

WEEK11-Final Reflection

Looking back on this course, I am struck by the profound overlap between design, environmental change, and political ecology. My practice, and that of designers worldwide, is not an isolated act, but an interactive dance with Earth's ecosystems and the sociopolitical forces that shape them.

The global environment is both the canvas and palette for our creative endeavors. From this perspective, we must consider our role as designers, not just producers, as active participants in the story of sustainability. The work of Fry, Dunn, Lavie, and Wood helps us understand how design can reflect and transform environmental narratives. Their philosophies call on us to embrace biomimicry, circular economies, and visionary policies, and work toward a future that is not only environmentally friendly but also politically conscious. 'The True Cost' is a compelling documentary that explores the complex story behind the clothing we wear, highlighting the people who make them and the significant impact of the fashion industry on our world. While the price of clothing has decreased over the decades, the human and environmental costs have escalated dramatically. The film investigates who truly pays the price for our clothing by showcasing footage from various countries, from glamorous runways to impoverished slums. Featuring insights from prominent figures like Stella McCartney, Livia Firth, and Vandana Shiva, 'The True Cost' takes viewers on an enlightening journey, revealing the hidden realities of the fashion industry and prompting us to reconsider our consumption choices.

My position within this broader ecological context is one of responsibility and opportunity. As a citizen and creator, my mission is to create projects that are not only beautiful but also politically and ecologically responsible. My future direction is prioritizing principles that minimize ecological footprint, promote sustainable lifestyles, strengthen communities, and increase biodiversity.

Reflecting critically on my disciplinary focus, I recognize that designers need to engage in visionary politics to effect the change we wish to see in the world through design. This involves shifting from traditional innovation towards more participatory and socially sustainable approaches (Ehn et al., 2014).

Velcro was invented by George de Mestral in 1941 and was inspired by the burrs he found on himself and his dog. Being an engineer and entrepreneur, Mr. de Mestral examined the burr under a microscope and realized the small hooks of the burr and loops of the fur/fabric allowed the burr to adhere exceedingly well.



Figure 1: Biomimicry of a burr (UP) for the invention of Velcro (DOWN), George de Mestral, 1941

In conclusion, my practice and that of designers in general must be informed by a new critical reading of the global context. We must inform our ideas, evaluations and analyses through a variety of creative strategies to ensure that our projects are not only responsive to environmental change but also stimulate political and environmental change. It doesn't have to be. It's our legacy to the world we live in and the future we are creating.

bibliography

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Ehn, P., Nilsson, E.M., Topgaard, R. and Press, M. (2014). *Making future : marginal notes on innovation, design, and democracy*. [online] Cambridge ; London: The Mit Press. Available at: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1405387/FULLTEXT01.pdf> [Accessed 20 Nov. 2024].

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Figure 1: Sagapixel (2020). *Biomimicry of a burr (Left) for the invention of Velcro (Right).* Micro Photonics Inc. Available at: <https://www.microphotonics.com/biomimicry-burr-invention-velcro/> [Accessed 27 Nov. 2024].

WEEK10-the Eco-Political Landscape of Design

Looking at the Future

Designers’ role in sustainable design goes beyond beauty and functionality. They are mediators of political ecology, a field that studies the interaction between environmental change and sociopolitical dynamics. As a designer, my work engages the intersection of global environmental issues and the political ecology of design, with each creative idea being a statement about our collective future.



Figure 1: Spear Thistles Mask Performance, Sally Li, 2024



Figure 2: Foraging of the Spear Thistles, Sally Li, 2024

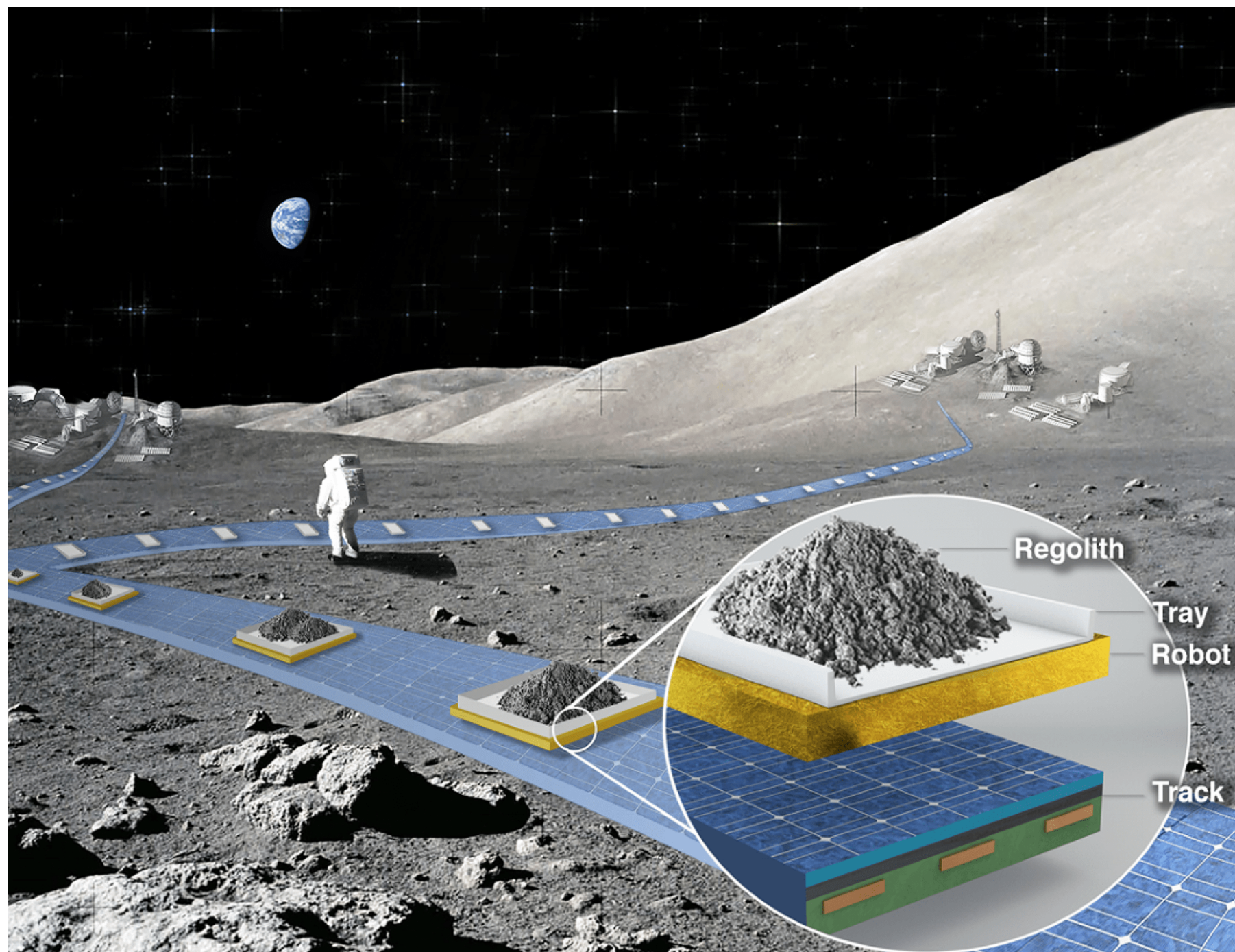


Figure 3: Artist's depiction of the FLOAT lunar railway system to provide reliable, autonomous, and efficient payload transport on the Moon, Ethan Schaler, 2022

The work of Tony Fry, Dunn & Lavie, and John Wood helps us understand the potential of design to not only reflect but also transform our environmental story. Fry's concept of "future distance" highlights the unsustainable conditions that distance us from the future and calls designers to the forefront of sustainable development. Dunn & Lavie's speculative designs invite us to imagine and discuss different possible futures, while Wood's micro-utopias inspire and encourage collective optimism to create a better world.

As I critically examine the direction of my field, I recognize the need for designers to engage in visionary politics and embody the change they wish to see in the world through design. This includes moving away from traditional innovation toward more participatory and socially sustainable approaches, as outlined in the book *Creating the Future: A Side Note on Innovation, Design, and Democracy*.

Finally, my practice, and that of designers in general, needs to be informed by new critical perspectives on the global environment. We must inform our ideas, evaluations, and analyses through a variety of creative strategies to ensure that our projects are not only responses to environmental change, but catalysts for political and environmental change—but they don't have to be.

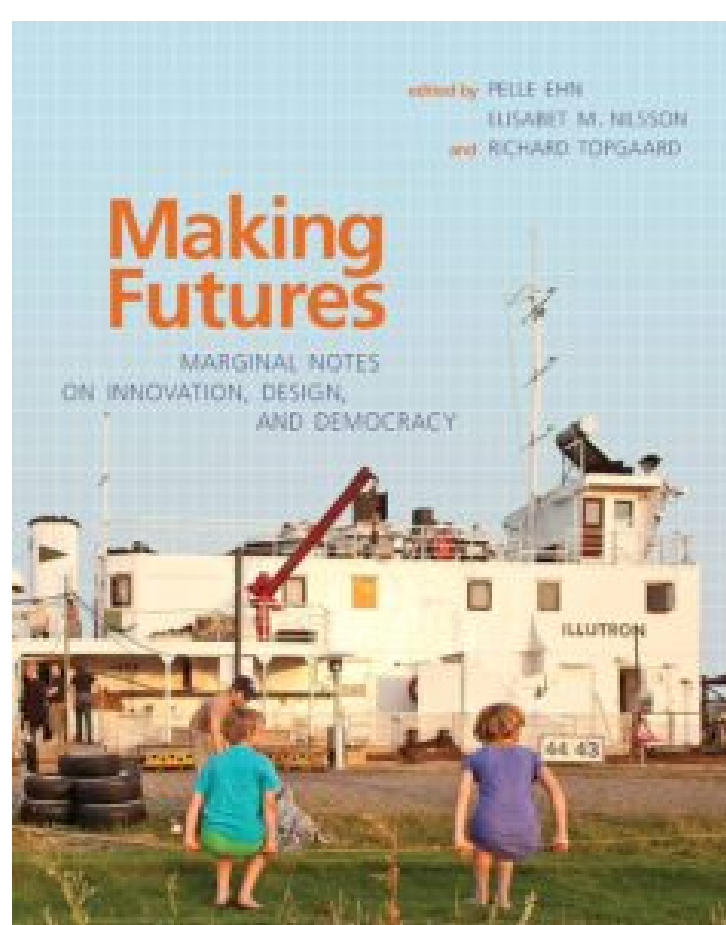


Figure 4: Book Cover of *Making Futures – Marginal Notes on Innovation, Design, and Democracy*, The MIT Press, 2014

Workshop: Manifesto Writing and Eco-Design Archive

1. Sustainability First: Prioritize designs that minimize ecological footprints and use resources efficiently. Promoting sustainable lifestyle.
2. Empower Communities: Engage local communities in the design process to ensure that solutions meet their needs and respect their contexts.
3. Biodiversity Combination: Incorporate natural ecosystems into design to

enhance biodiversity and create harmonious environments.

4. Innovative Solutions: Encourage the use of materials and technologies that promote environmental health and resource regeneration. Value Design quality. Create products and systems that endure over time, reducing the need for constant replacement and minimizing waste.
5. Education and Awareness: Design should aim to educate the public about environmental issues and inspire collective action.

bibliography

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Figure 1,2 are my own work

Figure 3: Schaler, E. (2022). *Artist's depiction of the FLOAT lunar railway system to provide reliable, autonomous, and efficient payload transport on the Moon*. NASA Innovative Advanced Concepts. Available at: <https://techport.nasa.gov/projects/106037> [Accessed 19 Nov. 2024].

Figure 4: The MIT Press (2014). *Making Futures: Marginal Notes on Innovation, Design, and Democracy*. Available at: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Making-Futures-Marginal-Innovation-Democracy/dp/0262537486> [Accessed 19 Nov. 2024].

WEEK9-Designing for a Sustainable Future

Capitalism and Environment

In the design world, our creative efforts are not isolated fantasies, but are closely tied to the global environment and the political forces that shape it. Designers are global citizens and creators who have a responsibility to consider the impact of their work on the environment and sustainable development efforts.

The concept of the Anthropocene requires recognition of our important role as geological agents, changing the planet through our actions. This recognition transforms design from being just a profession to a central player in the story of environmental change. Our work builds on foundational research that explores the dynamics of human nature, such as Crutzen and Stormer's "Anthropocene Discourse" and "Capitalocene Discourse", which highlight the role of capitalism in environmental destruction.

From my personal perspective and in a wider context, I see my design practice as a catalyst for change, and I believe in the ecological design principles developed by van der Leyen and Cowan, which we strive to adhere to below. Their five principles provide me with guidance in developing environmentally sustainable solutions that work in harmony with nature, engage all designers, and care about nature.

Design, Climate and Responsibilities

The Flood is the culmination of a three-year collaboration between co-writers and directors Fisher Stevens and Leonardo Dicaprio, exploring the devastating effects of climate change. The documentary explores humanity's ability to overcome the most difficult challenges. This highlights the interconnectedness of the global climate and the urgency of our situation. DiCaprio and Stevens bring a sense of urgency to communities by proposing practical solutions, such as a carbon tax to shift investment toward renewable energy and cutting subsidies to fossil fuel companies. They emphasize the need for political engagement, urging voters to support leaders who value science and the scientific process, and warning corporate interests

against resistance to climate action.

My work as a designer and global citizen reflects my commitment to the environment. My design philosophy is to respond to the political ecology around us, advocating for designs that are not only visually appealing but also environmentally friendly. This requires careful self-reflection on the development of your field and your place in it to ensure that your contributions help build a more sustainable and just world.



Figure 1: Transect Walk, Sally Li, 2024

In summary, as designers, we have a responsibility to express ideas and critical thinking in a variety of creative ways: verbally, visually, and in writing. Our mission is more than just creativity. It is about shaping a future that is in harmony with the environment and respects the political ecology in which we live. Through this lens, we can fully understand our ability to shape a richer world.

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Figure 1 is my own work.

WEEK8-Vital Materialism

Keep the Awareness

Penny Spark’s *The Age of Plastic* and Gabrys et al’s *Accumulation*. They are not just texts, but mirrors to the complex cultural significance of materials like plastic that embody both decline and progress. Reading this book made me think critically about my personal position as a designer in a wider context. How can I contribute to a more sustainable narrative as a citizen and creator?



Figure 1: Plastic Beach (detail), Robert Callender, 2003 - 2008



My practice must evolve to achieve a future where materials are not only used, but become part of a cycle of regeneration and respect. As Kate Franklin and Caroline Teale suggest, this includes a shift from linear to circular thinking, where waste is viewed as raw material. It is not just about designing for today, but also for the legacy we leave behind.

My work as a designer is not an isolated undertaking, but a dance with the global environment, deeply connected to the political ecology of design. It is sobering that each choice of material has an impact far beyond the studio. The environmental crisis is not just a distant phenomenon. It is the canvas on which we paint our works, and the palette we use is shaped by the original literature and thinking that guides our hands.



Figure 2: Plastic Waste Remake Process, Sally Li, 2024



Figure 3: Social Sculpture 'Intarvention' in Gardner's Crescent Garden, Sally Li, 2024

Breath

In this public talk, Jennifer will use materials from her forthcoming book, *Global Citizens: An Outdoor Toolkit for Environmental Action*, to explore how environmental sensing technologies can shape atmospheric citizenship and create a more breathable world. She will discuss collaborative efforts to monitor air pollution from fracking infrastructure, record emissions in urban environments, and create air quality gardens. As these projects demonstrate, how people respond to, care for, and fight changing environmental conditions has implications for political actors and groups seeking to create a kinder world.

I believe my field has a responsibility to promote critical conversations about the impact of design on the environment. This includes not only the physical products we create, but also the cultural stories we perpetuate. As a designer, I am a storyteller, and the stories I tell must be sustainable and regenerative.

From the disappearance of plastic to the possibilities of radical materials, my thinking about the course topics has been a journey of critical reading and creative response. I have tried to communicate these ideas in a variety of ways: visually through projects, through verbal discussions, and now in writing. Each strategy is a tool to engage with the world, inspire thought, and inspire action to achieve a more harmonious coexistence with the environment.

Workshop



Figure 4: Plastic Hybrid, Sally Li, 2024



Figure 5: Raw Materials and Making Process, Sally Li, 2024

What are vital materials? Plastic can breathe too. 'If matter itself is lively, then not only is the difference between subjects and objects minimized, but the status of the shared materiality of all things is elevated.' The vase I created was intended to highlight the conceptual idea of *materials* being important in design practice. The vase has channels that allow the flowers more air, acting as an airway, but also showing that they are a living plastic mix. Interestingly, during the process of creating the vase, sometimes pieces of the vase would fall out, making it more like a living thing.

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Figure 2,3,4,5 are my own work