

# Design Fiction and Speculative Design

## IML 385

Units: 4

Fall 2018, Mondays, 1-4:50pm

Location: [School of Cinematic Arts](#), SCI L104

Class wiki (updated weekly) available at: <https://mapwiki.sca.usc.edu>

**Instructor: Kate Hollenbach**

Office: SCI 101

Office Hours: 10am–12pm, Mondays or by appointment

Contact Info: [kjhollen@usc.edu](mailto:kjhollen@usc.edu)

Please allow 24 hours for email replies during the week  
and 48 hours for holidays and weekends.

## Course Description

Defined by Bruce Sterling as “the deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about change,” design fiction has become a powerful tool for exploring aspects of contemporary social, cultural, political and ethical life. Through the use of techniques borrowed from literature and cinema, through practices of estrangement and defamiliarization, and through a set of carefully chosen design methods, participants in this class will learn how to use design fiction to create new directions for the future.

This course focuses on the history and theory of design fiction with special attention to its relationship to critical making. The course includes case studies profiling the work of some of the most provocative theorists and creators of design fiction, as well as hands-on lab time devoted to developing skills in creating physical prototypes and shaping effective design fiction videos.

## Learning Objectives

As with all MA+P courses, Design Fiction and Speculative Futures integrates theory and practice; students should be prepared to read and discuss actively in class, and to develop skills necessary for completing the assignments. Specifically, students will engage in collaboration, video capture, video editing, user interface design, basic sound design, and object design.

- to help participants identify, understand and use specific design fiction methodologies
- to query forms of provocation and speculation and their relationship to contemporary social, cultural, political and ethical life
- to develop skills across diverse media in critical making and design fiction

# Expectations

## Grading Breakdown

Grades will be determined by the following percentage breakdown:

- 10% Journal Entries / Reading Responses
- 15% Three Design Exercises (5% each)
- 10% Participation
- 20% Project 1 (Pair Project)
- 20% Project 2
- 25% Project 3 (Group Project)

Work will be evaluated on how well it demonstrates understanding of the class material, conceptual creativity, and aesthetic quality. Exceptional or great work will receive As, good work will receive Bs, and work that meets minimum requirements will receive Cs.

Late projects will be accepted for up to two weeks after the original due date, with points deducted from the final score. After two weeks, no credit will be given for late work. Late journal entries are not accepted.

## Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

## Grading Timeline

Projects will be graded within two weeks of their due date.

## Attendance

More than two unexcused absences will lower your grade by one whole unit (for example, A- to B-). Each additional missed class will lower the final grade another unit. If there is an emergency and you must miss class, please email me before class. Absences will not be excused after the fact except in extreme circumstances. For an illness, please send a signed copy of USC's [Medical Excuse Policy](#) before class.

Class starts at 1:00pm. If you are more than 10 minutes late for class, you will be marked tardy. Three tardies become equivalent to one unexcused absence.

## Participation

Participation in a studio class is key! Please show up to class prepared to work, be ready to discuss your work and your classmates' work, and stay focused. Ask questions in class and share your thoughts during class discussions. Challenge yourself and be encouraging of others as they do the same. Be attentive and considerate to your classmates.

Please do not use your phone or check personal communications (email, Snapchat, Facebook, etc.) during class.

## Commitment to Diversity

In this class we make a commitment towards diversity by acknowledging the different identities and backgrounds we inhabit. A collaborative effort between the students and the teacher is needed for creating a supportive learning environment. If a class member says that something you have said or shared with the group is offensive, remember this is a valuable opportunity for everyone present to grow and learn from one another with further discussion. All class members are encouraged to discuss such instances with the instructor so they can be addressed with greater care in the future. [ voidLab / CC SA ]

## Assignments

### Journal Entries / Reading Responses

Students will write a short reading response, usually a set of questions for discussion, during most weeks of the class. Each journal entry is worth 1 point and there are 10 required entries in total (12 total will be assigned and students can miss up to 2 without penalty). Reading responses are due on Mondays at noon, an hour before class starts. No credit will be given for late responses.

### Design Exercises

#### Exercise #1 / Due week 3

Write a what-if scenario, 500 words, exploring an aspect of the near future.

**Exercise #2 / Due week 4**

Mis-use or reuse an everyday material to create something new.

**Exercise #3 / Due week 8**

Write a design fiction using a character from fiction to explore ethnography.

**Project 1: Pitch from the Future**

Pair project: Imagine you are a software or product developer pitching a product to an investor in the near or distant future. What are you selling to us, and why do we need it? What is the world like? Create a powerpoint pitch deck to make your case. Include drawings, mockups, photographs, or video of your product. Tell us a little bit about the backstory for the company or startup and how the product came to be. Present the pitch deck to the class in character, as though you are representatives of the company.

**Due week 6**

**Project 2: Object Design**

Solo project: Using the workflow explored in class, create an object suitable to the world discussed in class. Include the project visualization materials, scenario and context for an object and be prepared to present it formally in class.

**Due week 9**

**Project 3: Perceptive Interfaces**

Pair project: design the user interface for an application or operating system for a mobile device that understands its user's feelings and emotions. Create a narrative video that follows a user of your application or system and the world they inhabit.

**Part A, Due week 12**

Write two short stories (one utopian, one dystopian) about the application you intend to design for this project. Write the stories independently; choose one person to write the dystopian story and one person to write the utopian story. Focus each story on a particular user. Together, sketch a storyboard for a single narrative where a character uses your interface.

**Part B, Due week 14**

Mock up the design of your interface using Adobe Illustrator. Revise and complete the storyboards for a narrative in which a character uses your interface.

**Part C, Due week 16**

Show a prototype of your interface by creating a short video narrative, focused on the character developed in your storyboards. Incorporate your interface mockups and animate them with After Effects.

# Course Schedule

The course schedule will be updated every week on the class wiki; later course readings will be selected to optimize your learning experience. Please check the wiki every week for readings and assignment details.

## 1: Introduction

---

*Week 1: January 8, 2018*

### **What is Design Fiction?**

Introduction to Design Fiction, Critical Design and Speculative Design citing examples from architecture, film, art, and literature. In class we'll watch "Nose Dive" from Season 3 of the *Black Mirror* Series and discuss its elements of design fiction.

*Reading (NOTE two weeks worth of reading; no class next week):*

D. Hales, "Design Fictions: An Introduction and Provisional Taxonomy," *Digital Creativity*, 24:1, 1-10, 2013.

Julian Bleecker, "Design Fiction: From Props to Prototypes," *Negotiating Futures / Design Fictions*, Swiss Design Network 2011, Basel.

Julian Bleecker and Nicholas Nova, *Asynchronicity: Design Fictions for Asynchronous Urban Computing*. The Architectural League of New York, 2009.

Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction and Social Dreaming*, Chapters 1, 2, 5 and 7.

*Optional reading:*

Julian Bleecker, "Design Fiction: A Short Essay on Design, Science, Fact and Fiction," *Near Future Laboratory*, 2009.

*Homework:*

1. Create a journal entry with 3-5 questions for in class discussion of this week's readings, posted to the wiki by Sunday, January 21 at noon.
  2. Complete Design Exercise #1 before our next class. Properly cite any referenced material or articles.
  3. Create your student page on the wiki and link to both assignments from there. Please label each carefully.
- 

*Week 2: January 15, 2018*

### **No Class (Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday)**

No class today; please continue the reading and homework from last week.

*Week 3: January 22, 2018*

**Speculative Everything: The Work of Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby**

*Due:*

Journal Entry #1, Design Exercise #1

*Reading:*

Noah Raford, "[On Glass & Mud: A Critique of Corporate Design Fiction](#)," blog post, February 2012.

Noah Raford, "[Three Good Examples of Design Fiction](#)," blog post, February 2012.

*Homework:*

1. Create a journal entry with 2-3 questions for in class discussion of this week's reading, posted to the wiki by Sunday, January 28 at noon.
2. Complete Design Exercise #2 and link it from your wiki page. Properly cite any referenced material or articles.

Reading for subsequent weeks will be added to the wiki on a weekly basis.

---

## **2: Methods of Design Fiction**

In this unit, we will survey narrative and production techniques used to Design Fiction, drawing on historical and recent works to see the methods in action.

---

*Week 4: January 29, 2018*

**Technique Toolbox**

Sketching, models, mock-ups and mood boards for design fiction.

*Due:*

Journal Entry #2, Design Exercise #2

---

*Week 5: February 5, 2018*

**Video and Narrative as Tools for Design Fiction**

*Due:*

Journal Entry #3

*Week 6: February 12, 2018*

**Design Fiction and Ethnography**

*Due:*

Journal Entry #4, Project #1

---

*Week 7: February 19, 2018*

**Pastiche Scenarios**

No Class (George Washington's Birthday)

*Due:*

Journal Entry #5

---

### **3: Data, Bodies, and Interfaces**

Our lives are now lived simultaneously online and offline, mediated through new technologies with capacity for streaming video and other communication data. The design of software now affects posture, gesture, and presence across the digital and physical realms. New input technologies and interface paradigms, like augmented reality and head-mounted cameras and displays, deepen one's ability to be present both virtually and physically. Augmented reality merges human vision with computer graphics. Gestural interfaces and depth sensing technologies let humans use computers with full motion of their bodies. Voice recognition allows for hands-free interaction altogether. But what happens as computers know and learn more about human bodies? What freedoms and privacies are jeopardized or lost altogether? How do our bodies change under the pressures of a merged virtual and physical reality?

---

*Week 8: February 26, 2018*

**Cameras, Data, and Surveillance**

*Due:*

Design Exercise #3, Journal Entry #6

---

*Week 9: March 5, 2018*

**Design Fiction and the Political: Tactical Media**

*Due:*

Project #2, Journal Entry #7

---

*Week 10: March 12, 2018*

**No Class (Spring Break!)**

---

*Week 11: March 19, 2018*

**Artificial Intelligence and Digital Assistants**

*Due:*

Journal Entry #8

---

*Week 12: March 26, 2018*

**Design Fiction and the Geopolitical**

*Due:*

Project #3 Part A, Journal Entry #9

---

*Week 13: April 2, 2018*

**Final Project Work Session**

*Due:*

Journal Entry #10

---

*Week 14: April 9, 2018*

**Final Project Work Session**

*Due:*

Project #3 Part B, Journal Entry #11

---

Week 15: April 16, 2018

**Final Project Work Session**

Due:

Journal Entry #12

---

Week 16: April 23, 2018

**Begin Final Project Presentations and Screenings**

Final projects due at the beginning of class! Final presentations will begin, continuing into finals week. Even if you are assigned a presentation time next week, you must hand in all project and presentation materials today.

---

*Finals Week: May 2, 2018 (Wednesday!)*

**Finals Week: Presentations**

For our final meeting, we will continue presentations and demonstrations of final projects. Location TBD, but date and time are set: Wednesday, May 2, 2–4pm.

## Resources

### Recommended Texts

No textbooks are necessary for this class; readings will be posted on the course wiki.

## Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

### Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

**Citation Guidelines:** We assert that work produced in MA+P classes is covered under the Doctrine of Fair Use. In order to make this claim, however, all projects must include academically appropriate citations in the form of a References section, which covers all sources, in order to receive a passing grade. The References section is either included in the project itself or as a separate document, as appropriate. We follow the [Kairos Journal of Rhetoric, Technology and Pedagogy](#) style guide for citation purposes; Kairos uses a modified APA format, whose general guidelines and specific examples may be found here: <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/styleguide.html#apa>

**Statement on Fair Use:** Fair use is a legal principle that defines certain limitations on the exclusive rights of copyright holders. MA+P projects are produced with fair use doctrines in mind using its four pillars: (1) the purpose and character of use, (2) the nature of the copyrighted work, (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole, and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work. Generally speaking, this means you must only use as much of a copyrighted work as is necessary to make your point, and you must cite your sources accordingly.

## Support Systems

*Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

<https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

*Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

*Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

*Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

*Diversity at USC*

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

<https://diversity.usc.edu/>

*USC Emergency Information*

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

*USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.*

Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>

**PLEASE NOTE:**

**FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX**