

Critical/Political Design, The Electronic Object & The Discipline of Noticing

A Quick Review

The Design of Dissent

Tony Kushner

Art and design can be effective catalysts for dissent and change...

HOWEVER: We have to be careful due to the “impure” commercial roots of design.

Design can easily be used to further causes that may in complete opposition of promoters of “fair” dissent. But this same ability to convey strong messages can make it an important tool for invoking change.



“It is even more of a miracle that the act of forcing the impossible is, in the history of political revolution, often catalyzed by something as flimsy as a poster plastered on a wall [...]

What’s truly miraculous is that, as hard as it is to make the perfect poster [...] someone nearly always seems to be on hand to do the job when the time demands it. [...]

Is there a dismal history to be written of embryonic political movements aborted for want of a great graphic designer? One ought to be careful about claiming too much for art, but fires die for lack of kindling. So I suspect that there may be such a history, though I’m not sure I want anyone to bother unearthing it.”

A Quick Review

Hertzian Tales (extracts)

Anthony Dunne

Chapter 1: The Electronic as Post-Optimal Object

ON THE BOOK ITSELF: “The primary purpose of this book is to set the scene for relocating the electronic product beyond a culture of relentless innovation for its own sake, based simply on what is technologically possible and semiologically consumable, to a broader context of critical thinking about its aesthetic role in everyday life.”

ON INTERFACE: Electronic objects are only as good (or bad) as their interface.”With these objects the interface is everything. The behavior of video recorders, televisions, telephones, and faxes is more important than their appearance and physical form. Here design centers of the dialogue between people and machines. The object is experienced as an interface, a zone of transaction.”

ON THE ROLE OF THE ELECTRONIC OBJECT: “The electronic object [...] occupies a strange place in the world of material culture, closer to washing powered and cough mixture than to furniture and architecture.”

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Chapter 5: Real Fiction

THE CONCEPT: The role of conceptual design in bringing about change or awareness. “Design approaches are needed that focus on the interaction between the portrayed reality of alternative scenarios, which so often appear didactic or utopian, and the everyday reality in which they are encountered.”

ON THE ROLE OF DESIGN

OBJECTS: Dunne discusses design objects as ways of changing the path of technological innovation—designers can create new scenarios and derive ideas for new objects from it. These ideas can in turn impact what engineers choose to pursue in their own innovations.

Which brings us to...

The Intervention!

The Discipline of Noticing

Lisa Grocott

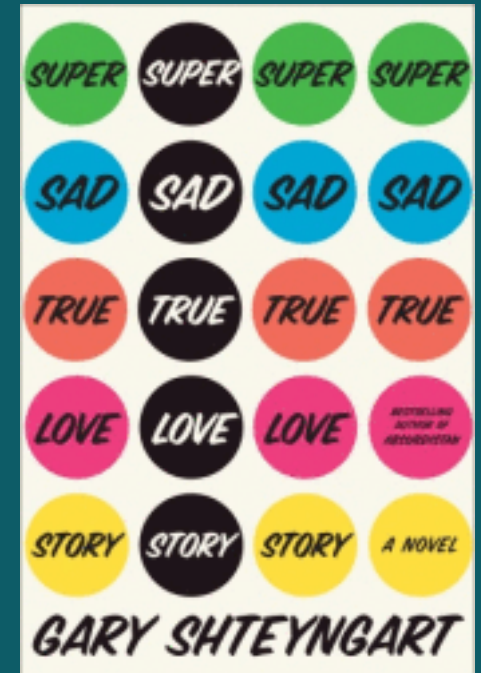
THE CONCEPT: To use the skills of “noticing” to make us think carefully and critically about the world that we are designing.

PUSH AND PULL: As designers, we are constantly pulled back and forth between two forces—the desire to explore beyond what we know and further the potential of a research project or design brief, while also being pulled back by the need to design for the world that we already live in.

THE EXAMPLE: Super Sad True Love Story: A Novel, by Gary Shteyngart. The Novel is a futuristic Facebook-meets-Big-Brother satire that makes the reader critically examine the role of technology and social labeling/ranking in our everyday lives.

CONTEMPORARY FICTION AS DESIGN

TOOL: Contemporary fiction allows us to take a critical look at the world around us (and to really notice the details that the authors’ trained eyes have picked up on) as a way of better understanding who and what we are designing for.



Snow Crash

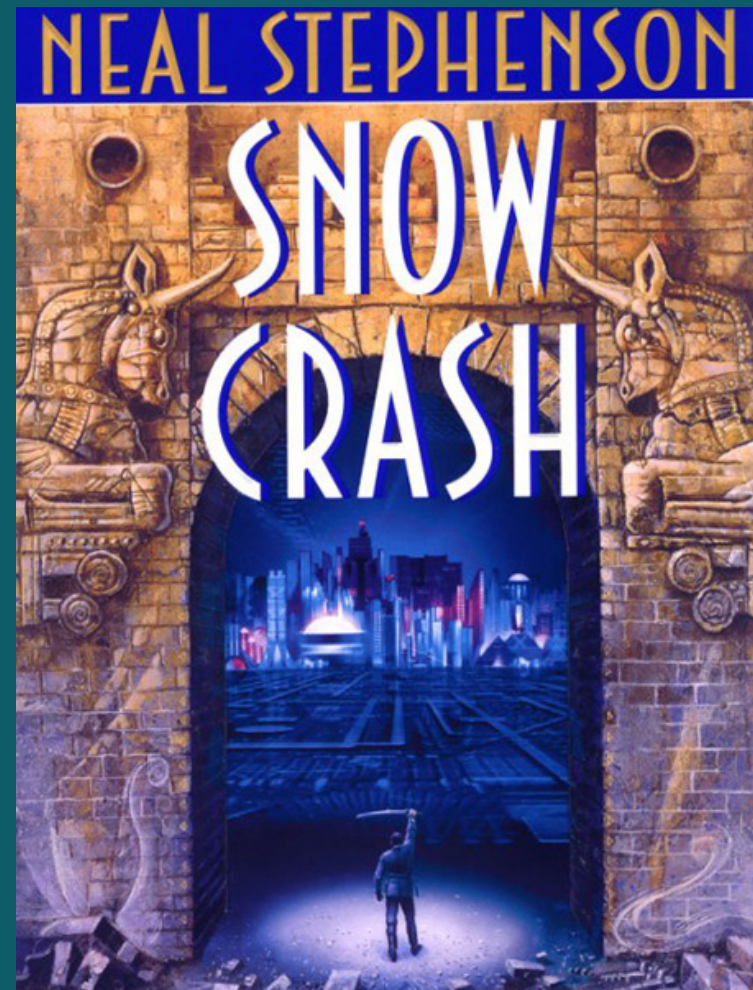
Neal Stephenson

1992

THE PREMISE: A crazy science fiction cyberpunk novel about the world in a future that has been overrun by colluded corporations and corrupt governments. Life has gotten so insane that people spend the bulk of their time in an alternate (virtual) reality known as the “Metaverse”.

WHY IS IT INTERESTING: Not only did this novel serve as a commentary on the increasing digitalization of life in the early 1990s, it actual led the way for much of the virtual community and augmented reality innovation we see today.

PLUS: He even coined the term “avatar” for our online personas.

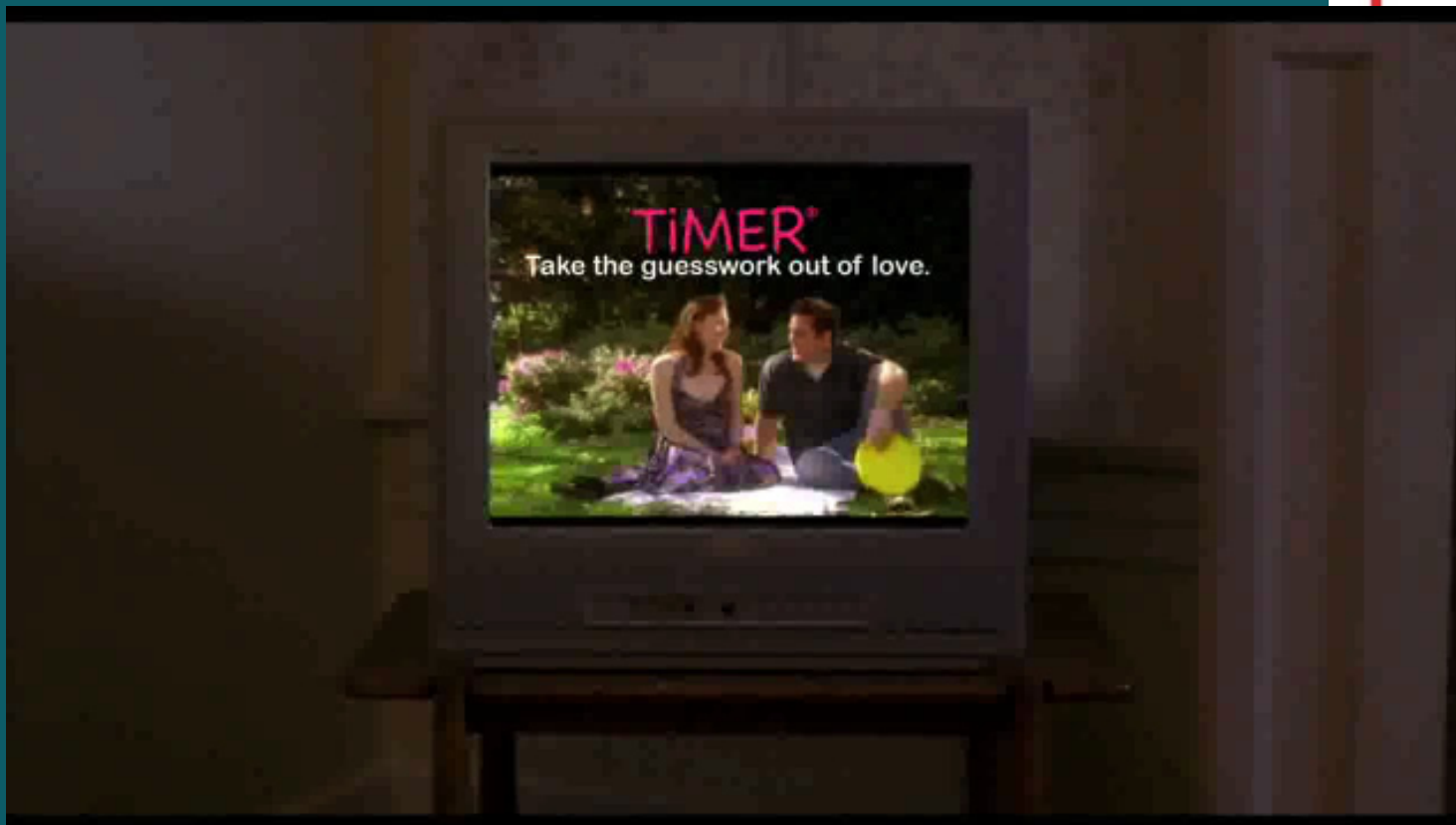


TiMER

Jac Schaeffer (Writer and Director)

2009

THE PREMISE: If a clock could count down to the moment you meet your soul mate, would you want to know?



Video available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpJE9QdsPhY>