

Image Use in Graphic Design II Project One

Pictograms

If you have watched the Olympics, you may have noticed the graphic images that served to represent each sport. Not only do these icons represent the sport; they also present a uniform visual style. If you look back at previous Olympics, you will see that each games has its own visual style presented through its icons.

For this first project, you will create three pictograms. Specific content will be your choice but your icons must represent the following three categories: person, place, thing. Your pictograms will be designed as potential signage for the Arts and Communication Center:

Process

1. Use line and graphic form to create a strong, simplified graphic sign.
 - Use tracing and repetition to simplify the elements of the graphic form
 - Develop a unified visual style that is communicated through three distinct images
 - Express dimension, tone, action, figure/ground through careful adjustment of abstract form
 - Consider how color may enhance or clarify your design. But keep in mind that color can also create confusion and reduce contrast
2. Explore signage opportunities in the Arts and Communication Center
 - Pictograms could be intended for public areas, classrooms, wayfinding
 - Your symbol may communicate an action or concept. Communication could be literal or figurative; concrete or abstract
 - For example, your person could be an opera singer; place could be the Music Hall, thing could be the conductor's baton; or art student, stairwell, soda can
3. Work from original photography.
 - Use your camera to find, capture, analyze the subject
 - Observe the effect of light, background, context, point of view
 - Learn to shoot photographs for the end result. Consider contrast, tone, and linear form
4. Work systematically
 - Gather multiple angles, positions, lighting
 - Enlarge, reduce, crop, combine images
 - Use tracing paper and pencil to develop linear/graphic form. Use repetition to build fluidity in the image.
 - Transfer pencil image to computer and build vector based graphic in Illustrator. Explore digital tools that will assist in drawing. Practice using the pen tool. You may not use live trace!
5. Research/Project Development
 - Research. Analyze the design problem, research subject and audience, outline methodology
 - Take pictures. Use the camera as your sketch pad. Take many pictures at multiple angles, change lighting
 - Choice/Refinement. Use tracing paper and pencil to simplify your form and create strong source material
 - Comprehensives. Complete digital comprehensives, experimenting and working towards finals. At this point you are perfecting your final concept.

Final Presentation

Use Adobe Illustrator to complete final compositions.

- Final presentation will be of three pictograms, illustrating person, place, thing
- Final size of each icon must be 7x7"
- Flush mount each icon to black foamcore
- Label the back of each board with your name; class; person, place, thing
- There are no color restrictions.
- All source material must be original photography

Schedule

- Jan 29 Syllabus. Introduction of Project One.
Homework: Take photographs to solve the problem.
 Shoot a minimum of 100 images: Person, Place, Thing. Create contact sheets.
- Jan 31 **Due Today:** Image contact sheets.
 Individual and Group Critiques. Work Day.
Homework: Tracing paper comps.
- Feb 5 **Due Today:** Pencil comprehensives of three pictograms. Group Critique.
 Work Day.
- Feb 7 Work Day.
Homework: Complete full-scale, digital color comps of three pictograms printed in color and ready
 for critique at the start of class..
- Feb 12 **Due Today:** Digital comprehensives of three pictograms. Group Critique.
 Work Day.
- Feb 14 Work Day.
Homework: Prepare final digital pictograms for submission.
- Feb 19 **Due Today:** Three pictograms due. Submit Workbooks, with clear evidence of source material and
 icon evolution, for grading.

Edwin Jager Art 436 Assignment One: Thing

The graphic signal

An important attempt to develop a theory of graphic design as communication was made by Crawford Dunn, who defined three distinct modes of communicative signals and coined a name for each.⁶

Alphasignal is the hard data or primary facts and figures of a communication. *Alpha* is the first letter of the Greek alphabet; it denotes that which is first or primary. Dunn believes that telephone directory listings, stock market quotations, and computer display data are all pure alphasignal. "Alphasignal, then we may say, carries the objective part of the message, without inflecting, without emphasizing, without editorializing, without reinforcing, without propagandizing, maximizing or minimizing—in short, without rhetoric."⁷ Alphasignal is the content of the stated message. In figure 1-7 (top), the word *stop* represents the alphasignal of the traffic sign.

Parasignal designates a mode of signal that travels alongside or at the side of the alphasignal to amplify and support it. On a stop sign, the red color and octagonal shape have become accepted through traditional usage as parasignals that support and enhance the alphasignal. Dunn points to the elegant script type and fine engraved printing used on wedding invitations as an example of parasignal, noting that alphasignal alone could be conveyed by typewriter output reproduced by a fast, inexpensive printing service.

Infrasignal is information underlying or beneath the message that can betray the sender. Dunn uses an excuse note forged by a schoolboy who played hooky to define this term. "With effort, he negotiates the alphasignal of the correctly spelled words and—almost—manages the parasignal of his penmanship. A certain unmistakably puerile quality in his handwriting informs the teacher that the note

is counterfeit."⁸ If a planned community installed traffic signs as shown in figure 1-7 (bottom), motorists would know that they were not "official" traffic signs erected by the highway department and might even ignore them. The color is appropriate parasignal; however, the heart shape and script letterforms convey an entirely different meaning. *Infrasignal* should not be confused with noise, Dunn cautions, for noise is an environmental element or systemic defect that occurs after the message has left the sender and interferes with clear communication between the sender and receiver. *Infrasignal* is a mode of the signal that is conveyed by the sender along with the alphasignal and parasignal.

Dunn's theory is one useful approach to analyzing and understanding the complexity of graphic forms. Another approach is the philosophy of semiotics,⁹ which is a general theory of signs and sign-using behavior.

Signs and their use

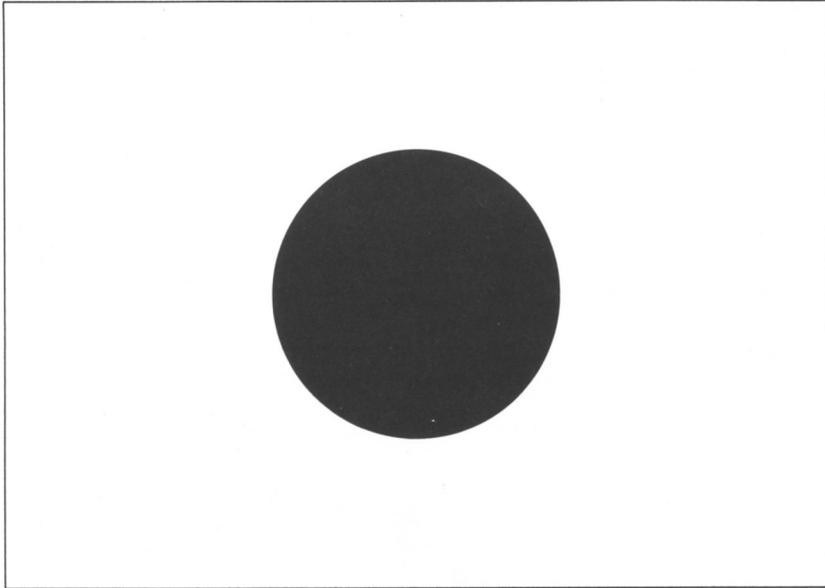
A *sign* is a mark or language unit that stands for or denotes another thing. The plus sign for addition, the letter *A* for a specific spoken sound, the word *apple*, and a simple pictograph of an apple are all signs. A sign and its object have a simple connection. They form a pair, bonded by a direct one-to-one relationship. A three-way relationship exists between the signified, the signifier, and the interpreter. The *signified* is the thing that is represented (an apple). The *signifier* is the sign that represents it (the word *apple* or a pictograph of an apple). The *interpreter* is the person who perceives and interprets the sign.

The interpretation of a sign is impacted by the context in which it is used, its relationships to other signs, and its environment. This is demonstrated by three uses of the same red circle. It is the sign of Japan: the country, the people, and their culture are all signified by this simple sign (fig. 1-8).

In South Carolina, where a state law prevents liquor stores from erecting signs announcing their products, such stores are identified by large red circles or dots painted on the buildings (fig. 1-9).

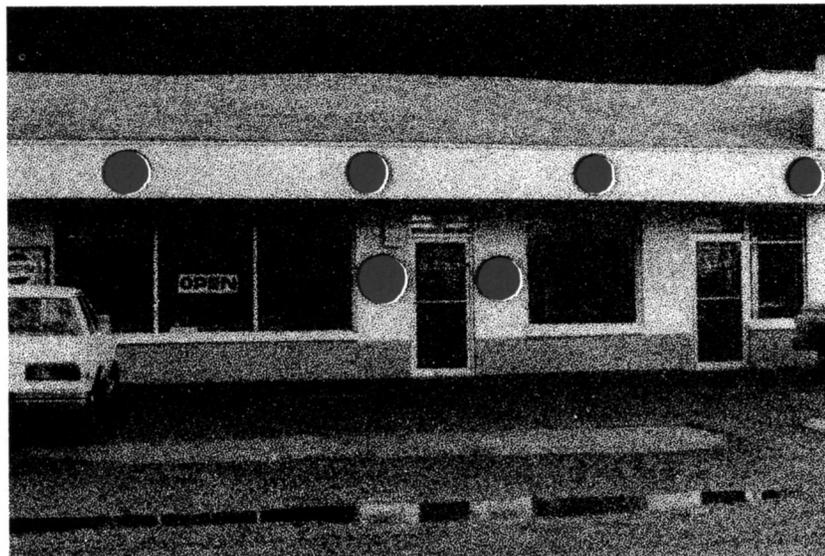


1-7



1-8

After Prohibition ended in 1933, a woman in Charleston, South Carolina, was opening a liquor store and hired a painter to paint the building white. After he finished, they were looking at the freshly painted store. The woman stated that she thought it was ridiculous that the state would not allow her to erect a sign and wondered aloud if she could do anything to identify her business. At that moment, the painter lit a cigarette, looked at the red circle on his Lucky Strike package, and suggested that he could paint a big red circle on the building. Soon other stores copied this practice, and a symbolic convention was established. This episode reveals several truths about visual signs. They are often arbitrary, having their meaning assigned by a deliberate decision. Signs can convey their message to only those individuals who have learned the sign or the sign system. A person from the Orient visiting South Carolina might presume that the liquor store was a Japanese facility if he or she had not yet learned that big red circles signified the sale of alcoholic beverages there.



The ability of words to direct the viewer toward the appropriate meaning of a sign or visual form is demonstrated by figure 1-10, designed by the Russian constructivist El Lissitzky to illustrate a poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky. In this poem, entitled "An Extraordinary Adventure which Befell Vladimir Mayakovsky in a Summer Cottage," the sun visits a desolate Mayakovsky in his cottage for tea and conversation one hot July afternoon. The large red circle signifies the visiting luminary. This layout is from the 1923 book *For the Voice*, noted for Lissitzky's ground-breaking use of elementary geometric elements as illustrations. He assigned them meanings that expressed the subjects of Mayakovsky's poems.

1-9



1-10

Signs can be categorized by types, and one philosopher developed a complex system of sixty-six classes. Signs used in graphic communications normally fall within four basic categories.

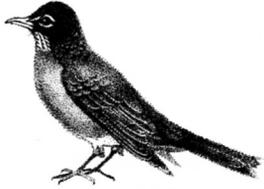
An *icon* resembles the thing it represents. A pictorial representation, a photograph, an architect's model of a building, or a star chart are all icons, because they imitate or copy aspects of their subject. Figure 1-11 is an icon representing a bird.

An *index* has a factual or causal connection that points toward its object. Wet streets are a sign that it has rained recently. Smoke signifies a fire. Figure 1-12 is an icon of a nest, but it is also an index signifying bird, because the viewer thinks of a bird upon seeing this image.

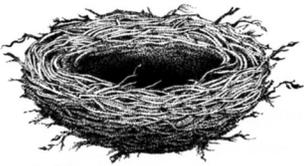
A *symbol* has an arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the thing signified. The interpreter understands the symbol through previous knowledge and experience. Spoken or written words are symbols. In figure 1-13, the word *bird* functions as a symbol. Its designation is arbitrary, for there is no reason for this word to represent a bird instead of a vegetable or a fruit.

A *metasymbol* is a symbol whose meaning transcends the tangible realm of simple one-to-one relationships. History, culture, and tradition all play a role in creating metasymbols, such as the dove with an olive branch as a symbol for peace (fig. 1-14). For certain audiences, religious and magical signs and symbols take on these properties. The Christian cross and the Hindu mandala are graphic signals possessing this transcendental quality for followers of these religions.

The interpreter brings this expanded meaning to the symbol, as is dramatically demonstrated by the swastika (fig. 1-15). This symbol has been found in ancient Europe, Asia, and America. In the ancient world it was called *crux gammata* because it is made up of four gammas, the third letter of the Greek alphabet. It is believed to have been a mystic symbol for the sun or fire and, by extension, life. During the early Christian era, it was marked on many tombs as a camouflaged version of the Christian cross. This form was chosen by the Nazi Party in Germany as its official insignia in 1935 under the mistaken belief that it was an ancient Nordic symbol. The swastika's symbolic meaning is now locked into a signification of Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler, and the Holocaust.



1-11



1-12

bird

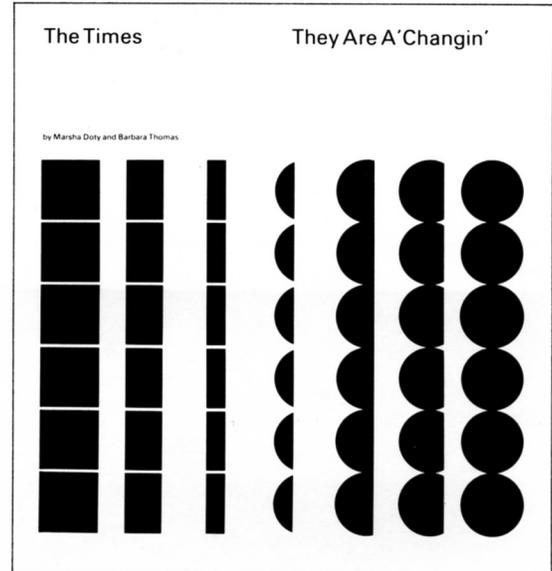
1-13



1-14



1-15



1-16

Graphic designers use signs and symbols as powerful vehicles for communication. Elemental forms can be combined to signify content. To illustrate the title of the article "The Times They Are A'Changin'," Dietmar Winkler used a sequence of squares that contract, followed by semicircles that grow into full circles (fig. 1-16) to give visual form to a concept—change over a period of time.

A letterform, the sign for a speech sound, can be adopted by a graphic designer to signify something else. Lorraine Louie designated the letter *Q* as a sign for a magazine of new American writing, *The Quarterly* (fig. 1-17). The size, style, and position of the letterform are a constant, but its color, the other forms, and the numeral designating the issue number change with each issue. Readers of this periodical learn this designation rather quickly.