

Syllabus ARTD 2315 & DMST 2000  
Term: Fall 2004  
Professor: Rafael A. Fajardo  
Assistant: Miguel A. Tarango  
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## **Introduction To Visual Meaning**

ARTD 2315 & DMST 2000

This course lays the groundwork for visual semiotics and design literacy, to understand how meaning is formed. It consists of practical design applications reflecting cultural, social, political and psychological contexts. Prerequisite(s): Instructor's permission, limited enrollment card. 5 quarter hours.

### ***Prerequisites:***

Students who have declared majors within the School of Art and Art History have prerequisites to satisfy before taking this course.

Students who have declared majors in Digital Media Studies (DMS) do not have prerequisites to enrollment. This course is will be taught at the Junior level of competency and above. All freshmen level students will be dropped from the course, regardless of major.

### ***Professor:***

Rafael A. Fajardo

[rfajardo@du.edu](mailto:rfajardo@du.edu)

(303) 871-3265

Shwayder 212

Office hours, MW 4:00pm – 5:30pm, or by appointment.

I will not return emails Friday through Sunday.

### ***Graduate Teaching Assistant***

Miguel A. Tarango

[mtarango@du.edu](mailto:mtarango@du.edu)

### ***Objectives:***

To explore how meaning operates and is constructed in the visual realm

There is a pragmatic objective, a practical objective, that of the introduction to the primary digital tool for manipulating visual images. We will make use of a pixel=editing tool, namely photoshop.

We will begin with an exploration of the tools available for raster-based image editing and creation.

To develop professional working and presentation methods, as expressed through the documentation of process and through the careful preparation of comprehensive prototypes.

### ***Strategy***

The skills of making and writing are both important to help us achieve the objectives.

The skill of writing is important ["C" level]

Evidence of critical reading skill is important ["B" level]

Evidence of interesting ideas is exceptional ["A" level]

### ***Required Materials:***

Dedicated sketchbook, minimum size 5" x 7", gridded paper preferable.

Black Letramax board, two sheets minimum. No substitutes.

5 CD-Recordables for Archival Purposes

### ***Required Texts:***

**Frank, Thomas. "Brand You". Harper's Magazine. July 1999. pp 74-90**

A copy can be found online through LexisNexis, or through EBSCO host.

**Shalit, Ruth. "The Return of the Hidden Persuaders". Salon.com. 1999.**

URL: <http://www.salon.com/media/col/shal/1999/09/27/persuaders>

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**Shalit, Ruth. "Hypnotizing Slackers". Salon.com. 1999.**

URL: <http://www.salon.com/media/col/shal/1999/09/28/hypnosis>

**Van Ham. "The Rise of the Brand State". Foreign Affairs. September 2001.**

A copy can be found online through LexisNexis

**Ortega, Francisco. An Introduction to Semiotics. website**

especially useful will be the concrete examples

url=<http://design.utep.edu/semiotics/>

**Mitchell, William. "How to do things with Pictures". The Reconfigured Eye. MIT.**

**Lynch, David. Mulholland Drive. Canal +. Canada**

To be screened in class

### **Classroom Policies:**

**Attendance:** Attendance and participation in all class meetings is required. A student may be absent from class three times during the semester without his or her final grade being affected. There are no excused absences beyond those three. Any further absences will result in the student being dropped from the class with the grade of "F" due to lack of participation. Attendance will be rigorously monitored. Each student is expected to come to class fully prepared to work.

Students who will be absent on religious holidays will notify the instructor in writing within fifteen days of the beginning of the semester in which those days will occur. Pending assignments will be completed and submitted prior to those days.

**Tardiness:** A student entering class after roll has been taken is tardy. Tardiness beyond three times is considered chronic and will result in a reduction of the student's semester grade by one lettergrade for each additional incident beyond three. A student arriving in class after the first 30 minutes of the class will be considered absent. Those who realize that promptness and attendance might be or is becoming a problem should drop the class.

**Grading:** Individual assignments will be graded on adherence to the criteria (both in letter and in spirit) of the problem. All assignments will be completed. Incomplete or late assignments will receive a grade of "F."

A final, cumulative, grade for the semester will be assigned by adding the average of the grades of individual assignments to the average of the grades of the exams given in class - if any. Points will then be deducted for tardiness, if applicable. The assignments will count for 80% of the final grade, while the exams will count for 20% of the final grade. If the final grade point is between two lettergrades, factors such as participation in class critiques, ability to verbalize concepts given, professional attitude and work habits will raise or lower the lettergrade.

**Delay of Grade:** If a student finds it impossible to complete assignments due to non-academic reasons (major health or personal problems), a written request stating the reason for a semester grade of "incomplete" will be given the instructor prior to the deadline for the final assignment. A grade of incomplete must be cleared before the end of the next semester. See page 26 of Undergraduate bulletin for procedural details.

**Plagiarism:** Solutions to assignments you submit will be your own work. A student who is discovered to have plagiarized another's work will immediately receive a grade of F for the course, and a recommendation for disciplinary action will be forwarded to the Dean of Students.

## Evaluation Criteria

### **Grading Criteria**

Grades:

- A.- Exceptional. Conceptualization, hand skills and visual skills are all close to a professional level. Concepts presented in class are used as a base for advanced exploration.
- B.- Above Average. Responses adhere to requirements of assignments, exhibit an understanding of the concepts presented. Solutions are unique, noteworthy and beyond competent. Hand and presentation skills are advanced.
- C.- Average. Student understands requirements of the assignment and is able to present an adequate solution with proper execution.
- D.- Below Average. Student exhibits little understanding of the requirements of the assignment. May indicate below average conceptual skills, hand skills, or presentation skills.
- F.- Failure. Student exhibits no understanding of the requirements of the assignment.

### **An explanation of ratings and criteria:**

- 4 = excellent
- 3 = good
- 2 = satisfactory
- 1 = unsatisfactory
- 0 = fail

**Contact:** Student-teacher contact is an essential aspect for the process of learning in higher education. How regular or active was student-teacher contact?

**Course Participation:** Beyond student-teacher contact there is a commitment to the process and to participate beyond one's personal work. What was the course participation for in-class discussions and group critiques? Was work performed in a timely fashion? What was the student's attendance record?

**Motivation:** Motivation forms enthusiasm and devotion to the tasks and the studies for the road ahead. How motivated is the student (in studio work, or the major, or the course, or the subject)?

**Craft:** Craft is a skill that is essential to all design and product making. Craft is viewed in all respects of product making and product presentation. How good is the student's craft?

**Visual Skills:** Students develop concepts and skills in visual language (perception, aesthetics, and use of form). They become visually literate, but also skillful in the use and application of this language. How skillful is the student with the visual language?

**Conceptual Skills:** Design is a conceptual process, requiring critical thinking, correlating theory and practice as well as inquiry into the subject at hand. Visual form, after all, is the visual representation of ideas and of content. This thinking becomes evident in the work itself, adding depth and value to content. How skillful is the student in this conceptual process?

**Search:** Design is a process of search: to experiment and seek alternative solutions. The product is a fall-out of this process. How much of this process does the student involve to resolve a design solution?

**Risk Taking:** The creative individual, in search for something other than imitation and mere adoption of convention, is willing to take risks. From failure we learn, and trial and error make essential components in design. How is risk taking evident in the work?

**Final Products:** The final product is, after all, part of the process, and a test of that process. How beautiful in form and structure is the final product? How clear is the communication? How well do form and content relate to their purpose?

**Personal Development:** Over time it becomes more evident how one's development of knowledge and skills relate to the individual. How is the individual developing over the time of a project, semester, or more?

**Other:** (an opportunity to suit a special circumstance...)

**Evaluation Matrix**

criteria:	ratings:				
	4	3	2	1	0
contact:	-	-	-	-	-
course participation:	-	-	-	-	-
motivation:	-	-	-	-	-
craftsmanship:	-	-	-	-	-
visual skills:	-	-	-	-	-
conceptual skills:	-	-	-	-	-
search:	-	-	-	-	-
risk taking:	-	-	-	-	-
final products:	-	-	-	-	-
personal development:	-	-	-	-	-
other...:	-	-	-	-	-

**Schedule:**

**Week 1**

Day 1 : Method, Ethic & Sign

In Class: Read the Syllabus

In Class: electronic Media Arts Design is . . .

Graphic Design is . . . the process of organizing words and images into meaningful messages in n-dimensions. The process inherently includes the planning for (re)production and dissemination of said messages.

The analysis, manipulation and creation of meaning is therefore important to the process, and is likewise an important skill for an aspiring designer to master.

Semiotics is the study of how and why sounds, gestures, things and situations convey meaning.

Linguistics is a sub-field of semiotics.

What is the importance of semiotics to the contemporary practice of designers, advertisers, and manufacturers?

**Homework:** Read "Brand You" from Harpers. Write two paragraphs, to be handed in; one paragraph summary, and one paragraph of opinion and commentary. Homework should be handed in as typed hardcopy, in Times Roman no smaller than 12pt type, double spaced paragraphs with a one-inch margin on the document. Papers that do not follow the formatting guidelines will be returned.

Day 2 : Signifier, Signified, Convention

Hand in a paragraph summarizing and a paragraph of opinion and commentary on "Brand You"

**Homework:** Read "The Return of the Hidden Persuaders" Write two paragraphs, to be handed in; one paragraph summary, and one paragraph of opinion and commentary. Homework should be typed.

Homework: Sketch for presentationa visual meaning bearing system that is made up of 8 x 8 pixels and has one bit of depth.

**Week 2**

Day 3 : Object, Interpretant, Representamen

The construction of a digital, electronic, image

The underlying infrastructure of the digital electronic image generates and reveals a grammar that reflects, signifies and means "digital" for an image. What are the components of this grammar?

Pixel  
Grid  
Resolution  
Device

Hand in a paragraph summarizing and a paragraph of opinion and commentary on "The return of the Hidden Persuaders"

In class, critique sketches of visual meaning bearing system(s).

**Homework:** Read "The rise of the brand state" Write two paragraphs, to be handed in; one paragraph summary, and one paragraph of opinion and commentary. Homework should be typed.

Homework: Translate sketches of meaning bearing systems to electronic form for final presentation, refine systems.

Day 4 : Icon, Index, Symbol

Hand in a paragraph summarizing and a paragraph of opinion and commentary on "The rise of the brand state"

Homework: Read "Hypnotizing Slackers..." Write two paragraphs, to be handed in; one paragraph summary, and one paragraph of opinion and commentary. Homework should be typed.

### ***Week 3: Operations on and with signs***

Day 5

Hand in paragraph summarizing and a paragraph of opinion and commentary on "Hypnotizing Slackers . . ."

Homework: Read Mitchell "How to do things with pictures" Write two paragraphs, to be handed in; one paragraph summary, and one paragraph of opinion and commentary. Homework should be typed.

In class: Print out and mount initial explorations on Black Letramax board.

Homework: How many pixels are needed to "mean" pictorial? How much tonal resolution is needed to "mean" pictorial? Attempt to create a self portrait that is "read" as pictorial, and that is 8 x 8 pixels x 8 tonal values (expressed as percentages of darkness; 0, 12, 24, 36, 48, 60, 72, 96) Use your student id photo as the model. Do not use a scanned image as a matrix, but attempt to build it from direct observation.

Day 6

Homework:.

In class: Show/View completed self-portraits. Save them as either .psd, .tif, or .bmp files and drop them into the Fajardo drop box on MuseShare.

Studio Homework: Refine self-portraits with a 16 x 16 pixel grid. Print

### ***Week 4: Image and text relationships ~~How signifiers are created; contrast, consistency:~~ Meaning bearing Systems***

Day 7

Hand in a paragraph summarizing, and a paragraph of opinion and commentary on "How to do things with pictures".

Hand in a paragraph summarizing, and a paragraph of opinion and commentary on "Laws of the Letter".

In class: Prepare for participation in Grafica

Actual.

In class: Show/View completed and refined self-portraits as printouts.

Studio Homework: Combine seven images selected at random from stock photography catalogs with seven sets of words or phrases chosen at random from a newspaper or magazine. Do not attempt to match words to images. They should be combined by chance. Save them as maximum 7" x 7" documents for display on the digital projector in class.

Day 8

### ***Week 5: Image and text relationships ~~Naturalization~~***

Day 9

View in class: Results of the random joining of word and image exercises

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Studio Homework: Attempt to intentionally make meaning(s) by combining 7 images with seven sets of words or sentences. These should be saved as maximum 7" x 7" to be printed on 8.5" x 11" paper

Day 10

Work in class

***Week 6: reasons we signify***

Day 11

Present and Critique seven intentional image and text relationships.

Evaluation: How close to the mark does our small audience feel the piece(s) come to their intended message?

Studio Homework: Make a single image mean seven different things

Day 12

View Mulholland Drive in class

Discussion Question: What does it mean?

***Week 7:***

Day 13

Present and Critique a single image means seven different things.

Evaluation: Are all seven meanings readily apparent?

Studio Homework: Rework Self Portraits for Final Presentation

Day 14

Present final version of Self Portraits

Studio Homework: Rework Meaning Bearing System for Final Presentation

***Week 8: looking at vs. looking through***

Day 15

Present final version of Meaning Bearing System

Studio Homework: Rework Seven Intentional Meanings for Final Presentation

Day 16

Work in class, receive feedback from professor

***Week 9***

Day 17

Present final version of Seven Intentional Meanings

Studio Homework: Rework Single Image with Seven Different Meanings for Final Presentation

Day 18

***Week 10***

Day 19

Present final version of Single Image with Seven Different Meanings

Day 20

Last Day of Classes

***Finals:***

The final exam will cover the theoretical component of this class, and will measure the students' appropriation of specialized vocabulary and concepts presented in this course.

**There will be no early or late finals given.**

## **Important Ideas**

### ***Saussure***

Ferdinand de Saussure

Father of Linguistics

Father of Semiotics

Asked the question "What is linguistics? What is its object of study?"

As he explored an answer to these questions he defined the "sign" and its nature.

Saussure proposed an arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified.

### ***Pierce***

American philosopher and mathematician

Father of Pragmatism [verify]

Father of Semiotics

Proposed the tri-partite nature of the sign: Object, Interpretant, Representamen.

### ***Method***

We take as a given that meaning is a subjective, unstable phenomena. It is a living, dynamic thing. We will have to freeze its motion in order to come to understand some of its operations and relations.

For example, the utterance /fat/ once meant large, obese, rotund. During the decade of the 1990s, the utterance took on a different meaning, and a novel spelling, "phat" came to mean hip, cool, desirable. And those who used it in this novel way were themselves hipsters. But late in the decade and on into the new century the neologism took on a decidedly unhip connotation. The new use had grown tired, and anyone still using the utterance /fat/ to mean cool and hip were themselves unfashionably late to the party.

Through this one example we can extrapolate out to the rest of spoken language, and meaning. We see that meaning is slippery. In less than one generation an utterance changed its meaning from one extreme to another and back again.

We can further extrapolate to visual meaning(s) if we look only to the fashions of the 1960s, and their reemergence at the turn of the 21st century.

### ***Ethic***

We generate meanings, we should do it with intention, not accident if we do it for money, in the public sphere, in the service of others.

### ***Sign***

Any mark, gesture, situation or utterance that means something to someone, at a particular place and time.

### ***Signifier, signified***

That which bears meaning

That which is meant

### ***Convention***

That which bears meaning does not necessarily bear a causal relationship to that which is meant

The arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign

The arbitrary nature of the typographic sign

The arbitrary nature of the symbolic sign(?)

We come to agree that something bears a particular meaning in a particular context.

At a roadway intersection, an octagon and the color red

In a nursery, the color pink or blue

In western cultures, the color black represents death, while in Japan, the color white represents death.

Tiffany's had to change the color of its signature ribbon for its Japanese store. Imagine giving little boxes of death to your loved one.

Long hair, short hair on men's heads

***Object, Interpretant, Representamen***

That ideal, or platonic thing

That which is meant, or imagined

That which bears meaning, and is shared

***icon, index, symbol***

That which looks like what it represents (icon)

That which is caused by what it represents (index)

That which is a conventional abstraction of what it represents (symbol)

***operations on -- and with -- signs***

For many of these operations to work, your audience has to have some pre-existing idea of what you are talking/making about.

substitution, insertion, omission

metaphor, simile, allegory

metonymy, synecdoche

denotation, connotation, polysemy

cliché, stereotype,

**Omission**

Reading an omission requires prior knowledge of what is not there but should be.

Creating an omission, what have you chosen not to include?

**Metonymy, synecdoche**

Both terms describe a relationship between parts and whole.

Sometimes a part or component is used to stand for a whole.

Sometimes a whole is used to define each member of a category.

Both terms can be used for both relationships for the purposes of this class.

Both can be criticized for oversimplification, sacrificing the particular ideosyncracies for generalizations.

**Denotation**

A sign that stands for itself and nothing more.

**Connotation**

A sign that carries with it shades of meaning beyond itself.

**Polysemy**

A sign carrying multiple meanings

**Cliché and Stereotype**

There are certain relationships that communicate very quickly. These follow established collective trains of thought.

By using a cliché or a stereotype, you choose to reinforce it.

In a mediaverse, a jaded public will easily forget clichéd messages, or they will fall into the background of the mediaverse, indistinguishable from the noise and clutter.

Both artistic and market agendas demand a guarded and minimal use of cliché.

Cleverness is a quality assigned to people and artifacts who employ cliché and other recognizable signs, but torque or twist them in such a way as to reveal a fresh or unexpected perspective.



Hallmark and other greeting card manufacturers make extensive use of cliché and stereotype.

### ***How signifiers are created***

#### **Ways we signify or sign the world**

writing (signing or marking)  
mark, signal, ink on paper, paint on canvas, light on a wall  
performance, ritual, display, action  
sound, utterance  
encoding/decoding

#### **contrast**

visual signifiers are generated by contrasting a figure from a ground (first level of contrast)  
and then by contrasting – or differentiating – two or more figures from each other (second level of contrast)

#### **consistency**

the contrasts noted above have to be deployed consistently for meaning to accrue  
inconsistent deployment(s) will delay recognition of the mark, gesture, etc, as a sign. The effort will have been wasted, and the information will blend in with the background noise that exists in the universe  
caveat: consistency has some flexibility, there are tolerances for a range of relations. This affords the opportunity for evolution and growth. This tolerance makes the systems we construct “alive”  
consistent deployment suggests systematization (in graphic design the notion of consistency takes as its extreme expression the use of grids to organize compositions of images and text.) Systematization is important. It begs the question, is it the signifier that means? Or is it the system?  
Consistency allows the opportunity for recognition  
[Spielberg played with this in close encounters of the third kind, and the light/music/sign language that was used to communicate with the aliens]

#### **meaning bearing systems**

a system of contrasts that come to mean something  
a conventional system is roughly equivalent to a grammar, a regime, a syntax  
do they always have to be part of a system to “mean”?  
If a leaf changes color according to a logic other than the change in the seasons, can we derive the same meanings from the turn?  
If each leaf changes at different times and for different reasons?  
Visual cacophony  
Static  
noise  
If smoke appears on the horizon but no fire, what can we surmise?  
If a manufacturer claims his products are of high quality, and yet fifty percent of his good fall apart, what can we surmise?  
If

#### **Naturalization**

When you decide to communicate, that is to say, when you decide to express yourself in a manner that you expect will be received and understood by another, you choose to make use of the pre-existing modes and forms, of the extant structures. In so doing you allow those extant structures, those pre-existing grammars, to shape your message.  
In so doing, you reinforce those pre-existing grammars, you validate them and re-validate them.  
When we no longer see the grammars because of repetitive practice, we begin to see “through” the grammars. At this point we have become naturalized to them, and they are invisible. At this point, using

the grammars is the most natural thing in the world. Use of a foreign or alien structure is at first alienating, then hard, and then, eventually, natural also.

**consider the relations between the "terms" (between the signifiers)**

value(s) generate(s) the system(s) of differences

**heirarchy**

*we establish visual heirarchies in order to make our messages decipherable, legible*

*we create visual ordering systems*

*we create visual value systems*

**we make judgements**

"this is very important information and I can't see it, it's too small"

"this thing goes better here"

"this color is better than that one"

"no, no, no, that's all wrong"

"more to the left"

"bigger"

"smaller"

etc.

**reasons we signify**

**pragmatic**

aimed at the satisfaction of a need or desire

**hortatorical**

aimed at teaching or displaying knowledge

**poetic**

Signs at play with themselves

**phatic**

Budweiser commercial "Whaasss Up?"

Communication with no other purpose than to reaffirm that we can communicate.

Shooting the breeze

Keeping in touch

Touching base

**[sensory pleasure]**

**image and text relationship**

There are several ways in which images and text can be combined in a composition. We can think of these ways as strateies for dealing with text/image relationships on a page or spread. Here are a few that address the relative heirarchical position of one with respect to the other:

**Text and image strategies:**

The image is subservient to the text, attempting to support or re-enforce the text by direct pictorial illustration - the image demonstrates the text (e.g. most childrens books, textbooks, how-to books, most

normal illustrated books and magazines).

The text is subservient to image, the image is seductive to the point that it doesn't matter - almost - what the text says (e.g. in the US, National Geographic, Vogue, Harpers Bazaar, Architectural Digest, coffee-table books, movie posters).

Discontinuity or non-sequitur, image and text bear no apparent causal relationship. The author / artist attempts jar the viewer into questioning the contents of the text or the image or both and hence see them differently. S/he may also be attempting to "trick" the viewer into creating a relationship (e.g. Dada, some Fluxus).

Dada, Surrealist, and Fluxus operations: Choose an image at random, choose a word at random, compose them in the same space; what do you get?

read text / see image / see text / read image. Text and image are placed on equal footing. One is incomplete without the other. Images are "read" and text has a self-conscious visual component; both are expected to pull double-duty (e.g. surrealist work by René Magritte, some components of synthetic cubism, Nike commercials, Coca Cola commercials for the 1994 world cup, the Talking Heads video "nothing but flowers").

[further, see and read compositions, artifacts, milieu, culture]

Mexican bingo cards (loteria) image and text re-assert and reaffirm one another. Image illustrates text, and text describes the image. Tarot cards, the relationship is redundant. The redundancy reinforces.

Stock Photography catalogs are collections of untethered signifiers, pregnant with potential. What happens when we fix them to a context? What happens when we mate them with words? Are there some images that are too strong to be "mated"? Are there some words that are too strong to be mated?

### **Compositional Strategies with images**

When we combine this with the strategies for composing an image we get a rich palette of possibility for how to create and handle visual meaning.

Photographic Image composition strategies include:

Strategies for manipulating visual meaning and narrative in and with images

Mis en scene:

Collage

Montage

Bunuel. Un Chein Andalou

The movie Memento

Lynch. Blue Velvet

Lynch. Lost Highway

Lynch. Mulholland Drive

### ***lens***

look at, look through

oscillate between modes of looking at and looking through

being in a space, but not of the space

differing conventions of professional display

what does it mean to "transgress"?

### ***reception theory***

reading

the role of the reader

interpretation

baggage, relativism

(potential for) misunderstanding

### ***communication***

signs must be disseminated, received, and reciprocated for there to be “communication”

otherwise what you have is broadcasting, or expression

much of the time, designers and artists are working in the expressive and broadcast model, with no feedback or reciprocation from audiences and users of the signs they generate.

### **you cannot not communicate —Watzlawick**

### **can you be invisible?**

### ***Grammar of Images***

Wassily Kandinsky offered us a grammar of form that has been reinforced through repetition for the last sixty years [verify time-frame]. Kandinsky’s reductivist analysis described elements of the visual field; point, line, plane, volume. These elemental figures stood apart from any ground, and could be combined to form (or describe) (many? all?) pictorial compositions. These elements are a vocabulary of shape, of form. From these, other forms can be derived. The elements can be deployed in certain configurations that are considered visually pleasing or visually beautiful.

Gestalt psychologists and the Bauhauser Itten described a logic for the visually appealing distribution of the elements; repetition, rhythm, syncopation, harmony, dissonance, juxtaposition, similarity, difference, alignment, illusory depth, flatness, balance, symmetry, asymmetry, color relationships, texture, illusory motion, illusory stillness, visual or optical tension. The usage of this logic, made evident in the visual work, resulting in “beauty” is said to display visual intelligence. Humans are thought to respond favorably, if subconsciously, to displays of visual intelligence.

Form and Counterform: “Thirty spokes meet in the hub, but the empty space between them is the essence of the wheel. Pots are formed of clay, but the empty space within it is the essence of the pot. Walls with windows and doors form the house, but the empty space within it is the essence of the house.” Lao Tse. [Bibliographic references for further study: Dondis, Itten, Bang, Brunelleschi, Alberti.]

### ***Grammar of Digital Images***

We derive meaning(s) from what is displayed on the CRT and on the monitor screens of our digital electronic devices, they become a medium and a substrate.

The information displayed on these devices, and transmitted through them, is subject to several “layers” of encoding. It is structured by several strata of grammars.

Electronic

Digital

Binary

Numeric

Alphabetic

Pictorial

Acoustic

Haptic

### **Electronic**

### **Digital (discrete, discontinuous)**

### **Binary**

Zero = 0

One = 1

Having two states. Can be used to describe a counting system.

A counting system of one binary digit can count up to two values (zero is considered a value)

A counting system of two binary digits can count up to four values:

Zero = 00

One = 01

Two = 10

Three = 11

(zero is considered a value)

A counting system of eight binary digits can count up to two-hundred and fifty-six values:

Zero = 0000 0000

:

Four = 0000 0100

:

255 = 1111 1111

(zero is considered a value)

We have been using the counting system to act as a code to represent other things.

### **Bit**

Contraction for Binary Digit

A bit is the smallest unit of information available for us. In digital information its values are either on or off; + or -; 1 or 0.

### **Byte**

A grouping of binary digits. Convention has settled the definition at eight binary digits, so one byte can count 256 values.

One Kilobyte = 1024 Bytes

One Megabyte = 1024 Kilobytes

One Gigabyte = 1024 Megabytes

Resolution

Monochrome

Greyscale

RGB

### **Pixel**

Contraction for Picture Element

Element = a basic part, the smallest part of ... the item in question.

A pixel is the smallest pictorial unit we can have in our computerized/digitized reality.

Pixels are organized by a grid.

## **Grid**

### **Raster**

A "raster" is a single unit of a grid. Raster and pixel will be used interchangeably in this class.

### **Translations**

Halftone

AM Screening

FM Screening

### **Continuous Tone**

#### ***Professional Documentation of Process (the grammar of design)***

Design is a reflective process, that is to say it involves: idea generation, judgement, refinement, and production. It is important to be able to develop a productive working process, a productive working method. It is also important to be able to speak articulately about this process, and to document the steps or phases of development in a project. The documentation is a record of the visual and intellectual work that often goes unseen. The documentation is useful to the creative process, useful for re-deployment of ideas in other projects, and useful for the development of an historical record for the discipline.

Historically, the documentation has taken the form of sketchbooks. These have a presupposition that pencil and paper are the underlying visualization media. We are open to other visualization media, and so expect documentation to take several forms.

Process documents will make evident the rigor of your methodology.

Artists and Designers share a level of non-verbal communication through "the work". The material, the finish, the polish, the craft, the aesthetic decisions, form a dynamic grammar through which the messages flow. Knowing this is essential to "connoisseurship" [spelling]. Employing and manipulating "material" at a high degree of polish and subtlety is essential to signification.

### **Projects and Exercises**

#### ***Raster-based brief***

0.- Create a meaningful system that is 1 pixel by 1 pixel by 1 bit. (in class exercise)

1.- Create a meaningful system that is 2 pixels by 2 pixels by 1 bit. (in class exercise)

2.- Create a meaningful system that is 8 pixels by 8 pixels by 1 bit. (home-work.) Bring the completed system to class and use it to signal a message to the class. This will be done on gridded paper with ink or pencil.

## **Bibliographic References**

### ***Primary Texts***

#### **Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. McGraw-Hill. 1959.**

This is the ur-text that brings semiotics into being on the continent of Europe

Semiotics is the science and study of signs and sign systems.

An informal definition of semiotics is the study of how things, utterances and situations come to mean.

pp 1-17, history of linguistics (esp 15-17)

pp 23-25, graphic representations of language

pp 65-78, nature of the linguistic sign

pp 111-122, linguistic value

### ***Secondary Texts***

#### **Culler, Jonathan. *Ferdinand de Saussure*. Cornell. 1976.**

Culler synthesizes and explains Saussure's ideas in a rich and concise way

pp 15-20

pp 105-150

#### **Blonsky, Marshall. "Endword: America On The Move". *On Signs*. Johns Hopkins University Press. 1985**

In this last essay of the collection Blonsky is asked to introduce semiotics to the vice president of DDBO, the global advertising conglomerate.

Collected essays applying semiotic theory and analysis; too comprehensive and abstract to be useful for an intro class.

#### **Sontag, Susan. "In Plato's Cave". *On Photography*. Anchor Books. 1990. pp 3-24.**

This essay is an inventory, a catalogue, a grammar, of how photographs, as image and artifact, function and mean. It is written from a very personal perspective. Although it is rigorous and exhaustive, I suspect, and hope, that it is incomplete.

This because of a practical reality of semiotic systems. If one can classify them completely, if one can nail down every single component, the system is closed, finite. The system will not grow, it will not evolve.

If this were to happen to a language, then that particular language is considered dead. My hope for photography, and other visual "systems" or "structures" or media is that they be vital, alive, and growing.

They should evolve, and change and mutate.

#### **Lupton, Ellen. "A Natural History of Typography". *Looking Closer*. Allworth Press. 1994. Pages 19-25**

In this essay, Lupton investigates typography as a semiotic system and draws upon Saussure for her argumentation.

This essay has been presented in other forms in other collections, In *Emigre Magazine* as "Type Writing: Structuralism and Typography", In *Design Writing Research* as "Laws of the Letter".

#### **Lupton, Ellen. "Type Writing: Structuralism and Typography". *Emigré Magazine*. Issue Number 15. 1990. Pages i-viii.**

#### **Lupton, Ellen. "Laws of the Letter". *Design Writing Research*. Kiosk. 1996. pages 52-61.**

#### **Forty, Adrian. *Objects of Desire*.**

This is a book length examination of some watershed designed artifacts and situations. It looks deeply and broadly at the economic and social contexts and implications of Wedgewood China, bathroom fixtures, the London Underground (poster),

**Mitchell, William. The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the digital era. MIT. 1992.**

Synthetic history of "photo-realistic imaging"

Provides a digestible, intelligible overview of highly technical processes

explodes notion that silver-hallide photography had a golden age of documentary truth telling. Forces all of photography to be morally relative.

Very useful for a studio class will be Chapter 9: "How to do things with pictures"

**Potts, Alex. "Sign". Critical Terms for Art History. Chicago. 1996. Pages 17-30.**

**Mitchell, WJT. "Word and Image". Critical Terms for Art History. Chicago. 1996. Pages 47-57.**

**Gerstner, Karl. A Compendium for Literates. MIT. 1974.**

**Dondis, Donis. A primer of Visual Literacy. MIT. 1973**

**McCloud, Scott. Understanding Comics.**

McCloud provides us with a book-length investigation and articulation of the syntax, or grammar or structure, of the medium he calls "comics". He also illustrates how meaning(s) attach and accrue to these structures through use. He does this by and through the very medium he is analyzing, that is to say, he uses comics to explain his ideas about comics.

It is difficult to recognize the semiotic content unless one has a firm grounding in semiotics before approaching the material.

**Johnson, Steven. Interface Culture. Harper Collins.**

Introduction: Proposes that there is no divide between technology, which he typifies by engineers, and culture, which he typifies by artists. He removes the divide between left and right brain, claiming that the segregation is an historical aberration, and that the idea will fall, much the way phrenology has fallen into disrepute. He positions his thoughts as addressing the whole brain, the whole intellect, the whole person. He points to DaVinci, and other inventor/artists to support his idea that the potential has been realized and recognized in humans already. He implies that all humans should, innate, have the capacity for systematic thinking, and fuzzy intuition, and the spark of invention.

Bitmapping: Begins with strong historical outline of the technological inception of the information space, the bit-mapped grid. It picks up speed and proposes meta-television forms as a logical precursor -- extensions to newer forms mapped on that space. This second part (the new proposal) forces one to read on to see how it will be linked to his greater thesis. Making use of the whole chapter, alone, without the context of the rest of the book, can cause confusion. The linkage between Englebart and e-television is not immediately clear.

"In the days before Gutenberg, cathedrals were the great signifying machines of public life." -- Johnson in Interface Culture. P 42.

**Cobley. Introducing Semiotics**

This illustrated volume provides a comprehensive look at the field of semiotics

Introducing Semiotics is too comprehensive to be useful to us.

**Bolton, Richard ed. The Contest of Meaning. MIT. 1989.**

Collected essays in photographic criticism and theory

Individual essays are too specific and detailed to be useful in an intro

collection displays diversity of discourse in visual meaning(s)

**Betsky, Aaron ed. Icons: Magnets of Meaning. SFMOMA. 1997.**

Catalog for exhibition of same name. Four essays plus high quality images.

pp 66-71 Pearlman, Chee. "Opining on Icons"



Pearlman interrogates famed creators of "icons" about their favorite icons

**Lunenfeld, Peter. Snap To Grid. MIT Press. 2000.**

Chapter 5: Digital Photography: The Dubitative Image. pp 55-

looks at the still image, both photochemical and digital and proposes a reconceptualization or repositioning of the semiotics of the image based on the "doubt" that images inspire.

Pierce developed semiotic as photography and cinema were being developed.

Pierce claimed that photographs were indices, though they may seem iconic.

**Friedman, Ken. "Language and Culture in the Information Age." Art & Design Magazine No 45: The Multimedia Text. Nicholas Zurbugg, ed. Academy Group Ltd. 1995. pp 56-59.**

This essay presents the idea of money as an information artefact, and as an information system, and explores the potential for language(s) as it is influenced by electronic information exchange technologies.

Ken Friedman is moderator of the PhD Design listserve.

**Ockerse, Tom. "Semiotics as design method." Spirals '91, book 5. RISD. pp177-188.**

This essay reveals the specific methodologies developed by Ockerse and Van Dijk to analyze and generate visual meaning(s). It is based on work by Pierce.

***Tertiary and Mass Market Texts***

**Frank, Thomas. "Brand You". Harper's Magazine. July 1999. pp 74-90.**

Abstract: Discusses account planning in advertising and marketing. How advertisements earn our loyalty; Job description of account planners; Information on the events at the Account Planning Conference; Audience-research techniques; Revolution against institutional hierarchy.

**Shalit, Ruth. "The Return of the Hidden Persuaders". Salon.com. 1999.**

"Driven by a booming economy, a corporate obsession with brand-building and a feel good philosophy, a motley crew of ex-grad students, starry-eyed admen and hypnosis gurus are probing the consumer unconscious to sell soap."

Probe the unconscious/sub-conscious desires and aspirations through hypnosis, freudian and jungian analysis, and semiotic decodings

In the Chrysler example, reveals pragmatic struggles in the interface with pre-existing corporate structure(s).

**Shalit, Ruth. "Hypnotizing Slackers for Starbucks, and other visionary acts of marketing research". Salon.com. 1999.**

"Through hypnosis, deconstructive theory and other advanced techniques, marketing experts have definitively established that champagne is associated with romance."

**Van Ham. "The Rise of the Brand State". Foreign Affairs. September 2001.**

"Over the last two decades, straightforward advertising has given way to branding -- giving products and services an emotional dimension with which people can identify. In this way, Singapore and Ireland are no longer merely countries one finds in an atlas. They have become "brand states," with geographical and political settings that seem trivial compared to their emotional resonance among an increasingly global audience of consumers. A brand is best described as a customer's idea about a product; the "brand state" comprises the outside world's ideas about a particular country."

**Gladwell, Malcolm. "The Cool Hunt". The New Yorker. pp 78-. 17 March 1997.**

Certain very highly paid consultants can read culture and spot the next big thing.

**Gladwell, Malcolm. "The Naked Face: Can you read people's thoughts just by looking at them?". The**

**New Yorker. 5 August 2002. p 38.**

Author profiles academic who has investigated a structuralism and a grammar of facial expression, and posits that facial expressions are universal (or the result of evolution and adaptation) across cultures. If this is so, then facial expressions will be an immutable, objective meaning bearing system.

**Helfand, Jessica. Screen. Princeton Architectural Press.**

Chapter: New Media New Narrative

Helfand offers Kurasawa's Rashomon as an exemplar for new media, with its multiple entry points to the overall narrative, each thread being aesthetically riveting. Each thread exhibiting different points of view on a single reality.

In 2002s fall television season, NBC experimented with a Rashomon-like narrative strategy for a weekly police drama. This show was called Boomtown.

We may find it useful to analyse Rashomon, and look at what each of the narrators finds meaningful. What are the elements of the story he or she includes, what are the elements he or she excludes.

**Cave, Damien. "Air Jordans". Salon.com. 2002.**

"What changed leisure footwear forever and created the wonderful, hideous behemoth of contemporary consumer culture? It's gotta be da shoes."

This is a personal reading of the meaning(s) that have attached to the famed basketball shoe.

Introducing Semiotics is too comprehensive to be useful to us.

**O'Neill, Molly. "The Viking Invasion: How trophy stoves took over the kitchen". The New Yorker. 29 July 2002. p 40.**

**Heller. Visual Literacy. Allworth.**

This volume is a collection of essays or criticisms of individual pieces. Heller, and his collaborator Pomeroy, propose to provide context and history and consequences of each of the pieces selected for the collection. These can be looked at as "readings" [can they?].

**McMahon. Karen. "Have Sign Will Travel: Cultural Issues In Design Education." The Education Of A Graphic Designer. Heller, ed. Allworth Press. 1998.**

**Lynch, David. Mulholland Drive**

**Lynch, David. Blue Velvet**

**Lynch, David. Lost Highway.**

**Lynch, David. Eraserhead.**

**Ortega, Francisco. An Introduction to Semiotics. website**

especially useful will be the concrete examples

**Freeman, Judi. The Dada & Surrealist Word/Image. MIT Press. 1989.**

As he noted in the 1950s, "The onlookers are the ones that make the picture." [The author is quoting Dushcamp from an essay by Jean Schuster, 1957.] p. 24

Freeman uses the word "language" interchangeably with the meaning(s) of alphabet, calligraphy, and typography.

Freeman notes how the mixture (montage) of language [see above] with image destabilizes meaning, and promotes ambiguous, multiple, layered meanings. This was a major innovation in thinking and in performance. It presages deconstruction and post-structuralism in literary criticism.

**Spiekermann, Erik. Stop Stealing Sheep & Figure Out How Type Works. Adobe Press. 1993.**

can be said to lay out a grammar of typography. Others have also attempted this enterprise, namely (in no particular order): Gerstner, Lupton, Bringhurst, Williams (Robin).

This volume is useful as a gentle, humorous, primer.

**Chaff**

***Objectives (too detailed or otherwise)***

To interpret meaning in the visual realm

To generate meaning in the visual realm

To manipulate meaning in the visual realm

To understand the relationship(s) that meaning has with Culture(s)

To explore, manipulate and create visual signs and sign systems (sign is used here in the semiotic sense)

To recognize and be able to interpret sign systems and the constituent elements

To Study how meaning seems to be a result of social organization, a social phenomenon specific to a particular society, social class, or period.

[NB.– The post-structuralist critique of structuralism is implicit in Peircian semiotic (with the *r/i* oscillation accounting for subjective interpretation, and infinite semiosis (recursive?) affording unintended, untethered meanings).]

Freud, Saussure, Peirce all developed their ideas nearly simultaneously.

They both developed their ideas simultaneous to the development of cinema

Jung developed his in an environment after semiotics was already in the ether. Levi-Strauss as well.

narrative

non-sequitur?

paradigm, syntagm

synchronic, diachronic

Readings will help students to read and interpret, by showing how others have read and interpreted. What will help students generate? Trial and error?

Spectator? Viewer?

***Spectacle***

An early 20th century thinker, Guy Debord, proposed a view of society as spectacle.

Debord, quoted in Marcus, says that spectacle is not a collection of images, it is a set of relationships between people mediated by images.

This is a “reading” of society.

***multiple channels***

iTunes visuals bear no direct relationship to the music that images them. The systems of equations and transformations were created independently from the music. There is an analytical step, Acoustic waveforms that represent a quantized analysis of the songs are used to provide amplitude, amongst other values, for the equations and transforms. We can say that the music causes certain things to happen in the visual.

However, no two playings of the song will result in the same visuals. The order in which the equations and transforms appears is different with each playing. We may project meaning(s) upon the visuals, but we cannot presume them. The analytical stage creates a relationship, but it is not a systematic one,

The acoustic channel suggests something to us about the optical one.

Stereo Equalizers provide visual feedback of the amplitude (volume, quantity) of different ranges of frequencies present in a recorded piece of music. This animated bar chart can be hypnotic. Imagine if the peaks and valleys and shifts were to be set into motion themselves. This is what gives us, roughly speaking, iTunes.

Transforms include: increase in scale as item moves from center (origin) to the edge of the frame; rotation within the picture plane, either clockwise or anti-clockwise; scale decrease in one half of the picture plane

with a simultaneous increase in the other, this feels like a pivot in space around the origin; warpings of the picture plane reminiscent of petals on a flower; etc.

### ***Pragmatics of a studio based class***

To search for insight into *how* visual meaning is produced. To do so we will rely on the theories of structuralism and semiotics formalized by Pierce and Saussure.

#### **do we have to limit ourselves to visual/ocular stimuli?**

##### **The role of the viewer:**

We will exclude as outside the realm of investigation all acoustic phenomena

We will exclude as outside the realm of investigation all tactile phenomena

We will exclude as outside the realm of investigation all gustatory phenomena

We will exclude as outside the realm of investigation all olfactory phenomena

##### **The role of the producer:**

We will use whatever media are at our disposal

We will use whatever media that seem appropriate to the task

We will use whatever substrates that seem appropriate to the task

We will bear in mind that our viewer will ignore or filter all sensory phenomena other than the visual/optical channel

**This class contains a concurrent introduction to Adobe Photoshop as a tool for image creation and manipulation. For our purposes, this tool allows us to generate semiotic signs.**

**make a meaning bearing system with 1 pixel by 1 pixel**

**32 pixels by 32 pixels**

**72 pixels by 72 pixels**

**128 pixels by 128 pixels**

**256 x 256**

**640 x 480**

**1024 x 768**

### ***Establishing, Identifying Convention(s)***

The first teaching day of class should be spent exploring the definition of the word "convention" in a seminar format with the students. My strategy has been to ask the students to define it for me, and to record the different definitions that are offered on the chalkboard/whiteboard. The goal is to arrive at an extemporaneous, shared definition -- a conventional definition of the word "convention." This shared definition will become more important as the semester progresses.

**Agreement**

I have read the syllabus for ARTD 2315 & DMST 2000 thouroughly. My questions and concerns as of this date have been asked and I understand the content of the course and what is expected of me.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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