SECOND YEAR GRADUATE STUDIO

Fall 2021

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
DATES	September 2021 – December 9, 2021
LOCATION	[confirm]
INSTRUCTOR	Assistant Professor Nicholas Rock
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OFFICE HOURS	By appointment — Tuesdays and Thursdays 11–12:30, Wednesdays 12–2

01

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.

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

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 of your thesis through a series of inquiry-based projects, a formal professional presentation, and several challenging form-making assignments, culminating in a design brief and semester-end reviews.

02

Learning Outcomes

Program learning outcomes are assessed with the rubric under Assessment: Process, Master Key Principles, Authorship, Design Agility, History & Context, and Professionalism.

03

Course Structure

Class as Community

I come into this class from a place of respect and trust, and I hope that you all do too.

We are a microcosm — of the department, the school, the university, and while small, we are still an incredibly diverse community. Our cohort includes students from all over the world with all sorts of backgrounds and experiences.

Our class is inclusive and accessible — We come from different places, backgrounds, and walks of life. We embrace the unique identities of each member of this community and commit to learning, growing, and understanding each other through historical contexts of race, gender, religion, sexuality, and other expressions of self.

I understand that your trust is earned. I am committed to helping you grow and learn and change or solidify your perspective and knowledge in design, and I am committed to learning from you. I will ensure that our class is a safe space to teach and learn, as I see all of us working in both capacities.

We will explore diverse content. I am working to ensure that this course represents a vast range of perspectives, ideas, topics, people, and cultures through what I will provide and what I hope you all will bring to the conversation. I will also strive to elevate your voices in this class through the project work and the conversation.

We will be flexible, patient, and understanding. I made a syllabus and a schedule of projects. I will shift and adjust the work and the due dates to adapt to our class. There is understandable uncertainty coming into this semester. Let's commit to the experience and see where it takes us.

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 and 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 / traveling in Europe), graduates of our MFA; Mohammed Nassem (LA) is a graduate of our undergrad, with his MFA from RISD.

These groups intentionally bridge both sections to ensure you have an alternate structure to see and hear from each other, thus taking advantage of the entire 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

00 — 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.).

01 — Form. This semester will include two form-making projects running in parallel to the broader inquiry and thesis development work. These projects will keep you making experimental forms and express ideas related to your thesis work (or not) that appear along the way. We will ask you to begin aligning and organizing yourself in relation to what interests and influences you. You will develop a more profound sense of your own identity as a designer and be better able to frame questions and lines of inquiry on your own.

02 — Inquiry. We will work through two distinct but complementary forms of inquiry that are intentionally sequential, the first building a sort of foundation for the second. 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, and something that can inform someone who has no idea about your work. We will ask that you begin to fully develop a coherent perspective on both the visual and verbal languages you utilize to discover and articulate your thesis while continually questioning design as it relates to your view and values. Synthesize, connect the dots, draw connections, compile insights, and begin to apply your thinking.

03 — Form + Inquiry. Using content you are generating through inquiry and form making, along with insights gleaned from this process, you will work on two projects combining form and inquiry. You will catalog and analyze what you have made, collected, saved, archived, or bookmarked to date. And begin to look for the appearance of formal strategies or ideas that are the threads or connections between everything.

04

Projects

A — Form: Remix

Individual · 3 weeks · 9/14–10/07

A project about recontextualizing content, ideas, and form.

B — Inquiry: Filter of Perspective

Individual · 5 weeks · 9/14–10/20

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.

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.

C — Form + Inquiry: Insights Presentation

Individual · 3 weeks · 9/28–10/20

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. Across two evenings of presentations you will formally deliver a presentation of insights stemming from the work developed from your Summer Letter to your Filter of Perspective. 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).

D — Form: Extreme Scale

Individual · 3 weeks · 10/26–11/18

A project about shifting understanding and perspective.

E — Inquiry: 50 Questions

Individual · 4 weeks · 10/26–11/23

You will begin to develop a research methodology based on conceptual and formal questions as a design process for this project. You will research and explore new content by creatives, authors, thought leaders, and others within and outside of design to help develop internal and external questions as practicing designers.

F — Form + Inquiry: Thesis Taxonomy + Methods

Individual · 4 weeks · 11/09–12/09

How can you begin to define your thesis idea and frame its references in a language we understand? Begin to develop a taxonomy of the language and terminology that have emerged from the beginning of the semester. It would be best if you additionally defined or described this terminology. Support this taxonomy with references, such as links, examples, or case studies. 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 representing this formal strategy or strategies.

05

Assessment

Program 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 a 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

OBJECTIVE	LEVEL 1 — UNSATISFACTORY	LEVEL 2 — COMPETENT	LEVEL 3 — ACCOMPLISHED
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
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

OBJECTIVE	LEVEL 1 — UNSATISFACTORY	LEVEL 2 — COMPETENT	LEVEL 3 — ACCOMPLISHED
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
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 skill Student communicates with the highest level of form and respect in person and digitally

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Calendar

DATES	PROJECT
9/14 – 10/07	A — Form: Remix
9/14 – 10/20	B — Inquiry: Filter of Perspective
9/28 – 10/20	C — Form + Inquiry: Insights Presentation
10/26 – 11/18	D — Form: Extreme Scale
10/26 – 11/23	E — Inquiry: 50 Questions
11/09 – 12/09	F — Form + Inquiry: Thesis Taxonomy + Methods

07

Materials & Tools

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