Design Principles Workshop Summary

UCLA Extension Lab

Howard Schneider, instructor
November 13, 2011

Workshop goals

The workshop's underlying goal was to provide an rich learning experience for those wishing to expand their ability to control the visual dynamics of two-dimensional space. Understanding design principles and the variable tensions between order and chaos were at the heart of the course pedagogy.

Attendance

All attendees were required to have "an awareness of design fundamentals and a basic understanding of Photoshop". Workshop size was initially limited to 10. A waiting list had grown to 19. Two additional students were later permitted to audit. All 10 registered students and two auditing students arrived early. Two individuals were turned away at the door attempting to add at the last minute. One auditing student left early due to a personal emergency. The workshop began at 9:00 AM and ran until 4:40 PM (10 minutes over).

Programming

The workshop program was comprised of three core areas interspersed over the course of the day: four Keynote presentations, three progressive exercises and three critiques. A verbal introduction to the course objectives and the history behind the workshop idea was given at the outset. Afterwards, a brief Keynote presentation on the fundamental relationship of *order and chaos* to the visual arts was given. This was followed by a larger Keynote presentation on how the *coordinating principles of design* manifest themselves in the visual arts as depicted through selections of 20th and 21st century paintings, photography and graphic design. The end of the day was set aside for reviewing student portfolios.

Video critiques in real-time

Real-time interactive desktop critiques of each student's work on *Exercise 3: Contrast of Two Systems* were recorded in QuickTime. The video-as-learning tool aspect was added to provide a means for students to review discussion of design principles in practice at any time following the workshop. Its intention was to reinforce lessons learned during the day, as needed.

Summary of responses regarding the workshop's benefits

According to post-workshop survey responses (10 in total), students wrote about coming away from the Design Principles Workshop with "a richer

understanding of hierarchy and design principles"; "how to analyze a piece of Design"; "(a) stronger sense of composition"; "designing with a conscious effort of those (design) principles in mind"; "(discovering that) time constraints really challenged me and pushed me to think faster and get a stronger grasp on design principles"; "(being) able to find my own solutions with design issues"; "new ways to assess my work."

Student recommendations

According to surveyed responses, student recommendations included: expansion into two half-day sessions; expansion into a regular Extension Design Certificate Program course; better control of timing for critiques; more exercises; student's critical interactions with each other's work; use of Illustrator or InDesign instead of Photoshop. All attendees positively responded to survey question number five, *Would you recommend this workshop to anyone else?*. (The only exception taken to the student's recommendations was the suggestion to build the workshop around Illustrator or InDesign instead of Photoshop.)

Areas for re-evaluation

(Combined student comments and instructor's self-assessment) Better adherence to schedule could have yielded broader results. Specifically, the early part of the program (the core Keynote presentation) went overtime in part due to the fact that pacing of the opening presentation depends on observable reactions from the student body. At times a key point would require deeper explanation. Also, based upon classroom observations, this key presentation might have went about five minutes too long though no compaints to that effect were received. Recommendation: review length and specificity of presentation.

Secondly, the course schedule did not allocate a specific time slot for Exercise two. It was instead combined with Exercise one's time slot. The problem there was the initial portion of the presentation needed to set the structural tone to condition the rest of the day for the presenter. This relatively minor adjustment might have contributed some broader results to an otherwise productive day. Specifically, such an adjustment might have affected the critique of student's portfolios scheduled at 3:45-4:15. Not all of the student portfolio reviews could be fitted in at day's end. (Two students could not have their portfolios reviewed in time. I later contacted them by email and provided a written critique on the portfolio samples they had submitted earlier.)

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Additionally, Exercise 3.2–in essence a second attempt at Exercise 3.1–may have been unnecessary. One response to the survery question, *Which exercise(s) were the least valuable?,* stated, "Ex.3b because there was not enough time to reconsider the principles." Another response echoed a similar reply. Still another student wrote, "I noticed my energy level dropping off towards the last exercise". Two possible refinement options worth considering are : (1) drop the final exercise (3.2) and its critique while giving more time for exercise 3.1; and/or (2) add a follow up session whose primary goals are reinforcement and expansion.

Lastly, the video critique ran longer than estimated though no complaints to that effect were received and it still appeared to connect with an engaged audience. One student noted: "I found it also very informative to observe the crits of the other students' work". For the instructor, a hierarchical checklist of design principles to immediately identify key issues in student's work could be helpful in streamlining the critique process. Another idea: allow students to become more directly involved in the critiques by asking each student to identify the "strengths" and "weakness" in their classmates' compositions based solely on the principles of design and unity as they understand them to mean. This directed, objective discussion might encourage critical analysis and help internalize the core lessons presented earlier in the day. Technical question: could audio capture from a student's computer be enabled while their desktop is being controlled in *Remote Desktop*?

Survey responses

1) *Which exercise(s) were the most valuable?*

- "All the hands on work was valuable (for design composition and refresher on Photoshop). I found it also very informative to observe the crits of the other students' work." – carolc (Carol Chung)
- "3" – Daniel C Ferreira
- "All were valuable, but the first, second & third were the most valuable" – Dan K (Dan Kozlowski) (Dan was likely referring to exercises 1, 2 and 3.1)
- "later exercises" – Mary Yaeger (Referring to exercises 3.1 and 3.2)
- "All the exercises were valuable, especially exercise 3." – Jennifer (Lee)
- "The first two exercises were a great warm-up and a refresher on recalling and applying the design principles learned in the first half. Once I was warmed up, I was better able to complete later exercises with a higher degree of complexity." – CindyH (Cynthia Hammond)

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■ "Ex. 3a where we addressed systems." – Jan.cHsurvey (Jan von Hausen)
■ "the workshops creating compositions, and the critiques. " – carolann (Carol Jerome) ("workshops" referring to the "exercises"; "compositions" likely referring to exercises 3.1, 3.2)
■ "I found each of the exercises of value. " – KV (Kristina Vargas)
■ "All were valuable. The 3rd was the most valuable" – fatim h (Fatim Hana)

2) *Which exercise(s) were the least valuable?*
■ (blank) – carolc
■ "1" – Daniel C Ferreira
■ "Maybe, the fourth, bust still valuable"– Dan K (Likely referring to exercise #3.2.)
■ "first exercise "– Mary Yaeger
■ "Perhaps just doing one version of exercise 3 since we were short on time." – Jennifer
■ "None" – CindyH
■ "Ex.3b because there was not enough time to reconsider the principles." – Jan.cHsurvey
■ "all 3 exercises were good " – carolann
■ "Again, I found value in each of the exercises, though I noticed my energy level dropping off towards the last exercise. Probably being a Sunday and a long day." – KV
■ "I thought every exercise was valuable to a certain degree. It was very much necessary and every exercise was a perfect precursor to the next exercise (and so forth). " – fatim h

3) *What did you gain from the workshop?*
■ "It was a good refresher of design principles. I felt like it was important info to review but just keep on studying on my own." – carolc
■ "Learned a lot of Design Principles and how to analyze a piece of Design." – Daniel C Ferreira
■ "a clear understanding & reinforcement of the fundamentals of graphic (design)" – Dan K
■ "stronger sense of composition " – Mary Yaeger
■ "A review of design principles and designing with a conscious effort of those

principles in mind. " – Jennifer
■ "Lots of reminders of what I should be consciously thinking of when I'm working on design problems for class or work. I think I'll approach future designs with more thoughtfulness as to what works and what doesn't, and be able to find my own solutions with design issues." – CindyH
■ "A focus on design principles to consider all elements' features in composition." – Jan.cHsurvey
■ "great overview of many graphic principles " – carolann
■ "New ways to assess my work. Also, I find the crits valuable." – KV
■ "A richer understanding on hierarchy and design elements. A reinforcement of Design 1 principles, if not giving me the purposefulness of design theories. Working on compositions within time constraints really challenged me and pushed me to think faster and get a stronger grasp on design principles."
– fatim h

4) *What recommendation(s) would you make to improve the workshop?*
■ "Possibly break it down into 2 - 1/2 day classes." – carolc
■ "Turn it into a full course in the Extension Design Certificate Program. "
– Daniel C Ferreira
■ "Students interacting with each other" – Dan K
■ "Use illustrator or InDesign for the composition and layout software. Photoshop doesn't lend itself well to the type of composition and layout work we were doing. " – Mary Yaeger
■ "I was looking forward to the portfolio critic section, but we ran out of time. So perhaps the schedule needs to be rearranged." – Jennifer
■ "I wish it could be two days! The exercises felt like they went by so fast."
– CindyH
■ "Control time for each critique." – Jan.cHsurvey
■ "time critical to keep on schedule, especially with the critiques " – carolann
■ "Can't think of any offhand." – KV
■ "More exercises." – fatim h

5) *Would you recommend this workshop to anyone else?*
■ "Yes" – carolc
■ "Of course!"– Daniel C Ferreira

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- "YES"– Dan K
- "Yes"– Mary Yaeger
- "Yes, especially for designers mid-way through their coursework. It is a great reminder of design rules. " – Jennifer
- "Absolutely. It was a great workshop and good to catch up with other friends from class." – CindyH
- "Yes, quite so." – Jan.cHsurvey
- "absolutely, wonderful! " – carolann
- "Yes, additional knowledge is always valuable. It definitely helps to gain a different perspective, as there are infinite ways to teach this subject matter. " – KV
- "YES. Definitely." – fatim h

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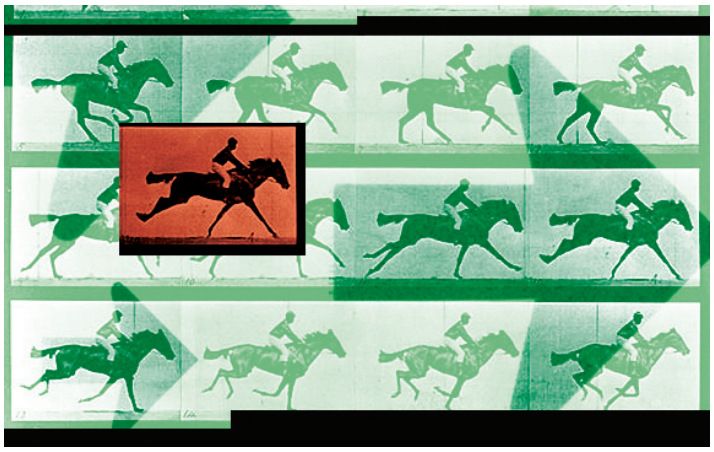
Selected Images From Exercises 2 and 3



Kristina Vargas

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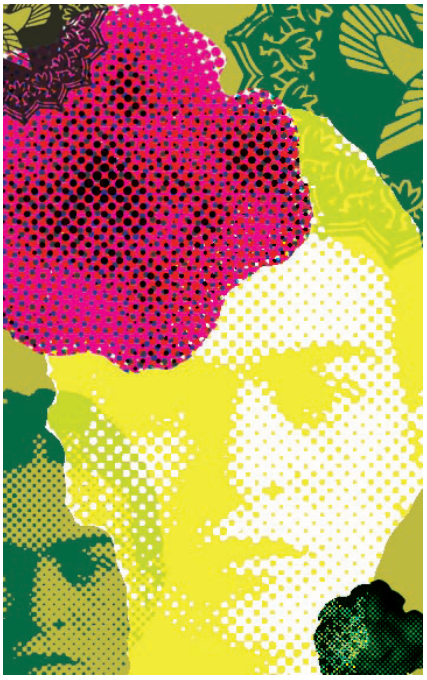

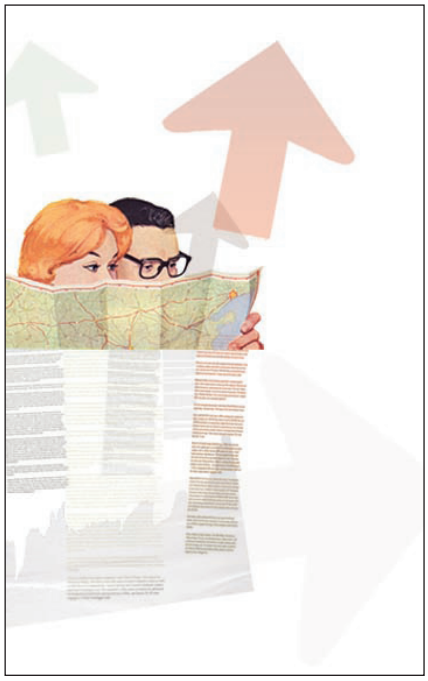

Cynthia Hammond

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Fatim Hana

Carol Jerome

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Jennifer Lee

Dan Kozlowski

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Jared Millar

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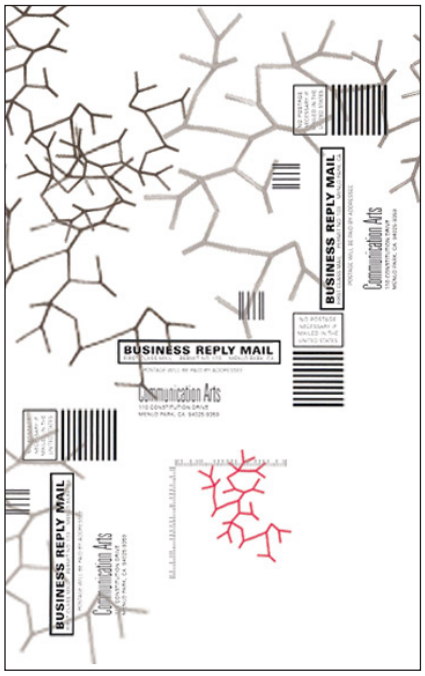
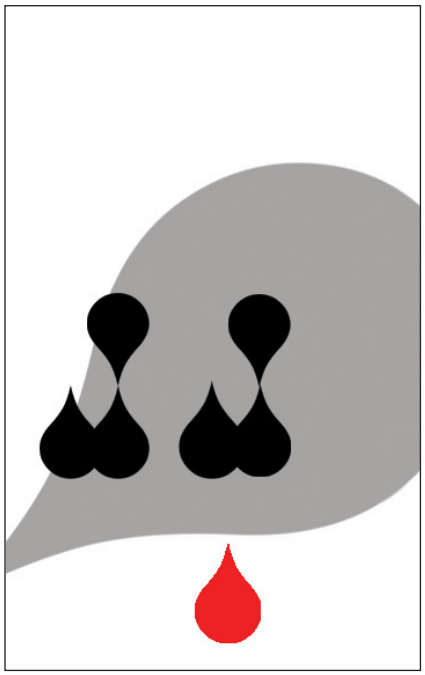


Carol Chung

Jan von Hausen



Mary Yaeger

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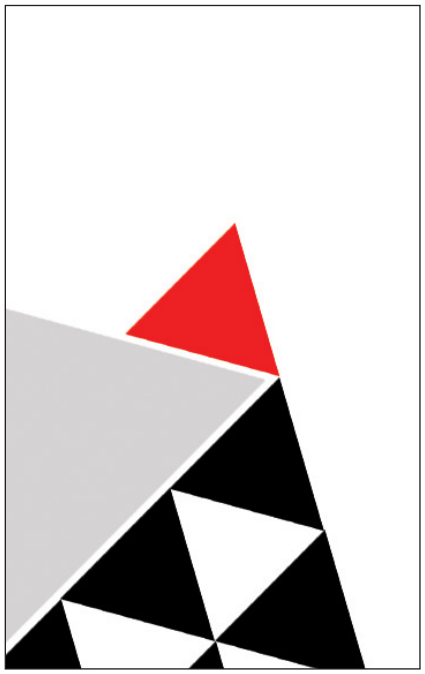

Daniel C. Ferreira (auditing student)