2022 DESIGN + WRITING FELLOWSHIP

A Visual Essay Poster Exhibition

SURFACE
AIGA National Design Conference
Seattle, Washington
October 20—22, 2022
This exhibition of posters features the work created by the **2022 AIGA DEC Design + Writing Fellows**. Starting in January, this group has been working individually and collaboratively to discuss and investigate the history and future of an often overlooked communication artifact, the Visual Essay. This format of visually displaying and combining writing and images offers an avenue for designers to conduct and disseminate their research through making practices. Together, members of this fellowship investigated the origins, influences, and possibilities for this specific format and aim to share their learnings with the greater design community.

**Experimental Peer-Review Process**
We invite you to participate in reviewing the work displayed here and anonymously share your feedback and perspectives. Your contribution will impact the designers’ process as they prepare for formal publication. Complete an online review form via the QR code provided on each individual poster and next to each poster in this booklet.

Following this conference and this “experimental” review process, the fellowship participants will have the opportunity to contribute to a special peer-reviewed issue of Dialogue. Dialogue is the ongoing series of fully open-access proceedings of the conferences and national symposia of the AIGA Design Educators Community.
Visual Essays in Design Education
Isabel Bo–Linn, ibolinn@illinois.edu
Teaching Assistant Professor,
University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign

Design foundation courses often center around individual projects with an emphasis on final outcomes towards individual students. While this system generally functions well, there is opportunity to develop a deeply collaborative culture through active learning within these studio courses. Collaboration is widely considered a threshold skill for today’s design practice. The process of design itself is intrinsically collaborative and modern design problems are increasingly uncertain and complex. Various factors including institutional barriers, student discontent, and uneven or inaccurate assessments can result in a haphazard, imprecise collaborative project. Visual essays provide an opportunity to empower students to develop new confidences and hone interpersonal communication skills. The creative production of these essays can be a transformative process of meaning making, one that enhances writing skills, an increased understanding of design principles, and immerses students in a participatory and critically-constructive learning environment.

Visual essays are images + words + layout + design resulting in new ways of understanding.

WHAT IS A VISUAL ESSAY?
Broadly, visual essays combine prose and imagery within a constructed layout to illustrate an informed narrative. Visual and verbal languages are combined and arranged to communicate knowledge and achieve ways of understanding that text alone could not – text and image become companions of one another. Visual essays can be presented as print material, digital work, videos, presentations, interactive websites, or participatory experiments with linear and non-linear narratives.

SUBJECT MATTERS
The flexibility of the medium is also the appeal of the medium – visual essays can illustrate social and cultural issues, present or exemplify an argument, or it can articulate a personal story. Visual essays harness narratives and storytelling to engage audiences and effectively communicate ideas to a potentially wide audience.

VISUAL ESSAYS IN DESIGN EDUCATION
How can we utilize visual essays as a pedagogical tool to teach collaborative practices in a design foundation course?

Design foundation courses often center around individual projects with an emphasis on final outcomes towards individual students. While this system functions well, there is opportunity to develop a deeply collaborative culture through active learning within these studio courses. Collaboration is widely considered a threshold skill for today’s design practice. The process of design itself is intrinsically collaborative and modern design problems are increasingly uncertain and complex. I am examining the use of visual essays as a pedagogical tool to teach collaborative practices to undergraduate students in a design foundation course.

PEDAGOGICAL BENEFITS
Visual essays provide an opportunity to:
• empower students to develop new confidences
• hone interpersonal communication skills
• encourage an alternative way critical thinking and intellectual exploration into design
• give voice to lived experiences through the power of storytelling

The creative production of visual essays can:
• be a transformative process of meaning making
• enhance writing skills
• improve understanding of design principles
• immerse students in a participatory and critically-constructive learning environment

WHAT’S NEXT?
Graphic Design Toolbox is a foundation design course where students focus on the makings of a creative process with an emphasis on the organization and visual presentation of content across media and systems.

In small groups, students will critically and collaboratively engage in explorations of design history, relevant designers, and the impacts of both on the design industry and discipline. Two visual essays will be produced – one as a group and one individually. One primary goal is to engage students in collaborative learning practices through relevant activities and projects. Another goal is to develop effective and constructive assessments to measure aspects of collaborative learning for potential interdisciplinary use.

Isabel Bo-Linn • Teaching Assistant Professor • University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign • School of Art & Design
Do These Seals Make Me Look Powerful?
The Graphic Design of Visual Authority
Claire Bula, cbula@bu.edu, clairebuladesigns.com
Lecturer, Boston University

The visual design of all documents carrying, or purporting to carry, legal or political authority—deeds, licenses, permits, money, diplomas, signage, police reports, identification cards, passports, & maps—confers or detracts from their authority simply based on their visual aesthetic. Design choices relating to layout, typefaces, symbols, embellishments, impressions, white space, signatures/certifications, and materials amalgamate and coalesce in documents that can feel domineering and incite specific behaviors simply by their appearance.

Because visual design can confer authority before content is consumed it should be noted and analyzed that: first, this construct exists; second, this visual authority can be connected to real legal authority and power, or not; and third, visual authority can be used to support and validate any structure or endeavor, whether it is striving to be beneficial, just, and egalitarian or corrupt, manipulative, and oppressive.

Scan to leave feedback for the author/designer of this poster!
What if design scholars created a new form, the public research notice, that made public understanding as significant as scholarly findings?

Audrey G. Bennett, a4bennet@umich.edu
Professor, University of Michigan

This poster explores the visual essay’s role in publicly disseminating new knowledge by scholars at research universities. Designed as a diptych, it speaks to the dual needs of the public, whose ways of knowing are rich but underutilized, and researchers, whose ways of knowing are precise but esoteric to the lay public. Because designers in academia function as both researchers and creative practitioners, they have a unique opportunity to mediate between these ways of knowing. How could one share dense or complex scholarly information that resonates with a diverse readership? I believe the emerging design convention of a visual essay applied to creating a public research notice may be the answer.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Use the QR Code on the left to view this work at its URL or create one of your own using the new Quilting QR Code.

REFERENCES


PUBLIC NOTICE


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Step 1. Naming and operationalizing the wicked problem.

Step 2. Conducting an integrative literature review to identify design outcomes (DOs) scattered across the globe like disconnected pebbles. Consider each DO as a potential solution to a wicked problem.

Step 3. Identifying stakeholders and developing a narrative that could speak to a lay audience.

Communicating scholarly findings multimodally for equity, inclusion & justice by Audrey G. Bennett, University Diversity and Social Transformation Professor, University of Michigan

This poster explores the role of visual essays could play in the dissemination of new knowledge by scholars at research universities. It is a diptych that speaks to the dual needs of the public, whose ways of knowing are rich but underutilized, and researchers, whose ways of knowing are precise but esoteric to the lay public. Because designers in academia function as both researchers and creative practitioners, they have a unique opportunity to mediate between these ways of knowing.

Critical issues of public health and safety are now routinely captured by journalists, government agencies, non-profits, or communities through social media platforms. However, the journals and book publishers and galleries are the ones who provide the kinds of venues that could amplify the research findings. The public research notice could be a type of review that would benefit from the findings of new knowledge. This poster also shows the public research notice as a form of audience-centered communication. A public research notice not only reaches marginalized communities through media venues that are more accessible, and can therefore become platforms for research dissemination.

Using multiple modes to communicate research findings can potentially give researchers by reaching a broader and more inclusive readership. The question becomes how could one design a public notice that visually revealing sometimes dense, complex scholarly information into a communicative public notice that resonates with a diverse readership? I believe the emerging design convention of a visual essay applied to the design of a public notice may be the answer to reimagined on the left.

This poster was presented at the ASLA Design Educators Community’s 2022 Design + Writing Fellowship Exhibition at the ASLA National Design Conference in Seattle, Washington, October 20-22, 2022.
An Ongoing Annotated Bibliography Documenting the Deindoctrination of the “Prototypical” American White Male
Zack Tucker, tuckerzw@miamioh.edu, zacktucker.me
Assistant Professor, Miami University

In this project, I use the visual essay to reflect on positionalities and subjectivities that influence my own relational practice using design as a tool to address issues of racial justice and civic engagement in my place-based creative practice around Freedom Summer 1964. I am a queer man who grew up poor in rural Missouri. I’m married to an East Asian man and we split our time between two small (relatively conservative) towns in Ohio. I am an activist, designer, teacher, friend, and many other identities one may imagine for an adult, white male. By using autoethnographic methods, I account for myself and my story through layered reporting that blurs the boundaries of these various identities to liberate myself from a lifetime of indoctrination I have faced as a queer, white male presenting person in the United States (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2016; Hansberry, 1964; Holman-Jones, 2005; Holman-Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013; Lyotard, 1988; Ronai, 1992). My intention is radical acceptance for myself and others for who they are and the things they have experienced. The annotated bibliography is a first (and ongoing) step in fulfilling this intention through the development of a visual essay.
Reconstructing Ephemeral Experiences with Design Artifacts

Christina Singer, christina.singer.designs@gmail.com, christinasinger.com
Assistant Professor of Graphic Design, UNC Charlotte

This visual essay interprets a precedented argument—that certain objects have the ability to elicit memories. The collages in this essay combine a collection of South Korean ephemera, which elicit autobiographical memories the author reveals through writing. The writing is a combination of personal writing and a literature review-type analysis of concepts discussed in Don Norman’s book Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Don Norman’s book, Emotional Design, he describes “reflective design” as a quality of a designed object that can tell a story, regardless of aesthetics or functionality (Norman, 2004). This visual essay echoes the concept that designed objects, a ticket stub for instance, can evoke strong emotions independent of the designer’s intent.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

It is pertinent to note other designers whose work I was familiar with at the time I was making these collages in 2020. A few designers who have collected ephemera and/or use(d) it in their work—which influenced my work—include Elaine Lustig Cohen, Tamar Cohen, and Nicholas Bonner.

THE WORK

Making this work through a process of deconstructing and reconstructing both personal memories and ephemeral design artifacts was an intimate experience. I collected these scraps of paper and packaging from South Korea while living and traveling there over the span of seven years. These objects are from personal experiences with my first love, and from a time thereafter while I was experiencing the loss of that relationship. She was Korean, fierce, brilliant, exciting, and—a woman. As a young woman from the Bible Belt, that was an extremely intimidating reality to confront at the time.

I am interested in the personal, reflective experience from this process of tearing up these objects that I valued and saved, and creating something new from them. Memories that this process resurrected allowed for processing and healing that I did not anticipate. These pieces of paper were hidden in a box for a while. Confronting these pieces during the pandemic and making in this way had an unexpected, restorative affect as I reflected on the loss and how far I have come with pride as an openly queer person.

REFERENCES

I am interested in intersections between creative non-fiction writing and visual design. This poster is part of a set of projects, both written and visual. I lived in San Diego with my mother when I was a very young child. My father, who had just joined the Navy after he was about to be drafted, was deployed to Vietnam for most of the time that we were there. For this work, I have been studying the geology and naval history of San Diego, and the textures and colors of Ocean Beach, which is the area where we lived. I have interviewed my mother several times. My larger consideration is how lived experiences can map onto place. In this poster, I attempt to use language, typography, data visualization, and image to tell part of a story, one that I hope resonates beyond just me.
No Freedom in Motherhood
Bree McMahon, bmcm@uark.edu, breemcmahon.com
Assistant Professor of Graphic Design, Director of Graduate Studies,
School of Art, University of Arkansas

This visual essay is concerned with the many choices (and loss of choice) associated with womb-bearing bodies, pregnancy, birth and parenting. Inspired by personal pregnancy experiences, the essay explores the reproductive life cycle through the lens of a designer. The recent Roe v. Wade decision disrupted the original writing of the piece, shifting the focus to choice and the many reproductive-related decisions made throughout a single lifetime. Whether it is the choice to have children, the method of preventing pregnancy, the means of becoming pregnant, the choices made while pregnant or during birth, recovery, or parenting, all these decisions are politicized to the degree that they are barely decisions at all. The poster here contains personal photographs and writing reflecting upon choices made during pregnancy and the absence of choice. Artifacts were scanned and collaged digitally and reproduced on a Risograph printer to emulate protest posters’ hand-made, raw quality. The two-color print was then digitally scanned and reprinted at full size.
Water ^Flood^ Lines
Ann McDonald, a.mcdonald@northeastern.edu, inabsentia.space
Associate Professor, Northeastern University

This in-progress essay experiments with ways to ‘see’ the glaring contrasts of attention and neglect and seemingly intractable issues via a mix of hyperlocal personal, community, environmental justice, and historical ‘lines’ inscribed on a polluted waterway and the surrounding flood-risk land. It visually and textually explores the Alewife Brook, a mostly channelized, slow-moving 2.5-mile stretch of water, far from its past ‘natural’ states. Once part of ‘The Great Swamp,’ the brook’s history includes plentiful fish weirs, dams, infilled connections to ponds, straightened channels, and current grade ‘D’ water quality aggravated by storm-water runoff and sewage outflows. Long influenced by utility, transportation, and development pressures, it sits at the boundaries of four cities/towns. Still, it is also part of the larger Mystic watershed, which touches twenty-plus cities/towns. In taking an ecological perspective, the project transcends boundaries, jurisdictions, and labels and views the watershed and the political and social forces that define this place.
Clear Cut
Cheryl Beckett, cbeckett@minordesign.com
Associate Professor, University of Houston

Clear cut implies no gray areas—the choices are straightforward, almost foreordained. To clear cut in developers' terms refers to clearing the land of its native flora—a controversial practice that defies a friendly negotiation with nature. This poster, and subsequent visual essay, examines our negotiations with nature both large and small from the perspective of a small plot of land in the middle of Texas. It is inspired by Rebecca Solnits’ trio of atlases, which uses maps to revisit a location over and over, each time revealing another layer of the limitless stories, history, and transformations of place due to our presence. Every plot has a story.
“Document” is part of a series of visual essays on the history and extermination of Cretan Jews during WWII. The essays use text, image, and the interplay between the two as a meditation on hate-based violence, cultural memory, and erased multiculturalisms.
Using Sketchnoting to Explore Approaches to Visual Essay

Omar Sosa-Tzec, omarsosa@sfsu.edu, tzec.com
Assistant Professor of Visual Communication Design, School of Design, San Francisco State University

Despite designers’ recognition of the visual essay as an artifact that reflects thinking and application of design skills, design scholars still struggle with its characterization and evaluation, fundamental activities to legitimize the visual essay within academia. This project utilized sketchnoting to reflect on the 2022 Design + Writing Fellowship experience and literature pertinent to visual essays. One idea captured in this exercise is a definition of visual essay centered on multimodality and argumentation. This definition urges scholars to think of visual essays beyond the text–image dichotomy and embrace the multiple modes employed in its development. The project outlines four approaches for developing and evaluating visual essays—a poetic, semiotic, rhetoric, and aesthetic approach, respectively. Another captured idea is the possibility of genres, which implies scrutiny to identify exemplars for each genre and its central themes, theories, and design strategies.

Scan to leave feedback for the author/designer of this poster!
Subversive tactics that use annotation, an insertion of a critical or explanatory note, call attention to specific issues by openly challenging established assumptions. Annotated propaganda can displace a dominant voice with one previously silenced. Seen in action, the original and its annotation deliver not a single meaning but an abundance of complicated motivations in a palimpsest of oppositional voices. Their symbolism does not stand for the transgressive action, it is the action—a gesture and a sign fused together. Like a megaphone, annotation amplifies voice. As a resource, it may be authored and leveraged when circulated across cultures. It can shape how opinion is articulated and impact whose opinion rises to the surface. And it can help to produce resistance and critiques of privilege, as it proposes the value of alternative perspectives.
This poster shares work from our visual essay, En El Frente, which uses the framework and visual language of the Chicano independent publications to make observations about the design practices of the designer-activists working toward social justice.
“Soy” (I am) is a visual essay led by reflexivity and memory. It employs excerpts from written memories collected since the Summer of 2021. I visually explored these narratives daily using illustration, texture, pattern, typography, material production, and several other design and art methods. With time, these explorations began to unveil a personal visual language that has given me a renewed sense of personhood and belonging. “Soy” shows aspects of my identity and heritage as an immigrant of color from Costa Rica who constantly lives in between—cultures, languages, beliefs, and traditions. The prose is unedited and true to how it incrementally came out of my memory—unfiltered, messy, and grammatically imperfect—allowing me to focus less on writing correctness (especially when translated to English) and more on the nuances of visual and written language and expression in Costa Rica.
What if design scholars created a new form, the public research notice, that made public understanding as significant as scholarly findings?

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VISUAL ESSAYS IN DESIGN EDUCATION

How can we author visual essays as a pedagogical tool to teach collaborative practices to undergraduate students in a design foundation course.

In response, students were asked to imagine a scenario in which a design community needed to report on a public issue. Imagine an urban development that was dislocating residents from their homes and disrupting the community. Imagine a public notice that visually translates sometimes dense or technical information into a communicative public form.

AIGA National Conference | Seattle, Washington, October 20-22, 2022

At the AIGA Design Educators Community’s 2022 Design + Writing Fellowship Poster Exhibition at the AIGA National Conference, visual essays were offered as a pedagogical tool to teach collaborative practices to undergraduate students in a design foundation course.
The 2022 AIGA DEC Design + Writing Fellows:
Cheryl Beckett
Audrey G Bennett
Isabel Bo-Linn
Claire Bula
Alexandria Canchola
Carla Cesare
Patricia Childers
Heather Corcoran
Joshua Duttweler
Gaby Hernández
Christopher Lynn
Ann McDonald
Bree McMahon
Christina Singer
Kyuha Shim
Omar Sosa-Tzec
Zack Tucker
Joshua Unikel

Organized and Facilitated by:
Rebecca Tegtmeyer
Liese Zahabi