

# Putting technology on trial

## Using mock trials to teach about the social impact of design

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# About me

Bachelor in industrial design in Brazil (1998-2003)

Master and PhD in design at TU Delft (2005-2012)

Tenured professorships in Brazilian universities  
(2013-2021)

Assistant professor at Faculty of Industrial Design  
Engineering (2021-)

Co-director of the *Justice by Design lab* (2025-)



# Mock trial as pedagogical method

**A mock trial is a simulated court proceeding in which students assume the roles of lawyers, witnesses, and judges.**

- **Active learning** – engages students directly in the learning process through role-play and simulation.
- **Critical thinking** – encourages analysis, argumentation, and evaluation of evidence.
- **Collaboration and teamwork** – requires coordination among prosecution, defence, witnesses, and judges, fostering group skills.

# Mock trial as pedagogical method

**A mock trial is a simulated court proceeding in which students assume the roles of lawyers, witnesses, and judges.**

- **Communication and rhetoric** – helps students practice public speaking, persuasive writing, and structured argumentation.
- **Perspective-taking** – students learn empathy and see issues from multiple viewpoints by inhabiting different roles.
- **Motivation and engagement** – dramatised structure increases student interest and emotional investment in the subject.

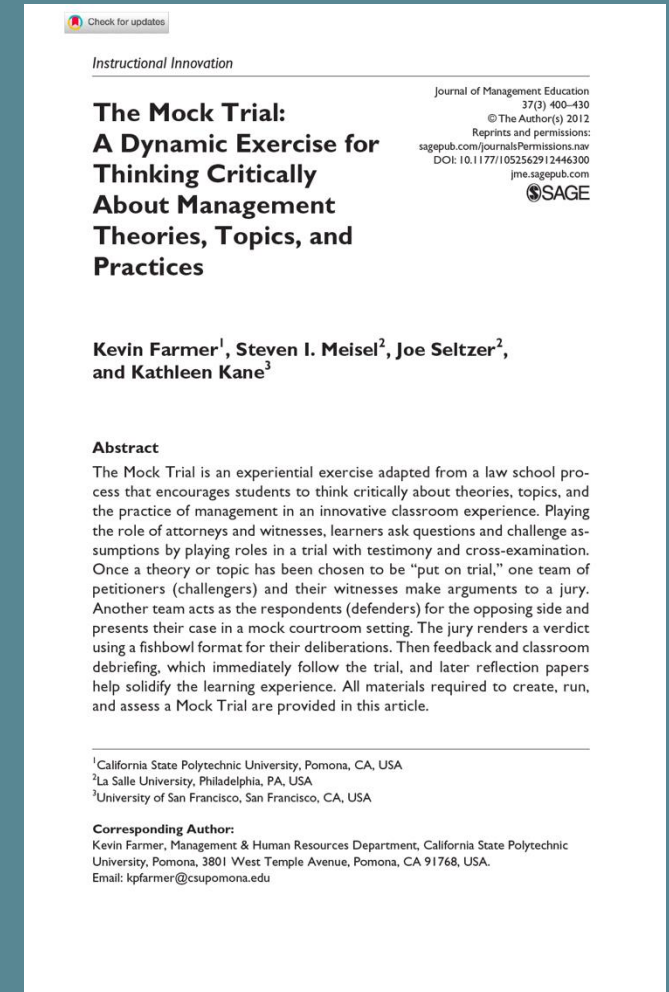
# Format adopted in my teaching

**Step 1.** Research and preparation

**Step 2.** Exchange of pretrial briefs

**Step 3.** Staging of the mock trial

**Step 4.** Debriefing and reflection



Farmer, K., Meisel, S. I., Seltzer, J., & Kane, K. (2013). The Mock Trial: A Dynamic Exercise for Thinking Critically About Management Theories, Topics, and Practices. *Journal of Management Education*, 37(3), 400–430.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562912446300>

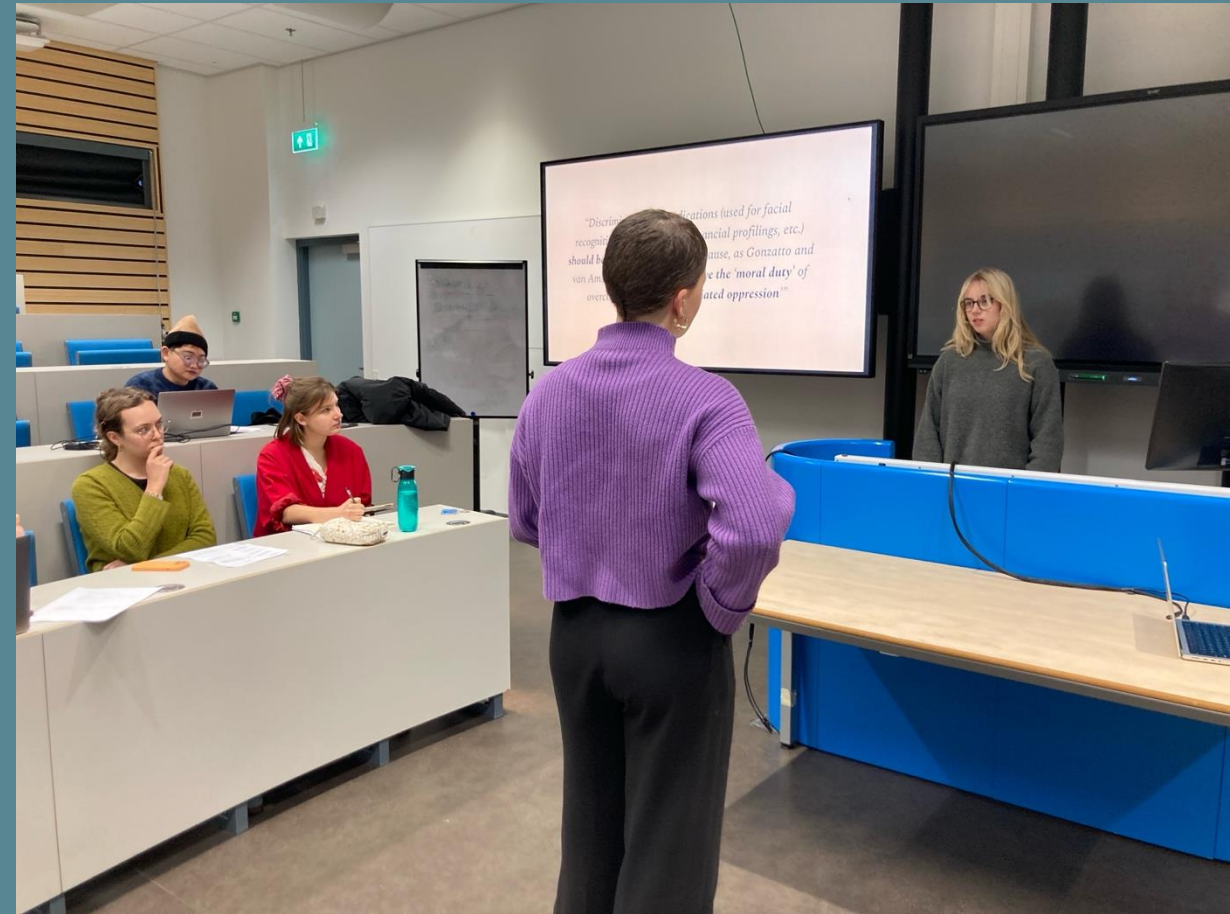
# Course: 'Design justice and emerging technologies'

## Learning objectives

Explain the relationship between emerging technology and social oppression in different design-related contexts.

Articulate critical standpoints informed by design scholarship to challenge existing cases of technology-mediated oppression.

Reflect on the roles that professional designers can play in better enabling social justice through emerging technology.



# Design for our future... with generative AI?!



# What future should design students fight to create?

*“Knowing who I am informs what I want to change.”*

**Lesley-Ann Noel**  
Dean, OCAD University, Canada



# Litigation issues for student groups

## Issue 1

Generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Midjourney, etc.) should be banned from design education because they reinforce what Tony Fry (1999) calls ‘defuturing’ practices that lead to ‘unsustainability’.

## Issue 2

Discriminatory AI applications (used for facial recognition, text generation, financial profiling, etc.) should be redesigned by users, because, as Gonzatto and Van Amstel suggest, only they have the ‘moral duty’ of overcoming ‘computer-mediated oppression’.

# Groups and trial teams

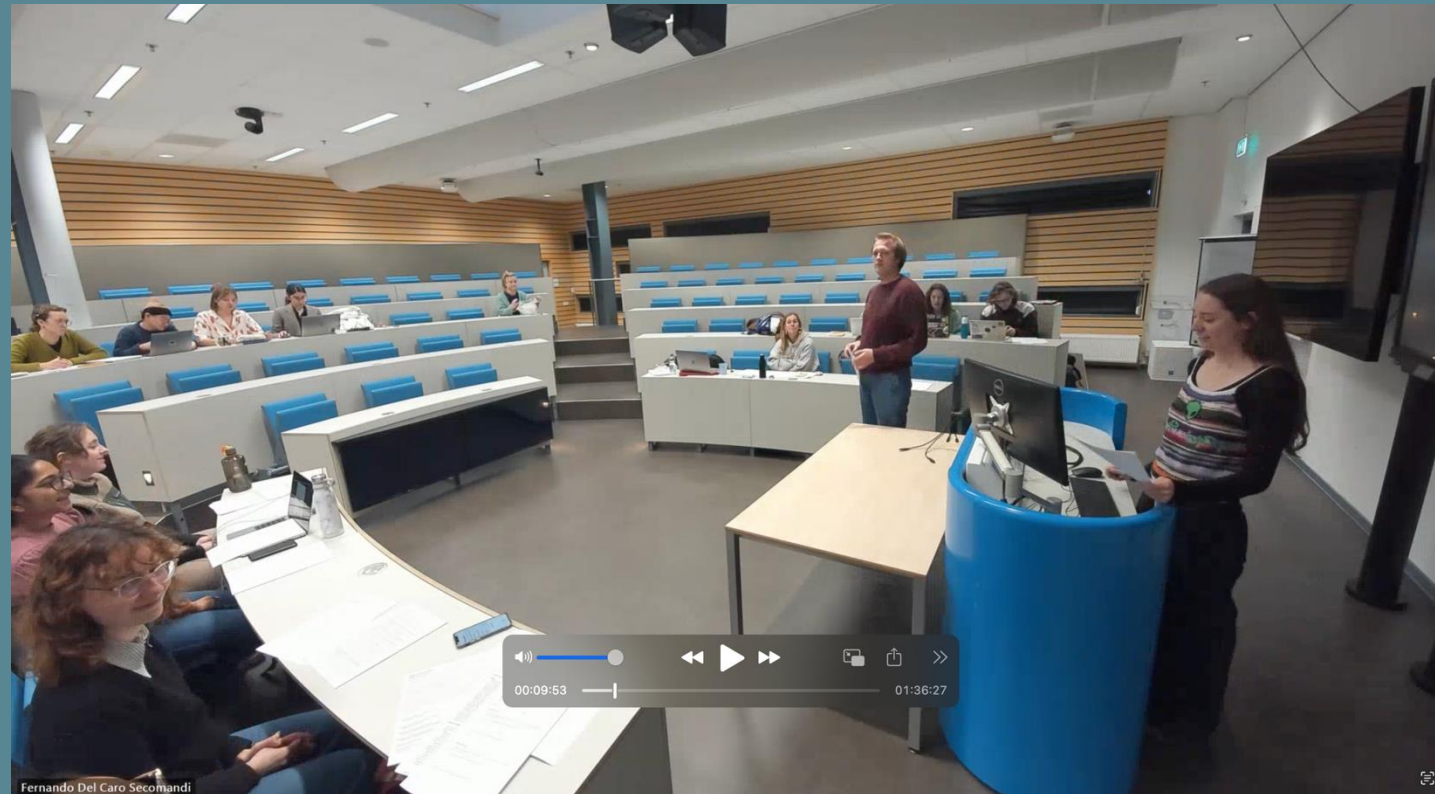
## **Petitioner (accuser) teams**

Develops arguments to support the claim made (issue 1 or 2).

## **Respondent (defendant) teams**

Take an opposite stance to contest the claim.

# Excerpts from mock trial recordings



Fernando Del Caro Secomandi

**Opening statement from the petitioning team**  
Trial 1 – the ban of genAI in design education

# Excerpts from mock trial recordings



**Cross-examination of a witness on the part of the defending team**  
Trial 2 – the moral duty of users to redesign biased AI

# Step 1 (week 7): research and preparation

## **Activities of petitioner and respondent teams:**

- research the issue and study the supporting literature
- define 'attorneys' and 'witnesses' internally
- prepare pretrial briefs

# Step 1 (week 7): research and preparation

## **Attorneys** (up to two)

- make opening and closing statements during the trial
- interrogate witnesses from both teams
- present other supporting evidence (charts, photos, etc.)

## **Witnesses** (up to two)

- respond to questions from attorneys of both teams
- express opinions based on the group's research
- can be anyone: an author, an expert, a fact witness, etc.

# Step 2 (week 8): exchange of pretrial briefs

## **Content of pretrial briefs** (max. two pages)

- delineation of key claims and supporting arguments
- summary of its witnesses' identity and testimony (incl. Q&A)
- list of supporting documentary evidence

Eventual disputes and objections are mediated by the 'jury' (other groups).

# Step 3 (week 9): staging of the mock trial

**Date** Monday, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025, 13:45-17:45

**Allotted time** 75-90 minutes for each issue

**Schedule**

- Opening statements petitioners and respondents (max 5 min each)
- Direct and cross-examination of each witness (max 5 min each)
- Closing arguments petitioners and respondents (max 5 min each)
- Jury deliberation (max 20 min)

# Step 3 (week 9): staging of the mock trial

## **Jury**

- is formed by the remainder of the class (two other groups)
- listen to the whole testimony and deliberate in a fishbowl format for all to hear
- make notes for the final report and self-reflection

## **Bailiff**

- is the teacher
- administers an oath to participants
- oversees the procedures and handles documents

# Step 4 (week 10): reflection and reporting

## **Contents of the written report**

- expands on pretrial briefs with a description of the full mock trial
- includes a verdict/sentence based on the jury deliberation
- includes a self-reflection on social responsibility as an industrial designer

# Example of student reflection after the mock trial

*The trial forced us to acknowledge that the current state [of how AI is integrated into design education] is unsustainable [...] As a designer educated in a European context with a high-level education, I benefit from the privilege of access to these cutting-edge technologies [...] I'll be honest: my use of AI has been largely self-serving. It makes my life easier. [...] But these are individual benefits, not systemic solutions. Have I truly explored AI's full potential? Definitely not [...] How can I, as a designer, contribute to shaping AI's purpose? I should take a critical look at the projects that I'm working on in my education. Can I integrate it into my projects not just as a tool, but as a means to empower those who need it most? [...] Can I explore alternative AI models that aren't owned by monopolistic tech giants but rather serve community-driven goals? As a designer, I hold more power than I sometimes realise. No, I might not be able to dismantle Big Tech overnight. But I can make choices in my field that either reinforce or resist the existing power structures. That realisation is crucial.*

– female Dutch student with a BSc degree in design from TU Delft

# Thank you!

Contact

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Justice by Design Lab

**<https://delftdesignlabs.org/justice-by-design/>**