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Synopsis of courses given (selection)

San Jose State University - SJSU, 2006
Virginia Commonwealth University - VCU, 1989-1991

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Digital Applications Methodology

Print (CMYK) and non-print (RGB) workspaces
SJSU - Fall 2006

Although this class had the formal structure of a technical lab, I made sure that the subject matter was thoroughly interesting. DIGITAL-ANALOG was the topic for a series of 26 research PUNCH CARDS. Each student developed a sub-topic based on the general theme. The concept of “threads and kinship” was the other main theme in this project: how design objects evolve from previous ones and the value of historical precedent. Each student received 3 complete printed sets, each containing all the 26 sub-topic cards.

TYPOGRAPHY, MY WAY is the title of an anonymous poem on type and also the title of the second project in this class. Students developed a 4-page broadside in which they presented their personal interpretation of the poem.

The last project in the class was the prototyping of each student’s PERSONAL website. Using only simple text editors, students were introduced to the basic building blocks of HTML coding and CSS. This was the first experience in html coding for the majority of the students and it formed an interesting transition for them from the color space of CMYK to that of RGB.

Introduction to Graphic Design

Principles of layout with type and images
SJSU - Fall 2006

A progressive series of exercises starting with drawing an object in B&W only and ending with a poster that incorporates the original drawing and other type and image explorations.

In-between steps included the progressive addition of color and also a 3-D treatment of the original object.

Various fruits and vegetables: PINEAPPLE, tomato, CORN, soy bean, and beet were the initial objects to be analyzed. Despite the initial simplicity of the first assignments, the final posters display the richness of all the exercises that had been carried out in preparation for the last one.

Communication Vehicles I

2 and 3-D design fundamentals
VCU - Fall 1989

Craftsmanship and precision were two of the main teaching goals of this class, which I conducted through a series of progressively challenging exercises. These exercises allowed the students to construct two and three-dimensional designs based on a few simple building blocks — maximum diversity through minimum inventory. The sectioning of a CUBE into three complex but equal parts allowed them to build a design vocabulary of relationships between plane and solid forms. In this class I introduced the topics of symmetry groups, platonic solids, and TOPOLOGICAL transformations. I also introduced more expressive techniques dealing with materials, free-hand DRAWING and rhythmic exercises with the pencil.

Many of my teaching materials and techniques have been inspired by the pedagogical work of the painter Paul Klee, and have been integrated into a structured process of “generative form” and concept creation.

Alongside the official assignments, I encouraged the students to participate in so-called non-assignments. I introduced a topic and they were free to explore the topic further by themselves. These topics included film screenings (Eames, Picasso), bionics, polarized light, golden section, perspective.

My students learned basic geometry and the craft of working with paper and other materials. Projects from this class were later included by the students in their portfolio review, to gain access to the major of their choice in the sophomore year.

Type I

Fundamentals of Typography
VCU - Fall 1991

In this class I opened up the world of LETTERFORMS and TYPOGRAPHY to my students, a world seemingly simple and straightforward at first. My students learned typography through a hands-on approach. Letterforms were drawn, constructed, and inked by hand, using ruling pen, compass, and other drafting tools. It was during this class that I resurrected the abandoned LETTERPRESS printing shop in the school, and I invited the students to do a simple composition with the composing stick, which was later printed on the Vandercook press.

Assignments included working on the following topics with large format illustration boards:

- Collage on the history of type (type families)
- Optical aspects of letterforms
- Structure and weight
- Counterform
- Logo (personal monogram)

I tested my students on the basic terminology of typography and required them to solve copy-fitting problems using only a pica ruler. This direct approach trained their hand and eye through a constant focus on detail.

Communication Vehicles II

Fundamentals of Color
VCU - Fall 1990

In this class I introduced the students to the basic concepts of COLOR and conducted progressive exercises that allowed for testing some of the basic propositions of color theory.

I used Josef Albers' *Interaction of Color* as the basis for the assignments. I know from personal experience that there is no substitute for mixing your own colors in order to gain a deeper understanding and sensibility for color. Therefore, except in the case of two VALUE GRADATION exercises, and whereas Albers had his students use colored paper, my students mixed and applied their own color. Large areas were painted first, then parts were cut and assembled into the required configurations.

Some of the exercises focused on the following topics:

- 1 color looks like 2 colors
- 2 colors look like 1 color
- Transparency - space illusion
- Interval transformation
- Color diffusion

This class was very challenging for the students who nevertheless were doubly rewarded when they saw the fruits of their experiments, and were able to confirm through their physical work some of the postulates of *Interaction of Color*.

Systems in Design

Graphic Design
VCU - Spring 1991

The traditional approach to SYSTEMS in graphic design is often associated with the development of a so-called visual identity, be it for a corporation or an individual. This identity is often reduced to the mere application of a logo to various instances and this is what we call the system.

In this class I encouraged my students to look outside of design for a more comprehensive definition of system. Borrowing mainly from biology for the terminology, I invited the students to research specific systems as they relate to the topic of the environment. They looked up keywords such as: cooperation, competition, cycle, entropy, GAMES, hierarchy, evolution, selection, chance, organization.

For their first assignment, the students produced simple booklets on the topic of the environment. In the second assignment they developed their own system and a presentation format for topics that related specifically to the relation between humans and the environment, both natural and man-made. Some of the final projects included books and other media that presented the exploration of systems in MUSIC, architecture, and SPORTS.

Applied Semiotics

Graduate Seminar
VCU - Spring 1990

I conducted this seminar on basic SEMIOTIC concepts and how they can be used to develop a generative process for ideas and images in a design environment. I presented the semiotic theory within the context of architecture and urban planning. I introduced the students to the concept of “Imageability” as put forward by Kevin Lynch in his book *The Image of the City*, to give them a real framework to which the theory could be related to.

The assignments started with the operation of PARALLAX representation (an event observed and represented from different points of view simultaneously) and progressed through other semiotic operations such as substitution and omission. Iconic, symbolic, and indexical modes of representation were introduced and students later inserted these modes into a graphic matrix. This MATRIX formed the visual kit-of-parts for the final project (supersign) which focused on a specific aspect of the urban environment, and was presented in the form of a poster, a booklet, and other graphic formats.

Visual Criticism

Graduate Seminar
VCU - Fall 1990

Designers need to know how to articulate their ideas verbally. They need to be able to support their designs with words as well as with images. In this SEMINAR I presented the students with a simple statement put forward by a philosopher and paraphrased here: “To know something is to know how to explain it. If you don’t know how to explain it, then you don’t know it.”

I included three main projects in the class. An individual critique of a painting examined during multiple visits to the Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia. The development of models of criticism was done within a small group format. A final paper on criticism also had to include a critique of the work that had been conducted in the class during the semester.

This class emphasized writing, discussions, and presentations. I also invited guest lecturers from other areas such as English literature, in which the discipline of criticism has been much more established and codified than in graphic design. This exposure was critical in helping the students develop their own models of criticism.

This class helped all the students in the graduate program with their ongoing graduate thesis efforts, where a large portion of the endeavor must be devoted to a written section in support of all other visual materials.