



DES

the experiences and  
contributions that shape



IGN



HIST

the contemporary practice  
of visual communication



ORIES

# HISTORY IS NOT BEHIND US

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When we survey the history of visual communication, we are in essence tracing the evolution of graphic innovation. From the first language systems that emerged on the continents of pre-modern Africa and Asia to the first printed books produced in China during the Tang Dynasty, from the genesis of modernism at the turn of the 19th century to the first digital designs that were produced in the eighties, these inventions represent the methods of seeing, thinking, making, and connecting that were, within the context of their time and place, at the forefront of collective human experience. Each subsequent hallmark builds on the ones that came before it. Every new development uses the achievements of the past as its foundation. By studying the history of graphic design and visual communication, not only are we exposed to the ideas, values, and motivations that brought about these developments, we also gain a perspective on how these past innovations inform our present.

Our current consciousness is the result of past experiences—achievements, ideas, inventions, challenges, victories, and defeats—the majority of which were enacted, recorded, and assimilated into our collective history long before our lifetimes. These shared mythologies play a vital role in the formation of our contemporary perceptions. They act as archetypes which legitimize existing systems and perpetuate what is culturally agreed upon to be real and true. These milestones, once chronicled, determine who and what is acknowledged, valued, celebrated, preserved, condemned, and forgotten.

But recorded history is inherently incomplete. It is never full or whole. It is a construct conceived by individuals who, through processes of research, study, and scholarship, are, in the end, fabricating a story. The act of historicizing is, at best, an abstraction—it's an interpretation which incorporates montage, simplification, omission, linearity, and outright invention as strategies for facilitating comprehension and resolution. In actuality, there are countless histories, limitless information, and endless occurrences. Human experience

is multifarious, infinite, and constant. To capture everything would be impossible. So, the historian picks and chooses, eliminates and excludes to create a digestible and coherent storyline.

When confronting history, how do we account for such unideal and problematic circumstances? How do we separate fact from fiction? How do we differentiate between truth and marketing? History must be approached with an acknowledgment of its boundaries and received with an anticipation of its limitations. No matter how valid an historic account is, we must never forget that there is always another story.

The role of recorded history is powerful, specifically in the field of art and design. The singular contributions that are memorialized through representation— included in a book or taught within a curriculum—establish and promote specific standards of legitimacy, talent, beauty, value, and relevance. Celebrated individuals and their accompanying works become models for present and future endeavor. But these past examples are contextual at best—their elevated positions are most often the result of advantageous positions within a particular system at a particular moment in time. Designers who are most commonly celebrated are by no means representative of the full spectrum of experience or perspectives. The ones who are left out are far from insignificant. The majority of the practitioners who have contributed to the legacy of visual communication are and will remain anonymous. We will never see their contributions or learn about their experiences. Yet, it is this collective experience that is the true force that moves our field forward.

By focusing on the role of designers as luminaries and by putting singular works on pedestals, not only do we get an incomplete picture of design, but we also lose sight of what's truly important—our current experience. Past works are most useful, not as objects of reverence, but as tools to critically examine the values, beliefs, and processes that informed their production. Instead of focusing on individuals, let's focus on the collective. Instead of canonizing singular works, let's investigate the systems within which these works were made. Instead of celebrating, let's question instead.

The approach of Design Histories is centered on critical examination. We will investigate the past to more fully comprehend its relationship to the present and future. Time is not linear; existence is not singular. The information we touch on in no way promotes or legitimizes any one single experience, approach, movement, or body of work, rather, the intent is to create a space to question our current experiences for the sake of better understanding how we connect to the many versions of the past, present, and future that exist.

Sincerely,  
Gabriel Stromberg

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## COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- Focus on the present.
- Promote a perspective that history can be expanded on, corrected, reframed, reinterpreted, rewritten, re-examined, and ultimately changed.
- Present visual communication as a practice that has been shaped by countless contributions from cultures across the globe for thousands of years.
- Define the canon of design as a collective lineage that is constantly evolving and expanding. Nothing is fixed, nothing is static, and nothing is sacred.
- Investigate the economic, social, and political practices of various cultures and time periods to observe how they shaped dominant visual styles and approaches.
- Question concepts like talent, success, legitimacy, and innovation and understand their relationship to capitalistic strategies like scarcity, marketability, and propriety.
- Champion the idea that new or “outside” perspectives move the field forward.
- Don’t be afraid or ashamed of limitations or boundaries of understanding. Let’s address and discuss them. We are all in the process of becoming.

**INSTRUCTOR: GABRIEL STROMBERG**

[gabriel.stromberg@seattlecolleges.edu](mailto:gabriel.stromberg@seattlecolleges.edu)

**COURSE RUBRIC:**

- Participation (2 Outside Projects, Group Discussions): 15%
- Midterm Group Project: 40%
- 3 Tests (Multiple Choice): 25%
- Final Project: 20%

**POLICIES:**

**Attendance:**

All classes will be hybrid to allow for both in-person and remote participation. Remote participation is meant for students who are exhibiting symptoms of or have tested positive for COVID.

All students are expected to be present at the start of class at 9am. If you are remote, please find a suitable workspace for class participation. Do not attend class while lying in bed.

If you are going to be late, please message me on Slack and let me know as far ahead of time as possible. If you miss more than an hour of class without any prior arrangement, it will count as an absence.

**Mask Policies (subject to change in response to updated COVID data):**

Masks are optional for the lecture portion of the class. Masks are required for smaller group interactions.

**WEEK 1: MON 9/26—TUES 9/27**

## Introduction

This first class is an easy introduction into the curriculum. We will go over the syllabus and get started on the midterm project. This includes reviewing the options for topics, assigning groups, and addressing any questions or concerns that may come up.

**Watch:** Ted Talk: Genevieve von Petzinger

**Watch:** Design Lecture, Saki Mafundikwa

**WEEK 2: MON 10/3—TUES 10/4**

## The Power of Language

This survey of the evolution of written language systems examines contributions from multiple cultures and civilizations. Beginning with prehistoric examples, we will discuss the function that language serves and investigate the ways in which language systems impact the history and legacy of a culture. There will be a focus on the connection between the visual embodiment of writing systems and the values, beliefs, and technologies within which they develop.

**Kick-Off: Outside Project 1, due Week 5**

**Read:** The Power of Language (gabrielstromberg.com)

**WEEK 3: MON 10/10—TUES 10/11**

## The Printed Word

We will first review the factors that laid the groundwork for the genesis of printing and movable type during the late middle ages in Europe including the development of technologies in China which were foundational in the modern era. We will then explore the evolution of the printed letterform and discuss how printing became a tool for progress and innovation.

**Read:** The Printed Word (gabrielstromberg.com)

**Watch:** *F\* The Stereotype: Revitalizing Indigenous Perspective in Design, Sadie Red Wing*

**WEEK 4: MON 10/17—TUES 10/18**

## The Catalyst of Industry

There will be a survey of the technological innovations that came out of the industrial revolution. We will discuss how these developments impacted culture and design in the Victorian era and generated counter movements throughout Europe, Asia, and the US.

**Test 1: Language and Print**

**Read:** The Catalyst of Industry (gabrielstromberg.com)

**Read:** Excerpt from *Anatomy of a Typeface*, Alexander S. Lawson

**WEEK 5: MON 10/24—TUES 10/25**

## The Lens of Colonialism

We will examine the emergence of colonialism in the 1400's and discuss how conquest and political dominance shaped the European perspective. There will be a specific focus on works from Japan and numerous African countries that became the foundational catalyst for the modernist movement in Europe during the late 1800's and early 1900's.

**Deadline: Outside Project 1**

**Read:** The Lens of Colonialism (gabrielstromberg.com)

**Read:** *The Original Influencer*, History Today

**WEEK 6: MON 10/31—TUES 11/1**

## Capitalism and Globalization

This lecture will focus on how modernism emerged in Europe during the twenties and thirties and evolved from a series of avant garde movements within art and design to a dynamic visual language used for marketing the new goods and services of a global post-war economy.

During this class, I will check in with every group to review their presentation transcripts, evaluate their progress, and address any questions or concerns.

**Kick-Off: Outside Project 2, due Week 9**

**Read:** Capitalism and Globalization (gabrielstromberg.com)

**WEEK 7: MON 11/7—TUES 11/8**

Open Work Day

This class will be dedicated to finishing up your midterm presentations and outside projects. You will not be required to attend class.

**WEEK 8: MON 11/14—TUES 11/15**

Marketing, Media, and Modernism Part 1

In the wake of the destruction of World War 2, many cultures used the visual language of modernism as a tool for signifying legitimacy and prosperity. We will investigate the role of modernism in the construction of the global post-war identity.

**Midterm Presentations!!**

**Read:** Marketing, Media, and Modernism (gabrielstromberg.com)

**WEEK 9: MON 11/21—TUES 11/22**

Marketing, Media, and Modernism Part 2

**Test 2: Industry, Colonialism, and Capitalism**  
**Deadline: Outside Project 2**

**Read:** Excerpt from *Caps Lock: How Capitalism Took Hold of Graphic Design, and How to Escape from It* by Ruben Pater

**WEEK 10: MON 11/28—TUES 11/29**

Propaganda and Protest

We will review how design can be used as a force for transformation and connection in both positive and negative ways. There will be a specific focus on different ways that design has been a catalyst for collective action.

**Read:** Propaganda and Protest (gabrielstromberg.com)

**Watch:** *How to Survive a Plague*, documentary by David France

**WEEK 11: MON 12/5—TUES 12/6**

Postmodernism and Digital Culture

A look at the history and evolution of technologies used in the practice and production of works of graphic design beginning with the postmodern movement. We will review how specific technologies relate to specific visual approaches and conventions. This class will end with a discussion of future developing technologies and how these new ways of working will effect our practice.

**Read:** Postmodernism and Digital Culture (gabrielstromberg.com)

**Read:** First Things First Manifesto, Ken Garland

**Watch:** Jerome Harris Lecture

**WEEK 12: MON 12/12—TUES 12/13**

Finals

**Test 3: Protest and Postmodernism**

**Deadline:** Outside Project 3

# MIDTERM PROJECT:

## DELIVERABLES

Deliverable 1: A 15 minute, pre-recorded presentation on your subject.  
Deliverable 2: An accompanying transcript/outline with imagery and citations. Final document should be in PDF or Google Slide format.

## DEADLINE:

Transcript: Week 6, Mon 10/31—Tues 11/1, 9 am.  
Presentation: Week 8, Mon 11/14—Tues 11/15, 9 am.  
We will watch all presentations together as a class.

The objective of this assignment is to research the creative legacy of a specific period, genre, culture, or movement. The final deliverable will be a pre-recorded design presentation. The relationship between the visual characteristics associated with the chosen subject and cultural factors like technology, production methods, trends, social customs, political milestones, and historical circumstances should be a central element of the project.

## HISTORY

The most effective designers are fully in control of the meaning that their work generates and accountable for the ideas and beliefs that it transmits. Having an understanding of history is a key factor in developing these abilities. The Design Histories midterm project is meant to foster a deeper comprehension of historic genres within the canon of graphic design. In researching the history and development of these movements, you gain a vital understanding of the ideas, values, beliefs, and perspectives that have shaped the visual expression of a period or culture.

## RESEARCH

What contributions inspired the organic forms of Art Nouveau? What historic factors generated a cultural affinity for the geometry of Art Deco? What technological innovations aligned with the features of postmodernism? Through research and investigation, you glean a deeper understanding of your subject. The strategy of research is elemental to the contemporary practice of design and a central feature to occupations like UX design and brand development.

## COLLABORATION

Collaboration is a huge factor in any design role. The ability to organize, delegate, manage time, and develop ideas collectively are vital skills that will serve you well in your creative practice.

## PRESENTATION

The success of creative work is typically measured by its ability to be accepted. Presentation is a key part of generating consensus. Being able to successfully showcase and communicate your point of view is an important part of being an effective designer and creative leader.

## GRADING CRITERIA

You will be graded on the following:

- 25%** Meeting outlined requirements—minimum word counts, specified subject matter—and aligning to an established structure.
- 25%** Teamwork—using time efficiently, being organized, dividing up workload and accountability in an intentional and successful manner.
- 25%** Presentation—presenting in a way that is clear, cohesive, and thoughtful. Creating an experience that is coordinated, well managed, and interesting.
- 25%** Content—specific interpretation of the assignment, accuracy of research, personal connection to the work, presence of narrative

## SCHEDULE:

### Week 1—4: Research

Use this time for research and investigation. Work to accumulate as much information as possible on your period. Seek out multiple sources. You must use at least three sources to derive your information —you can use both online and analog references.

### Week 4—6: Transcript Development

This time should be dedicated to the construction of the printed transcript for review during week 6.

### Week 6: Transcript Review

By the beginning of this class you should have your transcript completed and be able to review your final printed document. I will review each team's progress and give feedback to be integrated into the final presentation. Any questions or issues should be discussed during this time so they can be resolved before presentation day.

### Week 8: Presentation

Each group will give a 15 to 20 minute presentation.

# MIDTERM PROJECT SUGGESTED OUTLINE:

## 1. INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW

*Minimum word count: 200*

Give a brief overview of the assigned period or movement. Explain the key aesthetic and conceptual characteristics of the contributions from this period. Explain how the work fits into the overall history of design. Discuss what preceding developments were being built upon or reacted against. Possible points of discussion are world events, political climate, technological developments, accomplishments in the arts and sciences, and/or prominent instances of social change and revolution. Highlight individuals who significantly contributed to the zeitgeist of the time. If the period is concentrated within a specific region or location, illustrate how the impact of the work from this particular area impacted other parts of the world. If the movement was global, illustrate how the core approach was interpreted within different countries and/or cultures.

## 2. KEY FACTORS

*Minimum 3 slides, minimum word count: 450*

**Motivation:** Explain what impelled the key figures who defined the visual embodiment of the era or movement to create their work. Were they motivated by money, tradition, activism, revolution, or artistic expression? Were they embracing and attempting to facilitate change and evolution or were they reacting against specific developments or points of view? What were the cultural values that these creatives were responding to and how did design in particular fit into this value system?

**Perspective:** What previous or concurrent developments in creative practice or thought were significant influences on creative work at the time? Investigate the prevailing cultural dogmas of the time and detail if the designers worked within these tenets or stood in opposition against them.

**Circumstance:** What world events or societal factors shaped the set of resources and opportunities that were available to the designers at the time. What was the prevailing structure of power and was it oppressive or supportive to creative and intellectual pursuits within the space of design?

## 3. PERSONAS

*3 examples, 4 bullet points for each example*

Create 3 profiles based on people of the time. Derive these from actual examples if you can. Attempt to represent a wide range of cultural and economic demographics to create an accurate cross section of life from the era.

## 4. VISUAL VOCABULARY

**Materials, technology, and production:** Create a visual survey communicating the materials, technology, and production methods that defined the visual embodiment of design from your chosen period. You could include creative work other than design in this summary. Fine art, product design, and architecture are all relevant examples that contribute to the aesthetic attributes of an historical moment.

**Form language:** What were the shapes, patterns, forms, and visual vocabulary that defined the look of the time? Explain the connection of form language to materials, production, creative philosophies and practices, and cultural trends of the period.  
*Provide at least 4 visual references.*

**Typography:** What were the type styles that are associated with the specified period or movement. How did they develop and how were they used within production methods of the time?  
*Provide at least 4 visual references.*

**Color:** What colors were popular or widely used. Explain the historical significance of these colors. Discuss what connection they have to existing production methods of the time.  
*Provide at least 4 visual references.*

## 5. PRESENTATION

*Time: 15 minutes*

Give a creative presentation that outlines your research results. Each presentation should be around 15 minutes.

**DES** Mon & Tues

9am—2pm

**IGN**

**HIST** Fall 2022

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