

CAPS LOCK

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE KIT

Assignments and suggested reading per chapter

Capitalism could not exist without the coins, banknotes, documents, information graphics, interfaces, branding, and advertising made by graphic designers. Even strategies such as social design and speculative design are easily appropriated to serve economic growth. It seems design is locked in a cycle of exploitation and extraction, furthering inequality and environmental collapse. *CAPS LOCK* is a reference work that uses clear language and visual examples to show how graphic design and capitalism have come to be inextricably linked.

This free educational resource kit has practical assignments and suggesting reading that can be used by educators in different faculties and levels. These activities are intended for students to understand the complex relations between graphic design and capitalism through practice and debate.

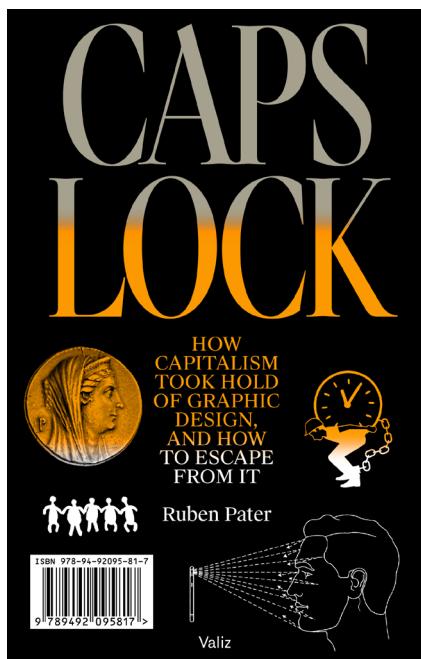
Organized by the chapters of *CAPS LOCK*, students can prepare by reading the chapter from which the assignments are derived. The aim of these exercises is for students to understand how economy and ideology are related to visual communication.

Levels

Trade schools, bachelor, and master programmes

Faculties

Graphic design, visual communication, communication design, design theory, typography, UX design, branding, social design, advertising



Ruben Pater, August 2021.
Valiz Publishers

Book and ebook available at valiz.nl/en/publications/caps-lock.html
For more information info@valiz.nl

THE DESIGNER AS SCRIBE

The scribe is a pre-cursor of the designer before printing technology existed. When societies grew larger, abstract graphic forms such as contracts, coins, banknotes, and financial statements were devised to replace social relations into abstract and more general ones. What is known as economy, is actually a collection of social relations between people. In this way graphic documents are indispensable to govern complex economic societies, but in designing those abstract forms, a personal and direct moment of contact is also lost. When a society introduces designed forms of value, a social relation based on trust becomes an abstract relation between debtor and indebted. How can graphic design be more socially sensitive about creating abstract value forms?

Pages 22-73

Themes: scribe, manuscript, currency, stock market, contracts, accounting, financial notation, alternative currencies, bookkeeping, spreadsheets

Further reading

Jon Astbury, 'In for a Penny: The Design Evolution of Money', *The Architectural Review*, 9 April 2014

Johanna Drucker, *Graphesis*, Harvard University Press, 2014

Johanna Drucker and Emily McVarish, *Graphic Design History: A Critical Guide*, Pearson, 2009

David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5000 Years*, Melville House, 2011

Hans de Heij, *Designing banknote Identity*, DNB Occasional Studies Vol.10, No.3, 2012

1.1

Assignments

1. Form groups of 2-5 students to design a currency for the class that is not official, but only used in the classroom. Think about exchange rates, counterfeiting, trust, circulation and it must be produced at school. Make a design together and produce the currency. Organize a small market in the school to start circulation where only local currencies are allowed (selling snacks or zines, posters). Finalize the assignment by a debate with the class to share experiences.
2. Start with the stock market section of a newspaper, each group of 2-3 students chooses one of the listed companies. Now each group takes 1-2 weeks to research the company and focus on the people and natural resources that are involved. Make sure sources are trustworthy, cross-referenced and documented. See if you can find testimonies or witness accounts of what the company actually does. Use the research to produce an alternative financial newspaper of 16 pages, tabloid/A3 size, that communicates the social and natural relations on which the stock price is based.
3. Think of a person in your social circle that you can exchange some kind of value with. It can be doing your neighbor's grocery shopping, giving a friend a light, or helping someone by taking out the dustbin. Then, create a graphic document (a receipt, or a contract) that formalizes that specific part of the relationship as closely as possible, so it could be used as an official document. Tell the other person beforehand and ask them permission. Now show your document to the other person and interview them about it. Ask them what they think about the contract, and document their response in a medium of your choosing, and involve it in the presentation.
4. Find a document of value, it can be an old banknote, a stock, a contract, a diploma, etc. Digitally separate the different design layers into information layers (text), value (a number), and ornaments and anti-counterfeiting details, etc. Create a work from of all these layers that can shed some new light on the document you found, for example by reproducing them on a larger scale exposing certain details, or reassembling them in a different order, or creating an animated version of it.

THE DESIGNER AS ENGINEER

The capitalist market cannot function without the production standards that are outlined in documents like manuals, infographics, identity documents, cadastral maps, and official forms. These came into existence with the beginning of the first nation states and the birth of industrial capitalism. Although these forms make communication easier and more efficient, they also have destroyed a lot of local/indigenous knowledge. Document such as maps have also strongly embedded capitalist ideas about land as personal property all across the globe, serving as graphic evidence to dispossess indigenous peoples from their land, and engage in resource extraction and exploitation. As designers we need standards. But which are useful, and which serve the profits of industrial production?

Pages 76–129

Themes: standards, measurements, bureaucracy, documents, forms, mapping, property, infographics, citizenship, passports

Further reading:

Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents*, Duke University Press, 2014

David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules*, Melville House, 2015

Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Duke University Press, 2011

James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition*, Yale University Press, 1998

David Turnbull, *Maps Are Territories: Science is an Atlas: A Portfolio of Exhibits*, University of Chicago Press, 1993

1.2

Assignments

1. Pre-industrial measures were often derived from body sizes; the thumb, the foot, the elbow. Divide the class into groups of three and come up with a new system of measurement based on the properties of your group, your interests, or your surroundings. Only the members of the group should understand where the measure comes from. Create a measuring tool and design and produce printed material that introduces and explains how your new measurement system works.
2. In groups of 3–6, choose a plot of land, such as the school or your house. Collect information from the land registry about who owns the land, what its approximate value is, and how it is used. Next is imagining what other uses the land can have through collective mapping. For example, what is the ecological value? What species of animals live here? Are there traces of human history, can you find maps of previous settlements or burial grounds? Consider both objective and subjective information about the place. Present the findings in a performative presentation that relates the scale of the persons presenting to the size of the land.
3. Bring a graphic document from your personal financial administration (a receipt, a contract, an insurance policy, an invoice). Preferably one that relates to a personal story where you felt unheard or treated badly/unfairly. Analyze the design of the document (size, typography, paper, printing, language, amelioration). Now redesign the document that includes or responds to the context of your personal experience.
4. Passports and IDs control the movement of people within and between nation states. They do that by reducing a human being to body metrics (age, eye colour, height, weight, fingerprints, a portrait photo) that can be measured and checked. Of course, these measurements do not come close to representing a person in full. In this assignment you redesign your own ID or passport twice. One is stripped of all ‘soft’ design elements (colour, ornaments) and only uses data: the metric information the state needs to monitor your movements. The other one has no metrics at all, and instead includes only images or information that you think adequately represent you as a person.

THE DESIGNER AS BRANDER

From the Nike swoosh to the Christian cross, abstract symbols play an important role in human society. Branding started with the marking of agricultural property. Brandings were a symbol of identification, but today they have become symbols for mass-produced products. With each step the maker of the product became further removed from the brand that it represented, until logotypes for businesses grew into graphic systems for multinational corporations known as corporate identities. Branding since then spread to include all aspects of life, with brands achieving an almost omnipresent and religious status. Marks on products can be useful to signify quality or ownership, but when does branding stop being useful and becomes wasteful through aggressive marketing and consumerism?

Pages 132–179

Themes: branding, logos, advertising, corporate identity, rebranding, monopolies, city marketing, fake brands

Further reading:

Nick Bell, 'Brand Madness: The Steamroller of Branding', *Eye Magazine* 14, no. 53, 2004

Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*, Duke University Press, 2015

Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, Vintage Canada, 2009

Wally Olins, 'Branding the Nation – The Historical Context', *The Journal of Brand Management* Vol.9, April 2002

1.3

Assignments

1. What is your favourite brand? Without looking up pictures of the logo, try to reproduce the logo from memory on letter/A4 size in black marker or ink, as precisely as possible. Repeat the exercise many times until you have at least twelve versions. Choose one that you like best, and blow it up to poster size.
2. Divide the class into groups. Each group of 2–3 persons can choose a famous logo designed that others will recognize. You can use a book with award-winning or well-known logotypes for this exercise. Each group researches the background of the company behind the logo, focusing on societal impact. About how much money was made, about socially responsible behaviour, about wages and labour conflicts. Were they/are they socially responsible? Eco-friendly? Benevolent? Generous? Friendly? Sociopathic? Write a biography of no more than 500 words as if the company were a person, without mentioning specifics such as names or locations that can give the identity away. Use a voice and way of speaking that matches the social behaviour of the company you chose. Each group reads their story as a personal introduction, without mentioning the name or showing the logo. After everyone has presented, your classmates can guess the company and logo.
3. The class collectively chooses a known brand that is locally criticized for gentrifying neighbourhoods and pushing out local businesses. First devise a strategy how to hurt this company. The class is divided into groups of 4–5, for a brainstorm on what strategy will work. Also decide what is a realistic end goal for the campaign. What will push this company to stop? Each team presents their ideas, and collectively you choose which actions are appropriate. Divide the class into a campaign team, researchers, copywriters, poster designers, flyer/leaflet designers, a press team, a community organizing team, and an event/performance team to carry out a series of actions, pasting posters, speaking to people, and handing out flyers in efforts to gain visibility and organize the community against this company.

THE DESIGNER AS SALESPERSON

Graphic designers sometimes distance themselves from advertising, which is regarded as too commercial or lacking certain taste. In reality graphic design and advertising often merge, and much of the work that graphic designers do, such as packaging, promotional material, branding or user experience design (UX design), are extensions of marketing strategies, and therefore directly or indirectly serve a sales purpose. Advertising is so omnipresent, especially after the privatization of public services such as healthcare and education, that we find the language of sales everywhere around us. We are so conditioned to viewing the world as a marketplace that this logic has been largely copied in all areas of graphic design, including cultural institutions, public services, and non-profits. How can design help to create and promote other forms of value and exchange?

Pages 182–233

Themes: advertising, sales, marketing, branding, surveillance capitalism, consumer demand, styling, planned obsolescence, the creative industries

Further reading

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, Penguin Books, 1972

Thomas C. Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, University of Chicago Press, 1997

Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, Vintage Canada, 2009

Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, Routledge, 1995

1.4

Assignments

1. The class visits a nearby supermarket. Each student chooses a different product within a product group (flour, oil, juice, coffee, etc.), so that work can be compared. Each student buys a different product, and redesigns the packaging with as little branding, and as little material as possible. All material must be reusable, and the type of product must be recognizable. Present all your designs together as an alternative supermarket at school and discuss the process.
2. Where does communication end and manipulation begin? Each student brings an advertisement to class of which they like the design; this can be print, video, web or otherwise. Study your advertisement and list all of the used elements (typefaces, colours, images, logo, text, price). Strip the advertisement from every manipulative or marketing element until only the bare communication layer is left, and then redesign the communication message in the most direct and non-manipulative way possible. Show each step of removal when presenting the final work.
3. Bring an object from your home made by a well-known brand. Look online for information about the object, where it was made, what it costs in the store, and if you can, how much the people get paid who made the product and estimate how much the materials cost that went into it. Look for any information regarding the design of the object and the brand, which advertising or design agencies were involved, and what profits the company makes and other information you can find. Produce a small booklet that is approximately the size of the product, to accompany the object. Think of it as a kind of extended product information that gives a more detailed account than the product information on the object, combining information about the design with product information. Show the object with the booklet in class and present your findings.
4. Some advertisers are convinced that everything can be branded, even sand. Choose a resource that is abundant and free that isn't commodified yet, and turn this into a commodity using branding. Produce branding, packaging and promotion material and set up a market stall. Talk to people and find out how the product is perceived, use their responses in a short final presentation.

THE DESIGNER AS WORKER

We spend most of our time working, training for work, looking for work, or recovering from it. Work is not only necessary for our basic needs: food, clothing, and shelter, it also structures our lives and indicates our status in society. Design is often regarded as a privileged form of work, a way to ‘turn your hobby into a job’, or even as a passion, to quote a popular meme. In fact a lot of design work is working long hours, doing unpaid internships, and struggling to pay the bills. Designers are faced with higher burnout and depression rates, while many design jobs are likely to become outsourced or automated. How can the working conditions of designers be improved?

Pages 240–285

Themes: work, work ethic, overwork, burnout, unpaid work, exploitation, wages, spec work, unions

Further reading

Brave New Alps, *Designers' Inquiry*, 2013

Perrin Drumm, ‘Can We Design a More Perfect Design Union?’, *AIGA Eye on design*, 19 June 2018, eyeondesign.aiga.org/can-we-design-a-more-perfect-design-union

Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulations*, Autonomedia, 2004

Emily Guendelsberger, *On The Clock: What Low-Wage Work Did to Me and How It Drives America Insane*, Little, Brown, and Company, 2019

Andrea Komlosy, *Work: The Last 1,000 Years*, Verso Books, 2018

Kathi Weeks, *The Problems with Work*, Duke University Press, 2011

2.1

Assignments

1. How are graphic design jobs advertised? Collect three job advertisements for graphic design jobs (online or offline). Analyze the text and images, to find out what kind of work ethic is expected from graphic designers. Take note of what is not mentioned in the ad (is salary or overwork mentioned? Do they say why they are hiring?) Secondly, interview a designer who has worked or interned at a graphic design studio, and ask them about their experiences. Combine your findings in a publication or poster series where the job ads are combined with job experiences.
2. What's your side job as a student? Or what side job did you use to have? Bring your pay check or financial contract and look at all aspects of the graphic design and communication. What percentage of taxes and insurance is involved? What is the company that is employing you? Who designed their identity? Find out as much as you can and make a poster with your findings.
3. We are used to designing products that are sold, but you can find free products everywhere. Discarded furniture, fruit from trees, mushrooms from the forest, old clothes, waste, dumpster diving. Each student finds at least five free products that still have use value, and have a design aspect that they admire or appreciate. Organize a free shop with all the products with the entire class, design the shop's interior and signage. Invite other departments and students!
4. What is work and what isn't considered work? Take a recent seven-day week and note down all your activities, including unpaid domestic work such as cleaning and cooking, activities necessary for your health: sports, meditation, sleep, and social activities that give other people value: meeting friends and family, or caring for children or friends. Analyze all the activities; which are paid and unpaid, what kind of value is produced (a clean house, study points, a healthy body, a nourishing meal, a poster design). Create a graphic representation of your week and communicate what value is produced and what activities are important and why? Finally, ask yourself what the best moment of the week was, and what the most educational moment was. The final work should represent the week's activities but using a personal idea of organization and value. End with a class discussion about value, and what everyone has learned from the assignment.

THE DESIGNER AS ENTREPRENEUR

There are many reasons why designers start a business. Some are simply fed up working for others, for others freelancing is the only option. Starting your own business, launching your own products, hustling small jobs, even becoming investors, are not really the main qualities of designers. They are part of a survival mechanism in a society where income from design jobs is increasingly uncertain and temporary. We should understand the term entrepreneur under capitalism as an ideology that interprets uncertainty as opportunity. Being in constant competition with each other, design entrepreneurship breeds a culture of individualism and mistrust while driving down prices. Can new notions of solidarity between designers and more collective forms of organizing create a more healthy work environment?

Pages 290–313

Themes: entrepreneur, freelancer, hype, star designer, copyrights, gig workers, gig economy

Further reading

Sarah Grey, 'Four Myths About the 'Freelancer Class', *Jacobin Magazine*, 5 July 2015,
jacobinmag.com/2015/05/freelance-independent-contractor-union-precariat

Silvio Lorusso, *Entreprerariat: Everyone is an Entrepreneur: Nobody is Safe*, Onomatopee, 2019

Oli Mould, *Against Creativity*, Verso Books, 2018

Precarious Workers Brigade, *Training for Exploitation? Politicising Employability and Reclaiming Education*, Journal of Aesthetics & Protest Press, 2017

Aggie Toppins, 'Can We Teach Graphic Design History Without the Cult of Hero Worship?', *AIGA Eye on design*, 29 May 2020, eyeondesign.aiga.org/can-we-teach-graphic-design-history-without-the-cult-of-heroworship

2.2

Assignments

1. Make an account as a graphic designer at an online gig website for example Fiverr.com or Task-rabbit.com. Create a profile and try to do at least one online gig. Document the communication with the employer, the steps, and how much time it takes you for each step in the process. Present the work you made in class with a five-minute presentation, and create a second work that communicates your experiences in response to the first one.
2. Graphic designers are used to working on an individual basis or in small teams. What if designers would work in teams of 20–30 people, like some sciences do? This assignment is about making one graphic design poster with the entire class. The only rules are that not one person can take the lead or have a recognizable trace in the final outcome, that the poster is self-produced, and that the design is about the process itself. Start by organizing together, writing a collective briefing or establishing a message, and how everyone feels the process should be organized equally.
3. Legal documents often use difficult language and aren't easy to read. But what if you have to work with these documents as a designer? Use a contract between a freelancer and a client, for example from online sources like aiga.org/resources/business-freelance-resources/legal-guides-contracts. Read the contract carefully and write down what are the most important clauses and separate details from main points. Make sure you understand it through and through. Redesign, rewrite and reorganize the document in such a way that your peers will better understand it. Also address the medium and choices for distribution (online, offline, video, print, digital, etc.).
4. The current copyright system depends on access to lawyers, and is therefore not available to the majority of freelance graphic designers. We need new ideas about value and exchange of design work. Form groups of 4–7 students and come up with an alternative system to facilitate the exchange of cultural work that considers how makers will receive some kind of value for their work. Start by researching alternatives such as copyleft (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copyleft) and creative commons (creativecommons.org), and come up with a symbol and a list/system so it can be used by other designers.

THE DESIGNER AS AMATEUR

What makes someone a graphic designer? Who decides what a designer is? The title ‘designer’ isn’t protected, it doesn’t require an educational background, or a formal code of conduct. Some even say that everyone is a designer, and design is ‘basic to all human activity’. The Designer as amateur is about the distinction between professional and amateur graphic designers, and why this has led to the exclusion of many designers from design organizations and practices. A more ethical sharing of knowledge and resources in design begins with the realization that the majority of design in the world is done by those who do not call themselves designers or have not received official design education. Ideally those who harbour design knowledge should be recognized and become part of the value exchange in the professional sphere, by receiving visibility, recognition, and compensation through a radical redistribution of the benefits of design.

Pages 318–339

Themes: amateur, professional, taste, class, System D, informal economy, counterfeiting, DIY

Further reading

Paul Atkinson, ‘Do It Yourself: Democracy and Design’, *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1, 2006

Gerry Beegan and Paul Atkinson, ‘Professionalism, Amateurism and the Boundaries of Design’, *Journal of Design History* 21, no. 4, 2008

Sasha Costanza-Chock, *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*, MIT Press, 2020

Michael Rock, ‘On Unprofessionalism’, 2 x 4, 1994, 2x4.org/ideas/1994/on-unprofessionalism

2.3

Assignments

1. Make a 16-page zine on half letter/A5 format about your hobby or a personal fascination outside of ‘professional’ art or design. The zine has to be made without use of a computer, for example using collage, photocopiers, scissors, tape, and glue. Print twelve copies.
2. Go around your neighbourhood and collect at least twelve examples of vernacular or ‘amateur’ graphic design. Document them with a camera or take physical copies if possible. Analyze all the pieces in detail (colour, image use, typography, reproduction method) and organize them on a wall or on a table as if you were the curator of this exhibition. Supply each piece with a short caption text describing its formal aspects. From these twelve works make a selection of 3–5 pieces, and think about a narrative that connects them to the area you found them in. Create a title for this collection and a format in which to display them (think about size, order, material). You can enlarge or reprint, as long as the original aesthetics and meaning remain intact. Create an exhibition in which all students present their collected material and each student does a five-minute talk about their collection.
3. Organize in groups of 5–7 students. Each group has to organize a (fictional) graphic design conference without any professional designers presenting or any professional graphic design work being shown. What would the programme look like? Who would speak? Create a line-up, debate topics, a title, and create promotional material for this fictional conference.
4. Embodied knowledge is a concept from feminist theory that posits that each individual has valuable knowledge based on their unique lived experience. Think about the things you have learned in your life, not from books or from teachers, but as a lived experience (for example based on your gender, race, mental health, physical health, economic background, the place where you grew up, age, experiences, etc.) Write a short essay of 800 words as if you were an expert on this topic, in which you explain this knowledge to outsiders, without using any academic or external references.

THE DESIGNER AS EDUCATOR

Less than a 150 years ago, graphic design was a practice-skilled job. Today, graphic design education is provided as summer schools, vocational courses, bachelor degrees, master degrees, and PhD programmes. Design graduates have become products themselves, produced by schools that resemble 'designer factories'. It is hardly surprising that design education is geared towards the needs of the industry. Professional graphic design evolved from the needs of industrial production, and education should be able to provide designers with skills that can pay the rent. If we regard education as a fundamental public service that should be accessible to everyone, education is a commons. As any other commons, education should be protected and defended against the pressures of capitalism to privatize, own, or influence the exchange of knowledge in society. How can design education be geared towards the well-being of society rather the profits of industry?

Pages 342–365

Themes: education, students, teachers, art school, discipline, tuition, radical pedagogy, creative industries

Further reading

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2000

bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Routledge, 1994

Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*, Harrow Books, 1973

Jacob Lindgren, ed., *Extra-Curricular*, Onomatopee, 2018

2.4

Assignments

1. In this assignment the students and the teacher switch places. The teacher is passively present, only allowed to ask questions or give suggestions. In the first class, all students collectively discuss their experience on education, and what is missing from the curriculum. Then collectively create a new programme for the remaining classes, where students are both teacher and organizers. For example, each student can teach one class, or give assignments or suggest workshops. The final class should be reserved for students to review and critically reflect on each other's work and review the experiences. What did you learn? How did this change your idea about education? Think about putting the experiences on a blog or in a booklet for future students to learn from.
2. Ivan Illich talked about a hidden curriculum: unwritten rules about discipline, structure, and knowledge that can be found in every school. Write down a list of what the hidden curriculum is in your school. What is expected but not officially communicated? Create a series of three posters, based on the hidden curriculum of the school. Organize a debate among the students in a space where all posters can be exhibited, about what the hidden curriculum is in your institute.
3. What is in your opinion the value of a graphic design degree? Should everyone have access to it or should it be restricted? Use your ideas about the value of a degree to redesign your own design diploma which you will receive after finishing your studies. Size, material and technique are free. No matter what your concept is, make it look convincing and frame it, as doctors and lawyers are known to do.
4. Graphic design education tends to focus on canonic authors and works by 'star designers' from the Global North. However, graphic design is practiced everywhere, so why not investigate the design culture in your own town/city? How local is the graphic design knowledge that is exchanged at school? Visit a local graphic design archive/library/document archive and have each student select a work that was made locally, but isn't well-known internationally. If a design archive isn't available you can take graphic documents made locally to create a mini archive. Dive into the history of the designer, the context of the work you selected, and create a visual essay about it. This can take the form of a zine, booklet, poster, or website.

THE DESIGNER AS HACKER

The hacker can provide a perspective to understand culture and knowledge production that comes from the emerging digital technologies of the twentieth century. The age of data is characterized by e-waste and tech billionaires. But unlike oil and coal, data cannot be seen, touched, or smelled. Still, it manages to fuel economies, sway elections, and earn advertising dollars. Graphic design craftsmanship has been largely replaced by an ‘upgrade addiction’ for graphic design software and hardware, making designers dependent on the handful of companies that own the platforms and software. The hacker ethic is a way of engaging with design and technology in a playful manner that challenges ownership of the network. Can a more critical stance towards digital technology help graphic designers escape the domination of aesthetic and production by tech monopolies?

Pages 370–395

Themes: hacker, hacking, open-source, copyright, algorithms, surveillance capitalism, artificial intelligence, network society, big data

Further reading

James Bridle, *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future*, Verso Books, 2018

Dmytri Kleiner, *The Telekommunist Manifesto* (Network Notebooks 03), ed. Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer, Institute of Network Cultures, 2010

Tristan Harris, ‘How Technology is Hijacking Your Mind—from a Magician and Google Design Ethicist’, *Medium*, 18 May 2016, medium.com/thrive-global/how-technology-hijacks-peoples-minds-from-a-magician-and-google-sdesign-ethicist-56d62ef5edf3

Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Hachette, 2019

3.1

Assignments

1. You can find many image filters online, such as logo generators and other graphic tools meant for amateur use. Create a poster without using professional graphic software like Adobe, but only use online tools. Make three separate layers which are then silk-screen or RISO-printed each in a different colour. Experiment with creating a narrative by combining the three layers in different ways.
2. Choose a text or manifest about digital rights, such as cyborgrights.eu, the gnu.org/gnu/manifesto.en.html, wiki.p2pfoundation.net/Open_Source_Everything_Manifesto, and there are many more. Redesign the text as a zine/booklet using only open-source software (such as Gimp, Inkscape, Scribus, etc). It may be difficult if you have no experience with these programs, but instead of trying to mimic proprietary software use the limitations to help your design choices. As an added feature you can use hybrid publishing, so that your design can both be published online (ebook, website) and as a printed book. Share your work online, so you are contributing to the commons.
3. Which technologies do you need to create designs? Make a list of all the hardware and software you use, and don’t forget communication devices such as email, smartphones, and search engines. From each technology, find the terms and conditions (often found in the about menu) and gather them in a massive reference publication. Typeset all the collected terms and conditions, create an index and make sure you employ navigation for easier use. Print it in black-and-white and bind it.
4. Tools to create software or to write code, using plug-ins, tutorials, are often publicly available. However, in graphic design, practitioners tend to protect and be secretive about their methods. This assignment is about sharing skills. What is a design skill you possess that others could benefit from? It can be a filter, a type treatment, a way to search for typefaces, pattern-making, or software tricks. Document your skill step by step and create a tutorial in a video of one minute. Think about the design and storytelling as well. Allow users to engage, build on your skill, or to ask questions. All tutorials are put into a video playlist for unlimited public access.

THE DESIGNER AS FUTURIST

The future is a way for designers to imagine fantastic worlds and float ideas that are not yet feasible. In that sense the future can be a space for experimentation but also an escape hatch from the constraints of reality. Speculative design and design fiction are some of the design methods that imagine future products and services, often in relation to new technologies. If speculative design wants to play a role in imagining better societies, designers should assume responsibility for the current crises and understand their own role in them. By embracing the emancipatory potential of the future and resisting the enclosure of the future by capitalism. If not, the future will only exist as commodities for entertainment or financial speculation. How can speculative design be used to imagine futures built on notions of solidarity, justice, and equality that can help to fight today's crises as well?

Pages 398–415

Themes: speculation, speculative design, design fiction, futurology, future studies, speculative finance, derivatives, science fiction

Further reading

Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything*, MIT Press, 2013

Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Verso Books, 2009

Ivica Mitrović, “Western Melancholy” / How to Imagine Different Futures in the “Real World”?’, *interakcije*, 27 August 2018, interakcije.net/en/2018/08/27/western-melancholy-how-to-imagine-different-futures-in-the-real-world

Pedro Oliveira and Luiza Prado, ‘Cheat Sheet for a Non- (or Less-) Colonialist Speculative Design’, *Medium*, 10 September 2014, medium.com/a-parede/cheat-sheet-for-anon-or-less-colonialist-speculative-design-9a6b4ae3c465

3.2

Assignments

1. Imagine a scenario fifty years into the future of your town/city, just using your own imagination. Write an abstract of the scenario, and create reference images to support the story. Secondly, find climate data, fossil vs. green energy, and population data and process all this into a second iteration of the scenario that is more science-based. Now imagine your children and your grandchildren will be living in this scenario, which will create the third iteration of the scenario, a more personally motivated one. Present the three iterations and reflect on them with the entire class.
2. Science fiction works often mention specific years in the future (1999, 2001, 2012). Take a science fiction movie or illustrated story that plays in a year that has already passed. Compile 6–8 photo spreads each showing one image from that year, and one image from the science fiction story (a still or illustration), comparing reality with imagination. Find visual parallels or combinations that add an extra layer. Make it into a twelve-page book or exhibit them spatially.
3. The planet is warming at an alarming rate, but what does that mean for our individual behaviour? For the rise in warming to stay below 2°C, our personal carbon budget needs to go to 2.1 tonnes in 2050 (the 2001 average for US citizens is 21.7 tonnes, the average for Chinese citizens is 1.7 tonnes). Use online carbon footprint calculators to find out how this will influence your personal behaviour. Document the steps and comparisons in a ‘carbon diary’ that discusses travel, family, eating habits, housing, etc.
4. Future scenarios often use speculative imagery to imagine futures with spectacular architecture and mobility systems (flying cars, floating cities). In retrospect, large societal changes are often not as visible as speculative design makes it seem. Our world doesn’t look that different from 25 years ago at the surface. Think about important emancipatory milestones such as universal suffrage, the eight-hour work week, women’s rights, ending racist practices, queer rights (such as gay marriage), legalizing of soft drugs. What emancipatory events would you foresee in the future in your city/country? Visualize these less visible but important societal changes in a future scenario, one image for each emancipatory event.

THE DESIGNER AS PHILANTHROPIST

The designer as philanthropist donates time and skills to address social issues that benefit the public good, instead of selling more products. We find these inclinations in social design, design for good, and design thinking. Under the influence of Silicon Valley, no ‘problem’ is too small to be solved by design. Design has come from a position of being humble, to one of hubris. Confident that design can do what is considered ‘too big for governments and NGOs alone’. To what extent can design contribute to ‘a better society’ when designers become philanthropists and donate their time and resources to social causes? Can design ‘solve’ problems at all?

Pages 420–443

Themes: social design, design thinking, design for good, philanthropy, white-saviour complex, mutual aid, reciprocity

Further reading

Danah Abdulla, ‘A Manifesto of Change or Design Imperialism? A Look at the Purpose of the Social Design Practice’, in *A Matter of Design: Making Society through Science and Technology*, ed. Claudio Coletta et al. STS Italia Publishing, 2014

Maggie Gram, ‘On Design Thinking’, *N+1 magazine* 35 (Fall 2019), nplusonemag.com/issue-35/reviews/on-design-thinking/, accessed 22 January 2021.

Victor J. Papanek, *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change*, Pantheon Books, 1972

Ruben Pater, ‘Treating the refugee crisis as a design problem is problematic’, *Dezeen*, 21 April 2016, dezeen.com/2016/04/21/rubenpater-opinion-what-design-can-do-refugeecrisis-problematic-design

3.3

Assignments

1. Each student chooses an example of social design. Write a 500-word abstract about the project. Try to use different sources and look for information about the impact or realization of the work, not just its promises or PR. Present it to the class in a two-minute visual presentation, and try leaving any judgement to the audience. After the entire day of presentations, discuss if design can provide solutions for social issues, and why it can or cannot in your opinion.

THE DESIGNER AS ACTIVIST

Each generation of designers have responded to capitalism with tactics such as writing manifestos, designing anti-capitalist campaigns, and political organizing. Activism sometimes implies social or progressive ideals, but capitalists and fascists also want political and social change, although in an entirely different direction. Design activism that isn't rooted in radical ideas can easily be appropriated by capitalism's appetite for growth, such as brands that engage in pinkwashing or causewashing. Capitalism's logic has been, and still is, to find the last remaining spaces of equal exchange and open access, and privatize those spaces for profit. Commoning, which is the process of creating and defending commons, has proven to be a useful strategy for designers to avoid their work being appropriated by capitalism.

Pages 446–505

Themes: activism, design activism, causewashing, pinkwashing, greenwashing, cooperative, commons, commoning, mutual aid

Further reading

Teju Cole, 'The White-Savior Industrial Complex', *The Atlantic*, 21 March 2012, theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843

Sasha Costanza-Chock, *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*, MIT Press, 2020

Silvia Federici, 'Feminism and the Politics of the Commons', in *Uses of a Whirlwind: Movement, Movements, and Contemporary Radical Currents in the United States*, ed. Craig Hughes, Stevie Peace and Kevin Van Meter for the Team Colors Collective, AK Press, 2010

Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)*, Verso Books, 2020

3.4

Assignments

1. Form groups of 3–4 students, discuss what you think can be improved in graphic design. Imagine an ideal design practice for after you graduate. Write a manifesto together of no more than one page (letter/A4 format) with a list of demands or suggestions how to achieve such improvements in practical ways. Make sure the design of the manifesto, the typography, and the writing also contain information or hints of what kind of graphic design your group is envisioning. Present it in front of your classmates as a performance/lecture.
2. Commoning is a verb that means the stewardship and caring for a resource that is accessible to all. Think of it like a forester keeping a forest healthy, or a cleaner keeping a hospital tidy. When graphic designers make designs that can be used or accessed by everyone, they also create commons. The more difficult question is how designers are paid or receive value from their work if it is accessible to everyone. Form groups of 3–4 to come up with different ideas for how designers can get value for their work while sharing their work publicly, without working for companies that exploit or own that work. Consider barter, solidarity networks, micropayments, alternative currencies, time-banking. Come up with at least three practical ideas, and choose the best and create a step-by-step license or instructions that others can easily use/follow.