

Visual Culture and Design

Nassim JafariNaimi

nassim@gatech.edu

Office Location: TSRB #320

Office Hours: TBD

TA: **Ridhima Gupta**

ridhimagupta@gatech.edu

Class Meetings: T, Th 9:35 – 10:55 am

Lab: Fri. 2:35 – 4:25 pm, TSRB 209

OBJECTIVE

To lay a foundation for understanding and informed criticism of visual and informational artifacts as well as the methods of devising effective media strategies.

OVERVIEW

Visual design is concerned with the invention of useful and beautiful products that mediate and facilitate communication. At its full potential, it has the ability *to teach, to please, and to move*. Communication is not a problem newly discovered in our time. However, the understanding of the problems of communication and methods of inquiry for arriving at appropriate solutions have become increasingly important in the contemporary culture. The need for effective communication is evident once we consider the wide presence and impact of digital and non-digital products in our everyday experiences. Examples span a wide range: from road signs to political campaigns, shopping lists to hypermedia applications.

The purpose of this course is to lay a foundation for better understanding communication that's mediated by visual artifacts as well as the methods of designing effective communication pieces. To this end, we will begin with a brief introduction to the grammar of visual design. We will look at the elements that make up the vocabulary of visual communication such as line, space, color, images, and type. In addition, we will study the principles of composition that bind these elements to create a unified whole. After this study, we will focus on understanding visual communication from three philosophic perspectives. More specifically, we examine three dominant paradigms of communication and explore how they might serve as *Topoi* for criticism and invention of media products. Alongside these, guest lectures will review methods or crafting the content of communication such as creative writing, interviewing, and archiving. We will wrap up with a discussion of design ethics and politics and the role and function of criticism and conversation as strategies of inquiry.

Learning Outcomes

- Understand philosophic foundations of visual design and communication.
- Understand information design artifacts as reasoned and persuasive arguments that are audience specific and situated.
- Use the theories and topics presented in this course to identify the problems and analyze the issues of information artifacts and digital media in the respective rhetorical and problematic contexts.
- Create digital artifacts with an awareness of history, respect and sensitivity to multiple and diverse audiences, and justice to the social and cultural contexts.

CLASS POLICIES

Evaluation

This course consists of discussions of selected readings, studio/critique sessions, and a set of projects.

Grades will be determined based on the following:

Project Assignments: 60%

Readings: 25%

Active engagement with class material: 15% (e.g., class discussions; active sketchbook; blog posts; and other individual explorations and contributions to class)

* Also, see note on attendance

Attendance

Due to a significant amount of in-class material and work, prompt attendance and active participation in class discussions and group critiques is required. Three absences are allowed. After that, your grade will drop by one letter grade with every two absences. You will only earn a failing grade if you are absent for 6 sessions or more.

*** note that the above is inclusive of job interviews or events such as Interactivity.

Projects and Assignments

Be sure to hand in your work in time. If you deliver your project later than the due date, your grade on that project will fall one letter grade. If you deliver your work more than one week after the due date, you will not earn any credit for it.

Readings

As you can see under grading section, I put a great emphasis on your preparation and participation in class. All of you are required to read the assigned papers/ book sections and be ready to discuss them in class. In addition, I will be making you in charge of some of the readings in class in which case you will be required to open and lead the class discussion.

Communication

I will use email as means of communication for this course. It is your responsibility to check email often to obtain information related to the course. T-square is also used heavily for communication in class. Make sure to update the settings on your t-square page so you will receive automatic emails about announcements, readings, and assignments. **You are responsible for all announcements made in class, via email or t-square.**

Office Hours

TBD. You can always request a meeting by email.

Information for Students with Disabilities

Please notify the instructor if you have any disabilities with which you need special assistance or consideration. The campus disability assistance program can be contacted through ADAPTS: <http://www.adapts.gatech.edu>

Honor Code Statement:

Students are expected to adhere to the Georgia Tech Honor Code: honor.gatech.edu

READINGS

Required

Lupton, Ellen. *Thinking with Type: A Critical Guide for Designers, Writers, Editors, & Students (Design Briefs)*. New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004.

Supplementary Readings

This course is inspired and informed by the following readings. Selections will be distributed in class for discussion.

Albers, Josef. *Interaction of Color*. (1994)

Carter, Rob, Philip Meggs, and Ben Day. *Typographic Design: Form & Communication*. (2002)

Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. (1934)

Handa, Carolyn. *Visual Rhetoric in a Digital World: A Critical Sourcebook*. (2004)

Hill, Charles A., and Marguerite H. Helmers. *Defining Visual Rhetorics*. (2004)

Meggs, Philip B. *Type & Image: The Language of Graphic Design*. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1992.

Müller-Brockmann, Josef. *A History of Visual Communication: From the Dawn of Barter in the Ancient World to the Visualized Conception of Today*. (1971)

Mullet, Kevin, and Darrell Sano. *Designing Visual Interfaces: Communication Oriented Techniques*. (1995)

Nelson, George. *How to See*. (2006)

Taylor, Joshua C., *Learning to Look: A Handbook for the Visual Arts*. (1981)

Wurman, Richard Saul. *Information Anxiety*. (1989)

Listening and Viewing Assignments

Each week, you will be required to watch videos or listen to podcasts. These materials are an essential part of the course that will be drawn upon in class discussions. **There will be very short quizzes with simple questions to make sure you have watched the videos.**

SOFTWARE & SUPPLIES

Software

We will be doing most of the early work using paper and pencil as well as Adobe Suite and Flash. Later in the course, we will use mapping and visualization software as appropriate for specific group projects. While most of the software are available at Georgia Tech library, the students are responsible for accessing the

software and not the course. It is also important to note that this is not a class on the software. While there will be tutorial sessions, I recommend that you consult the software help files, available books, or online material if you need more help using the software.

Supplies

A sketchbook & pencil
Steel ruler
Portable flash drive
Tracing paper
8.5"x11" paper
Black mounting board
Spray Mount Adhesive
X-acto knife

COURSE SCHEDULE

Part I. Grammar of Visual Design

Week 1, Jan 10

Creativity and Design

Discussion: Creativity

Activities: Drawing lines; Upside Down Drawing

View: IDEO redesigning the shopping cart

View: Tim Brown, Tales of Creativity and Play

Listen: Lego Kits and Your Creative Soul

Find: 100 uses for a paper clip

Read: Thinking with Type (LETTER)

Project 1: Type and Meaning

Tutorial: Introduction to Adobe Creative Suite

Week 2, Jan 17

Typography

Read: Thinking with Type

Read: "The Power of Punctuation," Martin Solomon

View: Helvetica, by Gary Hustwit

Listen: "Translation," RadioLab

Draw: 3 letters from 3 typefaces

Project 1: Type and Meaning

Friday Tour of Auburn Avenue: with **Gene Kansas (Cultural Developer)**

Listen: Sidewalk Radio Interview ("A Story Of Race, With Gary Pomerantz")

Listen: Sidewalk Radio Interview ("Historic Daily World Building")

Featured Designer: Erik Spiekermann

Week 3, Jan 24

Grids and Composition; Classification and Organization

Read: Thinking with Type

Read: Information Anxiety

Class Activity: Richard Gregory Poster

View: *Urbanized*, by Gary Hustwit

Draw: grid structures of 3 pages from 3 websites (9 pages)

Recommended Readings:

"Emil Ruder: A Future for Design Principles in Screen Typography", Kenna

"Writing with Complex Type" Lewis & Nadeau

"The Grid, History, Use, and Meaning," Jack H. Williamson

Selections from "Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences," By Geoffrey C. Bowker, Susan Leigh Star

Project 1: Type and Meaning

Friday Guest Lecture & Conversation: Signage and Historic Preservation, **Dean**

Baker (Central Atlanta Progress) & Herndon Human Rights Initiative and Non-

Violent Social Change, **Karcheik Sims (GSU Honors College)**

Listen: 3 Sidewalk Radio Shows of Your Choice

Listen/view: 3 Bitter Southerner Shows of Your Choice

Featured Designers: Theo van Doesburg; Jan Tschichold; Josef Müller-Brockmann

Week 4, Jan 31

Design Languages

Reading: Thinking with Type

Reading: "Design Languages," by John Rheinfrank and Shelley Evenson

Listen: TED Radio Hour: Building Better Cities

Collect: 6 images or artifacts from 3 brands or visual identities

Project 1: Due on Tuesday

Project 2 Assigned: Sweet Auburn Media Strategy I (Signs, Stories, and City Experience)

Tutorial: Adobe Creative Suite

*Friday Guest Lecture & Conversation: "Bitter Southerner Design and Creative Writing," **Chuck Reese (Bitter Southerner)***

Featured Designers: Paula Scher

Part II. Three Paradigms of Communication

Week 5, Feb 7

PARADIGM 1 :: Representation & Transmission

Reading: Weaver, The Mathematics of Communication

Reading: Fiske, Communication Theory

Reading: Ellen Lupton, Modern Hieroglyphs— for Th.

Project 2: Sweet Auburn Media Strategy I

*Friday Guest Lecture & Conversation: "Interviewing," **Gene Kansas (Creator & Host of Sidewalk Radio)***

Tutorial: TBD

Featured Designer: Otto Neurath

Week 6, Feb 14

PARADIGM 2 :: Perspectives & Interpretations

Read: Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Intro and Chapter 1; Erving Goffman

Read: "Shaping Belief: The Role of Audience in Visual Communication," Ann C. Tyler — for Th.

Listen: This American Life; Episode 110: Mapping (SEP 4, 1998) — for Th.

Listening: Radio Lab, "In the Valley of the Shadow of Doubt" — for Th.

*Attend: GVU Lecture, **Lisa Nathan (Assistant Professor, iSchool, UBC)***

Project 2: Sweet Auburn Media Strategy I

Tutorial: Group Meetings to Discuss the Project

*Friday Guest Lecture & Conversation: Bodies, Images, and Politics, **Jennifer Sterling (School of History and Sociology, GaTech)***

Featured Designers: Barbara Krugar

[INTENSE] Week 7, Feb 28

PARADIGM 3 :: Having an Experience, Social Interaction, & Education

Read: Selections from "Democracy and Education" by John Dewey

Read: John Dewey, "Art as Experience"

Listen: "In the Valley of the Shadow of Doubt," RadioLab

Project 2: Sweet Auburn Media Strategy I, DUE Thursday

Project 3: Sweet Auburn Media Strategy II (Visualization, Mapping, & Storytelling)

Tutorial: Mapping and Visualization

No Guest Lectures

Part III. Special Topics in Information Design and Visualization

Week 8, Mar 6

(Big) Data, Information Visualization and Mapping :: Arguments, Inquiries, & Environments

View: TED Playlist: Making Sense of Too Much Data (http://www.ted.com/playlists/56/making_sense_of_too_much_data)

Thursday: Case Examples:

"Mapping iThemba," with **Anne Pollock** (Associate Professor, LMC, GaTech)

"History of the World," with **Gene Kansas** (Digital Media Masters Student)

"Food Deserts," **Joe Gonzales** (HCC, PhD student)

"Yasmin Amer," **Locative Media and Journalism** (CNN)

Project 3: Sweet Auburn Media Strategy II

No Guest Lectures

Week 9, Mar 13

Urban Media

Reading: Special Issue in Digital Creativity (Rouse, JafariNaimi, Engberg, Bolter)

Project 3: Sweet Auburn Media Strategy II

View: Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision

Recommended Reading: Selections from Boundaries, by Maya Lin

Project 3: Sweet Auburn Media Strategy II

No Guest Lectures

Week 10, Mar 20

SPRING BREAK

Week 11, Mar 27

The Rhetorical Stance

Readings: "Rhetoric, Humanism, and Design", Buchanan

"The Rhetorical Stance," Wayne Booth

"The Rhetoric of Neutrality," Robin Kinross

Project 3: Sweet Auburn Media Strategy II
Tutorial: Designing a Process Book
Friday Guest Lecture & Conversation: Documentation, with Gene Kansas (Cultural Developer)

Week 12, April 3

Topoi, Places of Invention

Readings: TBD

Friday Guest Lecture & Conversation: "A City within a City," Todd Michney (School of History and Sociology, GaTech)

Part III. Ethics and Politics of Design

Week 13, Apr 10

Criticism and Conversation

Reading: Selections from "The Company We Keep," by Wayne Booth

Project 3: Sweet Auburn Media Strategy II

Friday Guest Lecture & Conversation: Innovation and Entrepreneurship, with Gene Kansas (Entrepreneur)

Tutorial: Process Book Design

Week 14, Apr 17

Principles and Values

Reading: "The Siyazama Project: A Traditional Beadwork and AIDS Intervention Program," Kate Wells et. al

Reading: "Re-establishing the Center of Human-Centered Design," Hargraves and JafariNaimi

Reading: "Human Dignity and Human Rights," Richard Buchanan

Project 3: Sweet Auburn Media Strategy II — dry run and crit

Friday Guest Lecture & Conversation: "Biological and Cultural Diversity," Jenny Hirtch

Week 15, Apr 24

Project 3

Final Presentations

PROJECT 1: WORDS AND MEANING (FORM AND CONTENT)

Choose three words from the list below; or selections from the poem by Maya Angelou titled, "Still I Rise". Based on your choice, design three panels that visually represent the meaning, the sound, the emotional quality, or other aspects that are associated with the words; or one panel that presents the quote; or a flash animation that presents the poem. You may vary the size, spacing, placement, and orientation of the letters. You may exaggerate, substitute, repeat, omit, slice, or overlap words or letters. Do not use drop shadows or horizontal/vertical scaling (distortion). Consider the entire space of the panels in design of your composition. You may execute your project by tracing letters, cutting and pasting photocopied letters, using a computer, or any combination of these methods.

Acknowledgement:

This assignment is informed by the design fundamental courses taught at Carnegie Mellon University, School of Design, as well as books *Thinking with Type* by Ellen Lupton, and *Design for Communication* by Elizabeth Resnik.

Week one: Idea generation (~10 concepts for the selected terms), critique, and more idea generation.

Week two: Refinement of **one of the designs** in response to feedback in class.

Week three: Presentation: Mount your final printouts on a sheet of 8"x8" black museum board (**for variations please refer to the discussion in class**).

Due: See syllabus.

Specifications:

Size: The composition is 6" x 6" square.

Typeface: Use the typeface Helvetica; or Futura Medium

Color: Black and White and shades of gray

Objectives:

To develop the basic skills of using composition principles in design.

To discover the realm of typography that represents and amplifies the semantics of the written language.

To explore the poetic quality of visual language.

Introductory mastery of software.

Familiarization with the themes and topics central to civil and human rights

rise

tide

dig

air

bowed

leap

gift

twisted

spring

cut

surprise

well

wide

daybreak

gloom

high

weaken

broken

terror

dream

wondrous

Still I Rise

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.
Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.
Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?
Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

Maya Angelou , 1928 – 2014

