

Design Histories

The Experiences and Contributions
that Shape the Contemporary Practice
of Visual Communication



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The Past is Not Behind Us

The function of visual communication is inherently social and political.

A designer's contributions, when disseminated through standard channels of media, have the potential to reach considerable audiences and produce significant social impact. Works of graphic design are most often commissioned by dominant entities—businesses, corporations, cultural institutions— to transmit specific values and ideas crafted to generate economic gain and cultural influence. En masse, these works perpetuate the systems and structures that shape our collective experience.

Whether an individual designer is conscious of the consequences of their output is irrelevant, the expression of visual concepts within the public sphere, when repeated over platforms of marketing and advertising, create thought, manipulate perspectives, and, in turn, alter reality.

Because of this transformative capacity latent in the act of design, it is crucial that designers be informed, accountable and intentional in their practice. This entails, among other things, developing a general knowledge of history—a basic comprehension of the movements and events that have formed the framework of contemporary society.

These past milestones—achievements, ideas, innovations, challenges, transgressions, victories, and defeats— once assimilated into our common mythology, serve to legitimize what is culturally agreed upon to be real and true. They determine who and what is acknowledged, valued, celebrated, preserved, condemned, and forgotten.

In other words, the past is not behind us.

The approach of Design Histories is centered on critically examining our collective canon of thought within the sphere of design and beyond. There will be a particular focus on socio- economic systems, technologies, and cultural conventions—all of which contribute to the visual character of a particular design movement or period. We will interrogate the correlation between aesthetics, cultural perceptions of value, and underlying structures of political and economic power.

During the course of the semester, 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 objective of the class is not to promote or legitimize any one single experience, methodology, 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.

Instructor: Gabriel Stromberg

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COURSE RUBRIC:

- Participation (Project 1, Group Exercises and Discussions): 15%
 - Group Project (Project 2): 30%
 - 4 Quizzes (Multiple Choice): 25%
 - Final Project (Project 3): 30%
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COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Research: Using history as an entry point, this class provides the opportunity to utilize research as a tool for comprehension and conceptual development.

The process of gathering information, then translating that data into cohesive, accessible content in the form of presentations and written briefs, can be found in brand design, UX and UI strategy, as well as within leadership roles in creative direction and client and project management.

Discussion: Discussion is an important aspect of any vocation within the field of design. Whether you are working as an individual contractor, or part of an in-house studio within a large company, being able to communicate your viewpoints in a way that is thoughtful, informed, and collaborative is important for successful outcomes. Discussion also involves listening which just might be *the* most vital skill-sets for a designer.

Critical Thinking: As we survey various time periods, movements, and historic figures, it will be up to you to develop your own conclusions and perspectives. Information, data, and statistics will be presented in a neutral format to give you the opportunity to make up your own mind and think for yourself.

Design: History is a primary element within the practice of design. You will learn to identify visual styles and approaches from a range of time periods and learn about the historic circumstances that generated their development.

The class also surveys the innovations and perspectives of cultures from across the globe that have contributed to the contemporary field of graphic design and visual communication.

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COURSE POLICIES:

Attendance: All classes will be hybrid to allow for both in-person and remote participation. Remote participation is meant for students who are sick, 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 half 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.

Disabilities:

Americans with Disability Act Accommodations Students with documented disabilities requesting class accommodations, requiring special arrangements in case of building evacuation, or have emergency medical information the instructor should know about are asked to contact the Disability Support Services office in room BE 1112. Once the disability is verified the student will be given a letter of accommodation to be given to the instructor as soon as possible. For more information, please visit the Disability Support Services website at: <http://www.seattlecentral.edu/disability-support/eligibility.php>.

WEEK 1: Tues Sept 26**Introduction:**

This first class is an easy introduction into the curriculum. We will go over the syllabus and review the midterm project. Because the semester starts on a Tuesday, the Monday class will receive an abbreviated introduction via email.

WATCH:

Ted Talk: Genevieve von Petzinger

WATCH:

Ted Talk: Saki Mafundikwa

**PROJECT 1
REVIEW****WEEK 3: Mon Oct 9, Tues Oct 10****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)

WEEK 5: Mon Oct 23, Tues Oct 24**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.

READ:

The Lens of Colonialism (gabrielstromberg.com)

WEEK 2: Mon Oct 2, Tues Oct 3**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.

READ:

The Power of Language (gabrielstromberg.com)

QUIZ 1**WEEK 4: Mon Oct 16, Tues Oct 17****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.

READ:

The Catalyst of Industry (gabrielstromberg.com)

READ:

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

QUIZ 2**WEEK 6: Mon Oct 30, Tues Oct 31****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.

READ:

Capitalism and Globalization (gabrielstromberg.com)


 PROJECT 2
REVIEW
WEEK 7: Mon Nov 6, Tues Nov 7**Marketing, Media, and Modernism:**

In the wake of the destruction of World War 2, many cultures use 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.

READ:

Marketing, Media, and Modernism
(gabrielstromberg.com)

READ:

The Original Influencer, History Today

WEEK 8: Mon Nov 13, Tues Nov 14**The American Identity:**

We will survey the histories and social dynamics that have shaped contemporary American culture. There will be a focus on Indigenous art and activism as well as a review of the circumstances that generated the Harlem Renaissance of the twenties and thirties.

READ:

The American Identity (gabrielstromberg.com)

WATCH:

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


 QUIZ 3
WEEK 9: Mon Nov 20, Tues Nov 21**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)

WEEK 10: Mon Nov 27, Tues Nov 28**Postmodernism and Digital Culture Part 1:**

An exploration of the new technologies that emerged in the sixties and seventies that expanded the field of design practitioners and eventually brought an end to the homogeneity of modernism.

READ:

Postmodernism and Digital Culture
(gabrielstromberg.com)

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 QUIZ 4
WEEK 11: Mon Dec 4, Tues Dec 5**Postmodernism and Digital Culture Part 2:**

Our final lecture will be an investigation of the effects of digital technologies on the field of visual communication. We will start with the first digital designs of the eighties and discuss current digital tools and platforms within the space of marketing and media.

READ:

Postmodernism and Digital Culture
(gabrielstromberg.com)

READ:


Excerpt from *CAPS LOCK*, Ruben Pater

WEEK 12: Mon Dec 11, Tues Dec 12**Finals:**

TBD

READ:

First Things First, Ken Garland


 PROJECT 3
HANDOFF

PROJECT 1 (Individual): Due Week 3—Mon Oct 9, Tues Oct 10

Assignment: Create an emoji or set of emojis that conveys your creative journey/ experience. Use the format of graphic iconography to tell your story as a designer. There are countless approaches you could take. Your final design might convey a linear narrative, evoke a specific feeling or emotion, or be a mysterious and cryptic representation of a particular concept or experience that is meaningful to you. You can focus on the past, present, or future. You can be as abstract or as literal as you like.

Deliverables: Color or black and white, format your final work as a 1920 x 1080 pixel, horizontal slide labeled with your name. Slide should be in JPEG format and uploaded to the final Google slide presentation. Link for upload to come.

Suggested time-frame for execution: 1.5 to 4 hours

Due: Week 3—be prepared to present your final solution in class.

Grading Criteria:

Participation, aligning to specified parameters, quality of work, and strength of your final concept.

PROJECT 2 (Group): Due Week 7—Mon Nov 6, Tues Nov 7

Assignment: Your group will be given a particular design period, genre, or movement to research. Together, you will create a 10 to 12 minute presentation detailing the basic elements of your subject. Presentation should focus on visual communication and graphic design. Below is an outline of the specific points that you should cover in your research.

When: Outline the time period that your subject was prevalent. Discuss how and when it began, how long it lasted, and the factors that brought about its cessation.

Where: Specify what country or region in which the subject originated and where it spread. Communicate any specific geographic or cultural elements that impacted its development.

How: Recount the world events, technologies, and cultural circumstances that were key factors in the formation of your movement or period.

Who: Present at least three figures who were in some way significant within the movement or period.

Why: Why is this movement ultimately consequential within the canon of design history? How has it influenced succeeding movements and contemporary perspectives?

Deliverables: 10 minute prerecorded presentation in appropriate format and accompanying transcript in Google Doc format-Link for upload to come.

Due: We will view all presentations as a class on Week 6

Grading Criteria:

25% Meeting outlined requirements: length, specified subject matter, factual accuracy, 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.

SOURCES:

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