

English 442: Visual Literacy, Spring 2014

About this Class

Just as texts can be read if we learn to speak the language (both literally and structurally), we can also learn to "read" images, which have their own kind of language. This class will focus on the reading, interpretation and creation of visual culture in the form of images, type and graphic novels.

Your Objectives

- To analyze some of the ways in which visual communication works.
- To get a grounding in typographical communication.
- To gain theoretical lenses through which to analyze graphic novels.
- To think about different ways of seeing and communicating ideas.

Textbooks

McCloud, Scott (1994). *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Harper. ISBN 006097625X.

Tufte, Edward (1990). *Envisioning Information*. Graphics Press. ISBN 0961392118.

Tufte, Edward (2006). *The Cognitive Style of Powerpoint*. Graphics Press. ISBN 0961392169.

Garfield, Simon (2011). *Just My Type*. Gotham. ISBN 1592407463.

Moore, Alan (2000). *From Hell - New Cover Edition*. Top Shelf Productions. ISBN 0958578346.

Kick, Russ (2012). *The Graphic Canon, Vol. 1: From the Epic of Gilgamesh to Shakespeare to Dangerous Liaisons*. Seven Stories Press. ISBN 1609803760.

Class Web Page

The class website is on Blackboard. I will post notes when appropriate; there will also be discussion forums every week for reading responses.

How to Contact Me

I keep office hours every Wednesday between 1 and 4pm, or by appointment. My office is PAHB403, and my Google phone number is 304.554.9881. You should know, though, that the best way to catch me is via email, at burgess@umbc.edu. A caveat: I always try to turn around emails within 24 hours, but emailing me 3 hours before class starts is probably not the best way to tell me your puppy ate your homework.

Honor and Integrity

In addition to the usual minimum requirements (turning in assignments on time, etc) I expect you to fully participate in in-class exercises and discussion, and to treat me and your fellow students with the respect every human being deserves. You will receive an automatic zero on all plagiarized work. *I am required to report all incidents of plagiarism, even if we arrange to make up the work in some way.* The UMBC policy on academic integrity can be found at http://www.umbc.edu/undergrad_ed/ai/.

Penalties

I attach three vouchers to give you a one-week free pass on a late assignment (ie, due the next class session) or to excuse an absence. Use them wisely! Once your vouchers are gone, any further late assignments or absence will result in a one-letter drop in your final grade.

How I Grade

This is a senior seminar. An "A" is an *exceptional* grade, not an expected one, and it is based on the *superior* quality of the final product. Typically in this class, my final grade distribution is around 30% As, 50% Bs, and 20% Cs, with Ds and Fs for clearly substandard or incomplete work. Your assignments will be graded on:

- the completeness of your work
- the technical quality of your work
- the intellectual sophistication of your work

Assignments

25% - "Wordless" Biography Assignment.

Create a biography of a famous person using NO words, i.e., construct a visual narrative that tells us about the person in question. Must not be someone in your family, and you'll probably find it easier to use someone who's dead. If it's in a paper format, i.e. multiple pages, there should be a minimum of 8 pages. If you want to be more nonlinear, you can choose to do it in another format.

25% - Typography Assignment. (8 pages)

Choose a document or object and analyze/evaluate the typographical choices made by the designer.

25% - Final Paper. (12-15 pages)

Do a reading/analysis of a graphic novel of your choice. If you're having trouble coming up with a book, I can give you a list.

20% - In-class activities.

In addition to regular assignments, we will be working in-class on a sonnet sequence – taking a sonnet and converting it into various types of objects according to the prompt. The work will be done in pairs. Completion and presentation of all parts of the sonnet sequence with a reasonable amount of effort will result in an A for this portion of your grade.

5% - Discussion & reading responses.

Graded on the quality of your contribution to our discussions of the texts, online reading responses, and mandatory in-class presentation of chapters.

Reading Schedule

- 01 . 28 Introductions (no class – check Blackboard)
- 02 . 04 Read *Envisioning Information*, 1-66
- 02 . 11 Read *Envisioning Information*, 67-121
- 02 . 18 Read *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint*
- 02 . 25 Wordless Biography due
- 03 . 04 Read *Just My Type* 1-157
- 03 . 11 Read *Just My Type* 158-331
- 03 . 18 Spring Break
- 03 . 25 Typography assignment due
- 04 . 01 Read *Understanding Comics*, 1-93
- 04 . 08 Read *Understanding Comics*, 94-213
- 04 . 15 Read *The Graphic Canon*, selections tbd
- 04 . 22 Read *The Graphic Canon*, selections tbd
- 04 . 29 Read *From Hell*, Prologue - Chapter 7
- 05 . 06 Read *From Hell*, Chapter 8 – Epilogue
- 05 . 13 Final Paper Due

VOUCHER 3

Good for one absence, or one class late on a graded assignment.
No explanation or excuse required.

NAME: _____

USED FOR: _____

DATE: _____

VOUCHER 2

Good for one absence, or one class late on a graded assignment.
No explanation or excuse required.

NAME: _____ USED FOR: _____

DATE: _____

VOUCHER 1

Good for one absence, or one class late on a graded assignment.
No explanation or excuse required.

NAME: _____ USED FOR: _____

DATE: _____
