
Instructor: Thomas (Tom) Ockerse
UNIT 2: Word and Image Equations

Unit inquiry: How does the medium *massage* the message, and why? How does the visual language (medium, technique, form, system, relations, time, space, etc.) aid or impair communication?

Unit summary: Since any object is an interface for human experience, its language system is the essential ground to generate meaning for that experience. In graphic design we use primarily visual and verbal devices to represent ideas. While these devices have assigned meanings, interpretation depends on awareness of relationships that determine such meaning. We know, for example, that tone, volume, and accent commonly affect and often determine how a spoken word is interpreted. The same holds true for the written word, and how the graphic means of visual form and structure affect and even determine content and interpretation. We will inquire into this phenomenon of equating verbivisual factors that reflect and massage meaning, and why.

Unit Details:

WEEK 1 - Wednesday September 11, 2014

For Phase 1, UNIT 2: Bring to your next class meeting (Week 2) an object: and **ordinary** (vs. precious, interesting), **simple** (vs. overly complex), **3-d** (small enough to hold in one hand) **object**, selected merely for your personal attraction to it.

WEEK 2 - Wednesday September 17, 2014

Phase 2 (in first class): First identify your object with single word (preferably short, simple, concrete). Then put the object out of your sight.

Then (for at least the next 2 hours) **experiment** by simply writing that word using a variety of means to explore the act of "writing" the word. See and feel the word and its parts (letters, form, qualities). Work quickly to experience and explore quantity and variety. **Use only the word and its letters** (forms, structures). There are no limits to shape, medium, scale, dimension, space, time, etc.

During this process become aware of your curiosities, interests, and questions for inquiry, and write these down as you go along or when you take time out to reflect.

Phase 3 (still in first class, after a brief non-critical review of accomplishments):

Now return to the object and briefly observe/study it anew, as if you have never seen it before.

Then explore the word and its object via the method of a **concept* map**:

Place your word in the center of a sheet of paper, then add to this other words that represent the nature and characteristics of the object the word represents: features, structures, feelings, qualities, values, relational properties. Minimize your notations with single words/phrases (or simple descriptions, or even quick visual notes) with the goal to become truly aware of your observations and to appreciate this object more intimately. Come back to the map later to expand it, as needed. Note that this concept map represents: 1) words (and other devices) as "signs" that represent ideas or stand for something else; 2) a whole that represents the principle of the many (words, ideas) into that single (central) idea of one.

Reflect on this during your process. Observe your curiosities, interests, and questions for inquiry, and write these down as you go along or when you take time out to reflect.

* NOTE: The **concept map** is a simple method to reveal the relational value of parts to a whole. This represents a fundamental principle: meaning exists only from relationship. To center your consciousness (by having a word in the center) helps maintain an awareness of the interactive nature of parts and wholes (immediate, indirect or hypothetical relationships), vs. a linear path, wherein awareness can lose sight of source and value. The concept map is also often referred to as "mind-map" (popularized by Tony Buzan, British psychologist, in the late 1970s, inspired by Alfred Korzybski's general semantics theory); but the term "mind-map" is misleading since the system does not map the mind, except to record "thought" as one, albeit limited, characteristic of the mind. Long before Buzan others used the same mapping system for similar purposes (e.g., 3rd cent. Greek philosopher, Porphyry, used it to map out Aristotle's categories; Ernest E. Wood, 1930s, used it as a means to train concentration skills).

Phase 4 (start in class, but continues for the next week):

Now return to the act of writing the word, **using ONLY the single word and its letters**, this time with a visual search to broaden the meaning of the word via visual qualities (cf. concept map). Begin in simple ways: to write the word with some adjective in mind to harmonize writing action and visual form.

During this process become aware of your curiosities, interests, and questions for inquiry, and write these down during reflective periods. Especially note the many ways the visual implicates the various complexities of expression embedded in the word. How much of the concept map's ideas can you integrate via this single word? How does the graphic action and medium "massage" the message (see Quentin Fiore and Marshall McLuhan)?

FOR NEXT WEEK (Sept 24): explore this "transcription" process for the visible word and its representational qualities for meaning.

WEEK 3 - Wednesday September 24, 2014

Come prepared to share the results in class. Communicate in a quick, efficient way to help us get into the depth of your work, inquiries and questions to help us appreciate the value of your efforts.

Phase 5 (starts in class; then completes by week 3):

We will now explore the so-called "dimensions of language" to further your inquiry of verbivisual equations and how these are experienced. Tom O will share his three-dimensional model for ways to use (the visual) language, but due to our limited time we will only use the Practical and Poetical dimensions as a sliding scale to serve our purposes:

- The PRACTICAL use of language serves a singleness of meaning as denotative, useful, sensible (obvious, concrete), with little need for user experience.
- The POETICAL use of language serves to stimulate imagination with a richness and depth of meaning as connotative (subtle, abstract), with greater need for user experience. In class we will begin to explore these aspects as our means for expression. As before: **ONLY use your word and its letters**.

Continue this for next week with the goal to exemplify your inquiry for both uses of the language. Then further the "poetical" dimension for expression as far as you can. While we expect a variety of explorations to present your word, develop at least two refined examples that you consider to optimize the fullest potential for harmonizing form and meaning to serve the purpose for something worth experiencing. **Observe your curiosities, interests, and questions for inquiry**, and write these down during reflective stops.

WEEK 4 - Wednesday October 1, 2014

Come prepared to share with the class your curiosities, interests, especially the questions you framed for your inquiry, and an analytical view of the results you arrived at. Emphasize your presentation with visual samples to help make your points, along with optimized results.

WEEK 4 - Thursday October 2, 2014

Phase 6: Also prepare a reflective record/document on your process of inquiry for all phases (you can use the course assessment criteria (below) to help you become self-aware of scope and effort with texts and visual samples (sketches, documentations, maps) in any format (pdf, course web, boxed, etc.) simple in design for easy (faculty) access. Due: the day after class: October 2, by 7 pm.