

STANDARD PRACTICE



Coffee cup lids 2017, courtesy of Louise Harpman and Scott Specht

“ISO presides over a multitude of technical standards that establish criteria for everything from roller bearings and refrigerants to lubricants and footwear. There are technical standards for the parameters of a JPEG (ISO/IEC:15444) or an MPEG (ISO/IEC 21000), for cooking pasta (ISO 7304-2:2008, and even a standard glass for wine tastings (ISO 3591:1977).”

Keller Easterling, Extrastatecraft

STANDARD PRACTICE

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MADEP Transfocality: Spring Term Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Blog: <https://standardpracticearchive.tumblr.com/>

CONTEXT

Standards homogenise products and practices to ensure a basic level of safety, quality, dimension or aesthetic. They are necessary for a product, practice or behavior to take part in a global economy, yet their presence largely goes unseen. Though standards are voluntary / advisory, those who make the standards hold an immense amount of power.

In her book *ExtraStateCraft*, Keller Easterling investigates the activities of the International Standards Organisation (ISO) – a privately run global institution which governs these rules, and the international bodies who maintain them. To “meet the standard” is a certificate of legitimacy and trust, a form of currency. “If law is the currency of governments, standards are the currency of international organizations and multinational enterprises.” (Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft*). Standards also produce us, and our behaviour: the typical passport photograph demands a rigorous set of rules that regulate the precise dimensions, position and expression of a face in the photograph, so it can be read by facial recognition technology.

Standards determine the dimensions of our built environment: the *Neufert* is an architectural handbook setting out optimum distances between bodies and architecture and ideal dimensions of furniture. Standards curate the everyday aesthetics of supermarket produce: US Agricultural Standards define what is the acceptable shape, size and texture of fruit, from strawberries to cucumbers. More generally, language has its own standards that may limit the way we think or express ourselves - for example there are four words for love in Greek and only one in English; whilst human behaviour has its own history of standards from rules on etiquette to the legal criteria of an ASBO.

Standards are often so intertwined with practice that they often go unnoticed and unquestioned. For designers, these parameters come to establish the usual way of doing things, shaping how we think, and can ultimately limit the variability or ambition of our work. “Standard Practice” ensures a ‘bare minimum’ is met – but often the bare minimum becomes the standard.

In this brief we seek to attune ourselves to the standards that affect our practice, become conscious of how we act within them, decide if (and how) we want to challenge or move beyond them as well as experiment with ways to subvert or disrupt standards and/or become standards ‘makers’.

PART 1 IDENTIFYING AND ANALYSING STANDARDS

WEEK 1 (w/b 08/01/2018): Identifying Standards

Monday: AM Project Launch / PM In studio groups (or groups of related expertise/practices) investigate the standards within your field(s). These could be technologies, methodologies, units of measurement, vocabulary / language, codes of conduct or behaviour.

Tuesday: AM Look at key projects for reference / PM Continue mapping studio standards – prepare 5 slides/objects each to communicate/share these with the whole group

Thursday: AM Present Studio Standards / PM Lecture: Matthew Chiles - British Standards Authority <https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/>

WEEK 2 (w/b 15/01/2018): Research a Standard of Interest

As individuals, identify a particular standard of interest (from those you identified in groups). How does standard limit or enable your practice? Investigate the origin of the standard, the parameters / limits of it. Visit relevant institutions/companies/experts to gain insight into your chosen area/standard. Become an expert!

Monday: Studio Tutorials

Tuesday: Self-Directed

Thursday: Self-Directed

WEEK 3 (w/b 22/01/2018): Standard Mapping > Zooming Out

Visualise your standard – and its impact/influence on its context.

Investigate and map the knock on effects in the world (as it interacts with people, industries, markets, economies etc). How does it interact and entangle with other standards and other practices? What are the powers structures behind it – how does this govern us...? Reflecting on your standard maps – where are the overlaps between specialisms? Develop an awareness of shared languages and the need for understanding across fields. Collect your findings in layers - as physical images or objects (No screen based outcomes)

Monday: Studio Work

Tuesday: Self-directed Continue mapping / becoming an 'expert'

Thursday: Studio Work – Produce a proforma sheet for this standard in 2 A4's (zine + looking at the BS0 format) – to be submitted at end of week.

WEEK 4 (w/b 29/01/2018): Standard Swap

Using the standard zines you have created you will swap standards between practices: Working in pairs, 'experts' tutor their partner on how the standard works. They then swap and apply the foreign standard to their own practice, making possible outcomes to capture the idea. A kind of standard 'hack' – the aim is to disrupt and create immediate outcomes, a chance to be playful and turn the status quo on its head.

Monday: Workshop / swapping
Tuesday: Making / Prototyping (self-directed)
Thursday: Making / Prototyping (self-directed)

WEEK 5 (w/b 05/02/2018): Present Standard Swaps + Brief / Film

You will begin this week by presenting your standard swaps and then use this as a starting point to develop your own brief (standard proposal). This will mean developing or defining a standard in one of the following ways:

- Select a standard to adapt, subvert, reconfigure, disrupt or rewrite. And in which way would doing this transform your practice?
- Invent a new standard for something that doesn't exist yet - a speculative future, or something that is not currently measurable (a tacit quality?)
- Champion or build upon an existing or forgotten/withdrawn standard

Make a film to describe the context and use of this standard. Where does it take place, who does it affect, who are the experts or the 'communities of interest' that should be consulted?

Monday: Present standard swaps to the group / discussion / reflection
Tuesday: Studio time – towards Standard proforma and context film
Thursday: Self directed

..... Reading Week

WEEK 8 (w/b 26/02/2018): Application of Your Standard

Using your standard design and produce something that adheres to / captures this new standard. What is its potential effect on your practice and the world beyond - legal, worth, safety, value? How do we classify it? What do we need to do to get it accepted?

Monday: Studio time - Modelmaking / Ideation / Tutorials

Tuesday: Self directed

Thursday: Self directed

WEEK 9 (w/b 05/03/2018): Design and Production

Mnday: Studio time / Tutorials

Tuesday: Self directed

Thursday: Self directed

WEEK 10 (w/b 12/03/2018): Production, Testing and Documentation

Monday: Studio time / Tutorials (documentation and communication)

Tuesday: Self Directed: photography, documentation and communication

Thursday: Self Directed

WEEK 11 (w/b 19/03/2018): Presentations (exact dates TBC)

Monday: Presentation to BSI

Tuesday: Other Transfocality presentations

Thursday: Other Transfocality presentations

POST WEEK 11: Group Outcome

A publication about the project that brings the multidisciplinary outcomes together in a 'post-standards' catalogue