

## GRAPHIC DESIGN THEORY SYLLABUS

Recommended Text: *Graphic Design Theory: Readings from the Field* by Helen Armstrong

**INSTRUCTOR: HELEN ARMSTRONG, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF GRAPHIC DESIGN, NC STATE UNIVERSITY**  
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### UNIT ONE: CREATING THE FIELD

*Unit One provides a strong foundation of theoretical ideas in graphic design spanning the last 100 years.*

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#### WEEK 1: SEPT 2

##### WHY DESIGN THEORY?

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#### WEEK 2: SEPT 9

##### OVERVIEW OF THE AVANT-GARDE, CONCEPT OF MATERIALITY

*This lecture examines designers who grappled with issues of form and function, striving to overcome past conventions and create new world orders. Special emphasis is placed on the concept of materiality and the work of these designers within the overall context of modernism.*

Marinetti, F. T.. *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*. 1909. < <http://www.unknown.nu/futurism/manifesto.html> >

Lupton, Ellen and Elaine Lustig. "Futurism." *Letters from the Avant-Garde: Modern Graphic Design*. New York: Princeton Arch. 1996. 17.

Drucker, Johanna. "Semiotics, Materiality, and Typographic Practice." (short excerpt) *The Visible Word*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994. 10.

Warde, Beatrice. "The Crystal Goblet or Printing Should be Invisible." *The Crystal Goblet: Sixteen Essays on Typography*. (excerpt). Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Co., 1956.

**Seminar Reading:** Helfand, Jessica and John Maeda. "Dematerialization of Screen Space." *Screen: Essays on Graphic Design, New Media and Visual Culture*. New York: Princeton Arch, 2001. 35-39.

**Optional Reading:** Jubert, Roxane. "The Avant-Garde Floodtide." *Typography and Graphic Design*. Singapore: Flammarion, 2006. 154-162.

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#### WEEK 3: SEPT 16

##### OVERVIEW OF CONSTRUCTIVISM

*Constructivists recast the role of the designer in modern society. This lecture considers the influence of constructivist thought upon modern design, including the emerging role of photography within design practice.*

Rodchenko, Aleksandr. "Who We Are: Manifesto of the Constructivist Group." *Aleksandr Rodchenko: Experiments for the Future*. Ed. Alexander N. Lavrentiev. New York: MOMA, 2005. 143-145.

Lupton, Ellen and Elaine Lustig. "Constructivism." *Letters from the Avant-Garde: Modern Graphic Design*. New York: Princeton Arch. 1996. 28

**Seminar Reading:** Sagmeister, Stefan. "How Good is Good?" <http://www.typotheque.com/>

**Optional Reading:** Jubert, Roxane. "Continuation and Reconstruction in the Avant-Garde." *Typography and Graphic Design*. Singapore: Flammarion, 2006. 180-184.

#### WEEK 4: SEPT 23

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##### THE BAUHAUS

*Design tenets developed during this period are particularly relevant to designers today (grid, white space, hierarchy, the Vorkurs, etc.) Issues to be discussed: importance of Bauhaus to contemporary design education and practice, concept of visual language, revolution of formal design methodologies.*

Lupton, Ellen and Elaine Lustig. "Bauhaus." *Letters from the Avant-Garde: Modern Graphic Design*. New York: Princeton Arch, 1996. 62

Moholy-Nagy, Laszlo. "Typophoto." *Moholy-Nagy: An Anthology*. Ed. Richard Kostelanetz. New York: Da Capo, 1970. 77-80.

Bayer, Herbert. "On Typography" *Herbert Bayer: The Complete Work*. Ed. Arthur A. Cohen. Cambridge: MIT, 1984. 350-352.

**Seminar Reading:** Ilyin, Natalia. "The Love Bucket." *Chasing the Perfect: Thoughts on Modernist Design in Our Time*. (excerpt) New York: Metropolis, 2006.

**Optional Reading:** Jubert, Roxane. "Continuation and Reconstruction in the Avant-Garde." *Typography and Graphic Design*. Singapore: Flammarion, 2006. 195-205.

#### WEEK 5: SEPT 30

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##### INTERNATIONAL STYLE

*This lecture traces the evolution of International Style and examines the concept of the grid.*

Müller-Brockmann, Josef. "Grid and Design Philosophy." *Grid Systems in Graphic Design*. Zurich: Niggli, 1996. 10.

Lupton, Ellen. "Grid." *Thinking with Type: A Critical Guide for Designers, Writers, Editors & Students*. New York: Princeton Arch, 2004. 113-134.

**Seminar Reading:** Helfand, Jessica and John Maeda. "Modern Life and Univernacular." *Screen: Essays on Graphic Design, New Media and Visual Culture*. New York: Princeton Arch, 2001. 41-45.

**Optional Reading:** Tschichold, Jan. "The Principles of the New Typography." (excerpt) *The New Typography: A Handbook for Modern Designers*. Trans. Ruari McLean. Berkeley: U of Cal, 1998, 64-84.

#### WEEK 6: OCT 7

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##### CORPORATE CULTURE: THE ASSIMILATION OF INTERNATIONAL STYLE.

*This lecture explores the relationship between corporate culture and the graphic designer, including issues of branding.*

Rand, Paul. "Good Design is Goodwill." *Design, Form and Chaos*. New Haven: Yale, 1993. 11-41.

Drucker, Johanna. "Turning the Page on the Hard Edge of Modernism." *The Visible Word*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994. 238-244.

Watson, Thomas J. "Good Design is Good Business." *Looking Closer 3: Classic Writings on Graphic Design*. Eds Michael Beirut, et al. New York: Allsworth, 1999. 246-250.

*Review for Exam; No Seminar Reading*

#### WEEK 7: OCT 14

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##### MIDTERM EXAM

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**WEEK 8: OCT 21**

**FALL BREAK**

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**WEEK 9: OCT 28**

**MODERNISM CRITIQUED**

*This lecture examines the effects of modernism on contemporary designers and considers strategies for productivity within this legacy.*

Vignelli, Massimo. "Long Live Modernism." *AIGA Journal of Graphic Design* 9:2 (1991): 1.

Good, Justin Vood and Peter Good. "Is Functionalism Functional? The Relationship Between Function and Purity" *Design Issues: How Graphic Design Informs Society*. Ed. D.K Holland. New York: Allworth, 2001. 83-91.

Ilyin, Natalia. "The No-Draw Rule." *Chasing the Perfect: Thoughts on Modernist Design in Our Time*. (excerpt) New York: Metropolis, 2006. 1-37.

**Seminar Reading:** Shaughnessy, Adrian. "Graphic Design versus Illustration." <http://www.designobserver.com/archives/018460.html>

**UNIT TWO: EMERGING IDEAS**

*Unit Two builds upon the fundamental themes presented in Unit One. Emerging Ideas explores fresh topics vital to a basic understanding of the current field.*

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**WEEK 10: NOV 4**

**OVERVIEW OF POSTMODERNISM; TYPOGRAPHY AS DISCOURSE**

*This lecture provides an overview of postmodernism specifically as it relates to graphic design with special emphasis on the concept of Typography as Discourse and the role of deconstruction.*

McCoy, Katherine with David Frej. "Typography as Discourse." *ID Magazine* (March/April 1988): 34-37.

Lupton, Ellen and Abbott Miller. "Deconstruction and Graphic Design." *Design|Writing|Research: Writing on Graphic Design*. New York: Phaidon, 1999.

**Seminar Reading:** Heller, Steven. "The Cult of the Ugly." *Eye* 3:9 (1993): 52-59.

**Optional Reading:** Wild, Lorraine. "Transgression and Delight: Graphic Design at Cranbrook." *The New Cranbrook Design Discourse*. New York: Rozzoli, 1990. 30-36.

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**WEEK 11: NOV 11**

**POSTMODERN AESTHETIC; THE LEGIBILITY WARS**

*This lecture considers the resulting postmodern aesthetic in its various forms and reactions within the design community.*

Poyner, Rick. "Deconstruction." (excerpt) *No More Rules: Graphic Design and Postmodernism*. New Haven: Yale U, 2003. 57-69.

Blackwell, Lewis. *The End of Print: The Graphic Design of David Carson*. (excerpt) London: Laurence King Publishing, 1995.

**Seminar Reading:** Siegel, Dmitri. "Context in Critique (Review of Emigre No. 64, Rant)." <http://www.type-theque.com/site/article.php?id=5>

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**WEEK 12: NOV 18**

**REVOLUTION**

*This lecture explores revolts between the graphic designer and Corporate America at the end of the 20th century, including the Social Responsibility Movement of the 1990's.*

Barnbrook, Jonathon, et al. "First Things First Manifesto 2000." *AIGA Journal of Graphic Design*. 17:2 (1999).

Lasn, Kalle. *Design Anarchy*. Vancouver: Adbusters, 2006.

McGinness, Ryan. *Flatnessisgod*. Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press, 1999.

**Seminar Reading:** Klein, Naomi. *No Logo*. New York: Picador, 2002.

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**WEEK 13: NOV 25**

**DESIGNER AS PRODUCER**

*This lecture recognizes contemporary possibilities for the designer as author/producer, rather than the traditional problem-solving role.*

Rock, Michael. "The Designer as Author." *Eye* 5:20 (Spring 1996): 44-53. (entitled *Graphic Authorship* in your readings)

Lupton, Ellen. "Designer as Producer." *The Education of a Graphic Designer*. Ed. Steven Heller. New York: Allworth Press, 1998. 159-62.

**Seminar Reading:** Siegel, Dmitri. Siegel, Dmitri. "Designing Our Own Graves." Design Observer blog. <http://www.designobserver.com> (visit Design Observer to read responses to Siegel's essay).

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**WEEK 14: DEC 2**

**CYBERSPACE**

*This lecture considers "reciprocity" between the physical and digital world, as well as the role of the designer in shaping/mapping both worlds.*

Van Weelden, Dirk. "Possible Worlds." *Else/Where: Mapping New Cartographies of Networks and Territories*. Ed. Janet Abrams and Peter Hall. Minneapolis: Univ Minn Design Inst., 2006. 26-29.

Baudrillard, Jean. "Simulacra and Simulations." *Modernism/Postmodernism*. Ed. Peter Brooker. New York: Longman, 1992. 151-162.

**Seminar Assignment:** Students are to bring in examples of simulated worlds for discussion or current products/issues that tie into the reading assignment. Examples will be presented to the class and turned in to your group leader.

**Critical Essay/Research Project due for undergraduates.**

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**WEEK 15: DEC 9**

**MOVING FORWARD**

*This lecture considers the monumental impact of technology upon contemporary aesthetics, as well as a reexamination of the concept of the universal.*

Lorraine Wild. "Modernism Revisited." *I.D.* (Sept/Oct 1992): 74-77.

Manovich, Lev. "After Effects, the Velvet Revolution." 2006. < <http://www.manovich.net/>>.

Ellen and Julia Lupton, "Univers Strikes Back," 2007. An edited form of this essay was published as "All Together Now," *Print* LXI:1 (January/February 2007): 28-30.

**Seminar Reading:** No extra reading. Discussion will revolve around central assigned text.

**Reader Response Project due for all students.**

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**WEEK 16: DEC 16**

**WRAP-UP**

Bierut, Michael. "How to Become Famous." *Seventy-Nine Short Essays on Design*. New York: Princeton Arch Press, 2007. 23-27

Glaser, Milton. "Ten Things I have Learned." [http://miltonglaser.com/pages/milton/mg\\_index.html](http://miltonglaser.com/pages/milton/mg_index.html)

**Critical Essay/Project due for graduate students.**

## **SEMINAR GROUPS AND REQUIRED PROJECTS**

Following the lecture portion of each class, students will break into smaller groups to discuss an issue in graphic design that relates to the content of the lecture and, more specifically, the seminar reading. It is important that each student participate fully in their group and come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Each student must bring a 100-150 word written response to the seminar reading each week.

### **REQUIRED: CRITICAL ESSAY PROJECT AND READER RESPONSE PROJECT**

#### **Critical Essay Project**

*Presentation of Essay Topic and Visual Exploration:* Each student must make a short presentation of their topic (5 minutes) and present a visual exploration of their subject to the class. *Due Nov 4*

*Paper:* Your paper should be around 750 words. Papers need not be strictly "for" or "against" an idea. You must develop your own point of view in relation to the issue, however, supported by references to the assigned readings and/or additional readings. Projects should have a visual component.

*Due Nov 25*

#### **Reader Response Project**

Students must compile 10 weekly seminar responses into one document and turn them to be graded.

*Due Dec 9*

## **GRADUATE STUDENT REQUIREMENTS**

Lead one of the smaller seminar groups weekly.

Help grade the midterm exams (exams will also be reviewed by Helen Armstrong); graduate students will not take the exam.

Write a more lengthy critical essay than undergraduates (3,000 words). This project should also have a visual component. *Due December 9*

Complete the same Reader Response Project as the undergraduates. *Due December 9*