

Positions through
contextualizing

Written Response

Jeremy Siyang CHEN

18 May 2023

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Maurer, L. et al. (2013) *Conditional design workbook*. Amsterdam: Valiz.

The Conditional Design Workbook proposes a framework for applying systematic processes in the design process. Through an iterative exercise of this brief, I attempted to implement these principles. I drew on the workshops suggested in the workbook and created design prompts to generate graphics and patterns. By establishing constraints and boundaries, this approach fosters a structured and collaborative design process. What captivates me about this method is its potential to enable non-designers or non-artists to engage in creative expression within a condensed timeframe. As an example, Sol LeWitt's mural practice involves providing step-by-step instructions for amateurs to create murals, promoting the democratization of the design process and potentially encouraging widespread participation in creative endeavours. This approach promotes the democratization of the design process and potentially encourages widespread participation in creative endeavours.

However, rather than striving for a predetermined design outcome, I wish to explore further the potential of the conditional design framework as a means of inspiring and facilitating creative expression among non-designers, while minimizing the effort required. Additionally, I am intrigued by the prospect of encouraging more diverse stylistic graphic expression and promoting a broader range of perspectives.

Haraway, D. (1988) 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn, 1988), pp. 575-599

Haraway argues that scientific knowledge is shaped by social and historical context challenges the traditional view of objectivity and universality in scientific inquiry. This idea resonated with me as I considered how to approach graphic design critically. Similarly, Martha Scotford's "Messy History vs Neat History" highlights the tendency to oversimplify the complex and contradictory history of graphic design. In these feminist points of view of approaching knowledge,

they both underscore the importance of subjectivity and inclusivity. In response, I have begun to explore graphic expressions that deviate from mainstream trends, and even those that do not fit within the conventional definition of design. I am also experimenting with unconventional design methods, co-authorship, and communication strategies, such as conditional design principles. Through this exploration, I hope to gain a better understanding of the role of subjectivity and context in design, and how these perspectives can inform more relevant outcomes for a wider range of audiences.

Jencks, C. and Silver, N. (2013) 'Mechanical, Natural and Critical Evolution', in *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation*. Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 38–53.

The exploration of the concept that all creations initially stem from ad hoc combinations of past subsystems, and that nothing can be created out of nothing, as presented in the book, is highly enlightening. This argument is articulated in the chapter through the lenses of natural, mechanical, and critical perspectives. This comparative approach employed in the argumentative structure proves to be effective, enabling the reader to discern and comprehend the distinctions among these various viewpoints, thereby fostering a more comprehensive understanding of knowledge in its entirety. It has stimulated me to contemplate adopting alternative approaches to communicate a design process or design outcome, with the aim of offering different perspectives on the same context.

Moreover, the narrative structure of the chapter itself serves as an embodiment of the knowledge it seeks to communicate. By employing pre-existing bodies of knowledge, such as the theory of natural evolution, analogies are drawn between similar situations in other context, while simultaneously highlighting their contrasting aspects. This underscores the notion that the communication of knowledge becomes more perspicuous and persuasive when the form of conveying such knowledge resonates with its specific content.

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***The Gleaners and I* (2000). Directed by Agnès Varda, France.**

Varda's utilization of narrative structure in the documentary is inspiring, as she adeptly organizes the subjective experiences of various individuals, while concurrently interweaving her own subjectivity as a connecting thread. This approach diverges significantly from conventional documentaries wherein the director remains absent from the film, striving instead to present an objective viewpoint. Notably, such narrative techniques are also frequently employed within the realm of graphic design. Although the design itself often serves as a manifestation of the designer's subjective perspective, this subjectivity is typically conveyed in a subtle manner, with overt information commonly assuming the guise of factual statements. Consequently, an inquiry arises regarding the altered comprehension and interpretation of a piece of work and its underlying significance when the designer's position is explicitly communicated in a subjective way, alongside a detailed account of the design process within the work itself.

Le Guin, U. (1986) *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. Available at: <https://otherfutures.nl/uploads/documents/le-guin-the-carrier-bag-theory-of-fiction.pdf> (Accessed: 16th April 2023).

LeGuin's argument presents a challenge to the prevalent notion that human evolution is primarily driven by aggression and violence. Within the context of graphic design, her argument evokes a series of traditional design strategies aimed at creating a lasting impression on the audience in a short period of time, such as the visual hammer theory, and the brand persona theory. The resulting visual communication produced by these methods is straightforward and efficient, yet slightly aggressive, echoing the dominant narrative structure in traditional storytelling, as described by LeGuin. As a result, LeGuin's theory offers a thought-provoking

point of view for a critical examination of the use of graphic design in commercial scenarios. This entails questioning whether linear storytelling is the only viable solution for brand design or whether brand storytelling can consist of collected stories. It also entails exploring situations where this narrative can be effective while providing more inclusivity and opportunities for authentic communication with the audience.

Andrushchenko, Olya. "Behance.", 14 Aug. 2019, www.behance.net/gallery/83700945/incompleteness-of-the-moment. Accessed 9 May 2023.

This editorial affords me the opportunity to adopt an audience-centered perspective when engaging with a random assortment of images captured in mundane everyday scenarios. Through reflection, I have considered the impressions evoked by these personalized images and the messages they convey to those lacking the specific context—essentially, anyone other than the designer. Notably, the images themselves possess substantial informational gaps, resulting in a communication that is somewhat blurred and perplexing. However, the designer judiciously supplements these images with a limited amount of textual information, including details about their source, context, and a selection of fragmented quotations that offer glimpses into the designer's disposition. This modest yet significant addition of contextual information intertwines the disparate images like threads, enabling the audience to envision the designer's experience. Consequently, this approach both preserves the poetic quality of the collection and allowed the audience with clues and space for diverse interpretations.

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【一席】高田唯Yui Takada: 從前面看 從側面看 還是從下面看. [online]
Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBQOaus-Uz4> [Accessed 26 Apr. 2023].

Yui Takada's presentation centred on the impact of graphic design encountered in ordinary settings on his design methodology. His discourse instilled in me a desire to examine the design language of non-professionals and explore the ways in which I could assimilate these diverse styles into my own design practice to communicate alternative messages. Takada's approach can be viewed as a rejoinder to LeGuin's philosophy, which emphasizes the disruption of conventional Japanese design industry aesthetics through unconventional standards. Furthermore, such perspectives may be employed to hijack and subvert design processes, authorship, and other related aspects.

Meet The Tube Moquette Designer.
[online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAJrfL6loC8>
[Accessed 8 May 2023].

During the interview, Paul Marchant, the designer who designs Tube Seats Moquettes, expounded upon the intricate process involved in shaping the design of the London tube moquette, which draws its creative essence from local architecture, history, and community. Marchant articulated how these diverse influences were translated into visual languages, thereby encapsulating the essence of the city. This resonates with the concept proposed in Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation, which posits that creation emerges from pre-existing subsystems. Notably, the circulation of these translated images within the realm of public transportation serves as a remarkable visual conduit, effectively linking the city's heritage with the daily lives of its inhabitants. The underlying insight suggests that the act of sampling, recycling, and repurposing visually derived elements generates meaning within the contextual framework of their origin, while simultaneously providing a novel lens through which to perceive and comprehend their source.

Stezaker, J. (2006-2007) *Marriage*.
Available at: https://www.saatchigallery.com/artist/john_stezaker (Accessed: 22nd April 2023).

Stezaker's collage project employs a methodology that involves utilizing found images as the primary material to forge a poetic amalgamation of diverse portraits, which ultimately coalesce into a personal narrative of the artist. This collection of photographic collages acquaints me with two related genres of art: appropriation art and vernacular photography. In my present design practice, I have noticed that many of my methodologies are relevant to these two genres. Specifically, through my iterative experiments, I employ the most accessible tools to capture photographs, and subsequently utilize these 'found visuals' as the fundamental material for a series of explorations. I have recognized that this design approach introduces ambiguity into the authorship of the work, a quality that may convey additional significance across varying contexts.

Holden, L. '*Studies in Visual Poetry*', Lauren Holden. Available at: <https://www.laurenholden.ca/studies/poetry.html> (Accessed: 20th April 2023).

Holden's case study examines the impact of typesetting and the interplay between textual and visual elements on the display of poetry across various media. This research exemplifies the iterative approach adopted in design research, which seeks to refine and improve the design process through multiple iterations. Holden's methodology emphasizes the value of visual and stylistic experimentation, demonstrating how comparable material can be presented in distinct media to gain insights into the subtle variations among them. This approach is noteworthy for its emphasis on uncovering the nuances that distinguish various media and for its potential to enhance the design process through rigorous experimentation and analysis.

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Takada, Y. (n.d.). *Trimming sports newspapers*. [online] www.instagram.com/_yui_takada_02/ [Accessed 9 May 2023].

Takada Yui's Instagram archive prompted my exploration of the possibility of cropping images as a documentary act. Firstly, the act of cropping, offers a swift and uncomplicated means of visual manipulation that can be effectively communicated through straightforward and suggestive language. This accessibility renders it a fitting avenue for my inquiry into capturing moments within everyday environments. Furthermore, cropping can be a minimalistic form of creative engagement. Unlike the recording of figurative subjects, the composition of an abstract image entails more intricate cognitive processes and necessitates deliberate choices. Consequently, the subjectivity of the creator can find deeper expression within the confines of the cropped image. Motivated by these considerations, my intention is to explore the act of cropping as a means of observing mundane moments and discerning how it diverges from the recording of objective reality. I also aim to investigate the feasibility of documenting elusive personal experience and qualia through this rapid and creative practice.

AmadoB. (n.d.). Bráulio Amado. [online] Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/Chcq4aWrGGf/> [Accessed 12 May 2023].

Bráulio Amado engages in the experimental stylization of images sourced from mundane daily life, a practice he incorporates into select poster designs. Notably, it is intriguing that he chooses to publish these stylized images in the form of posters alongside distinct supplementary information, despite the lack of direct visual correlation between the images and their accompanying contexts. Instead, Amado deliberately ascribes supplementary significance to his designs by showcasing the image sources and elucidating his visual translation process. This design approach exemplifies an almost anti-rational disposition, resonating with a post-modernist ethos.

When observing closely, I have noticed that Amado's appropriation process captures transient and easily disregarded moments from everyday life, while the subsequent publishing process elevates and recontextualizes these moments, endowing them with newfound significance. As an audience, I find myself simultaneously engaging with two distinct layers of information: the inherent content within the image and the supplementary information intended to be conveyed through the poster. Despite the absence of a direct visual link between these layers, the act of engaging with the poster engenders a unique impression and comprehension of the conveyed information, combining the two distinct realms into a cohesive whole.

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**Analysis of the Chapter “Mechanical,
Natural and Critical Evolution” in
the book Adhocism: The Case for
Improvisation**

In the chapter titled “Mechanical, Natural and Critical Evolution” from the book Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation, the author presents a compelling argument centred around the notion that all creations initially stem from ad hoc combinations of past subsystems, emphasizing the impossibility of creating something out of nothing. This argument unfolds through three distinct perspectives, supported by specific examples and contextualized knowledge, enhancing the comprehensiveness of the author’s ideas.

To introduce the chapter, the author employs a simple yet effective example featuring four different perspectives on a corkscrew, accompanied by a series of visually engaging images. This choice of example serves the purpose of presenting the core argument in a clear and relevant manner.

Throughout the chapter, similar examples are utilized, each illustrating different ways of perceiving objects such as bicycle seats, wheels, and the natural adaptations of various species’ body parts. The systematic pattern employed in presenting these examples ensures a smooth reading experience, as each argument supports the sub-arguments and reinforces the overarching argument from diverse angles. Furthermore, the selection of specific examples in the chapter is interconnected, intertwining the process of argumentation. In the section focusing on mechanical evolution, the author examines examples of bicycle seats, wheels, and automobiles, which are all in relation to transporting. Conversely, in the section discussing natural evolution, examples of animal skulls, foot bones, and wings are presented, also within the context of moving and travelling. While it is uncertain whether this connection between examples is intentional on the

part of the author, the consequence is an impactful mode of communication. It appears that the author consciously adopts a narrative structure in relation to the underlying argument, which is to strategically employ the same subsystem across diverse contexts to elicit multifaceted understandings and meanings.

Charles Jencks’ ideas find resonance in the field of graphic design, particularly in the practice of sampling and reappropriating images during the design process. Unlike the functional limitations encountered in natural evolution and industrial design, graphic design often involves the visual influence of content with few constraints. Therefore, recognizing the visual relevance between a single image and diverse contexts facilitates the reuse and re-contextualization of visual elements in the visual design process.

This piece of text has inspired my own studio experimentation by emphasizing the systematic and repetitive use of the same form and how it contributes to the generation and communication of meaning. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of establishing a direct connection between the found image and its associated context when attempting to reuse or re-contextualize them. This provided me with a new perspective of articulating my inquiry, wherein I aim to explore how images from everyday contexts can be utilized to visually and metaphorically capture immediate thoughts or emotions in an improvisational manner. The method of image cropping aims to discover visual symbols or compositions that relate to personal qualia, or to document visual information that evokes specific personal experiences, ultimately serving as a secondary means of capturing thoughts, feelings, and emotional encounters that are challenging to articulate with verbal languages.

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Analysis of “Trimming sports newspapers” by Takada Yui

Takada Yui's project “Trimming sports newspapers” offers a unique and thought-provoking exploration of design approaches through the deliberate act of trimming newspapers and investigating the resulting meaning in comparison to traditional methods of composition in graphic design. This practice involves the observance of predefined frames within which the designer carefully seeks out compelling compositions and subsequently cuts out the selected images. By considering this practice as a creative activity, it becomes apparent that the process of visually perceiving and composing images entails a series of cognitive processes and decision-making. This ad hoc approach aligns with the concept of adhocism, as discussed in the book “Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation,” as it encompasses small-scale, immediate, and personal actions driven by the straightforward objective of discovering engaging compositions. One noteworthy aspect of this practice is its accessibility. The process itself is swift, iterative, and does not require extensive training in art or craftsmanship, making it accessible to individuals with various backgrounds and skill levels. In this way, Takada Yui's project presents an inclusive approach to artistic expression, allowing almost anyone to utilize this method as a means of creative output. Furthermore, the utilization of newspapers as the source material challenges the boundaries of traditional graphic design practices by exploring the intersection between intuitive graphic expression and the rigorous design process.

Another significant aspect to consider is the diverse forms of circulation employed for the trimmed compositions. Takada Yui has established a dedicated Instagram account to document all the trimmed images and has also presented physical copies of the compositions in various exhibitions. These different modes of circulation cater to distinct audiences with varying visual qualities, providing multiple perspectives

through which the project can be interpreted. By embracing alternative modes of presentation, the designer expands the reach of the project and invites engagement from diverse audience. Additionally, Takada Yui pushes the boundaries of appropriation by incorporating some of the trimmed compositions into posters of different contexts. Through this act of repurposing, the original purpose of the newspapers, which is to convey information through graphics and texts, is subverted, transforming them into graphic design artifacts with alternative meanings.

Inspired by Takada Yui's project, my own studio experiments sought to build upon the concept by exploring the replacement of source content with found imagery from mundane environments, deviating from the use of newspapers. Through this adaptation, new perspectives and associations were generated, adding depth and nuance to the creative process. Moreover, I explored alternative goals within this *ad hoc* activity, such as fostering visual conversations between individuals and employing it as an alternative means of documenting personal qualia. This experiment aims to delve further into the versatility and creative potential of temporary creative practices to convey personal experiences or emotions that are difficult to convey through language.

In conclusion, Takada Yui's project “Trimming sports newspapers” provides a captivating and thought-provoking exploration of design methodologies through the deliberate act of trimming and recontextualizing pre-existing or already-designed imagery. The accessible nature of this practice, combined with its diverse forms of circulation, expands its reach to a broader audience, fostering multiple interpretations and engagements. By experimenting and building upon this project, new perspectives, goals, and avenues for creative exploration can be uncovered, thus contributing to the continued innovation within the realm of *ad hoc* creative practices.