

Ninety-Nine Graphic Design Workshops:
The Way We Attend to Things

Edited by James Dyer and Nick Deakin

Set Margins' #66

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Further reading:

George Nelson, *How to See: Visual Adventures in a World God Never Made*. Phaidon, 2017.

Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography*. Pocket Essentials, 2010.

Tina Richardson, *Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.

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The Anonymous Polemics Book Club

The Anonymous Polemics Book Club (APBC) is a long-term workshop for dissatisfied students of design. The goal of the workshop is to create a parallel educational moment amongst peers. APBC uses anonymity, critical reading, and diffraction as tools for collective reflection and polemical sense-making.

Step One: Create the Group

Design and distribute flyers to gather member for the club. On the flyer, state the aims of APBC, the date and time of the first gathering, and contact details in case plans change.

Note 1: The APBC is for students only, make that explicit on the flyer.

Note 2: Print the flyer at minimum cost - use scrap paper and few colours, for instance.

Note 3: The APBC should foment in your school. It is important that you use your bodies as means to occupy physical spaces in your institute. If this is not impossible, alternatives include: a coffee shop, a park, a bar, a public square.

Step Two: The First Gathering

Make the APBC members comfortable; bring snacks and beverages. Introduce yourselves and explain why you signed up. Each person should write on a piece of paper the title of a book they would like to read and discuss. Fold the papers, mix them up and pick one at random. Now you have your first APBC text to read and a reading list. Decide the next meeting date.

Note 1: The ideal range for the APBC is 6-8 people. If more people participate, you can split into two or more reading groups.

Note 2: Sit close to each other. Proximity and intimacy matter for the APBC.

Note 3: Use this space to propose books that you feel are not present in your school curriculum. This includes texts you have been interested in but are not used as teaching material by your professors; books not held at the library; writings from underrepresented authors; books

specific to your independent interests.

Note 4: The books chosen for the APBC don't have to be about graphic design, they could (and likely will) draw from other disciplines, even from fiction.

Step Three: Activated Reading

Engage in activated reading. Use the pages of the text as a notebook: annotate what resonates with you, make the notes personal, critical, reflective, associative. When you are done reading, write down your considerations in full sentences on a sheet of A4. Do not sign the paper, it must be anonymous. Fold the paper and bring it to the next APBC meeting.

Note 1: When reading the book, try to put yourself in the shoes of a writer, a critic, and an opinionator.

Note 2: Engage critically with the book by considering the "in-betweens" of the text, such as who the author is, the social context the book was written in, and the historical moment in which you read it.

Note 3: Use the A4 sheet to also reflect on the book in relation to your experience as a graphic design student. What new theories, perspectives, or attitudes does the book bring forward to you? How can they be applied, dismissed, confuted within your design studies?

Step Four: Conversations at the APBC

When you arrive at the venue, shuffle your folded A4 papers. The first person picks one and reads it out loud (if you pick your own writing, put it back and choose another). As you are reading the reflections, try to embody them as if they were your own. Try to connect with someone else's written words, embrace the feelings they give you. This is not a matter of agreeing or disagreeing with the text you hold in your hands, but a matter of making connection. Instead of commenting on the reflections, try to build upon them. Find spaces of kinship. Repeat this until all the A4 sheets have been read out loud and discussed. Once done, use the remaining time to reflect collectively about what you have learned, and connect it with your educational experiences. What new standpoints have emerged? Do they resonate with your current didactic life? If not, how can you bring them to your studies?

Note 1: Read each other's texts diffractively. Diffractive reading makes opinions interact through each other, producing a new critical consciousness. The aim here is not to engage in a self-reflective relationship between the person and the text, but to change perspectives, and produce new points of view.

Note 2: During the collective reflection, make sure all confrontations are dialectic and dialogic. Differences are not points of friction, rather they are conditions for encounters. The polemic here is not towards yourselves as members of APBC but towards the institution which grants your education. Reflect on the system that educates you and use the books you collectively choose as means to collectively mull over your educational journeys.

Step Five: Make a Lo-fi Publication

The APBC can last up to 12 months, depending on the number of members in the club and the number of books on the reading list. Once the APBC is over, collect all the papers with recommended readings, all the scraps of notes, and A4 sheets of written reflections. Scan everything. Write collectively, or as individuals, about your experience at the APBC and the educational system you are embedded in. Collect all of this into an anonymous, small publication to be circulated within your school. Title your publication.

Note 1: produce the publication at minimum cost. Do not sell your publication for profit.

Note 2: The layout of the publication, including typography, spacing, colours and any other formal aspects, should be reflective of your time spent together and offer readers a sense of what your group has learned collectively.

Further reading:

Evelien Geerts and Iris van der Tuin, *Diffraction & Reading Diffractively*. Matter: Journal of New Materialist Research, Vol. 3, 2021.

Deborah Knott, *Critical Reading: Towards Critical Writing*. University of Toronto, 2005.

Virginia Woolf, *How Should One Read a Book?* Renard Press, 2021 (originally published 1925).

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