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 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 Canvass.

**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:

**Listening and Viewing Assignments**
In addition to weekly readings, you will be assigned to watch videos or listen to podcasts. These materials 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?**
Winner, Langdon. "Do Artefacts Have Politics?"


**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, 
!eory, Technoscience* 
5, no. 1 (2019).

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

Doherty, Jacob. "Why 
Is This Trash Can 
Yelling at Me? Big 
Bellies and Clean 
Green Gentrification." 
*Anthropology Now*10, 

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**Week 3**

Design Utopias and the Paradox of Values
### Week 4

**A WORKING FRAMEWORK**


*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."  

**Week 6**

**DESIGN AND JUSTICE :: Duties and Inequalities**

*Required*  
- Watch and Engage with Michael Sandel’s Harvard Lectures #11, #12,
Week 7

**DESIGN AND JUSTICE:: Relational Justice**

*Required*


Week 8

**Justice as Hypothesis**

*Required*


*Project Milestone*

- Project 2: Brainstorming and Ideation

Week 9

**DESIGN AND JUSTICE :: Techno-utopias + STUDIO DAY**
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)