

# PARSONS THE NEW SCHOOL FOR DESIGN

## ***Design and Existential Risk***

Fall 2010 Lecture series

Parsons The New School for Design

Kellen Auditorium, 66 Fifth Avenue

6 PM - 8.30 PM Free and open to the public, limited seating

<http://designexrisk.wordpress.com/>

As we enter the second decade of the 21st Century, we are challenged by unprecedented planetary scale events: resource wars, climate change, emerging diseases- which increase in frequency and pose unprecedented problems for mapping and design. What can the role be for design when the reality that faces us is more extraordinary than the worlds we have imagined in science fiction?

Today, due to everyday revolutions in communications, computation, biotech, and nanotech, we face, statistically speaking, a range of *existential risks* that could transform or eradicate humanity and irrevocably alter all the systems on our planet. Indeed, along with massive geopolitical transformations catalyzed by energy and resource scarcity and systems management issues, we face constant social upheaval as a consequence of technologically driven globalization. From fast-forward cultural hybridization to nearly lifelike, esoteric economic instruments [and their spectacular collapse], we can sense an advance wave that heralds ever more extraordinary disruptive phenomena, including truly ubiquitous computation or even embryonic artificial intelligence systems. Farther a-field, off world, there is the risk of global catastrophe, through asteroid impacts or greater cosmologically scaled disasters.

Part of the design challenge we face is relatively simple and pragmatic: how can we predict, prepare for and react to such extreme situations. But another more urgent question parallels our work to design for these unstable futures: can we even conceive of some of the risks we may face as our technological capabilities accelerate every day and become increasingly hard to map and comprehend? An unprecedented evolution, transmutation, and erosion of scientific process [ and the basic frameworks of mind ] has put at risk our ability to imagine systems in a space and time outside of the contexts we are familiar with. We are rapidly approaching an epistemological event horizon, beyond which we can barely speculate.

***Design and Existential Risk*** is a series of conversations with leading thinkers, designers, authors and educators, critically questioning how the practice of design can imagine and prepare for extreme existential risks. Each event will explore the ways design thinking engages sustainability and indeed our very survival across near term [5 years], mid term [20 years] through very, very long term [tens of thousands of years and longer] time frames.

**PARSONS**  
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**FOR DESIGN**

- October 9 **Bruce Sterling**, author, *Tomorrow Now* and *Shaping Things*;  
in conversation with **Carla Leitao**, Adjunct Professor, Pratt & RPI
- October 9 **Geoff Manaugh**, BLDGBLOG, USC, Wired UK  
[streamcast on location from Los Angeles]
- October 21 **Robin Hanson**, Associate Professor, George Mason University;  
Research Associate, Oxford Future of Humanity Institute
- November 4 **Benjamin H. Bratton**, Director, Center for Design & Geopolitics and Associate  
Professor, UCSD; in conversation with **McKenzie Wark**, Professor of Culture &  
Media and Associate Dean, Eugene Lang College
- November 5 **Elizabeth Ellsworth**, Associate Provost for Curriculum & Learning and  
Professor, Media Studies, The New School; smudge studio  
**Jamie Kruse**, smudge studio  
**David Gersten**, Professor of Architecture, The Cooper Union;  
Visiting Professor, RISD
- November 11 **Jeffrey Inaba**, INABA; C-Lab
- November 15 **Keller Easterling**, Professor, Yale University; author, *Enduring Innocence*
- November 18 **Kazys Varnelis**, Director, Network Architecture Lab, Columbia Univ. GSAPP
- December 2 **Mark Wigley**, Dean, Columbia University GSAPP  
in conversation with **Joel Towers**, Dean, Parsons
- December 9 **Michael Chen** and **Jason Lee**, Pratt, CrisisFronts Design Research  
**Annie Kwon** and **Adriana Young**, The New School, GPIA Crisis Networks

Guests will speak for 30-50 minutes, followed by a conversation with respondent, and  
an audience discussion / Q&A.

Organized & sponsored by the Dean's Office, Parsons The New School for Design

Coordinated and moderated by **Ed Keller**, Associate Dean of Distributed Learning and Technology

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