

“The 4 Fields of Industrial Design” by Bruce and Stephanie Tharp begins with a provocative notion: “*The problem is that design is pretty much a mess.*”

And they may have a point. From the outside, it is easy to see where someone unfamiliar with the industry may view the realm of design as a bit—chaotic. Interestingly enough— as those on the inside understand— part of the very job of a designer is to make ideas, experiences, and products more palatable/understanding of the human experience— so for our own world to appear indiscernible to third parties is a bit ironic.

In this text, the Tharps present a broken-down set of categories for those-unfamiliar and designers alike and discern how different areas of the design world think and operate. They call this proposition “The Design Garage—a categorizing of designed-object activity into four primary fields: Commercial Design, Responsible Design, Experimental Design, and Discursive Design.” Each of these components of the “garage” appears to be highly relevant to Speculative City. However in the case of speculative design (as a lens), we are perhaps most concerned with Responsible and Discursive design(s) in the case of our collaborative studio.

“Responsible Design encompasses what is largely understood as *socially responsible design* and is driven by a more humanitarian notion of service.” In the case of Speculative City, responsible design might look like addressing social matters such as poverty, lack of education, overcrowding, racism, sexual harassment, etc. But it may also address environmental concerns such as global warming and overpopulation. Responsible design is crucially related to speculative design, because part of looking into the future of humanity is recognizing that there are crucial social and environmental plight(s) we must account for in our designs.

“Discursive Design refers to the creation of utilitarian objects whose primary purpose is to communicate ideas—*they encourage discourse.*” This design lens is particularly important, as it encourages discussion of areas regarding psychological, sociological, and ideological consequence. As described in the article, discursive design is less visible in the marketplace. Perhaps this is because it is a more cerebral form of design thinking that requires active engagement with users. Understanding its rarity in mainstream consumer forums, discursive design presents itself as a crucial lens to use within the collaborative studio. An objective of this course is to present futures to a set of “users” or “an audience” with the objective to get them talking *and* thinking. As designers, we will strive to spark conversation (a discourse) for viewers of our proposed futures. We will be successful if our projections have enough base in reality/ what is known, while positing ideals that have perhaps never been considered before.

In “Speculative Everything” by Anthony Dunne and Samantha Raby, the realm within which our speculative designs must fall is described: “In the scenarios we develop we believe, first, they should be scientifically possible, and second, there should be a path from where we are today to

where we are in the scenario. A believable series of events that led to the new situation is necessary, even if entirely fictional.” So as designers within this studio, we have a responsibility in our work and research to present ideals that do not promise what they could not (potentially) deliver.

The fictional nature of a proposed ideal will require our viewers to suspend their disbelief and allow their imaginations to wander, and to momentarily forget how things are now. More importantly for this studio, we want viewers to *wonder* about how things could be. The notion of futures was described wonderfully by the Tharps: “For us, futures are not a destination or something to be strived for, but a medium to aid imaginative thought-to speculate with.” So in fact, a future is not a definite-utopia that we are telling our viewers *will happen*. Rather, a future is a tool with which we aim to facilitate thought, and to provoke constructive discourse.

In considering multiple future societies, a phenomena our studio should take into account is the idea “Envy of the Future”, a concept illustrated in a video by the YouTube channel The School of Life. The four-minute video centers around the idea that we secretly resent the idea that beings in the future will easily have the solves to some (if not all) of the extremely pressing matters of today’s world. The idea is that, after human civilization continues progress, those that come after us (human-like or otherwise, will be able to look back on history and easily pinpoint the fixes to our problems. An example given is how now– with modern medicine– we could go back to 14th century Europe and tell a grieving mother that her child’s death could have easily been avoided with a simple antibiotic. The point is– the mother may resent the idea that a solution existed– only not in her lifetime. This video brought to my attention that this “future envy” might be a phenomena we encounter on our journey(s) toward envisioning futures that work to alleviate issues faced by today’s societies. Through our discursive design, will have to confront the idea that we are proposing futures that will may address these ills for others– and perhaps not ourselves.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zn7uD3o1uQ&list=PLwxNMb28XmpehnfQOa4c0E7j3Glj4qFEj&index=66>

http://studiojunglecat.com/teaching/GRCD3021-f15/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Dunne-Raby_SpeculativeEverything_ch1-3_opt5.pdf

<https://www.core77.com/posts/12232/the-4-fields-of-industrial-design-no-not-furniture-trans-consumer-electronics-toys-by-bruce-m-tharp-and-stephanie-m-tharp-12232>