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Draft Writing - Positions through Triangulation

Introduction:

Part 1: Summary of Current Research Topic/Project and Research Methods Used
This project investigates how gestures, as a form of visual communication, can challenge the notion of universality in cross-cultural interpretation.
Building upon explorations from previous units, my research project posits that gestures are "things" that inherently carry information like language, capable of conveying diverse messages such as emotions, objects, etc. In this unit, I primarily examined how the visual language derived from different gestures can lead to cultural differences in interpretation across contexts, challenging the notion of gesture universality. I attempted to translate gestures into simplified symbols using translation methods, and through cataloging, I compiled diverse interpretations of these gesture symbols within the same visual frame across different cultural backgrounds. My research culminates in a "newspaper" format. As a non-linear reading medium, the newspaper allows viewers to freely jump between pages—much like how the meaning of gestures is constantly reconstructed and reinterpreted by different observers. This mirrors the diversity and instability inherent in cross-cultural communication. Each panel represents a fragmentary dialogue between a gesture and its context, inviting viewers to reconsider the true meaning of a "universal visual language."

Part 2: Otto Neurath's Isotype System (My Selected Reference)
My reference is Otto Neurath's Isotype system. ISOTYPE works as a pictographic language, sharing information and statistics through image combinations. Its graphic elements are consistent and aim for universal use, acting as an auxiliary language for many fields.
My research, like Neurath's ISOTYPE, aims to transform information into graphic symbols, exploring the potential for cross-cultural and cross-contextual communication through visual language. However, our objectives are opposite: Neurath pursued the standardization and universality of visual language, aiming for people across all cultures to understand these graphic messages. My experiments with gestures primarily aim to explore the ambiguity and instability of visual language across cultural contexts, questioning the universality of gestures.

Common Ground:

- Using graphic symbols to convey information, an exploration of non-verbal communication
- Believing graphics can enable barrier-free communication, potentially making interaction simpler and smoother than language
- Attempting to use graphics across diverse contexts, hoping for successful, readable results

- Striving to present graphics in the simplest form, relying on combinations of lines and color blocks while omitting detail

Differences:

- Otto Neurath's ISOTYPE primarily aimed to establish a universal visual language transcending cultures and languages. Its highly simplified graphic symbols achieved precise, equitable information transmission to diverse audiences, eliminating subjective interpretations and preventing misunderstandings. This approach treated graphic symbols as a "factual language" devoid of emotional connotations.
- I use hand gestures as visual symbols. Despite extreme simplification, interpretations still carry cultural baggage. Consider how hailing a taxi with a hand gesture varies across countries. What constitutes a "wave" in China might convey entirely different meanings in the United States or Japan. Beyond such cultural distinctions, the interpretation of gestures also hinges on each individual's emotional association with them. Gestures are not merely empty vessels; they possess vitality and emotional resonance, inevitably infusing personal feelings into the viewer's interpretation.

Influences on Future Project Development:

Otto Neurath's rational approach to creating a series of graphic symbols and reconfiguring them within diverse contexts to convey information across fields has prompted me to rethink my research methodology. I no longer confine myself to fragmented visual creations of gestures. Defining contexts helps audiences better grasp my themes. Thus, I plan to transform my subject into a visual archive—specifically, an archive of traffic gestures across cultural contexts. This archive will categorize and document how gestures evolve, develop, and are applied in diverse cultures. Unlike Otto Neurath's neutral approach, I aim to emphasize the openness and fluidity of my visual archive. I have ceased pursuing standardized gesture symbols, shifting from a presentation of "universality" to one of "diversity." I envision my experimental project as a dynamic, fluid information space where audiences can also engage in cultural exchange.

Conclusion: Findings Summary / Future Research Directions:

My research reveals that the meaning of visual symbols is unstable, perpetually shifting within the currents of cultural collision and reinterpretation. This leads me to question whether the "universality" of visual language truly resides in fixed symbols, or rather in humanity's ongoing efforts to understand one another. I will conduct further experiments specifically on gestures, aiming to establish them as a fluid, living language while maintaining a degree of standardization.