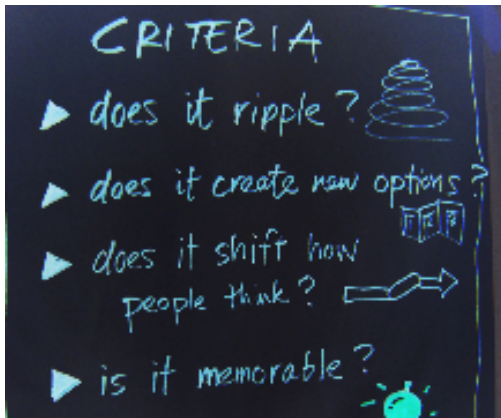


Mission Statement:

Our mission is to change how social justice is imagined, developed and deployed in the United States. We are creating a design studio for the progressive arm of the nonprofit sector in order to support the sector's ability to create new forms of effective social intervention and to explore new ways to be interventionists.



Founded in 2005, the Design Studio for Social Intervention is a creativity lab for social justice work. It is a space where activists, artists and academics come together to imagine new approaches to social change and new angles to addressing complex social issues. For us social interventions are actions taken to reconfigure social habits, unspoken agreements or arrangements that, prior to the intervention, add to the durability and normalcy of a social problem.

The Space

We provide a new kind of space to imagine new potential solutions for recurring and hard to solve social problems. The space blends opportunities to use traditional and high tech art materials—wood, cloth, computers—with chances to charrette ideas for new approaches, re-imagine campaigns, bump into thinkers from all different fields, etc. The space is also supported by our:

Artists in Residence-- We feel artists are critical to our work because art works with symbols, and artists understand how people, communities and cultures use symbols to make collective meaning. We host artists who are interested in bringing this perspective to designing social interventions and who are excited about helping us offer art programming in the Studio.

Activists in Residence—Since its inception, the Design Studio has supported and learned from experienced practitioners from the social justice sector who work across fields to explore new perspectives on solving particular social problems.

Programming in the Design Studio

Workshops

We offer one and two day workshops to practitioners who want to find new possibilities for solving problems. Workshops break down topics such as problem setting, using symbols, engaging the public, systems thinking, large scale interventions, etc.

Cohorts

We support small cohorts of practitioners in an integrated three month process that takes them in depth with Design Studio tools as they tackle a difficult social issue. For example, a small group of immigrant rights activists are interested in working together to change the language used in the larger conversation about immigrants in the U.S.

Intensive field building projects

YADI—the Youth Activism Design Institute supports youth activists from across Boston and beyond in designing effective interventions in topics ranging from social violence to youth jobs, better access to public transportation, quality education and more.

LifeLab—Supporting groups looking to rethink problems and design new solutions around food, health, housing and energy.

Consulting

The Design Studio is available for large and small scale consulting projects. Examples include working with practitioners interested in improving the quality of out-of-school time for youth at a city-wide scale, national climate change activists trying to impact the Copenhagen gathering, and individual youth organizing groups seeking to energize and strengthen their campaigns.

How the Design Studio works: A Case Study on Art and Activism

During the summer of 2009, the Design Studio worked with youth activists and over 150 young people in the Roxbury and Dorchester neighborhoods of Boston to imagine new ways to address social or “horizontal” violence among youth in these neighborhoods. In conjunction with our Artist-in-Residence, Judith Leemann, we decided to intervene in the social practice of “the grill” (where two peers catch eyes and assume animosity, often leading to threats or actual violence.) We wanted to play with how the grill demands the grill as response, instantly creating a narrow space of on-edge intensity and aggression. In that moment, all that matters is what the grill says matters. We felt that anything we could do to connect the grill to something else would make it more difficult for the grill to be its greedy self.



The grill caught our attention because in our methodology for designing social interventions we look for an entry point, a less explored angle with potential to interrupt social problems. Here was a simple gesture that functioned on a symbolic level to epitomize a system where violence could start over nothing more than “she looked at me wrong”, but also how *the nothing was everything*, their very reputation and safety being on the line in the instant of response. So the grill was symbolic, but also a literal act that we could point to, play with and make strange. Our interventions were aimed at surreptitiously messing with the power of the grill. As one player said after our “Grill Game”, “Damn, now I’m gonna smile every time I try to grill someone.”

For more information, check the Design Studio’s website: ds4si.org

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