

# THESIS

MICA\_Graphic Design MFA Thesis\_Fall 2008\_Ellen Lupton and Jennifer Cole Phillips

**OVERVIEW** The Graphic Design MFA Thesis at MICA is a process-driven platform for critical inquiry into the role graphic design serves in deciphering and making meaning. The goal of the graduate thesis is to break new ground – to move beyond the familiar. To do so requires the tenacity to dig deep to get to fresh territory. In order to sustain this rigor, a diligent and systematic approach to process must be developed as a framework and guide.

The thesis directed exercises included in the core studio syllabus have been designed to stimulate and support your thesis process. It should be implicit that the chief responsibility for content and elaboration of the thesis is yours, and the creative process is actively and independently self-directed.

**ADVISORS** Your graduate directors, Ellen Lupton and Jennifer Cole Phillips, serve as principal thesis advisors. As such, they provide regular and substantial counsel on the content, process, and progress of your thesis.

Additionally, you are strongly encouraged to locate a secondary advisor who may serve the special needs of your project domain. This secondary advisor can come from inside or outside of MICA, and must possess appropriate expertise for your needs. If your thesis involves highly specialized or complex content or research, you are welcome to add a third tertiary advisor to your panel. These advisors will need to serve on a volunteer basis and it will be your responsibility to set boundaries, goals, and schedules with them.

**DELIVERABLES** All exercises framed for the thesis in the core studio syllabus are expected to be completed throughout the semester as a supplement to your primary, independently undertaken work.

In your bi-weekly thesis presentations you are expected to share significant and steady progress. This can include research, visual and format experiments, writing, reflections, frustrations, etc. It is up to you to actively seek answers to the questions that present themselves through your process.

In addition to the thesis visualization exercises, the writing assignments, and your independent body of work, there will be two official forums in which you will present your thesis.

**Mid-Semester Thesis Review:** NOVEMBER 10th 1 – 3pm.

*All GDMFA students are required to attend.*

**Semester End Thesis Forum with guest critic Alice Twemlow.** DECEMBER 14th 12 – 3pm.

*All Graphic Design MFA students are required to attend.*

**WRITING EXERCISES** These exercises are process-oriented and provide an opportunity to explore particular aspects of your project through writing. You are more than welcome to append this writing with visual language as appropriate.

We ask that each student establish a thesis blog using any tool/technology you prefer. You may create a separate blog or simply post these responses within the context of an existing site. Post a link to your writing responses to the Thesis Writing page on our website, so that we can visit your site easily and offer feedback.

Exercise #1: **FRAME**

*Due/posted by September 22*

To frame a subject is to define a specific point of view, often in relation to a much broader range of concerns. In ± 250 words, define the subject area of your thesis by explaining what you are not doing. Refer to standard or generic approaches to the subject in order to define your own position, or indicate the vastness of your topic in order to locate your own point of focus.

"This thesis is not a chronological history of a printing company, but rather..."

"This thesis does not look at physical senses in isolation from one another, but rather..."

"This thesis is not a to-do list of sustainable practices, but rather..."

"This thesis is not a commercial advertising campaign, but rather..."

"This thesis does not try to describe all aspects of perspective, but rather..."

Exercise #2: **VOICE**

*Due/posted by September 29*

Voice is the tone of address that a text assumes in relation to its reader, writer, or subject matter. Choose one of the experiments below involving voice.

**Passive/active voice.** Strong writers consistently use the active rather than passive voice. In the passive voice, the subject of the sentence is the recipient of an action; in the active voice, the subject of the sentence is an agent. Experiment with stating different ideas in the passive and active voice.

*Passive:* "The milk was spilled."

*Active:* "I spilled the milk."

*Passive:* "The test was shown to five different respondents."

*Active:* "Five different respondents took the test."

*Passive:* "Many post-apocalyptic films were made around the world in the 1970s and 80s."

*Active:* "A rash of post-apocalyptic films erupted around the world in the 1970s and 80s."

*Passive:* "El Lissitzky's ideas were widely disseminated."

*Active:* "El Lissitzky's ideas dominated the avant-garde discourse."

**First/second/third person.** Take one key idea from your thesis and restate it in each of the three persons.

*-Third person: "Designers today are struggling with sustainability."*

*-Second person: "Thou shalt not waste materials or energy."*

*-First person: "I realized that worrying about the problem is another waste of energy; doing something about it is a better use of resources."*

**Different discourses.** Describe a phenomenon from the perspective of three different fields of expertise. For example:

*-Describe the experience of time in terms of science, philosophy, and personal experience.*

*-Define the concept of "taste" from the viewpoints of art criticism, art education, and popular culture, or explain how three different thinkers have defined the term.*

*-Describe how three different organisms would "see" a puddle of spilled orange juice.*

*-Describe how a brand functions in relation to internal and external audiences.*

*-Describe how different users will interact with a website about design theory.*

### Exercise #3: **VEHICLE**

*Due/posted by October 6*

In ± 250 words, make a case for the physical format/delivery system for your thesis: book, installation, interaction design, product, etc. Describe each of the elements that you plan to produce. Use vivid, active language to bring us into the scene. If your vehicle is a book, what kind of book (artists' book, scholarly book, popular book, designer book)? If your vehicle is an environment or exhibition, describe it.