New York University
Department of Media, Culture, and Communication

The Cultural Analysis of Design
Graduate Seminar

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East Building, Room 725  Classroom location
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Course Description
This class introduces design as an intersection of practice, philosophy, aesthetics, politics, and material culture. In the course of bringing students into the contemporary conversation that organizes design discourse increasingly in terms of “interaction” this class prepares students to conduct original project work on the history, culture, and aesthetics of contemporary material and visual culture at the scale of computers, media, architecture, and product.

Learner Objectives
Upon completion of this course students should be able to:

- Define key features of the meanings and applications of design throughout history
- Outline key theoretical frameworks in the understanding of design
- Analyze the politics of design across a range of social contexts
- Critique and evaluate the interrelationship of design and technology
- Conduct original research on a topic related to the social, cultural and political meanings of design

Evaluation
Participation (20%)
Research Proposal (20%)
Final Project (60%)

Evaluation Rubric
A= Excellent
This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute insightfully.
B=Good
This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.

C=Average
This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inarticulate.

D= Unsatisfactory
This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.

F=Failed
This grade indicates a failure to participate and/or incomplete assignments

**Expectations and Assessment**

(1) **Readings are to be completed before class.** Class meetings center on in-depth discussion of concepts from the texts. Weekly meetings are our opportunity to work through texts as a community and the prerequisite for high-quality discussion is that everyone reads material ahead of time. Come to class prepared for discussion.

(2) **Engaged participation.** I will be looking for knowledge-building contributions that show not only that you are trying to understand the readings but also that help contribute to your peers’ understandings. A pre-requisite for active and intelligent participation in discussions is prompt and regular attendance to all classes. Notify me in advance if you are going to miss a class.

(3) **Assignments.** You will be asked to complete a class project as part of this course on a self-chosen topic. Project proposals should reflect scholarly work drawn from themes discussed in readings and in class and should extend these themes through an original case study of a design. Once approved, projects should then be prepared as a 20 page paper and accompanying in-class presentation. Final project presentations should enable future scholarly publication or research.

**REQUIRED TEXT**
All readings (listed below) will be posted on blackboard.
CLASS POLICIES
Absences and Lateness
More than two unexcused absences will automatically result in a lower grade. Chronic lateness will also be reflected in your evaluation of participation. Regardless of the reason for your absence you will be responsible for any missed work. Travel arrangements do not constitute a valid excuse for rescheduling exams. There are no extra credit assignments for this class.

General Decorum
Slipping in late or leaving early, sleeping, text messaging, surfing the Internet, doing homework in class, eating, etc. are distracting and disrespectful to all participants in the course.

Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism
“Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do…you violate the principle when you: cheat on an exam; submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors; receive help on a take-home courses without prior permission from your professors; receive help on a take-home that calls for independent work; or plagiarize. Plagiarism, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following: copy verbatim from a book, article, or other media; download documents from the Internet; purchase documents; paraphrase or restate someone else’s facts, analysis, and/or conclusions…” (see Steinhardt School Bulletin 2008-2010 p. 177-8)

STUDENT RESOURCES
• Henry and Lucy Moses Center for students with disabilities
• Writing Center: 269 Mercer Street, Room 233. Schedule an appointment online at www.rich15.com/nyu/ or just walk-in.

INTRODUCTION: MOTIVATING DESIGN RESEARCH
Class 1 -- Introduction: What we talk about when we talk about “design”
Class 2 – Why Design?


**DESIGN AS NATIONALISM**

Class 3 – Design Strategies for Nationalism

- Durkheim, Emile. *Elementary forms of religious life*

Class 4 – The Best Laid Plans – Disastrous Designs and Modernism


**DESIGN AS MICRO-POLITICS**

Class 5 -- The Politics of Artifacts

Robles 2010 --- Sample Syllabus, 5


Class 6 – The Politics of Innovation

Class 7 – Participatory Design: How Users Matter

Class 8 – Make: Pre-Raphaelites, DIY-ers, and Craft to Design

COMPUTING AS A SITE FOR DESIGN

PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE
### Class 9 – Pattern: Information as Language


### Class 10 – Information Systems: Cybernetics and Human-Machine Interaction

- *Allan Kay, User Interface, a Personal View, Multimedia from Wagner to Virtual Reality*

### Class 11 – Feedback: From Information to Ecology


### Class 12 – The Interaction Turn: From Artificial Intelligence to Intelligent “Design”


### Class 13 – Extraordinary Machines: Conversations with Things We Think With


### Class 14 – Off the Desk and Into the world: Ubiquitous computing

Class 15 – **FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATIONS**