INCIDENTAL DATA

Curated by Kate Sweetapple
**Incidental Data**

*Incidental Data* is an exhibition that considers the use of information visualisation. It directly confronts the **misconception** that all data is dry and dull and that data visualisation must have a **commercial** purpose. Instead it aims its attention at the incidental, **whimsical** and poetic. *Incidental Data* includes the work of six designers and artists who all look at the world a little bit differently, encouraging us, their audience, to slow down and **revel** in the delight of what is around us.

*Incidental Data* is on exhibit at UTS Gallery from 2 August to 2 September 2011.

**How to use this resource:**

This resource has been designed to use in conjunction with a visit to UTS Gallery for the exhibition *Incidental Data*.

The curriculum connections listed are intended for students studying in year 9 and 10 according to the NSW syllabus, but this resource can be adapted and applied to other years and as a general guide for other audiences.

The exhibition provides a valuable learning experience for secondary students in the areas of Visual Arts, Design and Technology and all students studying English as a Second Language.

The activities in the book are divided into pre visit preparation activities and questions for in situ or post visit learning. Words in bold can be found in the glossary at the back of the resource along with information for further research.
NSW Syllabus Stage 5 Curriculum Connections:

Visual Arts:

Artmaking:
- Collaboration
- Designers and artists make work shaped by values and beliefs

Conceptual Framework:
- The world as a source of ideas and concepts
- Role of audience
- How artworks reflect different backgrounds and experience
- How artists develop their intentions
- Contemporary artists/designers
- Consider how artists work differently in different contexts-design, architecture
- The ways in which ideas are represented

Structural Frame:
- Consider how communication is embedded in the form of the work
- Understanding conventions including codes, symbols, signs - symbolic communication that transmits aesthetic information

Cultural Frame:
- Cultural and community identity and social perspectives contribute to the development of ideas and making of art
- How artists and audiences use cultural and community identities and social perspectives in making and responding to art

Design and Technology
- Definition of design and its interdisciplinary nature
- Principles of design in new situations and contexts
- Factors affecting a holistic approach to design
- Creative and innovative idea generating
- Communication and presentation techniques
- Trends in technology and design across contemporary culture
- Creativity and problem solving techniques used by designers
- The work of contemporary designers

ESL/NESB/CALD
- Developing a Visual Arts vocabulary
- Cultural reference in text
- Developing written and spoken communication for a variety of purposes
- Flexible and critical thinking
- The role of English as a language for ongoing learning
- English as a language of communication and culture
- Appropriateness, subtlety and aesthetics in language use.
Kate Sweetapple completed her PhD in 2004 and is a lecturer in the School of Design at UTS. She explores the intersection of words and images through exhibitions, installations and printed matter. Her research interests include Information Design – specifically the visualisation of quantitative and qualitative data through exploratory visual communication practices and Visual Writing, texts that are neither purely written, nor purely visual.

Kate Sweetapple creates her own work (not included in *Incidental Data*) which she has exhibited on UTS campus. She has published articles in various academic journals. *Incidental Data* is the first exhibition she has curated independently.

“Just as writers eavesdrop, collecting snippets of dialogue or description, artists and designers see things - they are the note-takers of the visual world.”
-Kate Sweetapple, 2011

http://katezoe.blogspot.com/
What is graphic design?

I prefer the term visual communication. The problem with the term graphic design is that it does not include the word communication. Communication is key as it suggests an awareness of context and audience.

What is information visualisation?

Information visualisation is about communicating complex and interconnected problems visually and finding a way to communicate large bodies of data into understandable narratives. For instance we are working on a project with the science faculty to help the researchers communicate complex ideas that they are having trouble disseminating into the larger community.

Since the inception of graphic design have its aesthetic and theoretical movements correlated with movements in the art world, i.e Surrealism? Modernism?

Yes and no. There are not as not as many definitive movements as there are in art. There have been design styles like the Bauhaus, Swiss graphics and digital design after the advent of the computer. In the 1990s there was a reaction to the previous abundance of digital design, which led to a ‘hands on’, crafty approach.

Design has followed the larger movements such as modernism and postmodernism. During the modernist period there was an authoritative voice with a universal message and the idea of an international language being possible. In postmodern the idea of the birth of the reader dominates and a personal, subjective reading and response to the work is possible.

Is visual communication cultural?

Graphic design is mostly dominated by Western culture, but there are definite cultural trends. It is interesting how much one’s own culture is embedded in visual communication. So much visual communication has reference points that are culturally specific and can therefore be missed by people from other cultures. For example fairy tales are a part of a group’s shared cultural understanding. Colours and their meanings are also a good example of culturally different reference points. Visual communication also reflects the desires of different cultures. What needs to be communicated and what the economy pushes designers to communicate.

How does your design work reflect your values, beliefs and the social structures in which you live?

At UTS, visual communication is understood to be a practice that is informed by, and informs, the social, cultural, political and economic environment in which it exists. We are concerned with producing design that contributes to conversations that are not only market-driven.

How important is an audience for graphic design?

Visual communication doesn’t exist without an audience because it is about communication, which involves an exchange between two parties, the work and its audience.
Through his explorations of language Sam Winston creates sculpture, drawings and books that question our understanding of words, both as carriers of messages and as information itself.

He uses graphics as his medium, cutting, pasting, folding and re-writing words and pages to give his audience a new way of looking and understanding language. He describes himself as a designer and an artist who always wanted to be a writer.

“I always wanted to be a writer, but I realised that you don’t always have to write with words. When I began to develop an understanding of design I realised that you can write with visual language. The idea that there are other alphabets – of colour, form and shape, and typefaces – that’s an unbelievable feeling. That’s what my work is about, this amazing relationship you can create between written language and visual language.”

Since 1999 Winston has collected all the scraps of paper, diary notes and typed word documents he has written on during the process of writing a story. When his final draft was written he realised that all the bits of paper he had collected commented on the writing process itself.

For Incidental Data Winston has created a book, Orphan, 2010, exhibited as a series of prints, that contains the final story told through a creative archaeology of his writing process. He has painstakingly cut out the words from his scrap papers and combined the same words into word clouds that form the typeface of the story.

Above: The production process.

http://www.samwinston.com/
**Sam Winston preparation activity:**

Open a dictionary to any page, close your eyes and point to the page. What word is your finger on? Try writing and typing that word in as many different fonts and sizes as possible.

Do you speak a language that is not English? If so translate your word into your own language and experiment with fonts and sizes.
Does the word’s meaning suit a particular font?
Does it look more aesthetically pleasing in English or translated?

Work in groups. Cut out the individual words you have written and combine them with your group’s words. Explain the meaning of your word to the rest of the group.

Work together to make silly sentences adding in **prepositions** as you need them.

**Questions**

Consider Sam Winston’s work and the Sam Winston preparation activity.

As a group discuss the use of **typography** in Western culture compared to other cultures.

Consider what products are advertised during your favourite television program. Examine what they tell you about the culture of their intended audience.

**Key Words:**

- graphic
- font
- typeface
- visual language
For *Incidental Data*, Eatock has randomly placed a complete set of 300 Letraset Tria Pantone markers to stand upright on a pedestal. A sheet of A1 paper is laid on the pen nibs and left for one minute. The second A1 paper is left on the pen nibs for two minutes, the third for four minutes, the fourth for eight minutes and so on until the fourteenth paper is left for 8192 minutes. The pen ink seeps through the paper creating pages of multi coloured dots which are displayed together on the wall of the gallery in the order in which they were made.

As a competitive teenager, Eatock was the second best at drawing at his school. One summer holiday he watched his friend, the best drawer in the school, sketching the view. Knowing he could not surpass his friend’s skill he felt he had to invent a creative way around the problem. Eatock chose to simplify the process, by removing excess information from the image.

“I realised in this instance that the craft and skill of drawing can be overcome with an idea….if something does not come naturally, I search out an alternative way to respond to the problem.”

http://eatock.com/
**Daniel Eatock preparation activity:**

Do you have a favourite painting? Research an image of the work on the internet. Look closely at the lines that make up the form removing all colour and tone. How much can the lines be reduced to still produce an image that can be read as the original image?

Draw your painting counting the number of markings you must put on the paper to produce a recognisable image.

Decide in a group who is the most successful in reproducing the work by using the least amount of lines.

**Questions**

Consider both of Daniel Eatock’s works. How does the installation in the gallery affect the audience’s understanding of the artist’s concept?

Research the work of Jackson Pollock and compare and contrast with Eatock’s *Pen Prints*.

Research Eatock’s practice. What other type of work does he do? What are some of the constraints faced by the artist?

**Key Words:**

dematerialisation, aesthetic
Tim Knowles (UK)

Tim Knowles uses outside forces to make works of art by creating elaborate systems, mechanisms or apparatus to trace random movement and record events over which he has no control.

Knowles is interested in process rather than form, wanting to follow and visually record the trajectory of natural and modern forces that are at play all around us.

Knowles is exhibiting the outcomes of two works for Incidental Data. Postal Drawing records the passage of a Perspex box being sent by parcel post from England to Sydney, Australia. The box contains a white piece of paper and a pen held perpendicular to the paper by a plastic circle tube. The tube moves within the box according to the slant and velocity at which the box is moved causing a mark to be rendered. When the box reaches its destination a visual history of its journey is visible.

Postal Drawing records the passage of a Perspex box being sent by parcel post from England to Sydney, Australia. The box contains a white piece of paper and a pen held perpendicular to the paper by a plastic circle tube. The tube moves within the box according to the slant and velocity at which the box is moved causing a mark to be rendered. When the box reaches its destination a visual history of its journey is visible.

Larch on Easel #1 is part of a series of process drawings made by tying a pen to the branch of a tree and placing an easel and canvas in close contact, allowing the wind to render a drawing.

Left: Mk3 Postal Drawing
Above top: Hawthorn on Easel #1 Foot of Castle Crag, Borrowdale, 2005
Above: Hawthorn on Easel #1 Foot of Castle Crag, Borrowdale, 2005, detail

http://www.timknowles.co.uk/
Tim Knowles preparation activity:

Experiment with the markings a pen can make without the direction of a human hand by tying a pen onto a tree branch. Hold up a piece of paper to the pen and let the wind create a mark on the paper.

What else could you tie a pen to, to make a mark on paper, that doesn’t involve you holding the pen? Write a list of possibilities.

In pairs experiment with the ideas on your lists.

What shapes and marks are made by the different objects?

During this experiment, consider the way you had to think about objects as drawing implements instead of their usual function.

Discuss as a group where the artistic moment is. Is it in the production of markings on paper or during your consideration of the objects around you?

Questions

As a group, discuss the difference between process and outcome. Which do you think is more important?

Research process art on the internet. Why would artists be interested in making this kind of art?

Key Words:

process art
form
apparatus
New York artist Stacy Greene’s photographs document augmented female beauty routines as personal and intimate statements of individualism. The application of a favourite lipstick, manicures, perfume bottles are all carefully documented and displayed to highlight the differences amongst women.

Her Northern American cultural heritage of drive-in cinemas and bottle blondes is prominent in her work and are represented through Greene’s signature style of documentary photography that lies in the grey area between objectivity and subjectivity. Greene’s work is a series of visual lists, documenting the repetition of styles the protagonists or unseen consumers follow to pronounce their individuality. Through Greene’s lens the objective style of documentary photography becomes a personal account of her cultural home giving us an insight into the artist’s background and experience.

Greene’s photographs of women’s lipsticks at the end of their life cycle, when they are worn away to varying degrees after years of use, are exhibited as part of Incidental Data. The documentation portrays the lipsticks as mini sculptures created by the slow erosion of continual idiosyncratic use.

“Most of my photographic work deals with a direct “anthropological” approach, then an interpretation comes into play from there. For instance, the “Lipstick” series is a cause & effect with women’s consumer culture, resulting in a personal, subconscious sculpture.”

Above: Lipstick, 1992-1993

http://www.stacygreene.com/lipstick.html
Stacy Greene preparation activity:

As a class put all your pencil cases in the middle of the room. Consider them from an anthropological perspective. Is there writing on the cases? What fonts are used? Are there images? From what culture do the images and words come from?

As a group discuss what the pencil cases tell you about the culture and cultural influences of your class.

Questions

Greene says her work deals with a direct anthropological approach. What does her lipstick series tell you about her culture?

How is your reading of the work informed by your knowledge of America?

How would the meaning of the work change if Greene was a Saudi Arabian artist?

Key Words:

objectivity

subjectivity

document
Chris Gaul’s process is to consider his *quotidian* existence and the objects that he comes across frequently, particularly the day-to-day *ephemera* that ends up in his wallet. He conceptually places these on a scale, with functionality at one end and imagination at the other and finds that the majority of the daily ephemera he encounters exist at the far end of functionality and little falls at the end of imagination.

Gaul attempts to shift the scale from a functional extreme to a more balanced central point on his personal scale of *utility*. His work uses clever design to do this, reworking bus tickets and library cards to provide the user with a little moment of imagination while still retaining the object’s functionality.

> “Balancing the tensions between efficiency and discovery is the key to creating objects that are both useful and meaningful.”

For *Incidental Data* Gaul has redesigned the humble library card to incorporate music. He uses a set of *binary code* characters known as ASCII, American Standard Code for Information Interchange, to write the letter of a person’s name on a cardboard ‘library card’. The card is hole punched in place of the 0s of the binary code. The card is then fed through a music box which was designed to read and play music by reading holes in sheets of paper. In Gaul’s work however, instead of a classical piece of music, the sound of the person’s name is heard.

*Library Card, 2010*
**Chris Gaul preparation activity:**

Choose an activity that you do often, catching the bus, cleaning your teeth, cooking your favourite cake. Sketch the sequence of steps in the storyboard on the next page.

What is another way you could visually communicate the process? Diagram, graph, brainstorm cloud, images, words, arrows?

Try to communicate the process in a completely different way then give your visual information to a friend, can they understand your directions? What do they think it means?

**Questions**

Gaul uses everyday life as a source of ideas and inspiration. Research the work of other Australian contemporary artists that also use everyday life as a source of inspiration.

Compare and contrast Gaul’s work with one of your researched artist’s work.

**Key Words:**

quotidian, ephemera, utility
Christopher Baker is concerned with the relationships between society and technology. His work attempts to register the scale of human interaction and communication in personal, local and global contexts. Baker often uses contemporary technology to playfully portray ways in which we navigate public space whether it is physical, digital or conceptual.

Baker’s work for Incidental Data is titled American Toys and is a collection of all the United States’ patents containing the term ‘toy pistol’ from 1800 to today. These separate patents are presented in a gridded 2D format and also as a video that combines all the images, blending them together to create a collective example of the American toy pistol.

“Trained first as a scientist and only recently as an artist, my practice represents an uneasy balance of eager technological optimism, analytical processes, deep-rooted scepticism and intuitive engagement.”

http://christopherbaker.net/
Christopher Baker preparation activity:

Research images of toy guns on the internet. Do you think there are a lot? Are they too similar to real guns?

In a group, discuss the use of toy guns in your culture and how you think it could affect people’s behaviour as adults.

Questions

Baker’s video piece combining all the toy gun patents in America forms one generic blurry pistol shape. What meaning can be drawn from the signs and symbols he has used?

What issues is Baker raising about violence and popular culture? What mediums and techniques does he use to communicate his ideas?

Baker has sourced his imagery from patented images that are not his own. Explain the original value of his work despite his use of appropriation.

Key Words:

physical
digital
conceptual
**Glossary**

**Aesthetic** the visual qualities of someone or something usually with emphasis on beauty

**Analytical Process** separating something into component parts or constituent elements over a course of time

**Anthropology** the science that deals with the origins, physical and cultural development, biological characteristics, and social customs and beliefs of humankind

**Apparatus** a complex instrument or mechanism

**Appropriation** to take without permission or consent

**Archaeology** the study of man’s past by scientific analysis through the material remains of his cultures

**Augment** to add to, increase

**Binary Code** a way of representing text or computer processor instructions by the use of the two binary digits 0 and 1

**Brief** a short and concise statement summarising a work order

**Commercial** related to buying and selling

**Conceptual** relating to or concerned with abstract concepts rather than with facts

**Consumer** a person or organization that uses a commodity or service

**Correlate** mutually related

**Curate** to design and produce art exhibitions

**Data** individual facts, statistics, or items of information

**Dematerialisation** to remove or not have material existence

**Designer** a person who devises and executes designs, as for works of art, clothes, machines, etc

**Digital** representing or operating on data or information in numerical form

**Disseminate** to broadcast or spread widely

**Document** to record or report in detail

**Documentation** The objects produced by documenting

**Ephemera** items designed to be useful or important for only a short time, especially pamphlets, notices, tickets, etc

**Font** a complete set of type e.g Times Roman, Calibri etc

**Form** the shape of a thing

**Graphic** the process of drawing according to mathematical principles in the form of diagrams, graphs, pictures, and symbols

**Idiosyncratic** a characteristic, habit, mannerism, that is peculiar to an individual

**Misconception** to not understand or have a false belief about something
Glossary

**Modernism** a philosophical, aesthetic, social and political period occurring in the late 20th century and first half of the 21st century

**Narrative** story

**Objectivity** to not be influenced by personal feelings, interpretations, or prejudice

**Patent** the exclusive right granted by a government to an inventor to manufacture, use, or sell an invention for a certain number of years

**Perpendicular** meeting a given line or surface at right angles

**Physical** of or relating to the body, as distinguished from the mind or spirit

**Postmodernism** a philosophical, aesthetic, social and political period following from modernism

**Preposition** short connecting words used before a noun or pronoun

**Process** a method of doing or producing something in the course of time

**Process Art** art that emphasises process rather than object

**Protagonist** the leading character of a literary work, film or other narrative

**Public Space** a social space that is open and accessible to all, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age or socio-economic level

**Qualitative** distinction based on quality

**Quantitative** distinction based on amount

**Quotidian** daily

**Render** to cause to be or become

**Revel** to take great pleasure or delight

**Scepticism** doubt or unbelief

**Subjectivity** to be influenced by personal feelings, interpretations and/or prejudice

**Subconscious** existing or operating in the mind beneath consciousness

**Technological Optimism** the belief that technology can resolve the problems facing humanity

**Trajectory** the curve described by a projectile in its flight e.g a rocket

**Typeface** a set of one or more fonts, in one or more sizes, designed with stylistic unity

**Typography** the selection and planning of type for printed matter

**Utility** the quality of being useful

**Velocity** the rate of speed with which something happens or moves

**Visual Language** means of communicating with written words, images or objects instead of verbal language

**Whimsical** spontaneously fanciful or playful
Further research

Websites:

http://katezoe.blogspot.com/
http://www.timknowles.co.uk/
http://eatock.com/
http://www.stacygreene.com/lipstick.html
http://chrisgaul.net/
http://christopherbaker.net/
http://www.samwinston.com/

Online talks:

http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/joann_kuchera_morin_tours_the_allosphere.html
http://www.ted.com/talks/hans_rosling_at_state.html

Books:


Fletcher, Alan, The Art of Looking Sideways, Phaidon, London 2001


Newark, Quentin, What is Graphic Design, Thames and Hudson, Australia, 2007

Tholenaar, Jan, Type: A Visual History of Typefaces and Graphic Styles, Taschen, London 2010
This resource has been written by Alice McAuliffe, Education and Outreach Coordinator, UTS Gallery.

This Project supports the UTS Widening Participation Strategy (WPS). The WPS is assisted by the Australian Government through funding from the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) distributed by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DWEER).