Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Beyond Design Today – Imagining New Futures for the Planet and Society through Design and Technology

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• Abstract (300 words):
What if Industrial/Product Design education was less about making things and more about problem solving and innovation for a better planet and society. Isn’t that what we claim to design for? In actuality, Industrial/Product design and the manufacturing of things has enabled humanity to attain the impressive feats of the space exploration, refrigeration, medical innovation, and food preservation. Over the last few centuries, fossil fuels, pollutants, and material waste produced by the manufacturing and use of those same innovations has led to environmental devastation and negative social impacts on some of the most vulnerable populations around the planet. These populations tend to be impoverished communities of color who lack agency, access, and means.

The negative impacts of design is evident in the daily reporting of polluted municipal water supplies, flooding from extreme weather, devastating fires, and lack of access to basic hygiene products. How do we teach “design” in the face of a ethical awakening
when issues of climate change are complicated by political turmoil, social injustice, and food insecurity; where advances in technology come laden with concerns over surveillance, data privacy, equity, and dependence. What if designers were less concerned with driving the economy, but instead designing a better planet? What if design education pushed students to identify problems that don’t exist yet by connecting their understanding history, society, technology, and design to provoke, interrogate, and shape the future?

This paper will describe ways design for Social and Environmental Impact has been integrated into the Drexel’s University Product Design curriculum. This paper will detail an interdisciplinary design course which includes students of various backgrounds and departments collaborating in teams on complex design issues as they seek to create a speculative and novel solutions to design problems related to climate change, diversity/inclusion, consent, identity, data security, and the artificial intelligence.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Raja Schaar, IDSA is Program Director and Assistant Professor of Product Design at Drexel University’s Westphal College of Media Arts and Design. She recently served as the Education Director for the Industrial Design Society of America’s Board of Directors.

Raja’s interdisciplinary research bridges three areas of Impact Design including education, health, and climate change. Black Girls STEAMing Through Dance focuses on developing pedagogy that engages girls and underrepresented minorities in STEAM education through dance and wearable technology. She is PI on an intercollegiate translational project that uses 3D knitting technology to create low-cost wearable technologies for maternal health. Raja also studies ways to address climate change through biologically inspired design. In her teaching, Raja pushes students to apply design thinking and making to the development of devices, systems, and services that positively and ethically impact the lives of users and the planet.

Before joining Drexel, Raja taught at GA Tech for 12 years in both the Colleges of Design and Engineering. Additionally, Raja is a museum exhibition designer with exhibitions in Museums and Visitor centers all over the Southeast.