Nelson, Harold G. and Erik Stolterman. *The Design Way: Intentional Change in an Unpredictable World.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012. 297 pp., preface, references, index. Paperback, $35.00.

Reviewed by Gabrielle Gaulin, student at Drexel University.

The authors of this book are both distinguished faculty at their respective universities: Harold G. Nelson is currently Senior Instructor in the Graduate School of Business and Public Policy at the Naval Postgraduate School and President of the Advanced Design Institute. He was recognized in 2009--2010 as the Nierenberg Distinguished Professor of Design at Carnegie Mellon University. Erik Stolterman is Professor of Informatics and Department Chair in the School of Informatics and Computing at Indiana University Bloomington.

The book is divided into several sections of varying lengths. The prelude introduces the purpose and content of the book, as well as serving as a disclaimer for what the book is not. “The First Tradition” explains design’s place in human history; following sections of “Foundations” and “Fundamentals” discuss the philosophies in existence about design and the “tools” that promote a design way of thinking. “Metaphysics” focuses on the meaning of design and the designer’s obligation to reflect and revise these meanings throughout the process. Finally, “A Drawing Together” and “The Way Forward” attempt to synthesize these ideas and promote design thinking as an important skill for humanity.

Overwhelmingly, the book’s goal is to promote design thinking as a new philosophy in problem solving from global to everyday issues. It secondary mission is the promotion of design as the “third discipline” in relation to science and the arts. The conceptualizing of design as an inherently different mindset (or what should be) and a distinct human capability apart from the sciences is intriguing, especially to those who have been plagued by questions such as “So you pick colors for paint and stuff, right?”, but their argument lacks a readability that would enable it to reach the masses ignorant of the true implications of design. In their quest to legitimize design thinking, the authors will lose many on the rocks of esoteric knowledge and intellectual spouting that they introduce to the chapters. In many ways, I feel that this “knowledge” and historical example was used as more of a crutch then anything, and weakens the argument by its posturing.

Although no strong critical approach was taken, the introduction of the heavy “meaning” of design introduced a religious tone to the book in “Metaphysics”. The rest of the book was strongly academic in nature and presented its message relatively impartially. Evidence provided was mostly historical reference and anecdotal, supplemented by diagrams of the authors’ ideas. Based on the authors’ message for more of the world to consider design thinking as a viable (and even more fruitful) option in decision making and problem solving, I believe that the way the book was written was too dry for the majority of readers. The book, although presenting some great points, consistently overstated those points or overexemplified them. References also frequently figured with concepts that would be unknown to the reader, such as an example of Balinese culture’s integrative perspective on the physical, spiritual, and representational.

Readers of this book will learn.

Although I have also tended to think of design as a separate discipline, this is the first time I’ve read a formal statement.

books overarching argument – its originality and persuasiveness