2013
Designing systems for praxis and critical engagement in design education: the speculative design method and the revelation of theory
Schaffzin, Gabriel and Kaiser, Zachary

Suggested citation:
A CURRICULUM OF LIBERATORY PRAXIS
EDUCATION
WHENEVER WE NEED A REVOLUTION, WE GET A NEW CURRICULUM.

—Neil Postman, paraphrasing Lawrence Cremin
The Elements of Typographic Style
APPROACH TO CRITIQUE THAT TRANSCENDS DESIGN DISCIPLINES.
ELEMENTS
RELATIONSHIPS
IDEOLOGY

ELEMENTS
RELATIONSHIPS
IDEOLOGY
GLOBAL CULTURE INDUSTRY
IMPOSSIBLE IS NOTHING.

WE ARE ALL WITNESSES.
**Pattern**

- Take the star shape and set the height to .45in.
  - Set color to C=2 M=85 Y=48 K=0
  - Repeat shape horizontally decreasing the R by 10 from the previous one.
  - Repeat this step only 7 times.
  - After the seventh time start over from the original setting.
  - Continue this until a row is completed.
  - Duplicate row 8.125in below the previous one.
  - Repeat until page is filled.

- Take the "A" shape and adjust height to .75in.
  - Adjust color to white.
  - Duplicate it 3 times rotating each 90 degrees more than the previous one.
  - Align them to each other in a star form where the legs of the A are slightly touching each other.
  - Group this shape, and duplicate it 3 times.
  - Form another star-like shape by having the points slightly touch each other in the center.
  - Adjust height of shape to 14 in and align to the center.

- Take the "Ooo" shape set color to C=65 M=40 Y=45 K=0
  - Duplicate and rotate it 60 degrees and scale it 125%.
  - Repeat this step adding 60 degrees to the previous one and scaling it 125% every time it's rotated.
  - Rotate and scale 3 times from original.
  - Set the entire shape height to 2in.
  - Duplicate 4 times and align them to each corner.
  - Duplicate 4 more times and align them in the center of the individual "A" shapes.
Design in our present decade cannot be thought of solely in terms of an object or product; rather, it must be considered as a process carried out within a nexus of particular social relations (cultural, economic, symbolic). As Clive Dilnot argues, the term "design" too often is used to denote either the final designed product or the original problem which first provoked the design activity. But the process of design, he claims, is where we need to locate the significance of design.\(^2\) Dilnot wants us to pay attention to that intricate web of social structures and practices within which the designer's conscious—and unconscious—decisions are made as to which set of forms will carry what significations. He wishes us to avoid the temptation of abstracting the outcome of those design
Perceiving input-output pairs,
Related by parameters,
Permits us, sometimes, to relate
An input, output and a state.
If this relation's good and stable
Then to predict we may be able,
But if this fails us—heaven forbid!
We'll be compelled to force the lid!

—Kenneth Boulding, economist

Systems fool us by presenting themselves—or we fool ourselves by seeing the world—as a series of events. The daily news tells of elections, battles, political agreements, disasters, stock market booms or busts. Much of our ordinary conversation is about specific happenings at specific times and places. A team wins. A river floods. The Dow Jones Industrial Average hits 10,000. Oil is discovered. A forest is cut. Events are the outputs, moment by moment, from the black box of the system.

Events can be spectacular: crashes, assassinations, great victories, terrible tragedies. They hook our emotions. Although we've seen many thousands of them on our TV screens or the front page of the paper, each one is different enough from the last to keep us fascinated (just as we never lose our fascination with the chaotic twists and turns of the weather). It's endlessly engaging to take in the world as a series of events, and constantly surprising, because that way of seeing the world has almost no predictive or explanatory value. Like the tip of an iceberg rising above the water, events are the most visible aspect of a larger complex—but not always the most important.

We are less likely to be surprised if we can see how events accumulate into dynamic patterns of behavior. The team is on a winning streak. The variance of the river is increasing, with higher floodwaters during rains

Standing. When a systems thinker encounters a problem, the first thing he or she does is look for data, time graphs, the history of the system. That's because long-term behavior provides clues to the underlying system structure. And structure is the key to understanding not just what is happening, but why.

The structure of a system is its interlocking stocks, flows, and feedback loops. The diagrams with boxes and arrows (my students call them "spaghetti-and-meatball diagrams") are pictures of system structure. Structure determines what behaviors are latent in the system. A goal-seeking balancing feedback loop approaches or holds a dynamic equilibrium. A reinforcing feedback loop generates exponential growth. The two of them linked together are capable of growth, decay, or equilibrium. If they also contain delays, they may produce oscillations. If they work in periodic, rapid bursts, they may produce even more surprising behaviors.

Systems thinking goes back and forth constantly between structure (diagrams of stocks, flows, and feedback) and behavior (time graphs). Systems thinkers strive to understand the connections between the hand releasing the Slinky (event) and the resulting oscillations (behavior) and the mechanical characteristics of the Slinky's helical coil (structure).

Simple examples like a Slinky make this event-behavior-structure distinction seem obvious. In fact, much analysis in the world goes no deeper than events. Listen to every night's explanation of why the stock market did what it did. Stocks went up (down) because the U.S. dollar fell (rose), or the prime interest rate rose (fell), or the Democrats won (lost), or one country invaded another (or didn't). Event-event analysis.

These explanations give you no ability to predict what will happen tomorrow. They give you an ability to change the behavior of the system—
SAMPLER.
ELEMENTS
RELATIONSHIPS
IDEOLOGY
TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Vilém Flusser
security

businessmen

local people

users

meet somebody living in the US

students
- Downloads music via proximity
- Market to consumer
- Able to download manually or wireless
- "Keep" or "delete" original files
- Able to hold up to 1,000 megabytes
- Recognizes you through your bone marrow
- Able to add users to your memCloud
of its life: everything in its place and a place for everything. Label it information design and it looks serious. Number it and it looks scientific.

But it’s a false authority, particularly because we buy into the form so unquestioningly. Perhaps this is why so much information design looks alike, ratified by an alarmingly robust strain of Swiss modernism that obliterates the chance for a more expressive design idiom, a more content-driven form. It’s also annoyingly ahistorical -- unconcerned with earlier sources and ignorant of alternative models that would, arguably, introduce a more original point-of-view.

Information design has become its own legitimizing force, regardless of its content or context. It’s modernism run amok: form masquerading as content.
Tangible Criticality is central to the curriculum of liberatory praxis.
DEFEAT HEGEMONIC IDEOLOGIES EMBEDDED IN SYSTEMS
TAKK.