and analytical methods that bring the material and symbolic world into existence.

Contemporary U.S. culture is a fully designed phenomenon. From the built spaces we inhabit, to the paths of circulation we travel through (in cars or on foot), to the way in which we create personal and embodied identities through acts of consumption and performance, design—an intentional set of expressive practices and professional skills—plays a critical role in the production of common, everyday culture. Everywhere we turn we encounter a “designed” world; every product we use certainly bears the overt mark of the professional “design” agent (such as product designers, engineers, architects, marketers). Moreover, we know that the symbolic and expressive realms of human existence, those of communication, of entertainment, of education, and of identity, to name a few, also bear the marks of intentional design and the signatures of a pantheon of designers whom work as digital technologists, network architects, web designers, film makers, fashion designers, writers, and teachers. But it is also the case that with the wider availability of multimedia digital applications (for example, graphics programs, audio sampling and recording tools, and network access applications) and cheaper technologies of symbolic reproduction (such as desktop computers, color printers, digital cameras), non-professional designers can and are playing an increasingly interesting role in the design of everyday culture.

This course investigates the dynamic nature of designing culture, evident both in the work of professional designers, especially technology innovators, and in the expressive and critical practices of non-professionals who use new media in their everyday lives. My particular interest, as reflected in course topics and new media projects, is focused on the process of “doing things differently.” The topics of this course draw on diverse disciplines: the humanities, cultural theory, history of design, philosophy of technology, and new media studies. It is broadly framed by feminist cultural studies, to ask the question: what is the relationship between critical cultural theory and the design of new media?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

All work must be completed to receive course credit.

- Weekly participation in class discussion;
- Weekly readings;
- Four design exercises (length and form TBD);
- One final project presentation and documentation (length and media TBD)

Recommended Books:

Interactions, March-April, 2000.

The Electronic Disturbance, Critical Arts Ensemble, Autonomedia, 1994.

Resisting the Virtual Life: The Culture and Politics of Information, ed. James Brook and Iain A. Boal, City Lights, SF: 1995.

Experience Design: A manifesto for the creation of experience, Nathan Shedroff, New Riders, Indianapolis, IN: 2001.

Adbusters, No. 37, Design Anarchy. Sept-Oct, 2001.

Design Exercises

For each of the last four weeks of the course, students will complete a design exercise with the objective of working iteratively on the design of a work of digitally mediate culture. The topic of the overall work will be negotiated individually; the form of the weekly design exercise may be also.

Final Project Presentation and Documentation

The practical aim of the course is to prepare students to create a work of digital culture, informed by cultural theory, and organized and planned using current design methods and practices. The topic of the final project will be negotiated individually. Each student will present the project and submit some form of documentation of the project design and planning.

Mar 12

Student Presentations on Final Projects

WEEKLY OUTLINE

Jan 10 **Introduction: The Technological Imagination Revisited**
Syllabus overview and SLIDE TALK

Jan 15 **A Reproductive Theory of Technology**
Develops an anti-essentialist theory of technology adequate to the digital age

Benamou, Michel. "Notes on the Technological Imagination," in eds. Teresa de Lauretis, Andreas Huyssen, and Kathleen Woodward, *The Technological Imagination: Theories and Fictions*, Coda Press, Madison, WI: 1980: 65-75.

Cook, Scott N. "The Structure of Technological Revolutions and the Gutenberg Myth," in ed., Joseph C. Pitt, *New Directions in the Philosophy of Technology*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Netherlands: 1995: 63-83.

Christensen, Clayton M. "The Dilemmas of Innovation: A summary," from *The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston: 1997:207-211.

Mosco, Vincent. "Home Sweet Factory: Perspectives on Mass Society," in ed. Sari Thomas, *Studies in Communication*, vol. 1, Ablex, NJ: 1984: 104-120.

Strathern, Marilyn. "Reproducing Anthropology," from *Reproducing Anthropology*.

Jan 22 **Design Across the Disciplines**
Reviews the major histories of and theories of design across media and disciplines.

Dondis, Donis A. "The Anatomy of a Visual Message," *A Primer of Visual Literacy*, MIT Press, Cambridge: 1973.

Forty, Adrian. "Introduction," and "Design, Designers and the Literature of Design," from *Objects of Desire: Design and Society from Wedgwood to IBM*, Pantheon, NY: 1986.

Frascara, Jorge. "A History of Design, A History of Concerns," in eds. Steven Heller and Georgette Ballance, *Graphic Design History*, Allworth Press, NY: 2001: 13-17.

Krippendorff, Klaus. "On the Essential Contents of Artifacts or on the Proposition that Design is Making Sense (of Things)," in eds. Victor Margolin and Richard Buchanan, *The Idea of Design*, MIT Press, Cambridge: 1995: 156-184.

Lionni, Leo. "The Urge to Make Things," *Looking Closer: Critical Writings on Graphic Design*, eds. Michael Bierut, William Drenttel, Steven Heller and DK Holland, Allworth Press, NY: 1994: 170-71.

Lowgren, Jonas and Erik Stolterman. "Design Methodology and Design Practice," *Interaction* Jan-Feb, 1999: 13-18.

Lupton, Ellen and Abbott Miller. "Disciplines of Design: Writing with Foucault," *Design Writing Research: Writing on Graphic Design*, PHAIDON, 1996: 66-70

Votolato, Gregory. "Critical Approaches to Design," *American Design in the Twentieth Century*, Manchester UP: 1998: 251-279.

Jan 29

Designing Culture: The Collaboration between Theory and Practice

How is culture designed? How could it be designed differently? What contribution can cultural theory make to the re-design of contemporary media culture? After the criticism, then what? Where do theory and practice diverge? Can theory contribute to compelling design?

De Certeau, Michel. "Culture Within Society," from *Culture in the Plural*, U of Minnesota P, Minneapolis: 1997: 101-121.

Deuten, J. Jasper, and Arie Rip. "Narrative Infrastructure in Product Creation Processes," *Organization Articles*, Vol 7 (1), 2000: 67-75.

Gaver, Bill, Tony Dunne, and Elena Pacenti. "Cultural Probes," *Interaction*, Jan-Feb, 1999: 21-28.

Lupton, Ellen, "Low and High: Design in Everyday Life," *Looking Closer: Critical Writings on Graphic Design*, eds. Michael Bierut, William Drenttel, Steven Heller and DK Holland, Allworth Press, NY: 1994: 104-108.

Lupton, Ellen. "A Postmortem on Deconstruction?" in eds. Steven Heller and Marie Finamore, *Design Culture: An anthology of writing from the AIGA Journal of Graphic Design*, Allworth Press, NY: 1997: 113-115.

McLuhan, Marshall and Eric McLuhan, "Media Poetics," *Laws of Media: The New Science*, U of Toronto Press: 1988: 215-239.

Rock, Michael. "Can Design be Socially Responsible?" *Looking Closer: Critical Writings on Graphic Design*, eds. Michael Bierut, William Drenttel, Steven Heller and DK Holland, Allworth Press, NY: 1994: 191-193.

Spencer, Herbert. "The Responsibilities of the Design Profession," *Looking Closer: Classic Writings on Graphic Design*, in eds. Michael Bierut, Jessica Helfand, Steven Heller, and Rick Poynor, Allworth Press, NY: 1999: 156-160.

Ward, A. "Ideology, Culture and the Design Studio," *Design Studies*, vol 11, no. 1, Jan, 1990: 10-16.

Feb 5

Multimedia Documentary: Women of the World Talk Back

Describes the digital information design and cultural theory that informed the production of a multimedia documentary about the 1995 NGO Forum and 4th UN World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China.

Ivinsky, Pamela. "Women who turn the Gaze Around," in eds. Michael Bierut, William Drenttel, Steven Heller, and DK Holland, *Looking Closer: Critical Writings on Graphic Design*, Allworth Press, NY: 1997: 219-224.

Levrant de Bretteville, Sheila. "Some aspects of Design from the Perspective of a Woman Designer," *Looking Closer: Classic Writings on Graphic Design*, in eds. Michael Bierut, Jessica Helfand, Steven Heller, and Rick Poynor, Allworth Press, NY: 1999: 238-245.

Luke, Timothy W. "The New Left, Critical Intellectuals, and Social Revolution: The role of the New Media in the Politics of Image," *Screens of Power: Ideology, Domination and Resistance in Information Society*. U of Illinois P, Urbana: 1989: 240-258.

Feb 12

The Technological Imagination at Work: Experiments in the Future of Reading

Discusses the design and theory behind the development of a Xerox PARC research project and museum exhibition called "XFR: Experiments in the Future of Reading." Also discusses the topic of new media genres and the development of new modes of storytelling and authoring.

Manovich, Lev. "What is New Media?" *The Language of New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge: 2001: 19-61.

Norman, Donald A. "The Psychopathology of Everyday Things," from *The Design of Everyday Things*, Doubleday, NY: 1988: 1-33.

Krippendorff, Klaus. "A Trajectory of Artificiality and New Principles of Design for the Information Age."

Feb 19

New Media Literacy: The History of Reading, Writing, and Technologies of Communication

Drucker, Johanna. "Signs of Life/Spaces of Art: From Standard Brands to Integrated Circuits," in ed. Gunnar Swanson, *Graphic Design and Reading: Explorations of an Uneasy Relationship*, Allworth Press, NY: 2000: 31-41.

Robertson, Ketih, "On White Space/When Less is More," *Looking Closer: Critical Writings on Graphic Design*, eds. Michael Bierut, William Drenttel, Steven Heller and DK Holland, Allworth Press, NY: 1994: 61-65.

Dinkla, Soke. "From Participation to Interaction: Toward the Origins of Interactive Art," in ed. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Clicking In: Hot Links to a Digital Culture*, Bay Press, Seattle: 1996: 279-290.

Feb 26

New Media Journalism and the Dream of Cyberdemocracy

Describes the journalistic experience of working on the Apple Corporation's webcast of the 1996 summer Olympic games; also discusses the emergence of webcasting as a new media genre and the myths of information that circulate about new information technologies.

Adbusters, No. 37, Design Anarchy. Sept-Oct, 2001.

Papanek, Victor. "Edugraphology—The Myths of Design and the Design of Myths," *Looking Closer: Classic Writings on Graphic Design*, in eds. Michael Bierut, Jessica Helfand, Steven Heller, and Rick Poynor, Allworth Press, NY: 1999: 251-55.

Mar 5

The Digital Divide: New Media in a Global Context

We mistakenly think that media landscapes are generally democratic and widely available. But are they? How do people across the globe react to the exportation of the U.S. media-scape?

Gomez-Pena, Guillermo. "The Virtual Barrio @ the Other Frontier," in ed. Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Clicking In: Hot Links to a Digital Culture*, Bay Press, Seattle: 1996: 173-79.

Lupton, Ellen and Abbott Miller. "White on Black on Gray," *Design Writing Research: Writing on Graphic Design*, PHAIDON, 1996: 103-120.

Garland, Ken. "Here are some things we must do," *Looking Closer: Classic Writings on Graphic Design*, in eds. Michael Bierut, Jessica Helfand, Steven Heller, and Rick Poynor, Allworth Press, NY: 1999: 187-192.

Course Reading List

Benamou, Michel. "Notes on the Technological Imagination," in eds. Teresa de Laetis, Andreas Huyssen, and Kathleen Woodward, *The Technological Imagination: Theories and Fictions*, Coda Press, Madison, WI: 1980: 65-75.

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