

artifact: 1) something created by humans usually for a practical purpose; especially an object remaining from a particular period.
2) something characteristic or resulting from a human institution or activity.

introduction

Invested in every artifact is a significance which provides information about the maker. "If we see the past as a series of artifacts, then we see our own work the same way. ...Each artifact marks more than a place in the progression of artistic sensibility. Each also speaks eloquently of its social history. All you have to do is learn the language. ...to look at artifacts without knowing what they were in their own time is to look into a vacuum."¹ Thus enters **context** which is intrinsic to the study of graphic design and of history. The way that we can more fully understand an artifact (and a culture) is through exploring its function, meaning and significance.

Graphic design isn't so easily defined or limited. (At least it shouldn't be.) Graphic design is the use of words and images on more or less everything, more or less everywhere.

Graphic design isn't so rarified or so special. It isn't a profession, it's a medium. It's a mode of address, a means of communication. It's used throughout culture at varying levels of complexity and with varying degrees of success. That's what's important about graphic design. That's what makes it interesting. And it is at work everywhere where there are words and images.

...But there is another more important history: it is a history of graphic design and it's audience. It tells how political images have been crafted, how corporations have manipulated public perceptions, how myths have been created by advertising. This other history is the history of design as a medium and as a multiplicity of languages speaking to a multiplicity of people.

excerpted from "Good History/Bad History" by Tibor Kalman, J. Abbott Miller and Karrie Jacobs, in *Looking Closer*, 1994.

Greek vases. Gutenberg Bible. Airline tickets. Cash register receipts. Nikes.

Can we invest too much in an artifact? Can we invest too little? What occurs when we divorce an artifact from its context? Recontextualize/decontextualize? When exploring the artifact should there be a balance between subjective and objective interpretations? Or do we weigh more heavily in one direction? In this project we will look to the artifact (in a general and specific manner) to explore and discuss the role it plays in our society, the relevance of the artifact to graphic design and larger issues of communication, history, context and other consequential issues.

objectives (formal, conceptual and theoretical)

- to organize complex information in a clear and concise manner.
- to understand and communicate the value of an artifact.
- identify the relationship of a designed object to the larger historical and cultural context, educating the public in this process.
- create a synthesis between type and image which demonstrates a sensitivity to form and responsible communication.
- broaden understanding communication issues and how design functions in 2D and 4D mediums.

As you begin to conclude your time here at UF you should expect to use your senior year projects in your portfolio. Therefore consider output quality, etc. If you have questions or comments on work for your portfolio – ask.

RESEARCH.WRITING.DESIGN.EVALUATION

selection

Select 2–3 artifacts to consider, one must be specifically graphic and you must be able to bring all into class. From this, you will select one to work with.

research

Research the following (at a minimum) related to your artifact:

- 1 Function: what does the artifact do?
- 2 History: describe the (social, economic, political, cultural) context in which the artifact was made and functions/ed. include a timeline here.
- 3 Significance: does the artifact have historic significance, has it changed our lives, how do we use it? what does it tell us about ourselves? cultural connotations?
- 4 Design: what are the aesthetic and ergonomic issues pertaining to this artifact?

THE ARTIFACT PROJECT

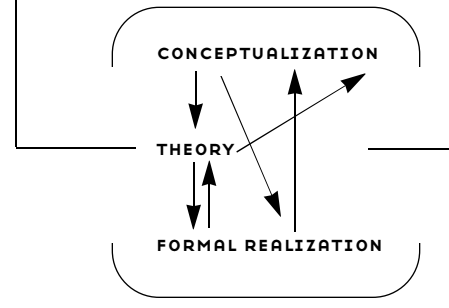
artifacts

bicycle
sugar packet
fork
flower seed packet
telephone
car (part)
business card
radio
coupon
nutrition label
airline ticket
medicine bottle labels
direct mail
matchbook
cigarette pack
magazine
coaster
menu
street sign
books
package labels
t-shirt
clock
letters
brochures
posters
money
typewriter
coffee cup
disk
wheel
shovel
fortune cookie
lottery ticket
etc

consider that the artifact signifies (to you, to the culture) and all messages it may send. Your research will be formally presented in a paper (research due, max 2 8-1/2 x 11 inch pages w/ appropriate text and images, layout and blurb).

ideation (related to your research)

- a word listing
- b mindmapping
- c semiotic matrix

**realization****online exploration**

Design a

poster

Develop a poster which includes all necessary elements. The final size is open but should be of a large scale (approximately 18x24 inches). Sketches, beyond thumbnails will be at 1/4 and 1/2 size.

considerations

Consider the scale relationships of the objects to the audience.

web/time-based to 2d poster.

all images must be your own (in rare exceptions, some may be footnoted)

note your references

What is your communication goal?

materials + presentation

For the final poster, I will accept a 1/2 size color only if it is accompanied by a full size black and white copy. Mounting of the poster depends on output. At this point We will discuss the best way to handle the online version—it will not be put online until after the final deadline.

All process work should be included in your process notebook.

schedule (in addition to lectures, etc.)

8.25

8.27 bring in 2–3 artifacts, mindmapping, wordlisting

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9.1

9.3 research due, max 2 8-1/2 x 11 pages w/ appropriate text and images, layout and blurb), discuss research in class, ideation with groups

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9.8

9.10 review concept sketches for web

THE ARTIFACT PROJECT

9.15 quiz on theory

9.17 review concept sketches for poster

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9.22

9.24

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9.29 present and briefly critique web project

10.1

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10.8

10.10 projects due: web and poster, discuss

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10.15 introduce project 2

10.17 final projects w/ final revisions due: web and poster

other notes:

ARTIFACT TERMINOLOGY

also see the course reader for additional terminology

context the environment, cultural or physical, in which a message or form is perceived and by which it is conditioned.

defamiliarization the term (along with “making strange”) often used to translate the Russian term *ostranenie*, the word used by Russian formalists to identify the principal function of artworks. The principal function of poetry and presumably other artworks is to challenge our habitual modes of perception. It can only do so by a process of defamiliarization.

anthropology 1) the science of human beings; especially the study of human beings in relation to distribution, origin, classification and relationship of races, physical character, environmental and social relations, and culture. 2) theology dealing with the origin, nature, and destiny of human beings.

sociology the science of society, social institutions and social relationships; specifically the systematic study of the development, structure, interaction and collective behavior of organized groups of human beings.

connotation and denotation a sign denotes that to which it explicitly refers. the denotation of the word is its literal meaning, what is found in the dictionary. these are objective. the connotations of the sign are the totality of the meanings evoked by the sign. these are subjective and derive meaning from culture. although the meaning may differ from individual to individual, we are able to gauge the response of the sign based on universal cultural implications.

sign most directly it is something that stands for somethings else. it is an umbrella term under which icon index and symbol, among others fall. French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure uses the terms signifier and signified to define a sign and the arbitrary relationships created. An example of a sign is the word “tree”, “arbol” and “arbre” which arbitrarily stands for the object, what we see and feel as a tree. In this example, the word “tree” is the signifier referring to the object, the signified.

icon a representation based on resemblance or similarity. A map is an example of an icon, since it represents a region or terrain. A portrait of Thomas Jefferson is an icon of him because it depicts a representation that is clearly discernable to the viewer.

index a representation of an indirect nature, causally influenced by the object they point to or are the physical mark left by the object (smoke = fire, fingerprint, a bullet hole). Indexes are the most interesting signs because they require more conceptual participation in the process of interpreting.

symbol an arbitrary representation based on agreement or convention. Examples: red for danger, a cross for Christianity, a flag for a country. Some are easy to accept while others require extensive learning and use.

metaphor a literary device where one thing is explained by comparing it to something else. “his eyes were as blue as the ocean” “her hair was as red as the sun”

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synecdoche describes the whole through a part. “glad to lend a helping hand” doesn’t mean only a hand will be lent—it is the whole person who will be doing the work.

metonymy literally means changed name. used as a substitute for the original. a hard hat would refer to a construction worker, a flatfoot would refer to a police officer walking a beat.

simile: a metaphor using the words “like” or “as.” this is a simple comparison and is useful in idea generation. “__ is like __.” or “__ as __.” as big as a house.

make your own semiotic matrix

	icon	index	symbol	color	weight	texture
words from your brainstorming							