

This semester, my project primarily focused on exploring the multiplicity and instability of visual language across linguistic and cultural contexts through experiments with gestures, questioning the universality of gestures. By simplifying and reinterpreting gestures and placing them within different cultural frameworks, I examined the variations in how people from diverse backgrounds interpret the same visual symbols. This approach revealed the inherent limitations of universal symbolism in gesture-based communication.

My initial conceptual exploration began with the second unit, “Positions through Iterating.” Here, I iteratively simplified 120 gestures and tool-holding postures, deconstructing and reconfiguring gestures alongside held objects to investigate whether gestures could function as independent communicative media detached from physical objects. Through a series of experiments, I discovered that gestures often require contextual cues from the surrounding scene and held objects to aid comprehension. Isolated gestures may lead to differences in public understanding. Subsequently, in the “Positions through contextualising” unit, I extracted “objects” as the core thread from the previous unit. I attempted to explore the gap between my past experiences and perceptions by using a specific object—in this case, a suitcase—as a medium.

Building on the divergent thinking and experimentation from these two units, I aimed to refine my core question into something more critical and detailed. I focused my attention on gestures. Gestures are commonly used as a means of communication, but what challenges arise in cross-cultural audience comprehension?

During this semester's exploration, specifically in Δ 1, I primarily conducted visual experiments. By organizing and simplifying various gestures into visual symbols, I placed them in different contexts to reveal how their meanings become fluid based on the audience's interpretation. For instance, the thumbs-up gesture can be interpreted in multiple ways depending on audience habits and backgrounds: 1) signifying praise, 2) indicating a roadside hail for a taxi... demonstrating inherent instability. Building on this discovery, I further attempted to have individuals from diverse backgrounds use identical gestures to convey information within a visual frame. I provided audiences with specific contextual scenarios and a set of gesture symbols, encouraging them to combine these elements to create new narratives. I also experimented with newspapers as a non-linear medium to document this process. This fragmented reading logic mirrors my project's exploration of “gestures as visual language,” as gesture interpretation is inherently fluid and non-unidirectional. Through this visual experiment, I also discovered that these visual symbols lack the universality of road signs or data analysis icons. The meaning of gestures remains unstable, perpetually navigating cultural collisions and interpretive fluidity.

In Δ 2, I referenced Otto Neurath's Isotype system. His project similarly explored establishing a universal visual language across cultures and languages. However, his core objective was to render visual symbols neutral—devoid of specific emotional connotations—to convey messages impartially to audiences. Consequently, his symbols carried no potential for ambiguity in the public eye. Inspired by this, I realized that despite extreme simplification, my project still invites interpretation through cultural lenses. This difference in approach to visual symbols stems from our distinct contextual backgrounds: in his era, rapid information transmission demanded

precise, equitable, and swift media. Today, with information's explosive growth, social media already serves as a primary means for pure information exchange. Precisely because of this environmental disparity, universality is no longer the standard I pursue in my experimental goals. Instead, I focus more on revealing the ongoing interpretation of these emotionally charged gestural symbols.

Therefore, in my subsequent exploration, I aim to create a “fluid” public archive. This archive invites viewers to collectively participate in constructing and interpreting the meanings of gestures within it, embodying and documenting the exchange between different cultures. Moving forward, I will further refine this “fluid archive” to investigate whether the “universality” of visual language truly resides in fixed symbols or in humanity's ongoing efforts to understand one another.