

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY | FINAL PROJECT

UMAIR ABBASI | SUM19 - 006

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# Beaconhouse National University

Beaconhouse National University, Tarogil Campus,  
13 Km Off Thokar Niazbeg Raiwind Road, Lahore, Punjab – 53700  
(042) 38100156

School / Department: *SVAD (VCD)*

Session: *Fall '20.*

Course Title: *Introduction to Design Fiction*

Credit Hours: *1.5/ 16 Classes over 16 Weeks*

Course Level: *5th Semester*

Course Code: *VCD-285*

Course Instructor: *Umair Abbasi*

## COURSE OVERVIEW

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

To put it simply, Design Fiction as an area of research and visualisation seeks to challenge and critique the notion of the Self, the Society and the State through the lens of technology & design, to promote discourse and speculate possible futures. Design Fiction stems from the need to critique and explore the various socio-cultural identities that any society develops in the digital age. Time, technology, governance and media, all change the way a society functions and affects all citizens, regardless of class or age.

This course aims to introduce **5th Semester VCD Students** to the theoretical frameworks that make up Design Fiction and assists them in developing works that touch upon these topics both visually and theoretically.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Introduction to Design Fiction seeks to approach Design Fiction from two vantage points; Theoretical Research & Visual Research. This course has been designed as a hybrid; **theory & studio course**. It takes place over the course of 16 weeks and has divided its objectives between the aforementioned **two modules**. At the end of this course:

- Students would be learning about *Design Fiction Methodologies of Critiquing, Writing, Designing and Story-Telling*.
- Students would be learning about *the various Aesthetic/Visual Themes that stem from/ or are directly related to the field of Design Fiction*.
- They would develop an initial understanding of the various *Historical and theoretical frameworks* that make-up Design Fiction.
- Students would be able to generate, speculate and critique various techno/ socio-cultural futures by observing their surroundings.
- Students would be able to observe, understand, analyse, critically reflect on and generate dialogue about the future state of things through their Designs/ Visuals/ Writing.
- Students would realise the potential of Speculative Design as a catalyst for Critical Dialogue and its positionality in the current field of Design.
- Due to the course being heavily centered around Dialogue & Critique; I hope that students would also be better equipped to deal with writing and speaking by the end of the course.



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### TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Although the entire course would have been planned before it starts, as a firm believer in scaffolding and constructivism, the course will be revised after the second week (to some extent) after input and discourse from the class. Critical Pedagogy teaches us that power structures, regardless of their kind, attempt to control the spread of information, which is why this course will steer away from Transmissive Modes of Education to **Constructivist** ones.

The class would primarily be a mixture of student-centric and student-led, with great emphasis on **critical dialogue**. The methods of instruction for this course are: Presentations, Visual Ideation, Group & One-on-One Discussions, Inquiry Based learning, Interactive study & independent learning.

### COURSE CONTENT & RATIONALE

This course serves as an effective successor (in some ways) to the 4th Semester course 'Theory of Modern Design' which deals primarily with the development of design theory and practice in the 20th Century - up until Present Day.

With the socio-political landscape of the world changing drastically in the 21st Century, it is imperative that **Designers/Creative practitioners develop the skills necessary in order to critique, understand the society around them.** Technology and all that it entails, adds to, and significantly alters the way we see Visual & Literate Culture. These aforementioned technological changes affect us in social, emotional, cultural and societal issues, regardless of where we're based. It is this omnipresence of technology, and how it affects human relationships that gives way to the critical dialogue that stems from Design Fiction. Through speculation, observation, analysis and design, creatives can choose to take an informed stance on themes that they feel concern their work and practice the most.

**Course Contents** are as follows.

#### **Module 1: Understanding Design Fiction**

- 1) Historical Frameworks
- 2) Design Fiction Theories
- 3) Design Fiction Methodology
- 4) Social Critique through Design
- 5) Design Research
- 6) Fiction Design Narratives.

#### **Module 2: Visualising Design Fiction**

- 1) Retro-futurism & Cyberpunk
- 2) Visualising fiction through Films/Comics/Design
- 3) Understanding Local Design Vernacular & its future.
- 4) Visual Storytelling & Visualising Narratives.



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## WEEKLY TEACHING PLAN

### Week 1-2

*Introduction/  
Historical  
Overview*

#### WHAT IS DESIGN FICTION?

Introductory Class Discussions. Presentation on the interrelationship between Technology, Design & Society. Re-cap of Design Ideologies in the 20th Century and discussing the origins of Science-Fiction.

#### TASKS

For the first two weeks, students will not receive any written tasks, but they will only be asked to be interactive and remain permeable to newer concepts and bring in their own ideas into the class discourse. The first two weeks would count significantly in students class participation.

### Week 3-4

*Theoretical  
Overview  
Presentations  
& Readings.*

#### DESIGN AS SOCIETAL CRITIQUE

*'What are the Aims of Design Fiction, how are they a form of societal critique?'*  
Presentation on the works of *Julian Bleecker*, *Bruce Sterling*, and the early 2000's International and National climate and how it effected creative practices.

#### TASKS: 10%

At the end of the fourth week, students would be required to submit one critical essay (400-500) based on their understanding of the course so far, an ideal essay should be reflective through three phases; interpersonal, intrapersonal & societal.

### Week 5-6

*'Design, Fiction  
& Social Dreaming'  
Reading & Class  
Presentations*

#### TECHNOLOGY & THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Presentation on Design Fiction Methodologies and an in-class reading of *Speculative Everything* by *Fiona Raby & Anthony Dunne*.

#### TASKS: 10%

After reading and dissecting parts of *Speculative Everything* in the 4th & 5th weeks, students would be asked to collate their learnings into a Visual Presentation, which will be done in groups of 4-5.



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## WEEKLY TEACHING PLAN

### Week 7-8

*Design Research & Developing Written Narratives (Initial) for the Final Project.*

#### NARRATIVE METHODS & WRAPPING UP MODULE #1

In-class discussion and review of Science Fiction narrative styles and methods. Discussion on the work of Frank Herbert's **Dune**, and George Orwell's **1984**.

#### TASKS

In these two weeks, students will lay the written/fictional/theoretical groundwork for their final project. Their narratives would be critiqued and peer-reviewed. This task will not be graded, but will play a big role in how their final project turns out to be.

### Week 9-10

*The Aesthetics of Unreality: AKIRA & Blade Runner.*

#### VISUALISING DESIGN FICTION PART 1

*'What was so special about the 80's Cyberpunk Aesthetic?'*

Understanding and breaking down the popular styles of visualising the future through the lens of Akira & Blade Runner. Movie Screening.

#### TASKS: 10%

This weeks' tasks will explore Design Fiction through the lens of a Designer. Students would be asked to revisit their narratives from Week 7-8 and asked to develop initial visuals/sketches for them, based on their skill-set. Due at the end of Week 10.

### Week 11-12

*Retrofuturism, CyberPunk; Design Fiction through a designers eyes.*

#### VISUALISING DESIGN FICTION PART 2

Understanding the aesthetics of unreality - continued. Resurgence in retrofuturist design and a class discussion on how the aesthetics of unreality might apply to their own works.

#### TASKS: 10%

This weeks' tasks will build upon the task done submitted in Week 10 - Students would now be asked to refine the visuals they designed based on their narratives and start developing a coherent visual project for their final course submission.



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### WEEKLY TEACHING PLAN

#### Week 13-14

*Final Project Development.*

##### INDIVIDUAL / GROUP DISCUSSIONS

One-on-One/Group Discussions on the final project and development. Moodboard + Storyboard development. Progress Review in the 14th week and more individual fine-tuning of the projects.

##### TASKS

The only tasks from this week onwards would all be directed towards their final project, in which they will be building their fictional narratives and visualise them through the various Design Fiction aesthetics they have learnt about in the weeks 9-12.

#### Week 15-16

*Final Displays & Jury.*

##### FINAL PRESENTATIONS & COURSE WRAP UP

Final Weeks of the Course - Presentation, Submission & Juries.

##### FINAL PROJECT - 40%

On the 15th class, we'll be looking at the work of the class holistically, giving them feedback for their final project, which they will submit post Jury, on the 16th Week. The weightage for this final task is 40%.

### READINGS & RESOURCES

#### Readings

- Paul Coulton, Joseph Lindley & Rachel Cooper  
'*Design Fiction for the Internet of Things.*'
- Julian Bleeker - *Design Fiction: 'A Short Essay on Design, Science, Fact and Fiction.'*
- Anthony Dunne & Fiona Raby - '*Speculative Everything.*'

#### Movies

- Katsuhiro Ôtomo - *AKIRA*
- Mamoru Oshii - *GHOST IN THE SHELL*
- Kathryn Bigelow - *STRANGE DAYS*



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### COURSE ASSESSMENT RUBRICS

#### COURSE GRADE BREAKDOWN

- Class Projects - 40% (4 Tasks - 10% Each)
- Final Project - 40%
- Class Discussions - 20%

#### GRADING CRITERIA

##### **Exemplary: A (85 - 100)**

Student shows an in-depth understanding, analysis and critique of the task, medium and tools at hand. Generates dialogue spanning a multitude of subjects and collects all possible points of view in order to be in the best position to analyse. Documents all new knowledge and shows an above and beyond analysis of subjects at hand. Depicts fascinating stories visually, portraying personal learnings & insights. Student notices a change in their thinking patterns and also generates dialogue through their work.

##### **Accomplished: A- (81.5 - 84.9) & B+ (78 - 81.49)**

Student carefully understands and explores the task at hand, often tapping into his pre-existing knowledge and critically reflects on it with new knowledge. Generates dialogue with potential and shows a clear stance. Documents relevant information and visuals, enthusiastically approaching the subject at hand.

##### **Developing: B (74.5 - 77.9) B- (71 - 74.9) & C+ (67 - 70.9)**

Student shows a base level understanding of the subject at hand. Shows eagerness to learn newer concepts and tries to apply them to the given task. Attempts to generate a critical dialogue and turn it into a coherent narrative, showing a developing sense of storytelling/research and practice.

##### **Unacceptable: C & Lower (64 & Lower)**

Student does not generate sufficient critical dialogue and is not experimental, or hard-working which shows either through literature or visual research. He/She needs to work harder on their conceptual, visual and analytical skills to be able to generate some sort of dialogue about the future through society and technology, etc.



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**ADDITIONAL NOTES (SPACE FOR STUDENTS)**

**THE END.**





*Resituating Critical Pedagogy*

**Umair Abbasi**

Critical Pedagogy | MA. Art. ED | SVAD, BNU Lahore.

*Submitted to:* Zoona Kundi & Shanza Elahi

### Abstract

Through the following reflective essay, I touch upon my Pedagogical Philosophy through the lens of Critical Pedagogy and all that it entails. I aim to share my experience with design education by addressing all the various questions and concerns that have been shared in our Course Outline for Critical Pedagogy. I reflect upon firstly, the various facets of art & design education in our current world. I correlate these newer findings with the methods instructors use to deliver said knowledge, and how they must be adapted to fit the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. I aim to articulate my learnings in this course of Critical Pedagogy, with the intention of applying them to my own practice.

*Keywords:* Re-evaluating, Artist-Teachers, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Design Education, Critical Pedagogy, Empathy, Critical Consciousness.

### Resituating Critical Pedagogy

The premise of this reflective essay is directly linked to all that entails when we say ‘21<sup>st</sup> century’ Education. What do we mean when we attribute something to be a part of the 21st Century? I truly feel that we *cannot* boil it down to one experience, as in the case of a melting pot. The entire world, at any given point in time, exists as a spider-web where one instance in time is connected to other instances across several cultures, experiences, societies; horizontally. Simultaneously, each instance in time also connects to a past, a present, and an unforeseeable future. Hence, it is next to impossible to bring this experience down to one metanarrative.

### Critical Pedagogy for the 21st Century

Andrabi, S. G. (Andrabi, May 2013) provides a well-rounded definition for Critical Pedagogy, saying that it is an educational philosophy driven by the need to educate its learners about the oppressive state of society. One interesting thing to note here is that all researchers, critical pedagogues, educators provide a different yet similar definition about the nature of Critical Pedagogy. Whereas McLaren (McLaren, 2005) argues that Critical Pedagogy is a method of liberatory education that must not be separated from its Marxist foundations, Giroux argues that it is an educational reform that aids the liberation of the culturally disregarded.

The one thing that ties all these varied definitions together is the idea of *escaping oppression through education*. These differences in definition might arise from the various kinds of oppression that surround or oppresses us. It perhaps might be easier to escape oppression had there only been one kind of it, which isn’t the case. Therefore, the definition of critical pedagogy changes with the time and context of the place where it is practiced. Critical Pedagogues believe that knowledge is merely a social construct and dependent on the norms of the dominant or accepted culture of a certain place, which inadvertently leads to oppression

of the marginalized culture. I believe that one of the challenges that make it difficult to practice western Critical Pedagogy is that we're often trying to force it into an Eastern culture, whose oppression is of another kind altogether.

If I talk about my context as a Designer and a Design Educator during COVID-19, I too feel at a disadvantage, caused by several factors, some of them being access to technology and resources, lack of social interaction, etc. Since the construction of knowledge is a social act, teaching and learning in these peculiar times affect the construction of said knowledge greatly. Throughout those three months of teaching during the pandemic, I had to understand the individual contexts of my students every single day, to be better equipped to teach them better. Some came from rural areas, while others came from broken families. For such students, broader issues that McLaren talks about, such as Capitalism vs Marxism are rather redundant. These students require a different kind of knowledge to be able to improve their conditions in times of distress, such as this pandemic. It is a humbling feeling at the same time, knowing that whatever typography/design I teach them is not going to improve their lives or help in their fight right away. Therefore, the education that I give to them must change. Its method of instruction must change because everything around it has changed. I must be able to, as critical pedagogues say, relinquish my position of power and be able to become a student of my students, in an effort to teach them more effectively.

### **Design & The Pedagogy of Listening.**

As a 21st Century Art Educator, I believe that I must be able to renounce my authority and power when I enter a classroom. I must also renounce the notion of 'knowing what's best for them' when instructing or planning curriculums. Emergent Strategies and Curriculum are the best way of tackling this problem. Such a curriculum is born out of the act of reflection on the existing course (Yu-le, Z. 2004) As I teach and learn more, I'm planning on including more

and more emphasis on implementing class-based strategies that emerge from the critical reflection of the student body. Which brings me to the power of listening. Emergent curriculum is reliant on the instructor being permeable to the ideas generated by their class. The instructor needs to be open to listening and must acknowledge the various viewpoints his/her students generate inside of the classroom. Smith (1999) calls this privileged knowledge, one which the educator gains from being receptive to info gained through dialogue. The acknowledgment of a student's unique beliefs in a classroom setting lets them know that the class is a safe space for his/her ideas.

### **A Design Classroom Based on Critical Pedagogy**

There are numerous changes that I intend on making based on my learning from this course. Our understanding of Visual Communication Design and Typography in particular is based on the world around us and how we observe/ perceive it. Our understanding of these visuals and society helps us design for them. For instance, all the typography that we see around us is derived from our experiences with language; how it's meant to be read, who is it meant for, and so on. Subsequently, when teaching such a course on Typography, I now understand that it cannot be taught without firstly taking from, and secondly, giving back to the society in one form or another. This isn't to say that typography cannot be taught otherwise. One criticism that critical pedagogues place on institutions is that all formal education (schools, universities, etc.) are all driven by hidden agendas that the institution inculcates in its learners.

Hence, the least an instructor can do is firstly, understand their biases/inclinations, and secondly, communicate their inclinations to their students so that they know the background workings behind their curriculum and the person who's been tasked to implement them. Despite going through so many years of education up until my bachelor's ended; never did my instructors once mention their inclinations, or the educational philosophies they believed in, or the ones

they implemented on us. This makes me reflect rather critically on all that I had learned until that point because I was not aware of how or why I was being made to learn. The power dynamic that an instructor shares with his/her student must be transparent in its aims and methodology, therefore, beginning now, I plan on sharing my personal beliefs with my students. Critical Pedagogy teaches us to delve deeper and critically analyze all the information that we're consuming, and rightfully so, considering the abundance of information around us due to the internet age. To tackle this, I will explicitly tell my students to think over everything that I tell them before absorbing it and making it a part of their internal knowledge; *as my views are not theirs, and my east is perhaps their west.*

**RE-SITUATE:** *To Situate (something) Elsewhere.*

The title of this essay is re-situating critical pedagogy, and I'd like to elaborate more on that. Critical Pedagogy teaches us to be *critical* of our learnings, and one of the connotations that stem from the word critical is 'negative'. When I speak of the need to resituate critical pedagogy, I intend to resituate it to come from *a place of concern*. A place where criticism is followed immediately by dialogue, and then a solution. I understand the revolutionary underpinnings of this pedagogical philosophy, which is why I feel that said revolution must start from within. I truly feel that wherever critical pedagogy is taught, it should be followed by teaching empathy to the same group of students. Empathy-based learning is a relatively newer concept. Studies are still debating whether empathy education even has any long-term effects on the human psyche or not; regardless, I feel that courses that it is then the responsibility of the critical pedagogue to direct their students to find the answer to their questions using the three levels of reflection that I referred to at the beginning of the essay.

Upon identifying a problem, we must try our best to reach a solution that works on these three levels: *intrapersonal*, *interpersonal*, and *societal*. Interaction Design is one such field of design that values these different levels of reflection a lot, as interaction designers tend to design services or products for large communities. Due to the nature of their work, they're required to spend time with whosoever they've chosen to design for, essentially bringing empathy into their creative practice from the get-go. I feel the need for such empathy-based learning in the field of Visual Design because we must truly understand the importance and far-reaching effects that our visuals have on the mindset of the public. It is a responsibility that we cannot turn a blind eye to. Simultaneously, I also understand that such changes cannot be made into my classroom overnight, as I haven't academically studied empathy-based theories or strategies, but it is a change that I'm willing to devote my time and effort to, with the intention that it makes the learning experiences of my students better, and in turn, makes them better human beings in society.

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