SECOND YEAR GRADUATE STUDIO

Fall 2020

CFA AR 883

Revelation Through Inquiry

LEVEL	MFA 2 · Graduate studio
CREDITS	8
MEETS	Section A1 Tuesdays · Section B1 Thursdays · 12:30–3:15 / 3:30–6:15 · hybrid
DATES	September 1 – December 3, 2020
LOCATION	Hybrid — in person Tuesdays, remote Thursdays
INSTRUCTOR	Assistant Professor Nicholas Rock
OFFICE	808 Commonwealth Ave — 406A
CONTACT	nickrock@bu.edu
OFFICE HOURS	By appointment — Mondays 10–2 (remote), Wednesdays 10–2 (remote / in person), Thursdays TBD

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Overview

This semester will introduce opportunities to rigorously explore forms of inquiry and research, leading to broad experimentation with one's creative process while helping you get a hold of who you are, what you believe in, and what you care about in terms of content and formal issues.

You will build on previous experiences and delve into unfamiliar territories. Guided by me, your peers, and outside critics, you will develop the foundation and framework for your thesis work.

This thesis development will be woven together with several challenging form-making assignments, culminating in a presentation of your semester of inquiry and final reviews.

Our main objective is to develop who you are as a designer while using inquiry and research as a catalyst for your critical thinking and creative process. Additionally, this is a moment in time for you to reflect on and orient yourselves to the current realities we are confronting in the world, which is the measure of a successful designer.

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Course Structure

Thesis Groups + Virtual Critics

I have organized you all into four groups of 4–5 students. You will meet with your group outside of class meetings, as well as coordinate and conduct four sessions throughout the semester with an outside critic assigned to your group.

All of the outside critics are BU alumni: Nicholas Samendinger (NYC), Daria Nikolaeva (Moscow), Molly Haig (Vermont / Scotland), graduates of our MFA; Mohammed Nassem (LA) is a graduate of our undergrad, with his MFA from RISD.

These groups are the groups we will use for in-person / remote synchronous meetings on Tuesdays. Thursday remote meetings mix up the groups to ensure you have structured time to see and hear from each other, taking advantage of the full group so that we don't become too small and siloed. Our goal is to exchange lots of ideas, thoughts, questions, and conversations.

GROUP	CRITIC
Group 01	Nicholas Samendinger
Group 02	Daria Nikolaeva
Group 03	Molly Haig
Group 04	Mohammed Nassem

The Work

The semester runs in three strands: Forms of Inquiry, Forms of Making, and Presenting Your Inquiry.

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Projects

01 — Forms of Inquiry

We will work through four distinct but complementary forms of inquiry that intentionally overlap and build upon each other as we move through the semester. Each requires a deliverable — a designed research document of sorts. You may choose what format this takes within some guidelines. You should see it as an asset for you to use and build upon, something you can refer back to as well as something that can inform someone who has no idea what you are doing.

How do you begin to align and organize yourselves in relation to the things that interest and influence you? You will develop a more profound sense of your own identity as a designer, and will be better able to frame questions and lines of inquiry on your own.

Inquiry A — 50 Questions

Individual · 4 weeks · weeks 2–5 · 9/10–10/08

For this project, you will begin to develop a research methodology based on conceptual and formal questions as a design process. You will research existing texts by creatives, authors, thought leaders, and others within and outside of design to develop internal and external questions as practicing designers.

Next, we will ask that you begin to fully develop a coherent perspective on visual and verbal languages you utilize to discover and articulate your thesis while continually questioning design as it relates to your view and values.

Inquiry B — Cataloging Words That Matter

Individual · 4 weeks · weeks 4–7 · 9/22–10/13

Develop a content specific cultural landscape; text-based (written or spoken) content, issues, points of view, values that are important to you, that you live by, that define your identity. Include reference points such as links to articles or videos, for example. What is your reading list, your bookmarks, your playlists? Determine and design the best format for cataloging and presenting this cultural landscape.

Inquiry C — The Filter of Perspective

Individual · 4 weeks · weeks 7–10 · 10/15–11/05

Work, influences, and inspiration. Begin by cataloging, analyzing what you have made to date, collected, saved, archived, or bookmarked. What formal strategies or ideas appear? Look for the threads or connections between everything. Try to extract five and define each of these in your own words. Your output should be a designed digital collection organized in some way according to the emergent formal strategies.

Finally, synthesize, connect the dots, draw connections, compile insights, and begin to apply your thinking.

Inquiry D — Thesis Taxonomy

Individual · 4 weeks · weeks 9–12 · 10/27–11/24

How can you begin to define your thesis idea and frame its references in a language we understand? Using the first 3 phases as your guide, begin to develop a taxonomy of the language and terminology that have emerged from stages 1–3. You should additionally define or describe this terminology. Support this taxonomy with references, such as links, examples or case studies.

02 — Forms of Making

This semester will include a number of projects running in parallel to the forms of inquiry project. These are designed to keep you making experimental form, and express ideas related to your thesis work (or not) that appear along the way.

- **Thesis Journal** (weekly, prompted through Basecamp). What things have you found or looked at or thought of this week? — something you want to do next, what inspired you, what did you hate — or maybe: my thesis is _ _ fill in the blank (a series of projects exploring x; an exploration of space; rebranding gender, etc.).
- **Remix** (3 weeks · weeks 3–5 · 9/15–10/08). A project about recontextualizing content, ideas, and form.
- **Extreme Scale** (3 weeks · weeks 7–9 · 10/13–11/03). A project about shifting understanding and perspective.
- **Design Methods** (4 weeks · weeks 10–13 · 11/05–12/03). Create a statement or series of statements as formal strategies that can begin to link, connect, or unify your findings. What patterns appear? What connections do you see across each form of inquiry? Once you have drafted your statement, generate a project which serves to represent this formal strategy or strategies.

03 — Presenting Your Inquiry

Individual · 3 weeks to build · 11/10–12/01 · tentatively Tuesday 12/1 and Thursday 12/3, 5:30–8

Your semester will culminate across two evenings of presentations in which you will formally deliver a presentation of your semester of inquiry. You will write a script and design a set of visuals to accompany the script. You will present this in front of your peers and mentors (virtually).

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Calendar

WEEK	DATE	BEGINS	DUE
01	09/01/2020	Thursday charrette	
02	09/08/2020	Charrette wrap-up · introductions · Summer Letter conversation · Thesis Journal (weekly) · Inquiry A — 50 Questions	
03	09/15/2020	Remix	
04	09/22/2020	Inquiry B — Words That Matter	
05	09/29/2020		**Inquiry A — 50 Questions · Remix**

WEEK	DATE	BEGINS	DUE
06	10/06/2020		
07	10/13/2020	Extreme Scale · Inquiry C — Filter of Perspective	**Inquiry B — Words That Matter**
08	10/20/2020		
09	10/27/2020	Inquiry D — Thesis Taxonomy	**Extreme Scale**
10	11/03/2020	Design Methods	**Inquiry C — Filter of Perspective**
11	11/10/2020	Presentation building	
12	11/17/2020		**Inquiry D — Thesis Taxonomy**
13	11/24/2020	Thanksgiving break	
14	12/01/2020	Inquiry Presentations	**Design Methods**

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Materials & Tools

- **Basecamp** — weekly Thesis Journal prompts and class communication.