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RESPONSES TO THE WORKSHOP *Imagining Japan: Literatures, Arts and Religions, September 15-17, 2011*

DESIGN DENIED: The Dynamics of Withholding Good Design and its Ethical Implications
School of the Art Institute of Chicago
ARCH 3933/DES OB 3933/INARC 3933/VCS3933
FALL 2010
Lisa Norton lnorton@saic.edu
Fridays 1-4:00 p.m. Sullivan Center, 36 S. Wabash Room 1241

Consumerist design is “...comparable to what would happen if all medical doctors were to forsake general practice and surgery and concentrate exclusively on dermatology, plastic surgery, and cosmetics”

Victor Papanek

Course Description:

Students develop new strategies for engaging and re-purposing existing systems and channels. A sense of ownership of existing conditions empowers them to imagine otherwise. For example, students must understand the complex factors of desire, production, and consumption that design landfills in order to design alternative inscriptive design scenarios for the future of waste systems, including the very concept of waste itself. The ethical opportunity for young designers is to become conscious of their power to create good via powerful stories and evocative models.

The formative influence of design on human behavior and possibilities calls for an ethically-oriented design praxis. The course considers the built environment from social justice and applied ethics perspectives through inquiries on existing typologies. Fieldwork involves looking at institutions, for example hospitals, elder care facilities, and zoos, in an effort to re-imagine lacks as opportunities for new ways to act as designers. In doing so, student research teams confront the post-natural condition of our world and see everything as a collective design that we call civilization.

SYLLABUS REVISION for DESIGN DENIED

1) Thomas Kasulis' lecture, *Japanese Buddhism: Shingon and Zen*, described the Five Aggregates constituting self as experience, self as process, 1) Matter/form, 2) Sensation 3) Perception, 4) Samskara, 5) Consciousness. The Five Aggregates can serve as a guiding framework for student investigations of the underlying values of the built environment and the intangible worlds of governance, policy, and punishment, all of which can be understood as human designs. *Design Denied* students will reflect on the Five Aggregates as a guide to development of reconnecting, healing and restorative design events.

2) Samskara, the habitual mental tendencies that Thomas described as being conditioned by previous experience and guiding future 'second nature' offers an ideal lens for thinking about sustainable design because habit and precedent produce the 'unsustainable'. Whether they know it or not, every human being is a designer. The environmental crisis is thus a designing, enacting process. Our very being is the crisis. Just as samskara may be skillful or unskillful, designing confers agency but responsibility must be consciously chosen. The root meaning of design is intention. The bringing of consciousness to designing can aid expansion of possibilities and mitigation of harm.

DESIGN FOR WELL-BEING

Instructor: Amy Burkholder, MAAT.

Email: AmyBurkholder@mac.com

Time: Mondays, 9am-4pm, SP2010

Room: CO 028 Metals Studio + Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago (RIC)

Course Description:

Students develop and prototype individual design projects addressing the complex issue of well-being understood widely to include physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual well-being. Possible realms of research include: design for delight and pleasure, design for sensory experience, design for enabling, design for access, and design for rehabilitation. Projects involve collaborative, interdisciplinary components as well as field-testing to produce prototypes viable for daily life of the RIC outpatient volunteers.

This course is structured as collaborations between SAIC undergraduates and outpatient volunteers of the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. The teacher is an art therapist holding the Masters of Art in Art Therapy. Design research and discovery occurs via a series of interviews that reveal needs as opposed to wants of the volunteer-collaborator, each of whom have a physical or mental challenge. The entire four-month process includes relating and sharing experiences, gathering of data, pattern recognition and synthesis, and iterative prototyping that follows an often abductive course resulting in a working prototype object of daily use.

Thomas Kasulis discussed the gestalt-teaching function of culture in terms of recursivities of patterns that structure thought and value. He characterized these cultural patterns as having heuristic and predictive functions. Because design is such a ubiquitous form of culture, the world of artifacts we are born into 'teaches' us how to be, how to respond, as Thomas put it, 'what is foreground and what is background'. In the design profession we refer to this as the inscriptive nature of designed artifacts. Designing is a pattern and process language, a cultural syntax that can conceal or reveal the patterns that connect. The idea that the world of artifacts can be 'otherwise' is at the heart of design philosophy. Design is sense-making. It can help cohere community and establish a sense of place, or produce fragmentation and alienation. *Experience Design*, *Wired to Care*, and *Emotionally Durable Design* are titles of three books representative of a recent trend that has captured the imaginations of designers who wish to play a role in re-enchanting lived experience by means of heightening awareness of the sacredness and fragility of our bonds. Focusing not on objective formal qualities but rather on sensory, empathic and emotional relationships within the flows in our lifeworld. In order to elicit experiences that attune us to the qualitative dimensions of experience the designer must sense and become the system. These newer realms of designing such as experience design and interaction design are highly relational and require empathic resonance with the subject. One of the most decisive roles available to design professionals is the revealing of interrelationships via stories, images and scenarios. These often performative and time-based design methods; storytelling, group visualization, contextualizing, choreographing, convening dialogue can reinforce existing habits and expectations or rhetorically nominate a new normal.

SYLLABUS REVISION for DESIGN FOR WELL-BEING

Design for Well-being would benefit from conscious focus on how process can disclose pattern:

- 1) How can we culturally inscribe designing for everyday experiences that arrive as care?
- 2) What would it take to consciously enact human being as the designing process that cares for all of life?
- 2) What patterns are conducive to mutuality and trust?
- 2) Discuss Albert Borgmann's notion of 'focal things and practices'. Might such foci serve as palliative and compassionate antidotes to mainstream allopathic medical and conventional legal definitions and treatments of 'disability'?

Dharma Drum College, Taipei, Taiwan
非暴力設計Non-Violent Design

Course Description:

Designing for a world of benevolent objects, products, systems and services.

Designing for elimination of destructive or deleterious products, processes and behaviors.

Dharma Drum College is founded upon the values of the world-renowned Dharma Drum Mountain monastery to “Uplift the character of humanity and build a Pure Land on Earth”

"Dharma Drum College is conceived as a space where ideas and experience, through the dynamic process of dialogue and practice, transform the creative self and the greater community. Dharma Drum College is a response to the needs of this era for higher education with a rich cultural orientation, spiritual vision and attention to global context."

Since 2008 I have been consulting to the preparatory office of Ch’An Buddhist monastery, Dharma Drum Mountain, in Taipei, as they prepare to launch a new graduate school dedicated to ‘engaged Buddhist’ action research in the context of an ecumenical, contemplative context. Our team developed a curriculum that rests on a non-violent ethos for designing based on Ch’An fundamentals. This is the first such framing that I am aware of in design education. Since then, I have been expanding this thought experiment on just what a non-dual disposition toward designing might be like. We began developing the idea as a website that might one day serve as a public resource.

Robert Oppenheimer’s famous quote from the Bhagavad-Gita, “Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds” obtains in every mundane moment, not just the vivid instantiations such as the Trinity Test that led to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Seen from a design and engineering vantage point, anthropocentric being is the decisive lever of creation and destruction. Thomas Kasulis’ point that ‘humans are the uniquely disharmonious aspect of the universe’ (in body, speech, mind) is echoed by design theorist Tony Fry in describing creation and destruction as co-arising phenomenon, mutually constituting one another in human being in a ‘dialectic of sustainment’. As long as our designing pattern languages relate to Nature as an object devoid of interiority, what Ken Wilber calls ‘mononature’; the devalued product of rationalization and industrialization, we will continue to ontologically reproduce human being dualistically and unsustainably.

REFLECTIONS ON THIS COURSE CONCEPT-IN-DEVELOPMENT

Although present in the Dharma Drum curriculum and the Non-violent Design course concept, the *Imagining Japan* workshop has enhanced my ideas for ways to deepen the formal design research methodologies as well as the informal, heuristic investigations. Entry points that key into some of our larger curricular objectives include:

- 1) Taiwan context; from factors of scale and efficiency to factors of quality and resonance.
- 2) Buddha, Sangha, Dharma; ‘holographic entry points’ as scaled opportunities for re-directing attention and action via designing.
- 3) Interdependence and cooperation; designing opportunities for youth flourishing especially on suicide awareness and prevention.
- 4) Being and becoming sustainable; designing as the unfolding event of not-two. What does the design (object, system, event, environment, structure) relationally elicit and via what modalities? How can we imagine designing beyond visuality and without dependence on digital media?
- 5) What roles does design have in mitigation or exacerbation of the extremes of poverty and wealth that tend toward suffering and environmental harm?

Design Advocacy
Architecture/Interior Arch/Designed Objects 4037
Lisa Norton lnorton@saic.edu
Mondays, 4:30-7:30 pm, Sullivan Center

This studio-seminar provides upper level undergraduate students with an immersion in current issues related to contemporary practice in the field of product and object design, design interaction and design for sustainability. Foregrounding ways and means, each student will imagine and shape a values-driven platform for their emerging professional practice. Topics include, the multiple roles of the designer in a complex and contingent world; the dialectic of sustainability (creation and destruction); technology and artifice; design advocacy; design politics; design action and rhetoric.

The design and engineering professions are heavily computational and social science driven, with cultural signals and cues usually limited to superficial sign values and branding purposes. This is an unfortunate misunderstanding of the integrative potential of the design process. Relegating design work to aesthetics and styling at the tail end of the product development process standardizes this missed opportunity for deep insights to emerge. Thus, what the industry calls best practices constitutes the routinization of fragmented ways of designing. These fragmented and alienating device paradigms are then adopted by copycat product platforms, and so it goes.

Young designers entering the worlds of product and system design and architecture stand at the leverage point with respect to consumers. They have the opportunity to express and model accessible and vitality-producing lifestyles and behaviors. From a user-centered design perspective, the role of the designer is to position an experience, behavior or service in such a way that the user resonates with it, feels seen and heard with respect to their needs, and ideally adopts it, thus making empowered choices and lower-impact behaviors part of their lifestyle.

SYLLABUS REVISION for DESIGN ADVOCACY

- 1) Counter-propositions in response to the role of digital technologies in design: Designers students today are taught to monologically manipulate objects in a profane mesh of systems. How does the digital technological remove impact the being of the designer? and eventually the user?
- 2) 3 and 4-axis computer aided machining as well as 3-D rendering and animation such as found in Second Life produce illusionary correlates to the tangible world consisting of all surfaces and no depth. How can we imagine designing otherwise?
- 3) Analyze an existing product platform that elicits alert relaxed attention. Hint: the iPod does not. Why not?