DESCRIPTION

The X-Box, beyond a video game console, is any apparently closed or closeted system, whose design, data selection parameters, and spatial politics have unintended technological, social, and biological consequences that reify our age of precarity. In addition, as a design product, the X-Box is a deliverable resulting from contemporary fabrication and risk management strategies. We will question how the X-Box, whose definition will further emerge through the work of the seminar, normalizes cultural specifications including queerness, gender, class, mental health, education, and other embodied determinants of agency.

Built around the rubrics of bed, game, brain, and world, this seminar will construct a framework to think embodiment, reproduction (biological, social, analog, and digital), self-determination, bias (in data, in the professions, and in design), and a future polity and subject.

The course does not deny that the currently understood triad of (biological) sex-gender-sexuality, itself a framework of relative closure, is inherently interdependent. At the same time, we will endeavor to extract and expand on the “history of sexuality” as a discursive object and autonomous sphere of life in order to hypothesize an “architecture of sexuality.” Consequently, action, intimacy, consent, and privacy, become probes to more rigorously position our questions as designers in technology fields against the spatial, demographic, and algorithmic facts of reproduction, labor, and privilege.

As designers, we seek to use an “epistemology of outing” to intervene in the transition from a governance of deviance to the implications of implicit consent. Our methodology is promiscuous and interdisciplinary, but seeks proof of concept through prototype as well as argument, and builds on extant case studies and traditions of design research and scholarship. Case studies may include Alexa, selfies, and chatrooms as
well as fertility clinics, post war “homes of the future,” institutions of higher education, studios and offices, and the circulation of objects and signs of sexuality in consumer and urban realms.

We will also consider ourselves in conversation with the artist Michael Mandiberg’s Art + Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon, Harvard University’s GenderSci Lab, ArchiteXX, Feminist Art and Architecture Collaborative, Architecture Lobby, Architecture LGBT+, amongst other contemporary practitioners that students are encouraged to bring to the table.

Guest lecturers will include architectural historians and practitioners, trans theorists, as well as technologists working at the machine-human, human-human, life extension, and both IA and AI interfaces. Independent student research, projects, texts, or prototypes will propose novel intimacies, collectivities, platforms, architectures broadly understood that remain to be designed, and in the 3-0-6 curriculum, students will collaborate on an exhibition proposal.

Thinking sexuality is problematic and polemical. Designing sexuality is activist and personal. Arguments for and against the inclusion of sites, situations, and interlocutors are at the discretion of students and attention will be paid to ensure that the classroom is not only a laboratory, but a safe space to inquire on the status of sexuality.

Class Size and Eligibility

Students from all backgrounds are encouraged to enroll but class size will be capped at 12 students in order to ensure quality of teaching and research. The course is open to graduate and PhD students across the school’s different programs; undergraduates with advisor’s approval will be considered.

Structure

The course is constructed around discussion, presentations, and occasional group work, as well as visits by guest practitioners and theorists. A midterm presentation, including precedent analysis, and a text of 2500 words, is required. The final requirement of the class will be of a format agreed upon by the student and the instructor. Final deliverables produced individually or in groups may include drawings, books, objects, games, performances, and environments, in addition to or in lieu of written text. In the 3-0-6 curriculum, students will collaborate on an exhibition proposal.

Learning Objectives

Investigate, conceptualize, and develop an argumentative or prototype-based research agenda. Apply interdisciplinary thinking to contemporary architecture and design questions. Think critically about sexuality and the role of architecture and design in society. Learn and practice presentation and moderator skills. Work collaboratively and individually. Practice ethical reasoning skills.

Evaluation Criteria

20% Reading Response & Assignments
30% Class Discussions
20% Midterm Presentation / Deliverable
30% Final Deliverable
SCHEDULE

Introduction

Epistemology of Outing
1. Feb 5

The Bed

Critically analyzes self-determination in intimate affairs based on precedents in design culture and political philosophy. Examines architecture’s relationship to traditional gender roles understood through the power dynamics of the gaze. Establishes the interdependent relationship between intimacy-privacy-social-political in societies of discipline and control. Poses sexuality as the enactment of biologically and socially determined sex and gender.

Love in the Age of Selfie
2. Feb 12

No Class Meeting
Note: President’s Day Holiday
3. Feb 19

History of Sexuality
4. Feb 26

The Game

Considers how the virtuality of the game, including sports, video games, and other platforms of relative closure where the rule-based circulation of signs and objects (physical, digital, and media,) produces a semiotics of sexuality. Surveys the spaces of “non-conforming” identities, including sexual orientation, avatars, and body enhancement. Identifies the unintended consequences of the circulation of data markers left by identity transactions.

Deviance by Design
5. Mar 5

Test Subjects
6. Mar 12

Super Models
7. Mar 19

No Class Meeting
Note: MIT Spring Break
8. Mar 26

Midterm Presentations
9. Apr 2

The Brain

Contextualizes contemporary models of cognition like neuroplasticity, machine learning, and augmented intelligence in a genealogy of brain-mind that may includes psychoanalysis, behavioralism, psychedelia, and bicameralism. Poses problems for designers regarding those conventionally excluded from the discourse of sexuality (teenagers, the elderly, asexuality, bisexuality, transexuality). Considers spatial
consequences in the move from classification to enhancement, disorders to personalities, ethics to popularity.

Avatars: Ada, Alexa, Hermaphroditus, Marie, Tay
10. Apr 9

Techniques of the Self: IA/Al, Life Enhancement/Extension
Note: Patriot's Day Holiday; an optional class will be held
11. Apr 16

The World

Continues the examination of the semiotics of sexuality, now in physical, designed, urban, and “natural” spaces. Proposes the “architecture of sexuality” as a methodology and practice. Reevaluates post-modern risk management structures like medicine, education, the professions, and new models of governance and social media, in addition to recent and continuing activism within the sex-gender-sexuality spectrum.

File-to-Factory / Lab-to-Life
12. Apr 23

Designing Consent
13. Apr 30

No Class Meeting
Note: Studio Reviews
14. May 7

Final Presentations
15. May 14

Exhibition Dossier Due
16. May 21

Readings / Resources

Required readings will be available on the Stellar course site as PDF files. Other reference resources will be placed on library reserve or otherwise provided. Readings will include seminal works on the history of technology, sexuality, and space by Beatriz Colomina, Judith Butler, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault and contemporary interlocutors like Hito Steyerl, Benjamin Bratton, and Wendy Chun, amongst others. Course material may also include film and television.

PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

Attendance

Attendance for the full duration of each class is mandatory. MIT policy permits a maximum of three excused absences for the semester. Excused absences are discussed and approved by the instructor, or a family or medical emergency that is confirmed by a physician or a dean. Absences beyond the three allotted will result in a decrease in the final grade. If you miss four or more classes, you will be asked to drop the subject or receive a failing grade.
**Assignments / Discussion**

Course assignments are to be completed and uploaded or posted in a timely manner. Brief 150-word reading responses demonstrating high quality analysis and critical thinking, are to be posted to the Class Forum on Stellar by midnight prior to class meetings. Late work will impact your grade, however extensions are possible with prior agreement of the instructor. Preparation and active participation in discussions on seminar themes and assigned readings is a requirement to pass the course. The seminar will also include a limited amount of required group work. There is no final exam in this course.

**Deliverables / Final Project**

The seminar places a premium on the multi-media artifact as an experimental and speculative medium. This modality of working draws on a variety of biographical aspects such as values, motives, and politics and may touch on issues related to the key social divisions of age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and training as they specifically apply to the researcher – that’s you.

The final project is to be considered a form of independent reflexive research and/or speculation on a future instantiation of the project of sexuality. One might entertain individual interests that cannot be covered in class for lack of time, including intersectional feminism, media theory, art history, radical epistemologies and other intellectual directions. Students involved in the collaborative production of an exhibition proposal will receive further instructions and a suggested set of milestones.

**Guest Lecturers / Moderating**

Students may be assigned to introduce speakers and moderate discussion by having prepared questions. Please communicate your interest in topics early in the semester; schedule of guest lectures is forthcoming.

**Grading Definition**

**A** Exceptionally good performance demonstrating a superior understanding of the subject matter, a foundation of extensive knowledge, and a skillful use of concepts and/or materials.

**B** Good performance demonstrating capacity to use the appropriate concepts, a good understanding of the subject matter, and an ability to handle the problems and materials encountered in the subject.

**C** Adequate performance demonstrating an adequate understanding of the subject matter, an ability to handle relatively simple problems, and adequate preparation for moving on to advanced work in the field.

**D** Minimally acceptable performance demonstrating at least partial familiarity with the subject matter and some capacity to deal with relatively simple problems, but also demonstrating deficiencies serious enough to make it inadvisable to proceed further in the field without additional work.

**F** Failed. This grade also signifies that the student must repeat the subject to receive credit.

**Academic Integrity + Honesty**

MIT’s expectations and policies regarding academic integrity should be read carefully and adhered to diligently:  [http://integrity.mit.edu](http://integrity.mit.edu)