



Five semesters, to run concurrently with the undergraduate Graphic Design studio program at CCAC.

It is intended that this curriculum will create:

- Practitioners who teach
- Practitioners who write
- Practitioners who are central to the development of project content and appearance
- Practitioners who do all of the above

History ain't what it used to be.

I. Contextual studies. Rather than extract images and objects from their times and places of origin and inject them into the present as isolated objects of investigation, broader and more complex contextual understanding of image and object must be established. Designers need to know more about the original culture of an image or object than visceral response tells us. Alternate histories surround image and object production. These histories may be found as subtext in the literature of a culture, various documentation and by revisiting the powerless whose stories were overlooked in the dominant, conventional narrative of any period or subject. We learn from omission as well as commission. Context is found at the intersection of complex, alternate histories that reveal the conditions of image and object production.

II. Reversing the narrative: viable connections. Those drawn to a studio-based life are, as defined by their daily professional activities, seduced by an ever-changing present. Therefore, to engage soon-to-be-practitioners in historical studies suggests that we start with what is and look backwards to what was. In opposition to traditional histories which select potentially arbitrary (or at least arguable) starting dates for study, the non-studio component of design education should begin with attachment to contemporary, familiar images and objects and travel to their antecedents.

Mired in the present, designers respond viscerally to the most compelling contemporary images, objects, sounds and ideas (theories). What is pressing? Urgent? Forming? Informing? What is design yet not graphic? Beginning with what is known, experienced and observed by the design student has a greater likelihood of engagement than remote scholarly studies.

Inverting chronology within thematic areas of study, panmedia/panculture (a swath across Western, Eastern, African) would serve to engage design students, inform issues in contemporary practice and stimulate historical interest. A reverse chronology could rest at moments of notable cultural change resulting from technological, economic, religious or political shifts (for example, swaths could be taken at -1, -5, -10, -20, -40, -80, -160 years). The stopping points in reverse investigations would be limited or delimited by the particular

object or image under scrutiny (or pragmatically, by what time allows). Can we investigate context from the present using a narrative in reverse? Can we name our current biases through which we configure a past? What do we know about our own context(s) and how the experiential and intuitive operate?

It is the goal of this sequence of courses to develop a conscious and responsible practitioner with a strong personal voice. The sequence is intended to educate the graphic designer who will drive project content, develop into a competent researcher and interpreter of research, and ultimately serve intraprofessionally as a disseminator of design knowledge and delineator/provocateur of design issues. In addition to the series of courses listed below, frequent introductions of the scholar in the studio where images are created would raise the level of discourse around where meaning resides.

The following five courses address broad headings and somewhat mutable topics. When content is historical in nature, the narrative would read in reverse (from the present to the past).

Creating a Framework for Investigation

Because designers must work with an almost infinite variety of subjects, the first course addresses research issues and the complex relationship between knowing and making. It would address questions such as:

- 1.1 What is the relationship between historical/cultural knowledge and practice (making)? What is the relationship between what you know and what you make?
- 1.2 How does making inform research? How does research inform making?
- 1.3 What are the functions of design? (i.e. Persuasion/Seduction/ Production of Desire/ Identification/Signification/Navigation)
- 1.4 What are valid research methods? (Problem Statements/Propositions/Proprietary Language of Design)
- 1.5 How are sources evaluated? How are validity and authenticity established?
- 1.6 How do we create context?
- 1.7 What are the roles of tacit knowledge, observation, and intuition?
- 1.8 What are the differences between knowledge, information and data? How is the need for specificity in design determined?
- 1.9 What are the pedagogical distinctions between the history of art and the history of design?

Culture and Commerce

Because design activities require understanding popular culture, cultural variations and commerce, the second course addresses the following kinds of questions:

-
- 2.1 What are the attributes of culture? (from the general to the specific)
(Hofstede/sociology/psychology)
- 2.2 Popular and Consumer Culture: The History of the Consumer. What is the relationship of products and materials to sales, free market economies, Marxism, and mass production of goods and images? Consumer issues could be examined through topics such as:
- Webvan (food delivery service with online ordering) to William Morris (acknowledging commerce) to John Ruskin (resisting industrialization)
 - Walmart to Parisian Arcades (Walter Benjamin)
 - iMac to sundial (the role of commerce w.r.t. to implicit beliefs in measurement and hard science)
 - Design and the mall (J.B. Jackson defending the mall/the flaneur)
- Issues of popular culture could be examined through topics such as:
- Sensory issues: music and sound (IRCAM, rave, jazz, Scott Joplin, sound identities); and more peripherally touch, taste and smell (Diane Ackerman)
 - Aesthetics and opulence: What does a culture consider opulent and why? (Bang and Olufsen, Versailles)
 - How and what does popular culture commemorate? How does it memorialize? (Vietnam Memorial, Academy Awards)
- 2.3 Communication: What is the cultural impact of communication devices? (Recognition, coincidence, commonalities across cultures) What is the relationship between device and message? How is information distributed now? The history of the dissemination of information (present to past) could be a central topic.

Course 3

This course deals with the issues of and questions concerning what we are making, what we have made and why. The topics may include such design specific issues as:

- 3.1 What is the relationship between tools and the marks they make? How have “tools” influenced appropriation?
- 3.2 What is the relationship between style and meaning?
- 3.3 What are the roles of the designer? (object maker, form giver, strategist, educator, writer, philosopher, ethicist) What were the roles of the designer?
- 3.4 What is the relationship of non-western imagery to contemporary, western pop culture?
- 3.5 What are the tangible legacies of 20th century graphic design, Arts and Crafts and the Industrial Revolution?
- 3.6 What has technology afforded (or deprived) design? (i.e., Mario Bellini discussed, for example, the disconnect between appearance and function when Olivetti office equipment

housed non-moving electronics versus mechanical guts.) What happens to the “problem” when form follows form?

Course 4

This course deals with design “real estate.” Where does design live? Where has it lived?

- 4.1 How should information be represented? (Good Design/Bad Science)
- 4.2 What does the designer need to know when design moves? (virtual issues: whirling worlds and static bodies)
- 4.3 What are the limits of communication design? Where can it reside? (Design Sites/Widening Orbits: urban/suburban/rural/extra terrestrial) What were the limits (venues and media) of communication design?
- 4.4 What constitutes media literacy? Forms may include: books, journals, magazines, zines, comics; videography (Bill Viola), film, photography (back to Daguerre); radio, tv, email, internet; fashion and body art (piercing, tattoos, cosmetics); phone, dvd, cd, gps; signs, architecture and landscape.
- 4.8 How does the designer inhabit the word? (designer as writer)

Course 5

This last course addresses ethical issues confronting the practitioner. It raises questions about what we do for/to the culture in which we practice.

- 5.1 How are values formed? What is the function of a value set? What determines the life cycle of value sets? What causes or influences a shift in values?
- 5.2 Whom are you making look good? (i.e., joe camel and big tobacco) What is the relationship between what CAN be done to what SHOULD be done? (experimentation, play, problem-solving)
- 5.3 What is the role of the designer to the environment? What ethical dilemmas have designers faced in the past? What are the responsibilities surrounding the production of ephemera?
- 5.4 What should the designer know about different styles of learning? (considering the recipient of design)
- 5.5 What is the relationship between values and image?

Bibliography

Following are a small selection of books that might be useful in the above-described courses. In all cases, it would be preferable to create a set of readers that could cut across salient cultural themes without overwhelming the student with copious reading materials.

Ackerman, Diane. *A Natural History of the Senses*. New York: Random House, 1990.

-
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- Bolter, Jay David and Richard Grusin (editors). *Remediation. Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1999.
- Born, Georgina. *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Broude, Norma and Mary Garrard (editors). *The Power of Feminist Art*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. *The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1989.
- Drucker, Johanna. *The Alphabetic Labyrinth. The Letters in History and Imagination*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1995.
- Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Harper Collins, 1983.
- Giedion, Sigfried. *Mechanization Takes Command. A contribution to anonymous history*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1948.
- Hofstede, Geert. *Cultures and Organizations. Softwares of the Mind*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997.
- Huelsenbeck, Richard. *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
- Jespersen, James and Jane Fitz-Randolph. *From sundials to atomic clocks. Understanding time and frequency*. Washington: National Bureau of Standards Monograph 155, 1977.
- Kaes, Anton, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg (editors). *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Manguel, Alberto. *A History of Reading*. New York: Viking, 1996.
- Marcus, Greil. *Lipstick Traces A secret history of the twentieth century*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The extensions of man*. New York: Signet Books, 1964.
- McLuhan, Marshall and Quentin Fiore. *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*. New York: Bantam Books, 1967.
- Morris, William. *The Decorative Arts and the Aims of Art*. Osnabruck: Otto Zeller, 1975 (reprint from 1878).
- Naylor, Gillian. *The Arts and Crafts movement. a study of its sources, ideals and influence on design theory*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1971.
- Papanek, Victor. *Design for the Real World*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1972.

Roszak, Theodore. *The Cult of Information. A Neo-Luddite treatise on high-tech, artificial intelligence and the true art of thinking.* Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1986.

Ruskin, John. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture.* New York: Dover, 1989 (originally published 1880)

Biographical note

Professor Leslie Becker is the Chair of Graphic Design at the California College of Arts and Crafts and a practicing designer (Becker Design). She received her degrees from Cooper Union (B.F.A.) and the University of California at Berkeley (M.A.), College of Environmental Design. She has been a design educator for approximately 25 years, with particular interest in curricular issues (reflected in CCAC's atypical course content and catholic faculty points of view). Her work includes furniture and lighting design, signage, web design and print. The nature of her work ranges from projects for Intel to pro bono work for The Aids Project of the East Bay and ongoing pro bono print work for the Kelsey St. Press, a national grant-winning women's poetry press. She was a participant (and the only female) in the first ever design web cast from Wuppertal, Germany in 1999. Leslie served on the AIGA San Francisco Chapter Board, founded (designed and wrote) its newsletter "Snappy Patter" and continues to write about design for a variety of design publications.