

Social Justice and Ethical Imagination in Design

OVERVIEW

What are the grounds for rethinking dominant trajectories of emerging technologies such as smart cities, image recognition apps, or algorithmic decision-making? Technology-centered and industry-driven, discourses around such technologies are techno-utopic, upholding ideals such as speed, efficiency, and control. But are we stuck with these values or are there alternative possibilities? If so, what might they look like? This course is centered on theoretical readings in philosophy, ethnography, STS, and design studies to critically engage the historical, social, and cultural grounding of emerging technologies while drawing on design-based practices and methods of inquiry to question their dominant logic and imagine alternate possibilities. No prior design experience is needed.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To understand and appreciate design as a liberal art
- To understand the philosophic foundations design as a way of knowing, being, and acting in the world
- To draw upon theories of social justice as a strategy for characterizing design problems and approaching design design issues creatively and critically
- Hands-on experience in framing design problems and devising design strategies with awareness of the relevant ethical, political, and cultural issues

EVALUATION

- This course consists of discussions of selected readings, studio/critique sessions, and a set of projects. Grades will be determined based on the following: Project 1: "Paradoxes of Design and Values," 20%
- Project 2: "Close Reading of Artifacts and Justice," 20%
- Project 3: "Experiments in Re-Making Values," 30%
- 7 Written Reflections on Weekly Readings, 15%
- Readings and discussion: 15%

ATTENDANCE

Please let me know if you have any ADAPTS plans or related requests for learning accommodations, and also if you have any health concerns that make in-person learning problematic for you. The campus disability assistance program can be contacted through ADAPTS: <http://www.adapts.gatech.edu>

Please also note President Cabrera's message on the importance of vaccination, indoor masking, and weekly testing to contain infection on campus and protect one another: <https://president.gatech.edu/blog/jackets-moving-forward>

This semester it is particularly important that you never come to class in person if you have any flu-like symptoms. Please send me an email to let me know you will be out, and notify your teammates as necessary. But all absences will be excused, and arrangements will be made for virtual attendance if requested.

Information for Students with Disabilities

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READINGS

Required

All required readings, except for the required text by Michael Sandel, will be distributed to the class via Canvas.

Recommended

I have included those so you can follow up based on your own individual interest or future research.

Supplementary Readings

This course is inspired and informed by the following:

Dewey, John. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. 1959.

Nelson, George. *How to See: A Guide to Reading Our Man-Made Environment*. 2003.

hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress*. 1994.

Levine, Donald N. *Powers of the Mind: The Reinvention of Liberal Learning in America*. 2006.

Listening and Viewing Assignments

In addition to weekly readings, you will be assigned to watch videos or listen to podcasts. These materials are an essential part of the course that will be drawn upon in class discussions.

Written Reflections

To engender class discussion, students will write short entries and/or concept maps (up to 1000 words) on the assigned readings ahead of each session. These entries are due at 9pm on Monday. The readings will be discussed in class every week.

THE PARADOX OF VALUES

[Week 1](#)

What are values?

What are values?
Why do they matter?
And how do we
make sense of their
plurality and
apparent
contradictions?

[Week 2](#)

Do artefacts have politics?

Required

Winner, Langdon. "Do
Artefacts Have
Politics?"

Wong, Alice. "The
Rise and Fall of the
Plastic Straw Sucking
in Crip Defiance."
Catalyst: Feminism,
Theory, Technoscience
5, no. 1 (2019).

Phan, Thao. "Amazon
Echo and the
Aesthetics of
Whiteness." Catalyst:
Feminism, Theory,
Technoscience 5, no.
1 (2019).

Recommended

Richard Buchanan,
Design Ethics, In
Encyclopedia of
Science, Technology,
and Ethics, 504–509.

Parvin, Nassim. "Look
Up and Smile! Seeing
through Alexa's
Algorithmic Gaze."
Catalyst: Feminism,
Theory, Technoscience
5, no. 1 (2019).

Sheppard, Alice.
"Staging Bodies,
Performing Ramps:
Cultural-Aesthetic
Disability
Technoscience."
Catalyst: Feminism,
Theory, Technoscience
5, no. 1 (2019).

Doherty, Jacob. "Why
Is This Trash Can
Yelling at Me? Big
Bellies and Clean
Green Gentrification."
Anthropology Now10,
no. 1 (2018): 93-101.

Week 3

Design Utopias and the Paradox of Values

Required

Utopia Podcast:

- Episode 1: Jamestown
- Episode 2: Chandigarh
- Episode 3: Levittown
- Episode 5: Germania

PROJECT 1 DISCUSSION: THE PARADOX OF VALUES

Week 4

A WORKING FRAMEWORK

Required

Buchanan, Richard. "Systems thinking and design thinking: The search for principles in the world we are making." *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics, Week 5, September 15 and Innovation 5, no. 2 (2019): 85-104.*

*Project
Milestone*

Project 1, Due by the end of the week (flexible deadline)

JUSTICE

Week 5

DESIGN AND JUSTICE :: Utilitarianism and Libertarianism

Required

- Watch and Read: Michael Sandel's Harvard Lectures #1, #4, #5
- Michael Sandel, Chapters 2 and 3.

Recommended

- JafariNaimi, Nassim. "Our Bodies in the Trolley's Path, or Why Self-Driving Cars Must Not Be Programmed to Kill."
- Le Guin, Ursula K. 1993. *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*. Creative Education.
- Noam Cohen, *The Libertarian Logic of Peter Thiel*, WIRED Magazine
George Packer, *No Death, No Taxes: The libertarian futurism of a Silicon Valley billionaire*.

Week 6

DESIGN AND JUSTICE :: Duties and Inequalities

Required

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Watch and Engage with Michael Sandel's Harvard Lectures #11, #12,

#15

Read: Michael Sandel, Chapters 5 and 6.

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Week 7

DESIGN AND JUSTICE:: Relational Justice

Required

- Young, Iris Marion. Justice and the Politics of Difference. Princeton University Press, 2011. Chapters 1 and 2.
- Kumar, Neha, Nassim JafarNaimi, and Mehrab Bin Morshed. "Uber in Bangladesh: The Tangled Web of mobility and justice." Proceedings of the ACM on Human- Computer Interaction 2, no. CSCW (2018): 98.

Week 8

Justice as Hypothesis

Required

- JafarNaimi, Nassim, Lisa Nathan, and Ian Hargraves. "Values as hypotheses: design, inquiry, and the service of values." Design Issues 31, no. 4 (2015): 91–104.
- Wells, Kate, Edgard Sienaert, and Joan Conolly. "The Siyazama Project: A Traditional Beadwork and AIDS Intervention Program." Design Issues 20, no. 2 (2004): 73-89.
- Benjamin, Ruha. Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code. John Wiley & Sons, 2019. Selections.

Project Milestone

- Project 2: Brainstorming and Ideation

Week 9

DESIGN AND JUSTICE :: Techno-utopias + STUDIO DAY

Required

- In-class discussion of Project 2.
- Stark, Luke. "Facial recognition is the plutonium of AI." XRDS: Crossroads, the ACM Magazine for Students 25, no. 3 (2019): 50-55.
- Keyes, Os, Jevan Hutson, and Meredith Durbin. "A mulching proposal: Analysing and improving an algorithmic system for turning the elderly into high-nutrient slurry." In Extended Abstracts of the 2019 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, pp. 1-11. 2019.
- Recommended Viewing: Citizen Jane: Battle for the City (2016), directed by Matt Tyrnauer

Week 10

DESIGN AND JUSTICE:: the Master Tools

Required

- hooks, bell. "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness." Yearnings, Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics (1989).
- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: the danger of a single story.
- Audre Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury."
- Wayne Boothe, "The Possibilities of Pluralism"

*Project
Milestone*

- Project 2 Due by the end of the week (Flexible deadline)