



in the form of a question

WHAT IS IT TO KNOW



GUY CAPPICIE

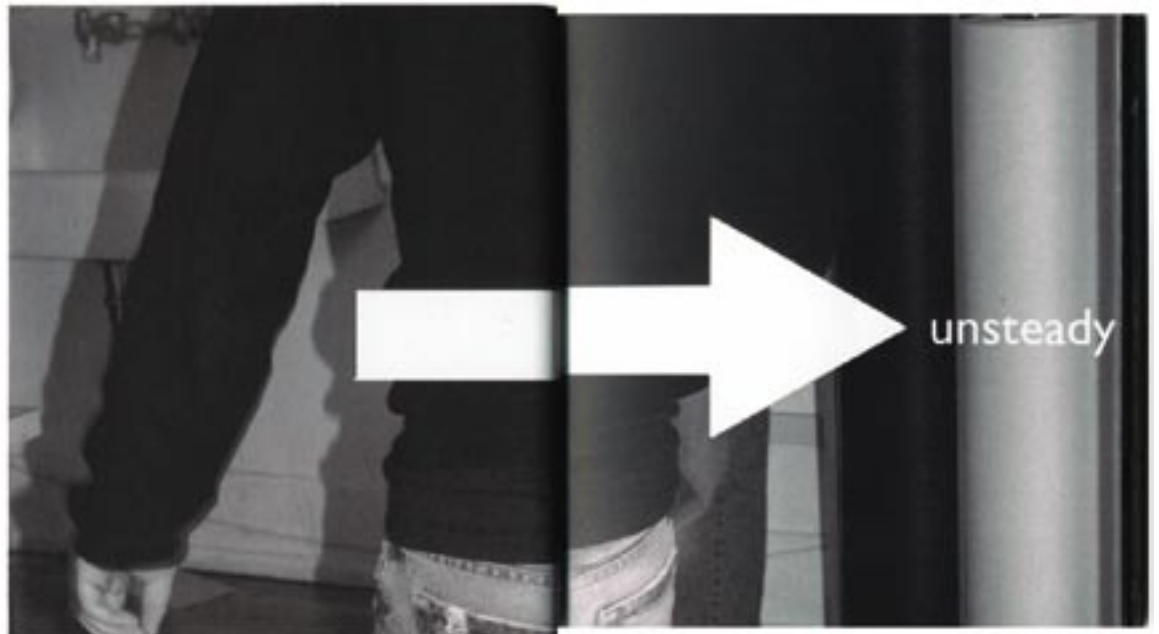
- >> It begins with a question.
- >> I don't know. Do not tell.

With each course we begin by asking our students to do a free-write on what it means to know. Without discussion or follow up on this topic, we go on to introduce the syllabus. Toward the end of the class, one at a time, each student is brought into a room to be interviewed on video about their idea of what it means to know.



LAP LE

For the student this is unexpected, and they are caught off guard. They go into the room agreeing not to discuss what happens with their classmates. The following class we watch the video together. They are critical of themselves, there is humor. They are exposed. They are real. This vulnerability, levels the playing field. A camaraderie is built from this, a community. An exciting diverse discussion forms about knowing vs. understanding. Many ideas are sparked here: the idea of knowledge, being in the know, fear, responsibility, safety is knowing, control, false concreteness, and so forth. They realize the uneasy, yet curious ground they are on.



QUAN LE

>> *Its a Process.*

This is a time when there is so much information, technology, and things to know. We are a society of receiving, and reacting. Students type in a word and get a result. They are programmed through education and society to take in and spit out. One of the biggest challenges we face is students focussed on the product, and not the process. Often their way of working is filled with predetermined conclusions before they begin the making. We want them to notice these filters they use -- to be aware of them and practice a way around them. They need to notice the relationship between what they are saying, and doing. It is about accountability and responsibility. They are not catching themselves -- they need tools to do this.

Our experience takes place in a rural liberal arts setting. The students are only taking one, maybe two design courses per term or semester. The programs usually have one professor for each discipline. Our students are often first generation college graduates, wanting to be graphic designers -- but often having a narrow view of what graphic design is. They think that learning the applications makes them a graphic designer and many think only about advertising. They don't realize that graphic design is a complex and divergent field that includes areas such as: exhibit design, book design, editorial work, film titles, and so on.

Within this limited bandwidth of understanding and time, how can we effectively teach all these avenues of communication in our rural institutions? How can we create a classroom with a heightened sense of awareness, to help the students see beyond what they believe to be there?

>> Education is eternal, not temporal.

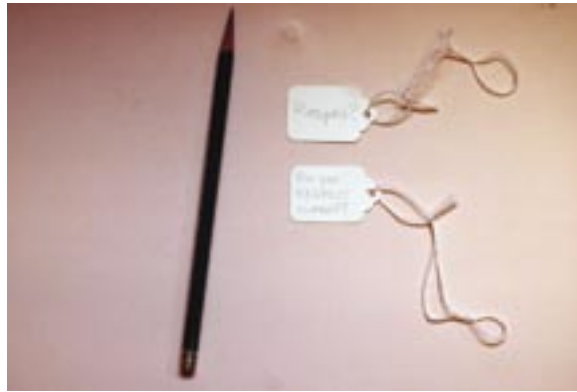
We believe in leading by example. That everything we do is influenced, and connected to each other. That this wave of time and energy we put into something, or someone will manifest itself. Collaboration is our method for creating. We share, gleam and reflect off of one another. We believe it has improved us as teachers, designers, and members of society. We think it is important to bring this same kind of energy we create in the studio, to the classroom. By showing the students a living example of what it is to communicate -- to see an exchange.

We teach by creating an environment that aims to nurture the classroom as community while also building a sense of ownership into each student. Having two teachers in the classroom helps develop a different interaction. It changes the dynamic of student and teacher: we see this as an open circle instead of a straight line. By the time our students reach college they are used to a particular learning pattern: sender to receiver -- action to reaction. We let them know on the first day this is not the class they have expected.

This building of community and breaking down of expectations empowers students to think for themselves, but it comes with resistance. They are initially uneasy. They ask so many questions about what they can and can't do. They don't want to think for themselves -- but at the same time they want to be original and unique. By default they fight against themselves and us. The rebels complain and the conformists emulate. It is so hard for them to turn their voice into process -- to put it out there, and to own it. To complicate matters, it is easy to feel isolated on our small campus. Isolation can cause student apathy and close them off to what is immediate. We have all heard students say, "When I get out of here. . ." as if, they are somewhere they don't want to be -- as if education is temporal, not eternal.

No method is without struggle and we have noticed that giving them a voice grounds them in the now, it makes them accountable for being active and aware of the moment. In graduate school, our professors taught us how important it is to examine and question your surroundings. We show them that working on social and critical issues brings their voice to the larger community. Projects don't end on a critique wall. Often the project is concluded by how it is integrated and received in society.

One of our projects is the object assignment. The students are given a mundane object that performs a concrete, defined role in our every day lives. Over the course of the term they have one day assignments that implement specific design principles and methodologies such as: narrative, grid, balance, perspective, improvisation, and chance}. It is in a sense, a mini self-directed study that also relates to the current longer project they are working on. It acts as a catalyst to distract and re-focus them out of their heads, to step back from what they are working on, and to inform each project. Toward the end of the term, they are directed to transform their object by relating it to a social issue they feel something about. This connection could pertain to relationships at home or globally. These projects are placed into the community and that action is documented.



BEATRICE THOMPSON

This student began with a pencil. During the course of the term she was impacted by a personal event that determined her topic: respect. She wrote simple phrases about respect on stickers and labels. Over a period of a few days these quiet moments were placed into visible and unassuming parts of the community: on car bumpers, in grocery stores, on street signs and on people. She created a book with the documentation of these locations.



GERRY BLAKNEY

A fork became a statement about the fast food industry. This student projected comments on the fast food industry on the side of a Burgerville. He documented this event through a series of polaroids.



>> Building the maverick.

The idea of the maverick, independent in thought and action, is different than one of the rebel or conformist. A rebel is a person who resists authority with defiance and a conformist conforms unquestioningly to the usual standards.

The maverick embraces what is there and paves the way for it to grow. What are the questions we as teachers are answering in these rural settings in order to cultivate and educate our students? Is it the same question or model of an arts institution, or a vocational trade school? Neither. It is one of the maverick. Where independent behavior needs to exist. How do we empower the students to learn and to hold them accountable for their learning? How do we teach them to explore and continue learning after they leave the university?

We do this by drawing out, not pouring in. We cultivate awareness, openness and encourage them to challenge their fears. We leave the learning open, we don't give them all of the answers. As a wise professor once said to us, "The Thinking Comes From The Making." Matt Monk.

>> Go deeper, quicker

When you are working in ten week terms, time is precious. How do we draw out the maverick by teaching a wide set of skills, to a wide set of students in a limited time frame? We don't; we have to dive in, and teach the core skills of seeing, reflecting and being. We give them projects with a set of limitations and let them choose how these projects manifest themselves. They need to look beyond themselves as designer, otherwise we will only get to the tip of the iceberg. We focus on divergent and convergent process', the thinking and making always together, and moving inside and outside of design. We ask "what can this be?"

These projects are designed to unfold -- to start together, then diverge so each student can create their own path with the project. It is helpful to have an assignment that allows for ideas to sink in, a chance for reflection. To keep thoughts percolating. These projects unfold in stages, so the end result is not the sole focus at the start. This gives room for the students to concentrate on the task at hand, to fully engage in each stage. Over the course of the project, chance opportunity and experimentation exist. They build an idea, to a message and then to a medium. They spend time reworking, and experimenting with mediums and materials. They grow, nurture, tend to it and expose themselves along the way. The process each student takes is guided by the individual, but we believe that the camaraderie developed within the classroom community helps each student be more invested in their work and that of their peers. These projects open up their eyes to what graphic design can be, while simultaneously challenging their ideas of what graphic design is in our society today. The progress from these projects permeates throughout the whole class. They are invested and excited.

One of our assignments is the Take_Notice assignment. It addresses seeing for what is there, and not what one assumes to be there. Again the project is broken down into parts: to record, sort, and translate. Students were to record a place or a form of media. For example: to sit in the emergency room for 30 minutes, to log the 2 sections of the New York Times, to log Vogue magazine, to log 30 minutes of radio on one station, to log the evening news, and so forth. The learning outcomes for the project are to stop, slow down and challenge our ways of seeing. To dissect what is actually there, and what we assume to be there. To reflect on the experience and translate the findings into objective information, and then transform this into a subjective message. They are mapping the experience and designing information. The medium is individual to the project. It can be done by hand, be a video, book, etc



OWEN ZIOLS

This is a piece done by a student who recorded a thirty minute bus ride. He transcribed the experience by writing during the duration of the entire ride about what he saw and heard. He became particularly interested in the physicality of the ride and the quality of line and movement his hand picked-up while writing. In his final transformation he printed out his text on a large format and carefully traced each word -- shifting the focus from the literal reading of text, to one of emotion and motion.



KRISTEN LARSEN

This student's translation of Business Week magazine explored issues related to gluttony, layering, filling oneself with news.

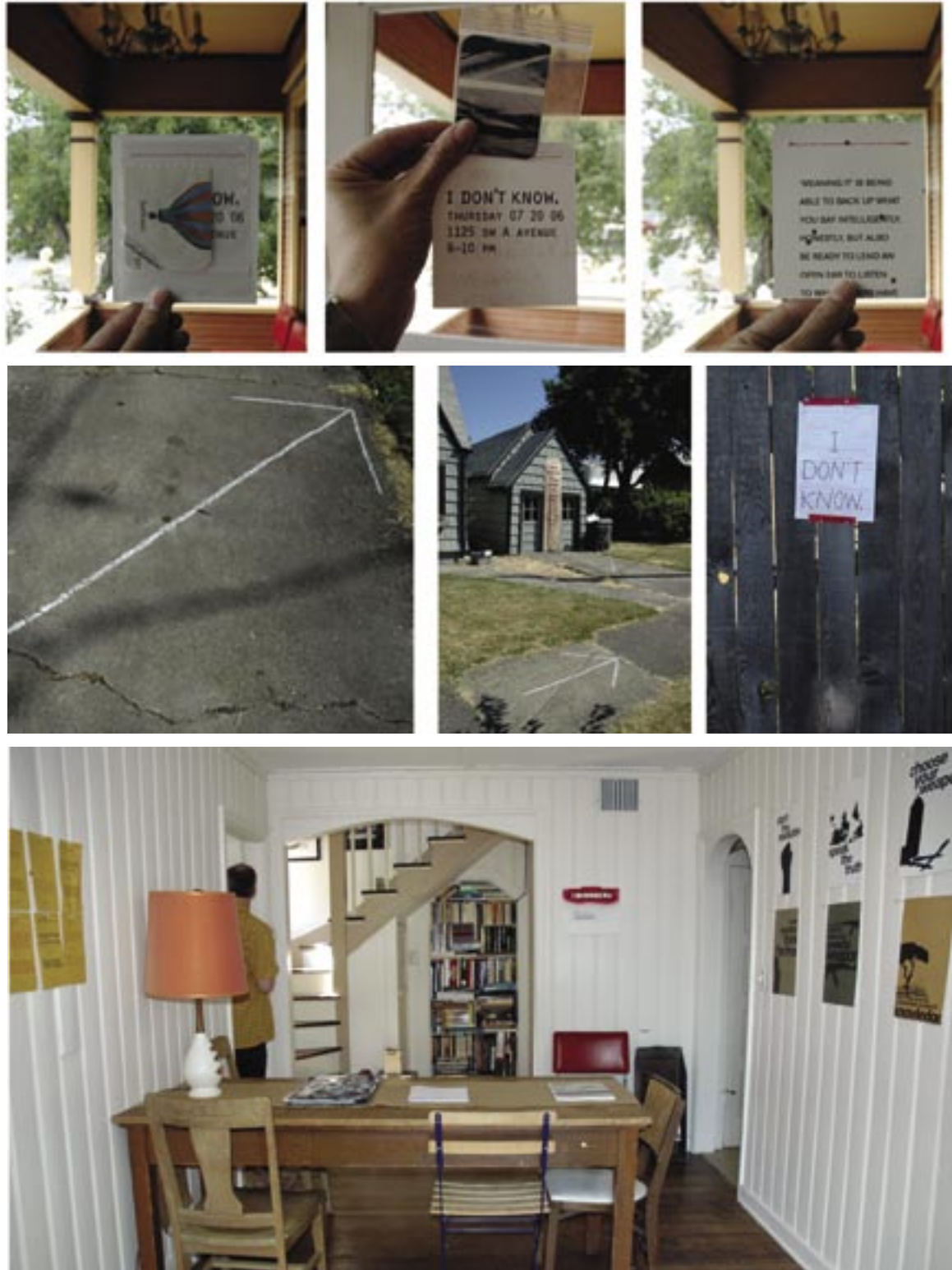


QUAN LE

>> A {w}holistic process.

Self awareness is an important part of our teaching process putting more ownership on the student. We place emphasis on how everything you do ripples out to other parts of your life and out to society. Because studio classes are living – the relationship a student has with their work, and peers is directly related to how you are at home, work, in society, etc.

Our focus is on communication vs. portfolio with more experimentation and theory. Don't limit. Open up. Encourage curiosity. This is not new or original -- but an extension of how we have been taught , influenced and want to live. We especially thank Tom Ockerse and Martin Venezky for leading us to this way of thinking and working.



We look for connections that reach outside the classroom. At the end of our course on process we collected each student's final piece and curated a show in a few rooms of a house. We created invitations that they handed out to friends and family.



MEGAN EDWARDS



GUY CAPPICIE





JESSICA TRESSER

| | |
|--|-------------------------|
| <p>06/26 07/20 CLASS DATE</p> | |
| <p><u>Diana Lien</u> PUPIL'S NAME</p> | |
| <p><u>organization, keeping it together, vanilla</u> ALIAS NAMES</p> | |
| <p>constructing communication SUBJECT</p> | <p>faqs TEACHER</p> |
| <p>DESCRIBE AN IMPACTFUL MOMENT IN THIS CLASS</p> | |
| <p>I don't know the video recording of what 'knowing' is made me think about what I know and how I know I know memories. Recollection.</p> | |
| <p>WHAT IS ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE THIS CLASS?</p> | |
| <p><u>confidence</u></p> | |
| <p>WHAT ARE YOUR PARTING WORDS?</p> | |
| <p>this class has been very memorable and I feel as though it went by too fast. I have learned so many ways to communicate, and I have more confidence in my work. This has been a class I won't forget.</p> | |
| <p>TEACHERS COMMENTS:</p> | |
| <p>SEE ME</p> | |

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| <p>06/26 07/20 CLASS DATE</p> | |
| <p><u>Aaron Zurcher</u> PUPIL'S NAME</p> | |
| <p><u>Zooch, ferment, toxic, growth</u> ALIAS NAMES</p> | |
| <p>constructing communication SUBJECT</p> | <p>faqs TEACHER</p> |
| <p>DESCRIBE AN IMPACTFUL MOMENT IN THIS CLASS</p> | |
| <p>this is more of a personal insight that grew over the class, during this class I started to look at design, and let it in growth as a tool or weapon that we can use to change the world. we have the power to instill thought in the mind of the public, and we need to utilize this to make the world a better place. this was somewhat of a huge discovery.</p> | |
| <p>WHAT IS ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE THIS CLASS?</p> | |
| <p><u>refreshing</u></p> | |
| <p>WHAT ARE YOUR PARTING WORDS?</p> | |
| <p>I really enjoyed this class. I was very refreshing to have all the restrictions of most design classes and let the process lead us to wherever it took the process. Sorry I had to be gone for 2 weeks, but I think the combo of this class and my week in Seattle has made me grow a LOT as a designer, artist and person.</p> | |
| <p>TEACHERS COMMENTS:</p> | |
| <p>SEE ME</p> | |

We collaborate with urban design studios. This fall, students designed anti-war posters for the website anti-war.com -- a project involving Joshua Berger of Plazm Media. The site provides anti-war propaganda accessible to anyone around the world. This was an opportunity for the students to formulate their own message for or against war. The students were invited to Plazm for a formal critique and one design was chosen to be published on the website.

We teach a class on exhibition space. Recently, the students organized exhibitions in the student art spaces and created an Artwalk to corresponded with the university's art gallery exhibition opening reception.

We are trying to bring relevant work to this small community that they would otherwise not be in contact with. While we don't have the budget of large academic institutions, we are looking for ways to compete with that. At Western Oregon University, we are the Director's of the art gallery. Currently, we are working with Plazm's Joshua Berger to curate an exhibition in February called XXX: The Power of Sex in Contemporary Design. The show is based on this book by Berger and Sarah Dougher with an intro from Stephen Heller that was previously curated at the Museum of Sex in New York City.



>> Reflection.

So what do we see in working this way? We see students responding, bringing more to the experience. They bring in books to share and discuss. They take more chances. They look at design and community and see opportunity. They aim higher. There is camaraderie.

They tell each other the truth. They challenge us and send thoughtful, questioning emails. They are building a {w}holistic skill set that provides them the opportunity to grow. They know where to go to get ideas, how to generate work, and that sometimes they need to fail in order to learn. Their work is becoming more conceptual and substantial. They are learning to expand, contract and explore. They have empathy. They are gaining tools to see the whole process and the steps needed to get there.

Today, in society, we can't pour in anymore -- there is too much information already out there. They need the room and skills to find, edit, and sort. In our teaching, we facilitate the journey of self-discovery, and one's impact on a culture. To discover from within, and to draw out.

In order for someone to teach or be taught, one must understand the simultaneous significance and insignificance of themselves, and to see the classroom as a community whose growth depends on the participation of the whole. We guide, point, and let the student lead.