SENIOR GRAPHIC DESIGN

Fall 2013

CFA AR 483

Senior design studio · advanced graphic design

LEVEL	BFA · Senior studio (pre-thesis)
CREDITS	4
MEETS	Once a week
DATES	Fall 2013
LOCATION	[confirm]
INSTRUCTOR	Professor Nicholas Rock
OFFICE	[confirm]
CONTACT	nickrock@bu.edu
OFFICE HOURS	Mondays and Wednesdays 12–2, by appointment

01

Overview

> Nobody tells this to people who are beginners, I wish someone told me. All of us who do creative work, we get into it because we have good taste. But there is this gap. For the first couple years you make stuff, it's just not that good. It's trying to be good, it has potential, but it's not. But your taste, the thing that got you into the game, is still killer. And your taste is why your work disappoints you. A lot of people never get past this phase, they quit. Most people I know who do interesting, creative work went through years of this. We know our work doesn't have this special thing that we want it to have. We all go through this. And if you are just starting out or you are still in this phase, you gotta know it's normal and the most important thing you can do is do a lot of work. Put yourself on a deadline so that every week you will finish one story. It is only by going through a volume of work that you will close that gap, and your work will be as good as your ambitions. And I took longer to figure out how to do this than anyone I've ever met. It's gonna take awhile. It's normal to take awhile. You've just gotta fight your way through. —Ira Glass

Design is as much about process, critical thinking and social responsibility as it is about aesthetics and form. Projects, clients' needs, the field of graphic design are all constantly and rapidly changing. Changes can happen across disciplines or from one medium to another; how we as designers adapt to those changes, employing traditional design techniques and using the newest technology, is about more than aesthetics and form. It is about practicing a process of research and discovery that can solve design problems no matter how content, technology, and styles change over time.

All designers have a unique and powerful responsibility to affect how, when, why and where people receive information. The challenge we face is to reveal this information through the filter of our own perspective. This course will begin to help you define what that perspective is. It will challenge and strengthen your views and opinions as designers. It will help to encourage the development of your voice as a designer as well as begin to establish your methodology, your way of thinking or your process. It is important that as designers we have our own voice as we often bring ourselves into every project. We are more than translators, we are interpreters. We are also authors and makers. We need to have the ability to adapt and change and continue to solve design problems along the way and we do this by relying on our perspective, influences and ways of thinking. Take what you learn from and about the process of this class and carry it with you to your thesis and onward into your future design careers.

03

Course Structure

> If you come to a project determined that the end product is going to appear this way or that (it's called "conceptualism"), the publication will never be appropriate, as integrated, or as satisfying as it could have been if the designer had "listened" to the material in the first place. No, you have to immerse yourself in the text and the illustrations, and let the material tell you how it might best be treated and what, in the end, it wants to look like. —Greer Allen

This semester is essentially preparation for you all to be able to move on to your thesis. It is senior design studio, which can also be called advanced graphic design; either of these titles are accurate and true. This studio will be challenging and demanding but also, I hope, rewarding. There will be a lot of work, sometimes at the same time, because this is how it is when you work as a professional designer. Projects don't begin and end neatly on very specific deadlines. Deliverables and expectations are often not easily defined and open ended as it is the designer's job to define these things in order to solve the problem.

When you work on your thesis it will be like an independent study. You will come up with a concept for a project, generate content, define deliverables etc. It is sometimes a hard jump to make, from doing more rigid and structured work, so your projects this semester are designed to bridge that divide. I will be helping you move into more open ended spaces, to continue to learn how to interpret and filter. We will be discussing inspiration, and how to find it, gather it and use it to fuel your process.

Class Rules

1. This class is a lot of work,
2. so work hard.
3. and be respectful. Yes to me, but also to your peers.
4. Make sure you show up,
5. and show up on time.
6. Work harder.
7. Show your work, process, everything you have or be prepared to, daily. The more you are getting feedback from the class the better. It makes your work better and it helps you evolve as a designer.
8. Questions. Ask them. Often. Questions are ALWAYS beneficial to the entire class, not just the person asking.
9. Experiment. Sketch. Test. Sample. Prototype. Rinse. Repeat.
10. The project is never complete.
11. The printer is always broken.
12. Collaborate.

13. Dish it out and take it.
14. Laugh. Don't cry.
15. Be opinionated. Debate. Ask more questions.
16. Don't take it personally.
17. I will help you be a better designer.
18. There are no favorites. If you do good work, or work hard it will be recognized. Likewise for poor work or laziness.
19. I will challenge your ideas, be prepared to defend them.

Communication

It is expected that you as a class will help and support each other throughout this course and others for that matter. That said, I am of course fully accessible in class, at my office (general office hours are Mondays and Wednesdays 12–2; however please make an appointment with me), and via email: nickrock@bu.edu. Please do not use any other email address to contact me. All communication should go through my BU email address or via Basecamp.

We will be using Basecamp again to consolidate class communications. You all will have access to our Basecamp site after the first class; this will act as a central portal for class discussion outside of class as well as a digital library of class resources, such as this syllabus, project briefs, certain readings as well as our class calendar.

04

Projects

Process & Research

Ongoing · start of thesis research

This semester marks the beginning of your thesis research which means: start gathering and collecting anything you think is moving or inspirational or that you just think is cool. Set up a method for doing this. You may use any tool or method you like to collect and document, however it needs to be something you can easily present to the group. In the past students have chosen to use Pinterest, GimmeBar, Tumblr, Evernote, Dropbox, iPhoto, a folder on your desktop, an envelope, a shoebox … it's up to you.

Typographic Exquisite Corpse

Individual, assembled collectively · typographic motion graphics with sound

Exquisite corpse, also known as exquisite cadaver (from the original French term *cadavre exquis*) or rotating corpse, is a method by which a collection of words or images is collectively assembled. Each collaborator adds to a composition in sequence, either by following a rule (e.g. "The adjective noun adverb verb the adjective noun") or by being allowed to see the end of what the previous person contributed.

You will each be assigned a few lines of T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. Without revealing your lines to anyone else in the class you will create a primarily typographic, motion graphics piece. You are required to use sound. Upon completion I will assemble all of the pieces in the order of the poem and create one final video. Remember, it's much more fun in the end if you keep your lines a secret. You may use other graphic elements, but the primary focus needs to be the animation of the text of the poem in some way.

Readings: T.S. Eliot, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* · Paul D. Miller aka DJ Spooky That Subliminal Kid, "Totems without Taboos: The Exquisite Corpse."

Design Voice in Three Acts

Individual · three projects from one episode of This American Life

There's a theme to each episode of *This American Life*, and a variety of stories on that theme. Most of the stories are journalism, with an occasional comedy routine or essay.

Search through the favorites section of the *This American Life* website — only the "Favorites" short list and the "Other Favorites" sections. This will give you a focused set of shows but still offer you a variety of content. Listen to lots of the shows, and pick the one that you like the most, that you relate to, or that you find most interesting. This episode will be the foundation for this assignment. You will be making 3 projects as part of this assignment, each inspired by your chosen episode:

- **A.** You must make a printed thing (poster, book, etc.).
- **B.** You must make a digital thing (web, video, motion etc.).
- **C.** Make anything you want.

Curiosity Publication

Individual · 16-page publication · 5.5 × 8.5 in

Choose one thing that you are curious about or fascinated by. Research, gather and create content. Then create a 16-page publication about this topic. Draw from your experiences, skills and influences as a designer to date in order to help craft this publication.

05

Assessment

Your grade in this class will be based primarily on the body of work you produce over the course of the class. In addition, the following specific points will be factored into your final grade for the course:

- **Attendance.** Attendance at each class is mandatory, we meet only once a week so each class is important. Class discussion and critique are not things that are easily made up and happen regularly. You must contact me in advance if you need to miss a class. If you have more than one unexcused absence your mark will be lowered by one full grade. If you are late, or absent you must follow up with me, as you will still be responsible for the work. I will not chase you down to catch you up. You should be scheduling appointments around your classes since you know your class schedule, and not the other way around.
- **Class Participation.** Part of the job as a designer is communicating effectively, on a design team, in a studio environment or with clients. You will be expected to be an active member of the class, particularly during critiques as all feedback is important. Discussion is an important part of the design process. If you are not participating regularly in the discussion you will be asked for your opinion.
- **Group Work.** Designers rarely work independently. Completed work is almost always the result of a team effort of some sort, whether it be just designers, designer and client, designer, developer, writer etc. In this class there will be times when you will be asked to work as part of a team. Your contribution to the group will be assessed along with the final output of the group's work.
- **Project Execution.** All projects should be given your full attention and effort. Each component of your projects will be reviewed, projects need to be submitted on deadline and should be complete according to project brief. Projects must be completed by the due date. Late work will be penalized. All parts of your projects in this class will be evaluated including process and research documents.
- **Project Process.** You are expected to document the process of each of your projects throughout the semester. This means, saving all sketches, writings mock ups etc. Your documents will be given the same attention to detail as your design work. The process for each project will make up a portion of your grade.

You will not be graded on your projects individually. While we will have final critiques for each project, you may continue to work on an individual project and re-present the work at the semester final review.

Monthly Check-Ins

We will also be having 2 individual, monthly check-in meetings — **October 2** and **November 4** — in which we will discuss your status in the class, to ensure that you all know where you stand and that we are all on the same page. You are required to sign up for a time slot on both dates.

Final Reviews

We will not have a final review of work for the class. You will have your normal semester end reviews. After which you will receive a letter grade based upon the following criteria:

- **A** — You demonstrate an advanced understanding of concepts presented and are able to complete work above and beyond suggested parameters.
- **B** — You exhibit a more than competent understanding of concepts presented and utilize these concepts in an articulate and noteworthy manner.
- **C** — You demonstrate a basic understanding of the information studied and apply this information to assigned problems meeting basic expectations but not going beyond suggested parameters.
- **D** — You exhibit limited understanding of the concepts and complete work below the level required for satisfactory performance.
- **F** — You demonstrate little or no understanding of course material, show little desire or motivation to complete the work, or turn in incomplete projects.

06

Calendar

- **October 2** — individual check-in
- **November 4** — individual check-in

07

Materials & Tools

Required Reading

- Nicholson Baker, *The Mezzanine.*

Weekly Readings

You will be receiving 1 or 2 readings per week. We will periodically reference and discuss these readings at the beginning of class.

Courseware

- **Basecamp** — class portal for discussion outside of class and a digital library of class resources: syllabus, project briefs, readings and the class calendar.