SECOND YEAR GRADUATE STUDIO

Fall 2016

CFA AR 883

Inquiry and research as catalysts for the creative process

LEVEL	MFA 2 · Graduate studio
CREDITS	8
MEETS	Thursdays
DATES	September 8 – December 9, 2016
LOCATION	[confirm]
INSTRUCTOR	Nick Rock · co-taught with Yael Ort-Dinoor (yaelod@bu.edu)
OFFICE	[confirm]
CONTACT	nickrock@bu.edu
OFFICE HOURS	Nick: Mon / Wed 12–2, Thurs 12–1, by appointment · Yael: Mon / Wed / Thurs 12–1

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Overview

> Nobody tells this to people who are beginners, I wish someone told me. All of us who do creative work, we get into it because we have good taste. But there is this gap. For the first couple years you make stuff, it's just not that good. It's trying to be good, it has potential, but it's not. But your taste, the thing that got you into the game, is still killer. And your taste is why your work disappoints you. A lot of people never get past this phase, they quit. Most people I know who do interesting, creative work went through years of this. We know our work doesn't have this special thing that we want it to have. We all go through this. And if you are just starting out or you are still in this phase, you gotta know it's normal and the most important thing you can do is do a lot of work. Put yourself on a deadline so that every week you will finish one story. It is only by going through a volume of work that you will close that gap, and your work will be as good as your ambitions. And I took longer to figure out how to do this than anyone I've ever met. It's gonna take awhile. It's normal to take awhile. You've just gotta fight your way through. —Ira Glass

Design is as much about process, critical thinking and social responsibility as it is about aesthetics and form. Projects, clients' needs, the field of graphic design, are all constantly and rapidly changing. Changes can happen across disciplines or from one medium to another; how we as designers adapt to those changes, employing traditional design techniques and using the newest technology, is about more than aesthetics and form. It is about practicing a process of research and discovery that can solve design problems no matter how content, technology, and styles change over time.

Grad II Fall semester will introduce opportunities to explore forms of inquiry and research, leading to broad experimentation with one's creative process from concept through final product. The following weeks are anchored in identifying problems, conducting research along constant intensive making. You are expected to build on former experiences and delve into unfamiliar territories.

The main goal is to develop and use inquiry and research as catalysts for the creative process.

Make sure to constantly ask yourself (and others) questions while responding with design experiments along the process.

This course will enable investigation. Strive to consider how each experiment serves to develop who you are as a designer while examining what constitutes a context for your critical thinking and creative process as a designer.

The studio acts as a lab for testing hypotheses and revealing new discoveries. Serve as a contributor within the studio. Participate beyond your own process: be engaged to

share a point of view, ask questions and think out loud. A conversation is essential in driving any creative endeavor.

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Learning Outcomes

Course Objectives

1. **Form making** — sophisticate the making and use of form.
2. **Interrelationship** — identify how concept and form relate to each other.
3. **Authorship** — generate and develop methodologies to curate content.
4. **Constraints** — develop, test and apply your own set of rules to define solutions.
5. **Vocabulary** — explore how to objectively discuss your own creative process and offer peer critique.
6. **Designer's voice** — critically consider what forms your point of view. Use class readings, personal writing and explore beyond the classroom.

The six-objective Student Learning Outcomes rubric is under Assessment.

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Course Structure

This semester is essentially preparation for you all to be able to move on to your thesis. This studio will be challenging and demanding but also, I hope, rewarding. There will be a lot of work, sometimes at the same time, because this is how it is when you work as a professional designer. Projects don't begin and end neatly on very specific deadlines. Deliverables and expectations are often not easily defined and open ended as it is the designer's job to define these things in order to solve the problem.

When you work on your thesis it will be like an independent study. You will come up with a concept for a project, generate content, define deliverables etc. It is sometimes a hard jump to make, from doing more rigid and structured work, so your projects this semester are designed to bridge that divide. I will be helping you move into more open ended spaces, to continue to learn how to interpret and filter. We will be discussing inspiration, and how to find it, gather it and use it to fuel your process.

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Projects

PROJECT	LENGTH	DATES
01 — Extreme Scale	2 weeks	Sep 8 – Sep 22
02 — Voice, in 3 Acts (*This American Life*)	5 weeks	Sep 22 – Oct 20
03 — Exchange Poster	5 weeks	Oct 13 – Nov 24
04 — Personal Manifesto	4 weeks	Nov 3 – final review

Process & Research

Ongoing · start of thesis research

This semester marks the beginning of your thesis research which means: start gathering and collecting anything you think is moving or inspirational or that you just think is cool. Set up a method for doing this. You may use any tool or method you like to collect and document, however it needs to be something you can easily present to the group. In the past students have chosen to use Pinterest, Tumblr, Evernote, Dropbox, iPhoto, a folder on your desktop, an envelope, a shoebox ... it's up to you.

01 — Extreme Scale

2 weeks · due Sep 22

Description: Design something in an extreme scale.

Objective: Develop content, parameters and form as a response to a concise brief.

02 — Voice, in 3 Acts

5 weeks · three projects from one episode of This American Life *· due Oct 20*

Description: Approach content from 3 different perspectives and forms.

Objective: Learn how to interpret content in order to generate new content while understanding the power of context and form in communication.

There's a theme to each episode of *This American Life*, and a variety of stories on that theme. Most of the stories are journalism, with an occasional comedy routine or essay. There's lots more to the show, but it's sort of hard to describe.

Search through the favorites section of the *This American Life* website — only the "Favorites" short list and the "Other Favorites" sections. This will give you a focused set of shows but still offer you a variety of content. Listen to lots of the shows, and pick the one that you like the most, that you relate to, or that you find most interesting.

This episode will be the foundation for this assignment. You will be making three different projects, each inspired by your chosen episode:

- **A.** You must make a printed thing (poster, book, etc.).
- **B.** You must make a digital thing (web, video, motion etc.).
- **C.** Make anything you want.

03 — Exchange Poster

5 weeks · two rounds · due Oct 27 and Nov 10

Description: Design through a filter of perspective. Adapt to shifting conditions.

Objective: Learn how to design and plan for the interpretation of content and changing parameters.

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04 — Personal Manifesto

4 weeks · written manifesto, then a design response · final due Dec 1

Manifesto (noun): a written statement publicly declaring intentions, motives, goals or views of the writer or a group.

Develop a written text to reflect a personal philosophy or set of beliefs that matter to you as a designer. Use your own manifesto to launch a design process.

Objective and outcomes. For this assignment you will generate a proposed framework to articulate what it is you find of importance at this point in time. You are required to use a personal point of view to structure the brief toward a design project. This is a process of inquiry about the things you value or care to carry with you both as an individual and a designer.

Process / schedule

- **11.03** — Presentation and class discussion. 1. Read and compare both assigned texts: Bruce Mau's *Incomplete Manifesto for Growth* (operation plans) with speculative design FAQs (utopian solutions). While each text offers a different point of view both serve as a framework for creative processes. 2. Research other manifestos. Explore outside and beyond design! What is it that turns a few sentences into a manifesto? 3. Write 8–10 statements to share a personal manifesto. Form a collection of opinions to support a theme or an idea.
- **11.10** — Present a typographic version of your manifesto. Concept: use the manifesto to create a piece as a reflection of or an extension to the written text. Consider how metaphors serve applying written ideas into a new medium. Who are you designing for?
- **11.17** — Class review.
- **11.23** — No class.
- **12.01** — Final due.

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Assessment

Student Learning Outcomes

OBJECTIVE	LEVEL 1 — UNSATISFACTORY	LEVEL 2 — COMPETENT	LEVEL 3 — ACCOMPLISHED
Process	Student struggles with defining problems, researching, generating ideas and / or developing concepts. Student fails to participate in critiques. Student doesn't employ any method of documentation of work. Student fails to demonstrate research as part of the design process. Student rarely uses research to develop content and ideas. Student struggles to meet deadlines. Student does not set goals or is unable to achieve stated goals. Student struggles to balance workload.	Student is able to define a problem, employ methods, develop concepts, research and develop concepts. Student participates in critiques and is able to document work. Student understands the value of thorough research in a graphic design process and is able to employ research into their design process. Student understands value of goal setting. Student is able to meet deadlines. Student satisfactorily balances workload.	Student shows thorough understanding of a graphic design studio process; is able to define a problem, employ methods of research and idea generation, develop concepts, critiques and documents work as a way of developing smart, informed and carefully considered solutions to design problems. Student understands the value of thorough research in a graphic design process and consistently explores a variety of methods of gathering, collecting and documenting as a way of developing content and ideas. Student manages time efficiently, sets and achieves goals and deadlines and is able to confidently balance a full studio workload.
Master Key Principles	Student has a basic understanding of the fundamentals and principles of typography and layout as a way of communicating visual and written messages and demonstrates these skills regularly in assigned projects.	Student understands and applies fundamentals and principles of typography and layout as a way of communicating visual and written messages and experiments to explore these skills regularly in assigned projects.	Student has an advanced understanding of the fundamentals and principles of typography and layout as a way of communicating visual and written messages and is able to employ these skills in inventive ways.

OBJECTIVE	LEVEL 1 — UNSATISFACTORY	LEVEL 2 — COMPETENT	LEVEL 3 — ACCOMPLISHED
Authorship	Student struggles to generate, curate or develop their own content for assigned projects.	Student is able to author and curate their own content for assigned projects. Student is able to use and understand many tools, media and forms of communication.	Student understands the role of the graphic designer in professional practice and the ability of the designer to help define, shape and also author the content of the work they create.
Design Agility	Student has limited grasp of tools and media. Student is unable or has difficulty choosing appropriate technology, media or tool to successfully complete a design project.	Student explores problems through more than one form of media. Student is frequently able to choose appropriate mode of technology and media to successfully complete their design solution.	Student is able to author and curate their own content for assigned projects. Student exhibits a broad understanding of tools, services and a full range of media and forms of communication by exploring problems using print, interactive, spatial and experiential, web, interactive, static and dynamic. Student is able to choose appropriate mode of technology and media to successfully complete their design solution.
History & Context	Student struggles to recall or identify major moments, works, and figures in design history.	Student is aware of major moments in design history and is able to recognize some major works and figures as well as some currently practicing designers.	Student is able to identify and reference major moments in design history, major and important figures in design history, and currently practicing designers. Student is able to cross reference and make connections across history.

OBJECTIVE	LEVEL 1 — UNSATISFACTORY	LEVEL 2 — COMPETENT	LEVEL 3 — ACCOMPLISHED
Professionalism	Student has limited understanding of the vocabulary of the graphic design field and little to no understanding of related fields. Student unable to, or has difficulty presenting ideas in front of a group. Student is unable to, or has difficulty expressing ideas in writing.	Student has a basic understanding of vocabulary of the graphic design field and its related fields such as print production, web development and video production. Student competently expresses ideas visually and verbally when presenting in front of a group and writing ideas and statements.	Student has mastered and is fluent in the vocabulary of the graphic design field and its related fields such as print production, web development and video production. Student has strong visual and verbal communication skills speaking in front of a group, critiquing work, writing project statements and descriptions. Student leverages design skills to enhance writing and presentation skills. Student communicates with the highest level of form and respect in person and digitally.

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Calendar

WEEK	DATE	SESSION
W01	Sep 8	Intro presentation: context — objectives, expectations, course “rules.” Intro: Extreme Scale (Sep 8–22).
W02	Sep 15	Extreme Scale: be prepared to share how your idea of extreme scale relates to form, content and context.
W03	Sep 22	**Due: Extreme Scale.** Intro: Voice, in 3 Acts (Sep 22 – Oct 20).
W04	Sep 29	*This American Life*: concept, small groups.
W05	Oct 6	*This American Life*: process and group review.
W06	Oct 13	Intro: Exchange Poster (Oct 13 – Nov 24).
W07	Oct 20	**Due: Voice, in 3 Acts.** Exchange Poster: concept + round 1.
W08	Oct 27	**Due: Exchange Poster #1.**
W09	Nov 3	Round 2: process. Intro: Personal Manifesto.

WEEK	DATE	SESSION
W10	Nov 10	**Due: Exchange Poster #2.** Personal Manifesto: share written piece.
W11	Nov 17	Personal Manifesto: concept.
W12	Nov 24	No class — Thanksgiving break.
W13	Dec 1	Personal Manifesto: review, extension / response project.
W14	Dec 9	**Final review** (no class Dec 8).