

B+C | A

Barnard and Columbia Architecture, Fall 2021

ARCH 1010V: Design Futures, NYC

Virginia Black
e: vab2130@columbia.edu
e: vblack@barnard.edu

Remote office hours available by appointment



From Left: Gucci x coco capitan for the 2017 campaign, as advertised in NYC; Simone Niquille, Safety Measures; Arakawa and Gins, Bioscleave House (Lifespan Extending Villa); FaceApp, as applied to Katie Holmes

DESIGN FUTURES COURSE DESCRIPTION

“In the future food will be 3D-printed, or there won’t be any food. In the future there will be no borders, or your passport will be embedded in your iris. In the future, gender will be flexible, or nonexistent, or just like it is now but better. In the future there will be no cops, or cops will stop killing black people, or cops will be tiny drones the size of flies. In the future you will be happy, or you will be unhappy, or you will be dead. But the future never comes, because it’s not habitable by any part of the human body apart from language, and so the future is only ever a way to talk about the present and the past.”

-Editor’s Note, Vol. 38: Futures, The New Inquiry

How do we make futures, and what is futurity’s relationship to design? What do the images, products, and processes we create to bring about futures say about the desires, hopes, and fears of the present moment? What is the power of design in ushering forth future visions? How does it operate on the world, and our ideas of what is possible? What can we learn by looking to designs on futures past?

This course looks to design methods, artifacts, and visions across multiple scales-- from the nanochip, to our bodies, to the earth-- to better see how futurity is conceived of and represented, and how it acts on the world. We will not only explore how design has been used to subvert existing norms, and even to organize protest, we will also question its intentions and blindspots, examining how it has contributed to and exacerbated existing inequity.

We will look to varied disciplinary histories to understand their impacts on the present, and we will pursue design’s contemporaneity as decidedly interdisciplinary. Students will apply concepts presented in class and readings in design workshops, exercises and case studies. Taking New York City as a site of analysis, we will take digital field trips and be visited by guest speakers to learn more about design’s operations within the city. We will focus on events of the last year including the COVID-19 crisis, the Movement for Black Lives, and climate change and will consider these topics through the lens of design.