I LOOK BUT DO I SEE?

The application of visual design grammar in an

introductory image analysis discussion course

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

An aim in arts education is to develop the skill to talk about art. This goal was combined with years of teaching experience in English discussion and resulted in the development of an introductory image analysis discussion course. The theoretical basis for the course was provided by the visual design grammar theory of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. Their book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996) uses the design elements of color, perspective, framing and composition to show how visual design communicates meaning in contemporary Western culture where visual design has two major roles. It represents the world surrounding and inside us and communicates within a social context. Visual design grammar is not widely accepted. It was hoped that this controversial nature would spur discussion and expression of opinions. The central research question of this thesis looks at how visual design grammar functions as a teaching framework in an introductory image analysis discussion course.

The material for this thesis was obtained through a 3-tiered action research project involving the planning, execution and evaluation of a course called *I look but do I see? An introductory discussion course in image analysis*. Through a 5-step process of active observation utilizing the life experiences of the participants it was hoped that students would begin to acknowledge and discover how visual images can be interpreted in numerous ways and hold many levels of meaning. This exploration can be achieved and enhanced through verbal interaction with others. Through this exchange of ideas, the aim was to develop the confidence, courage and ability to participate in group discussions.

The results of the research showed that while students did not agree with all of Kress and van Leeuwen's ideas, they look at images in a more critical and aware manner after having approached images from the 13 points of visual design grammar. The application of the theory in practice revealed that their ideas are most fitting for popular print media and in particular advertisements.

There was an equal balance of agreeing and disagreeing with fellow classmates and with the ideas of visual design grammar. The overwhelming majority of students believed that visual design grammar is an effective platform from which to discuss visual images. In the final evaluation of their own performance, students expressed the opinion that they had become more proficient in image analysis and discussion.

Pedagogical issues were also explored. It was found that a more fluent approach would serve the needs of the course. This includes streamlining image analysis worksheets, classroom exercises, and schedules. In summary, visual design grammar is a viable alternative to ignite discussion about our very visual world.

Asiasanat image analysis, visual design grammar, english discussion course, action research, pedagogy
Säilytyspaikka Department of Art and Culture Research
Muita tietoja

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PART I

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1 Introduction

If all else fails,
bring out the folder
of magazine clippings.

It was my plan B.

It hardly ever let me down.

I always had it with me.

In my ten years of creating learning environments conducive to discussion in English by non-natives, I have experimented with many methods to get people to speak in a group. One of the most successful ways I discovered was to put an image in front of them. The image acts as a catalyst for discussion. People react to what they see in some way. It comes naturally and gives them confidence to say what comes to their mind. I also believe that for some people, the image acts as a focal point and takes the attention and pressure away from the speaker. An image is loaded with meanings and open to an infinite amount of interpretations. The fact that people can look at the same image and express different reactions and opinions is intriguing.

As a student of arts education, I am interested in applying my teaching experience to a more specific type of discussion – Arttalk. The University of Jyväskylä study guide for the Faculty of Humanities states that a central aim in arts education is the skill to talk about art.[1] What does this mean in practice? How broad of an area does this encompass? What about the field of media images and their interpretation? The website for the Department of Art and Culture Research claims that a current challenge for arts education is the increasing importance of media education.[2] What kind of teaching could be developed to explore this area at an introductory level?

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[1] Jyväskylän yliopisto, Humanistisen tiedekunnan opinto-opas, 1998-2000, p. 230
[2] http://www.jyu.fi/taiku/index/.php?p=eng_arteducation referred to 29.03.2004

The above questions directed my research. In the beginning I assumed that being able to talk about visual images fluently and being visually literate were identical. Through reading literature in this field I found the definition of visual literacy to be much broader than I first realized. In some definitions being able to 'read' our visual environment encompasses such areas as sign language. I decided to narrow my area of concentration to the analysis of still printed images.

I was struck by the apparent polarization of context-centered theories and formalist-centered ideas within visual literacy definitions of still images. Some of that can be explained chronologically, but it still seemed that an approach to visual literacy combining both context (history, social factors, politics, etc.) and formal qualities (color, line, composition, etc.) would be appropriate. My goal was to find a more middle-of-the road theory that could act as a platform to discuss visual images in an introductory image analysis course for polytechnic students.

Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen offer one such method of image interpretation involving context and formal elements in the book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996). They use the design elements of color, perspective, framing and composition to show how visual design communicates meaning in contemporary Western culture. The back cover of their book makes such bold assertions as "the first systematic and comprehensive account of the grammar of visual design" and "an invaluable 'tool-kit' for reading images", that it is hard not to be curious about their theory.

Kress and van Leeuwen believe that the work done in visual semiotics up to this point has concentrated on 'vocabulary' – the significance of individual people, places and things shown in images. They see their theory as more like grammar in that it examines how these people, places and things are used to produce a meaningful whole. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 1.)

Visual design grammar is based on the idea that visual design has two major roles. It represents the world surrounding and inside us and communicates within a social context. The theory is broken down into three sections or metafunctions that describe the way images represent relations in Western society. The ideational metafunction looks at how the people, places and things that are depicted in images relate to each other. The interpersonal metafunction concentrates on the relations between the image and its viewer or the things we can do to or for each other with visual communication. The third metafunction, textual, deals with composition and how representations and communicative acts come together into a meaningful whole. Kress and van Leeuwen strived to develop a theory that covers all kinds of images from business diagrams to abstract art. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 13, 40-41.)

The material for this thesis was obtained through a 3-tiered action research project involving the planning, execution and evaluation of a course called *I look but do I see? An introductory discussion course in image analysis.* Visual design grammar was chosen as the theoretical framework for this course for a number of reasons. It is a relatively new theory and has not received a lot of attention. This 'virgin ground' makes it interesting as an alternative method. Visual design grammar encompasses contextual and formalistic qualities. It does this in an almost naive way. Their ideas seem a bit simplified which on the one hand makes it appear easy to understand while on the other hand offers room for debate. I believe that a catalyst for discussion can be information that surprises, irritates, or contradicts what one believes. Due to the controversial nature of visual design grammar (art is free and unpredictable vs. Western culture has reoccurring patterns of representation that are detectable), I believe it may ignite discussion more than a commonly held belief (ex. Rudolf Arnheim) would. In expressing opinions and reacting to others, students may become more proficient in interpreting images and discussing.

Thus the research question for this thesis is: How does visual design grammar function as a teaching framework in an introductory image analysis discussion course? In other words, my thesis offers an example of how a discussion course in image analysis could be organized.

Media often raises the issue that reading among young people has decreased. The importance of visual images is in strong competition with the written word. It seems as if there is a prevalent view that the use of pictures implies that information can be received in a fun, easy and unnoticeable manner as opposed to text. (ex. Viitanen 2004, 17) As more and more information and entertainment is acquired through non-print media, the ability to think critically about the images presented becomes a necessary skill.

The idea behind the course, *I look but do I see?,* is to have students take a closer look at our visual culture. We live in a world of instant gratification. I'm hungry. I eat. I see an image, o.k., next. As if seeing and registering an image in our mind after 10 seconds is done and ready. What about the possibility of stopping and allowing a visual image to open up before us? Do we see everything at first glance? (also see Perkins 1994)

Through a 5-step process of active observation utilizing the life experiences of the participants it is hoped that students will begin to acknowledge and discover how visual images can be interpreted in numerous ways and hold many levels of meaning. This exploration can be achieved and enhanced through verbal interaction with others. In my opinion coursework is successful if it opens up the world of images a little more to the students and makes them more critical. The course will not concentrate on 'teaching' the grammar of visual design. The ideas of Kress and van Leeuwen will act as a springboard to further understand visual images and express one's own opinion. Discussion centering on the critique of visual design grammar is just as valuable, if not more valuable, than blindly accepting what they have to offer. I think it is important to stress that the meaning found in images according to this theory should not be compared to the 'truth'. It is one approach among many. A central question to ask in my opinion is: Does a theory raise discussion in which participants look at images in a new light and ponder the possible meanings that visual images hold? If so, then it is an appropriate tool to use in the classroom. Sirkku Kotilainen states that different forms of media or their interpretation is not to be judged right or wrong in media education rather the student should be made aware of different

strategies and techniques in the production, expression and reception of media text (Kotilainen 1999, 35-36).

This thesis is divided into four parts. The first section concentrates on image analysis with a look at definitions of concepts used in this paper and a brief description of the current educational situation. Various models of interpreting images are introduced although the emphasis is on the visual design grammar theory of Kress and van Leeuwen.

The second part describes methodology used in carrying out research and planning coursework. Action research is described and studies are presented that support claims concerning the effects of discussion groups on learning and the use of controversial topics in the classroom.

Part three is the heart of this paper as it depicts the 3-tiered action research project entitled *I look but do I see? An introductory discussion course in image analysis.* The ideology of the course is explained within the overview of the project. Then my observations as well as student feedback and exercises offer a glimpse of what went on in the classroom.

The final section, part four, attempts to pull together the ideas of the previous three parts. How does the visual design grammar approach of Kress and van Leeuwen function in the classroom? The results of the action research project are summarized here and conclusions are drawn.

2 Definitions and current educational context

This thesis is concerned with talking about visual images. Images are the oldest form of recording and transmitting information. Visual expression dates back 30 000 years while the written word is about 7000 years old. (Hietala 1993, 9.) The terms *picture* and *image* are used interchangeably in this field. When I hear the word picture I think of a painting or photo, not necessarily i.e. an ad that includes text or a digitally produced album cover. In my exploration of the area I wanted to include the analysis of many forms of visual communication and thus I decided that the term image is more encompassing than picture. Image can of course also refer to imagination, concept, statue, semblance, impression, etc. In a quick survey on the Internet when entering the words image analysis into the search engine, one receives a mass of sites referring to a mathematical approach to digital image processing in the computer field. Media text is a term used to describe any form of media that includes a narrative message. An essential element is that it includes text, pictures or other visual signs and sounds together or apart. (Kotilainen 1999, 40.) In order to avoid confusion I will need to define my subject area as the analysis of still printed images.

2.1 Talking about images

The goal of image analysis is to examine pictorial representation in relation to criteria decided on beforehand. Images can be approached from an infinite amount of perspectives. It is important to acknowledge the aims of the analysis. An image could be approached as visual expression, an object to be experienced, a form of communication, a cultural-historic product, etc. Each one of these analysis perspectives would require different questions. This kind of goal-oriented approach includes theory and practice. While it is important to include personal reactions in image analysis, a strictly intuitive interpretation can often lead to hasty results. When analyzing images it is important to remember that in addition to the contents, the formal qualities play an important role. The 'reading' of images requires a certain competence of the viewer even though the surface content of many images is recognizable to the masses. All

images, which include an interpretive message, are in some way linked to a time and culture. Fully appreciating the image involves knowledge about these kinds of background influences. Analysis is always subjective as the interpreter's personality, temperament, values, and opinions influence how the picture is 'read'. (Anttila 1996, 256-261.)

A frequent term heard in arts education is that of *ArtTalk*. Professor Routila describes this as information concerning what we talk about when we discuss art or "art talk for art's sake" (1995, 26). The forms, contents and concepts expressed in art talk depend on the speaker. We can understand someone's concept of art by examining what he or she pays attention to when speaking about art. (Pääjoki 1999, 96.)

Visual literacy

When I first began looking into the ideas of visual literacy, I equated it with being able to 'read' pictures. I soon discovered what a vast area of study visual literacy encompasses and the myriad of definitions existing. The Clark-Baca Delphi Study in 1990 looked at the ideas of 52 experts from various visual fields. This resulted in 167 different statements regarding the explanation of visual literacy. (Pettersson 1997,47.)

The fact that visual literacy touches upon so many areas of study makes it difficult to confine but at the same time it offers a rich source of interaction and exploration. Sign language and body language are examples of how far visual literacy can extend to. A leading organization in the research of visual literacy is the International Visual Literacy Association (IVLA) based in the U.S.A. It was formed in the 1960s, in part, as a response to the growing influence of television. John Debes was one of the leading forces behind the movement and is credited with using the term 'visual literacy' in 1966.[3]

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[3] http://www.asu.edu/lib/archives/vlist.htm referred to 27.01.2002

He reluctantly defined visual literacy as:

> Visual literacy refers to a group of vision competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences. The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning. When developed, they enable a visually literate person to discriminate and interpret the visible actions, objects, and symbols natural or man-made, that he encounters in his environment. Through the creative use of these competencies, he is able to communicate with others. Through the appreciative use of these competencies, he is able to comprehend and enjoy the masterworks of visual communication. (Pettersson 1997,45.)

As the definition shows seeing is only a part of the process. According to this definition, by developing other 'competencies' one can become more critical in their approach to visual images.

Advertising literacy

As the first images to be discussed in the *I look but do I see?* course are advertisements it is necessary to see how advertising literacy differs from the more general area of visual literacy.

Advertising literacy aids in the interpretation of media phenomenon and advertising activities. It can be further divided into 3 dimensions: rhetorical, functional and aesthetical. The special qualities of advertising literacy can be found in the nature of striving to understand rhetorical and goal-directed communication. Rhetorical literacy is concerned with the understanding of suggestive means. This includes the acknowledgement and interpretation of commercial messages and the potential goal directed meaning. Advertising literacy can also be described as a refinement of perspectives used to better understand the means used in advertising. The cultural importance of advertising is significant as it both illustrates and forms people's view of the surrounding reality. (Malmelin 2003, 191-194.)

Is looking enough?

Being able to talk about visual images is a part of visual literacy. Being literate means a certain level of achievement in interpretation. Even though many visual images seem to open up to their audience effortlessly, the mechanisms used to form meanings and the connections to various visual arrangements are often hidden. (Seppänen 2001a, 14-15.) An inherent dimension of visual literacy is the skill to notice and seek both pictorial and non-pictorial realities in visual images. In this way both what is seen and what is un-seen is considered. (Seppänen 2001b, 36.)

Daniel Perkins describes two kinds of intelligence necessary to gain a fuller perception of art. Experiential intelligence involves first impressions and applying prior experience. It offers a fast, efficient and streamlined approach that can result in a narrow perspective if left alone. Reflective intelligence on the other hand deals with cultivating awareness, asking questions and guiding our exploration with strategies. It is used to direct and go beyond our experiential intelligence. Looking at the subtleties found via reflective intelligence often uncovers the art in the art. (Perkins 1994, 13, 15, 32, 53, 67.)

Why isn't just looking enough? According to Perkins, there are four tendencies or shortfalls of human thinking. Human cognition is disposed to be *hasty* (people reach fast conclusions without deliberation), *narrow* (tend to think in familiar categories), *fuzzy* (cognition is undiscriminating), *sprawling* (thinking jumps from one thing to another haphazardly). This leads to the conclusion that the work of art is not invisible rather it is our way of looking that fails to make it visible. The physical object is seen, but not the art of it. Art is invisible in that it holds aspects that await and hide. What awaits are features that are meant to be seen. They may not be obvious at first but they can be found with a concentrated effort. The aspects that hide are technical devises that allow the work to achieve its intended impact. These hidden devises can open up the aesthetic dimensions that await us. We can see what was at first passed over by looking longer, and in more refined, informed and systematic ways. (Perkins 1994, 17, 23, 31-32, 64.)

2.2 Visual education

Media education and art education include the area of image analysis. They are both concerned, at least in part , with the production and reception of visual images. This area is gaining importance in today's information society.

Media education

Media education is a term that encompasses a vast area of study. The definition of this term depends on who is defining it and what field they are in. Media education is included in the study programs of such fields as audiovisual culture, film science, education, journalism and art research. One thing most definitions have in common is that media education strives to prepare students to interpret and produce media messages in a critical manner. The terms used to define this area of study vary geographically. The British use media education while North Americans tend to use media literacy or critical viewing skills. The Germans talk of media competency and in Scandinavia media pedagogy is used. Kotilainen describes the key areas of media literacy to be the production (ex. how to record a message), expression (ex. what to record) and reception of media text. This skill is needed in written, visual and/or verbal media messages. (Kotilainen 1999, 31-33, 37.)

What is the purpose or goal of critical viewing skills within media education? Terry Barrett argues that images present opinions as if they were the truth, reinforce attitudes, and confirm or deny beliefs and values. Without interpreting the messages of our visual culture we may be unconsciously buying, wearing, promoting or consuming opinions that we may disagree with. (Barrett 2003, 12.)

Art education

Art education can be defined as an area of study that encompasses the production, consumption, delivery, reception, making and experiencing of art. It can also be understood as an activity whose purpose is to bring art and it's audience a little closer together. Central to these tasks is the idea that the artwork, artist and audience form the phenomenon called art.   Art not only 'is', it 'happens' within the reality of our lives. (Routila 1985.) Noted art educator Elliott Eisner argues that art education's contribution lies in the fact that it can help people see aspects that normally go undetected. This ability to perceptually differentiate visual forms can be developed through experience. (Eisner 1972, 71.)

What is the relation between art education and media education? Jarmo Valkola describes literacy in the areas of applied art and media education to mean that people are taught to observe, analyze and interpret art and media content, to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of art and media and to use art and media as a means to express, create and participate in society. He stresses the importance of taking into consideration our own reality as a starting point and developing the ability to see the phenomenon in art, media and life in a broad manner both currently and in a historical perspective. (Valkola 1999, 14.)

Combining media and art studies

The integration of media education into the realm of art education is not without conflicts. One point of contention is the idea that images from popular culture will be raised at the same level as great masterpieces of art. This could take away from the appreciation of aesthetic wonders, as the time devoted to this now is so minimal. In the 1980's Vincent Lanier defended the position of aesthetic literacy. He believed that the purpose of art is to stimulate aesthetic response. This can be achieved both by the popular arts as well as the fine arts. The difference he points out is that fine arts have more artistic merit but they cannot be said to have more aesthetic merit. The shift from traditional art education to aesthetic literacy demands a move towards a non-studio

curriculum. This entitles looking at, talking and reading about art. His dialogue-based curriculum uses the term visual arts, which includes fine and vernacular (common, everyday) art. (Lanier 1981, 155-165.)

Eisner feels the shift from art study to visual culture is one of the more pressing issues in art education today. There are ever increasing demands on education to adapt. One argument is that if art education would concentrate more on the study of visual culture it would be more socially relevant to the real needs of current students. Eisner sees positive sides of this visual culture trend. Art education does not solely rely on museums while context and social purposes are taken into serious consideration. The turn side of this is that the politics of visual culture may become more important than the aesthetics. Art teachers are educated, according to Eisner, to make and appreciate art not to delve into the realms of social sciences. Another concern Eisner has is the transformation of young artists into passive spectators who analyze. He believes that the opportunities to make art "…stimulate, develop, and refine among the highest and most sophisticated forms of human cognition…" (Eisner 2001,9). He proposes that the study of visual forms in context should be integrated into art courses without dominating them (Eisner 2001) .

Paul Duncum, a lecturer in visual arts curriculum, both agrees and refutes what Eisner has to say. He states that the main goals of visual culture art education are critical understanding and empowerment. Stressing image making where students are allowed to explore meaning for themselves can best support these aims. Critique should not take the attention away from creating art yet the open-ended exploratory approach often present in art classes today should be replaced with tasks focusing on questions concerning the nature and function of visual images in society and the impact on individual's lives. This shift to visual culture means a change in what is to be learned about images. The technical possibilities in digital art vary remarkably from paint strokes in expressionism. This will need to be addressed in teacher education. The starting point in visual culture is the students' own cultural experience. As much of current image making is influenced by capitalism there is a shift to understand more than to celebrate aesthetic traditions. Duncum argues that aesthetics is a social issue.

The planning of a theme park involves as many aesthetic considerations as planning an oil painting. In response to the argument that teachers are not prepared for this drastic shift, he replies that change is a slow process and introducing new forms of visual culture one at a time will eventually form a new paradigm in art education. (Duncum 2002.)

There are different means to analyze, interpret or critique images. The next chapter will briefly discuss these various approaches to understanding our visual environment.

2.3 Critical communication skills in the schools

In addition to high literacy rates, Finland is also known for it's leading position in high technology. The Ministry of Education in Finland has acknowledged the challenges that this places on the changing form of education. The Ministry published a committee report in February of 2000 called 'FINLAND CAN READ: Literacy in the information society'. The purpose of the report was to "evaluate the state of traditional literacy in Finland and its development into media literacy as part of modern communications competence." While the future of visual importance seems to be bright, this report shows visual literacy taking a back seat to literacy in general (reading and writing) and also to media literacy. The influence of visual images can be found "between the lines" of the report, but it is not given any significant consideration. Visual literacy is a part of media literacy but is not limited only to media.[4]

The following studies show the importance of various forms of communication in the curriculum of the Finnish schools and the need for development in instruction.

The National Board of Education in Finland recently published a report, which showed that, among other things, ninth graders are lacking in the areas of

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[4] Suomi (o)saa lukea: Tietoyhteiskunnan lukutaidot – työryhmän linjaukset. Opetusministeriön työryhmien muistiota 4:2000, Opetusministeriö, p.4
http://www.minedu.fi/julkaisut/julkaisusarjat/tyoryhmamuistiot.html#2000 referred to 08.03.02

verbal communication and critical examination. Forty three percent of the boys were weak in discussion skills compared to 25% of the girls. The majority of those responded feel that group discussions are a pleasurable way of studying. Those students that chose optional courses in the area of foreign language or discussion succeeded well in all communication exercises. This study was based on the examination of 3900 students in 111 schools throughout Finland.[5]

The National Board of Education also published a study in 2003 stating that Finnish ninth graders fared well in a comparison of English skills among 8 European countries. In the overall rating, Finns placed third behind Norway and Sweden. The Finnish ninth graders in the study were strong in understanding spoken English and received the highest scores in the grammar examination. The study looked at the skills of 11,511 students in France, Spain, Holland, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland.[6] The study did not mention the students' verbal skills. My own experience coincides with the results of this study that Finnish students have a good command of the English language. This is an essential base from which to develop discussion skills.

The national framework curriculum for comprehensive and upper secondary schools is being revised in Finland. Education will be organized according to thematic entities. These operating principles define those areas that will hold priority. Communication and media skills are simultaneously emphasized among the 7 entities of the comprehensive schools and the 6 entities of the upper secondary schools. Comprehensive schools will adopt this new framework by August of 2006 while upper secondary schools will take it into use already in 2005.[7]

Although these studies concern students who are younger than the participants in my thesis courses, I believe that the results found by the National Board of Education show a general need for improvement in the communications

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[5] http://www.oph.fi/pageLast.asp?path=1,434,28963 referred to 10.3.2004
[6] http://www.oph.fi/pageLast.asp?path=1,434,28724 referred to 14.3.2004
[7] http://www.oph.fi/english/pageLast.asp?path=447,488,28326 referred to 10.3.2004

curriculum. If ninth grade students are not developing discussion and critical analysis skills in the lower grades then their needs must be met at a later stage.

The higher education evaluation council researched the importance of media and communication studies in higher education in Finland in 2002. The purpose of the evaluation was to assure the quality of these studies in universities and polytechnics. They found that the border between these two educational systems is often unclear. Among the 35 recommendations they proposed were improvements in teaching methods, increasing international networking and offering courses in English.[8]

In summary, these studies show that media and communication play a central role in the education of Finnish students. The strengths of those students entering upper secondary schools include a good knowledge of English, while improvements are needed in discussion and critical analysis skills. The course, *I look but do I see?* assumes a solid base in English and offers an environment to develop understanding and critical analysis of visual images in a discussion format.

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[8] http://www.kka.fi/julkaisut.lasso?vuosi=2002 referred to 21.04.04

3 Image analysis models

The analysis of images can be approached from many different angles. Examples of these perspectives include historical, technical, experiential-constructive, intentional, sociological, psychoanalytical and feminist. The goals of any particular analysis of an image dictate which viewpoint will be adopted.

What to concentrate on when looking at images? Definitions of visual literacy involving still images focus in varying degrees on the formalistic and contextual qualities of images. When looking at the definitions chronologically, design elements and principles held a much stronger position in the earlier years. This coincides with the ideas of Basic Design in the 1960's and the teaching of Klee, Kandinsky, etc. The aesthetic theory of formalism was also in full force in the 60's and 70's. The importance of structural qualities in these movements was so extreme that there was little room for other interpretations. The creative nature of art was in danger of being compartmentalized.

In some ways I feel that the current situation is a leap to the other extreme. Content, context and consequences play such a major role that the physical image itself appears to be secondary at times. An approach acknowledging the various aspects in a more middle-of-the-road fashion seems to be appropriate. A viable perspective could include ideas from a receiver-centered approach to image analysis. This model places importance on the outlook of the viewer while the image acts as a subjective experience (Anttila 1996, 264).

The idea of finding a middle ground between formalism and contextualism has found its place in current art education discussion. This chapter will briefly describe and illustrate through example three major image analysis models; formalism, contextualism and semiotics.

3.1 Formalism

Formalism, also known as universalism, values art for art's sake, individuality, skills development and excellence in composition. This aesthetic theory

considers form as a prominent feature. The viewer's job is to "read and appropriate the meanings that reside within these aesthetic forms and to appreciate their intrinsic beauty" (Jeffers 2000, 40). An image is thought of as an object to be experienced. It is important to look at *how* something has been depicted as opposed to *what* has been shown. (Anttila 1996, 262.) Formalism relies upon a set body of rules or criteria that all artworks are compared to. It is concerned with the intrinsic or visible aspects of artworks. It does not require any external information. Understanding the visible elements, according to formalism, will provide the meaning of the artwork. (Prater 2002, 12-13.)

Feldman model

An example of this type of formalist approach to art criticism is the Feldman model. It has been popular among art educators in the United States for its straightforward approach. There are four phases that include:

> 1. <u>Describe</u> – recording of information such as title, artist and what is seen in the image, i.e. color, line, action.
>
> 2. <u>Analyze</u> – what principles of design or composition are existent, i.e. balance, harmony, movement.
>
> 3. <u>Interpret</u> – describe the emotions, moods, symbols and ideas not visible in the artwork.
>
> 4. <u>Judge</u> – decide what type of art is being examined (theories of art - imitationalism, emotionalism, formalism) and how effectively the artwork compares to criteria for that specific theory of art.

A problem with this approach is that many types of art don't fit nicely into these categories. Examples of this are functional art items that also serve a utilitarian purpose, i.e. totem poles. The context has obviously been set-aside in this method. Especially in current art education theories this is a major point that has been overlooked. This model has been adapted by many art educators to suit the current demands of the field. (Prater 2002, 12-13.)

3.2 Contextualism

Contextualism concentrates on the functional value of art, collective experience and social aspects. A work's meaning and value must be considered through the context in which it is made. This includes the functions of culture, history, society and politics. (Jeffers 2000, 40-41.)

Panofsky model

An example of a contextualist approach is American art historian Edward Panofsky's (1892-1968) content analysis. He believed that in addition to an image's formal qualities the content and internal meanings must be analyzed. This means looking at how the subject of the image was chosen, what is pictured, who has made it, when it was made and the cultural context. His model includes three levels:

> 1. Pre-iconography This first step involves describing the elements of the image and what it represents, i.e. a tree, people. This phase does not require any special knowledge.
>
> 2. Iconography The second stage goes into more detail concerning the subject matter or meanings of artworks. Here items can be identified and defined. The people pictured in the image might be well known or represent a certain lifestyle, etc. This requires more specific knowledge.
>
> 3. Iconology The third step attempts to compile an interpretation which takes into account the intrinsic meanings and the subject of the image including the historical, societal and cultural contexts. It requires the acquisition of knowledge about the time, culture and political environment that the image involves. The image is interpreted as an object relating to a person and culture.
> (Anttila 1996, 262-263.)

3.3 Semiotics

Semiotics offers one approach to combining formalism and contextualism by concentrating on the meaning of the message being transmitted. Semiotics can be understood as the study of signs. Signs are meant in this case as anything

that represents another thing or person i.e. smooth flowing lines represent love. Sign making can bring what is 'behind the scenes' to the foreground. Semiotics can give form to something other than what is literally represented. (Jeffers 2000, 42; Anttila 1996, 263.)

Semiotics is a form of communication studies that is concerned with the generation of meaning. Within this field there are three main areas of study: the sign itself; the codes or systems into which signs are organized; the culture within which these signs and codes operate. (Fiske 1990, 40.)

The above list illustrates that communication involves social interaction through various forms of messages. The messages are composed of signs, which are interpreted by 'readers' (active receivers) and thus produce meanings. The reader is a member of some group, community, society, etc. His/her interaction with a message occurs when he/she brings aspects of a cultural experience to bear upon the codes and signs. (Fiske 1990, 3.) Many scholars have approached these topics from various perspectives.

Peirce

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839 – 1914) is one of the leading figures in semiotics. Pierce's elements of meaning can be seen in a triangle format where the *sign*, that to which it refers (*object*) and its *interpretant* (a mental concept created by the sign and the user's experience of the object) are all interactive and affect one another. (Fiske 1990, 42.) According to his theory, signs are related to objects in three ways:

> 1. <u>Icon</u> – we can see that it resembles the object ex. photo.
>
> 2. <u>Index</u> – we can figure out that it is casually connected to the object   ex. smoke is an index of fire.
>
> 3. <u>Symbol</u> – we must learn that it is conventionally tied to the object ex. word is a symbol for what it stands for.
> (Berger 1984, 12; Fiske 1990, 46.)

Saussure

Another important name in this field is the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1871 – 1913). Saussure believes that *signs* are composed of two elements:

> 1. signifier **–** sound or image as we perceive it ex. marks on paper

> 2. signified **-** concept for which the sound-image stands

The relationship between the signifier and signified is signification which gives meaning. (Saussure 1983, 67-74; Fiske 1990, 44.) The signifier and signified do not have any natural connection. There is no logical reason why a tall plant should be called a tree. People from Germany call it a "baum" while Finnish people call it "puu". These are all learned conventions. Interpreting signs is always a risky matter as there are no laws governing it. People make their own conclusions depending on experience, culture, etc.

Another important concept is that of code which relates to culture. These codes are "guidelines" in the environment in which we live that affect and influence our behavior. They are often obvious and thus are not consciously recognized. Codes can be found at different levels, universal, national, regional, local and individual. They can be social (greetings), logical (morse code), elaborated and restricted (emotional). (Berger 1984, 155-160.)

Signs are often thought of as words or pictures. This is a limited view as signs come in many other forms as well. Different kinds of signs include objects and material culture ex. jewelry, activities and performances ex. body language, and sound and music. Things people own or things people do tell us a great deal about who they are. (Berger 1984, 24-28.) Signs can also be imaginary in that they exist visually in our mind. These include verbal descriptions, dreams, hallucinations and visions (Berger 1984, 58-60).

Identity is another example of a sign. Berger defines identity as a condition when one is the same as others in certain respects and maintaining a certain cohesive style. This can be shown on a variety of levels: personal (hairstyle),

occupational (uniforms), corporate identity (logo), gender identity (voice), religious identity(cross). (Berger 1984, 95.)

Signs can appear as groups as well. Systems of signs can be found for example in the arts. Understanding how signs are interrelated can aid the understanding of a particular medium, i.e. portrait painting. Signs can also be in groups where some signs are missing. Sign closure describes how we can often 'imagine' what the missing elements are in order to form a more complete picture. Adding to this group of signs can be risky as well. Stereotyping is one example where people all too easily 'complete the picture' to form their own reality. (Berger 1984, 83-85.)

There are other problems associated with signs. The relationship between signifier and signified is not concrete and thus open to interpretation. Our society is filled with signs, which results in competition to get one's ideas through in the intended way. Codes can be confused through the interpretations of the creators and consumers of signs. Meaning can change from one period to another, which puts its reliability into question. Ambiguity can result from signifiers and signifieds having multiple relations to each other. (Berger 1984, 42.)

Barthes

The French philosopher Roland Barthes (1915 – 1980) was a follower of Saussure and literary critic who studied how items of our material culture signify and express meaning. He was the first to devise a systematic model by which the arbitrary idea of meaning could be analyzed. Central to his ideas are two orders of signification. The first order Barthes calls *denotation* and refers to the relationship between signifier and signified. Denotation involves the direct, obvious meaning of the sign. It is in essence a description or label of the signifier. (Barthes 1984, 17; Berger 1984, 48; Fiske 1990, 85-86.)

The second order of signification includes three parts: connotation, myth and symbol. These involve the interaction between sign and user/culture.

Connotation includes the cultural baggage or memories that comes with a sign. While denotation includes a more mechanical approach, connotation takes the human characteristics into consideration. The sign meets with the feelings and emotions of the user and the values of their culture. It is important to ask such questions of the sign as: What does it symbolize? What does it reflect about it's culture? What effect does it have? Connotation is the second-order meaning of the signifier. (Barthes 1984, 17-20; Fiske 1990, 86-87.)

The word *myth* can be interpreted in many ways. Barthes uses the term to mean a narrative way in which a culture explains or understands reality or nature (Fiske 1990, 88). Myths allow a culture to better understand itself. Barthes believes that myths promote and serve the interests of the dominant class in capitalist societies. The subordinate classes accept the myths because their meanings have become so commonplace. Myths become naturalized so that their process and existence are not obvious to all. (Fiske 1990, 132.) Myths can become well accepted in a society and exert enormous influence, ex: the roles of men and women. Myth is the second-order meaning of the signified. (Barthes 1973, 123.)

Symbols play a less significant role than connotation and myths. An object becomes a symbol when it stands for something else through convention and repeated use. Our understanding of the symbol is influenced by history, context and culture. An example of a symbol could be a pair of scales used to represent the justice system. (Barthes 1984, 52-69; Berger 1984, 19; Fiske 1990, 91.)

A difference between Panofsky's model and semiotics is in the reason for analyzing. Semiotics is not concerned with the analysis of internal meaning rather it analyzes the messages which semiotics can reveal. (Anttila 1996, 264.)

Nordström model

An example of how semiotics can be used in practice is Nordström's three level semiotic analysis model for interpreting images.

> 1. The **denotation** level involves basic meanings of an image that are common for all cultures. It is a phase where the details that can be seen in the image are registered. Questions such as the following could be asked: What do you see in the image? Who are the people in the image? When/where was the image made? What happened before and after the image?

> 2. The **connotation** level is affected by emotions. The contents are interpreted through cultural perspectives and are influenced by how much is known about the subject and how it has been experienced. This interpretation should be one that would be accepted by many as being feasible. The signs in the image carry additional meanings that the viewer can identify with through previous experiences and knowledge in this area. Appropriate questions could be: Are there clear symbols in the image? What is the relationship between the people in the image? Is there humor or violence in the picture? What is the lesson, direction or warning to be learned from the image?

> 3. The **associative** level is explored by acknowledging one's own views, past experiences and concepts of the image in question. This includes questions such as: Have you yourself been in a similar situation? How did you react/behave/respond? How do you experience the image? What else does the image bring to mind?[9]

The visual design grammar analysis model, on which the action research project of this thesis is based, is described in the next chapter. Kress and van Leeuwen place their work within the field of social semiotics which attempts to describe and understand how people produce and communicate meaning in

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[9] Anttila 1996, 260 and http://www.uta.fi/laitokset/normaalikoulu/hyperops/viest2.htm referred to 20.2.2002. These sources refer to the book Nordström, Gert Z. 1984. *Bildspråk och bildanalysis.* Stockholm: Prisma.

4 Visual design grammar

Kress and van Leeuwen provide an interesting theoretical basis for understanding visual images in their book *Reading Images: the Grammar of Visual Design* (1996). Through the examination of color, perspective, framing and composition, they analyze how images produce meaning. According to their theory the functions of visual design are ideational (patterns of representation), interpersonal (patterns of interaction), and textual (representation and communicative acts come together to give meaning).

Throughout Reading Images the grammars of written and visual communication are compared and contrasted. This may be explained by the fact that Kress is a Professor of English and Education and van Leeuwen is a lecturer in Communication Theory. They take their ideas in part from written communication and the ideas of Michael Halliday. Kress and van Leeuwen attempt to draw together the study of languages and images as they are so intertwined in communication (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 183). Although they acknowledge the advances in semiotics made by Roland Barthes, they differ with him on one major point. Barthes believed that the meaning of images is dependent on verbal text. Visual design grammar shows that the image is an independent message, which is connected to the text but does not solely rely on it and vice versa. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 17.)

This chapter will briefly introduce the ideas of visual design grammar and shed some light on the critique it has received.

4.1 Ideational metafunction – image content relation

Kress and van Leeuwen stress the fact that images do not just show us visual structures of 'reality'. Images are visual arrangements of representation that offer a viewpoint depending on the institution within which they are produced, distributed and consumed. Images are not only comprised of formal elements,

they are ideologically engrained and carry a "deeply important semantic dimension" (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 45).

Every semiotic act involves interactive participants and represented participants.

> interactive participants – those who speak/listen or write/read, make/view images.

> represented participants - they are the subject of the communication, that is the people, places and things(including "abstract" things) represented in and by images. They are the participants about whom or which images are produced.
> (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 46.)

The first metafunction in the theory of visual design grammar concerns the representation of interaction and relation between the people, places and things shown in images. Objects within an image are shown to interact by the use of vectors or 'arrows'. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 40.) Within the ideational metafunction there are two types of representations - narrative and conceptual. Narrative representations include represented participants involved in actions, events and change –'movement'. A key point in identifying narrative representations is the presence of a vector. Vectors are formed by elements that create a slanting line. The line is often strong and diagonal and always gives a sense of direction. Vectors connect participants and show movement. The context usually relates what movement the vectors illustrate. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 56 –61.) Whereas narrative representations involve some kind of 'movement', conceptual representations show participants in a more general, stable and timeless fashion. They may also be portrayed in terms of class, structure, meaning or how participants are part of a larger whole. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 79.)

4.2 Interpersonal metafunction - producer/viewer affair

The interpersonal metafunction involves the interaction between the producer and the viewer of the image. It deals with the way images represent social interactions and relations. Producers and viewers of images are joined in an

interaction where there is usually no face-to-face communication. The producer must work through the image to get his/her point across. This communication is achieved in part through conventions, values and beliefs of the culture in which the work is made and consumed. Viewers may recognize these attempts without having to accept them. These social interactions and relations are encoded in images. Kress and van Leeuwen believe that this is a language shared by producers and viewers by means of socially determined attitudes. The interpersonal metafunction deals with imaginary relations. People are portrayed as if they were related to the viewer in some way. This enables relations that would not otherwise be possible. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 119-121,132.)

There are three dimensions in which images bring about relations between represented participants and those who view them; gaze, size of frame and perspective.

4.2.1 Gaze = demand/offer

When represented participants look directly at the viewer's eyes, their eye lines form vectors. This creates a visual form of direct contact with the viewer. The producer tries to do something to the viewer. An example of this kind of "demand" is to come closer or pay attention. It is as if the viewer should form some kind of relation with the represented participant. In this way images can be directed towards some viewers while excluding others.

If there is no direct eye contact between the represented participants and viewers, the image is referred to as an "offer". The invisible viewer is observing the represented participant as items of information, objects of contemplation and impersonally as if they were on display. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 122-124.)

4.2.2 Size of frame and social distance

This dimension deals with how close the participants /objects are depicted to the viewer. Social relations determine how near or far we stay from other people. Kress and van Leeuwen look to the work of Edward Hall and Proxemics in this dimension.

When the image involves people, the close shot offers an intimate and personal atmosphere where participants are often expressing their feelings. The medium shot is more objective and social. Interviews often use a breast pocket shot. This distance shows respect for authorities and experts. The long shot is used with strangers and is more impersonal.

Objects take on a different light than people at various distances. At close distance the viewer may feel as if he/she is personally involved with the product. If only part of it is shown there could be a suggestion of action. In the middle shot the object is tightly cropped within the image as if the viewer could touch it but not use it. There is an invisible barrier between the object and viewer in the long distance shot. The product is there for us to see but not be directly involved with. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 130-134.)

4.2.3 Perspective

The third dimension, perspective, is a way to express subjective attitudes towards the contents of an image through the selection of an angle. Images in Western culture can either be subjective (have built-in point of view -central perspective) or objective (no central perspective – shows what there is to know, i.e. furniture instructions). Subjective images impose a certain point of view on both the viewer and represented participants. With subjective images it is important to keep such questions in mind: "who could see this scene in this way? Where would one have to be to see this scene in this way, and what sort of person would one have to be to occupy that space?". (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 137, 149.)

Horizontal angle = involvement

The horizontal angle indicates to what degree the maker of the image is involved with the represented participants. In a frontal angle, the horizontal line vanishing points of the image-producer and represented participants fall within the vertical boundaries of the image. The frontal angle shows involvement, as if the image-producer and represented participants were somehow interacting. The oblique angle shows detachment and not identifying with one another. The viewers see how the represented participants have been portrayed, whether they identify with it or not. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 141-143.)

Vertical angle = power

The vertical angle of an image represents power between the represented and interactive participants. If a represented participant is shown from a high angle, meaning that the viewer is "looking down" to the represented participant, it puts the interactive participants in a place of power. It is just the opposite if the represented participants are seen from a low angle. In this case the power belongs to the represented participant. The eye level angle represents equality between both sides. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 146.)

4.2.4 Modality = credibility

Modality refers to the truth-value or credibility of statements about the world. In images we seek to know if what we see is true, real, factual. An image can represent its contents as if it was real. Judgment of this reality depends on the social setting and history. Kress and van Leeuwen believe that the main standard by which we judge visual modality is naturalism or photo-realism. This means that the more an image is represented like we normally see it – the more it is considered real. This representation is of course dependent on the technology available at the time. In order to trust the information shown we look for 'clues' or modality markers such as color, contextualization (background), representation, depth, illumination, and brightness. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 160-167.)

4.3 Textual metafunction – spatial composition

The third metafunction, textual, concerns composition and the relation between what is represented (first metafunction – relations between the people, places and the things they depict) with interactive components (second metafunction – relations between images and viewers). It looks at the way in which the first two metafunctions come together into a meaningful whole. Where elements are placed gives them information values in relation to each other. Many images are made up of different elements, i.e. text, graphics, photos, etc. Kress and van Leeuwen see all the parts of an image interacting and affecting each other as an integrated whole. Composition looks at the relation of the first two metafunctions via three interrelated systems: information value, salience, and framing. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 181-183.)

4.3.1 Information value

The positioning of elements in relation to each other offers information values. These values are assigned to the "zones" in the image: left and right, top and bottom, center and margin. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 183.)

Left=given, right=new

In looking at the information value of the two sides of an image, there seems to be a pattern. The left side shows the 'already given'. This involves that which the readers are assumed to know as part of their culture. It is familiar and is used as a common base from which to communicate. The ideas are presented as common sense and obvious although not all will interpret them in that way.

The right side represents the new. This is key information that warrants special attention. It is not common knowledge and has not been unanimously agreed upon. This makes it 'problematic' and 'contestable'. Kress and van Leeuwen explain this horizontal division in part due to the reading direction and sentence structure of western cultures. Text is read from left to right with the new information at the end of the sentences. Although information may be shown to

have the above meanings to the reader, inevitably all readers will not receive the message in this fashion. Thus this given/new distinction should be interpreted as an ideological structure that is presented as if these values are significant inn western societies. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 186-188.)

Top=ideal, bottom=real

As with the horizontal division of the page, the vertical sides may show meaning. The top can be connected with the ideal or the promise an image makes i.e. status, glamour, and fulfillment. The upper section seems to appeal more to the emotions and possibilities that are available. This part is often the most eye-catching as well.

The lower section concentrates more on the real, actual or factual. It often shows the product and gives information about it. The bottom is more practical in that it gives details and evidence i.e. photos, maps, directions. The vertical sections are not as connected as their horizontal counterparts. In advertisements there may be a photo on the top and only text at the bottom. This gives a feeling of contrast and opposition in vertical composition as opposed to the movement between left and right sides. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 193-194.) Figure 1 gives an illustrated summary of the informational value fields.

Center = important, margin = subservient

Visual design grammar concentrates on visual images in western culture where central composition is not so common. When used, the middle element often holds a symbolic meaning which brings together those elements surrounding it. The center is shown as the nucleus of the information and the elements situated in the margins surrounding the central element are often similar to each other. Thus there is not a strict distinction of left-given, right-new, top-ideal, bottom-real. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 203, 206.)

The above text refers to circular type compositions. Figure 2 shows how the center is relevant when looking at triptych compositions. In this case the idea of

left-given and right-new is accompanied with a center which connects the two and acts as a mediator. This can also be achieved with vertical triptychs where top-ideal and bottom-real are brought together by the center. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 208-211.)

Margin Ideal Given	Margin Ideal New
Margin Real Given	Margin Real New

Centre
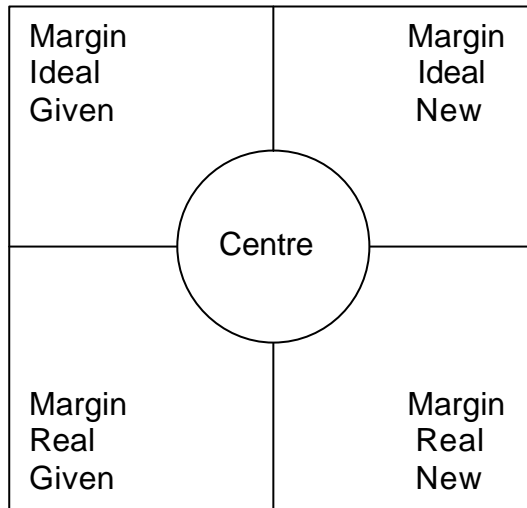
Figure 1. The dimensions of visual space (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 208)

Given	Mediator	New

Ideal
Mediator
Real
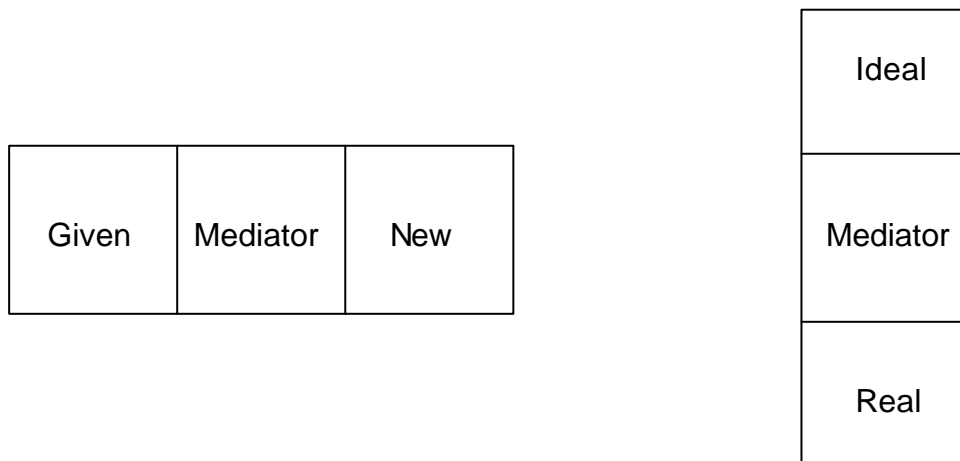
Figure 2. Horizontal and vertical triptychs (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 211)

4.3.2 Salience = eye-catching

Salience describes how the elements in an image are made to attract the viewer's attention at varying levels. When viewing spatial composition we assign a "weight" to the composition. The greater the weight, the more salient is the element. Elements draw attention to themselves and thus create levels of importance. When looking at reading paths of images they usually begin with the most salient and move on down towards less salient items. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 218.) Salience cannot be measured objectively as there are so many variables involved. The following is but a sampling of factors used to achieve salience:

> -<u>perspective</u> - foreground objects are more salient than background objects, and elements that overlap other elements are more salient than the elements they overlap
>
> -<u>contrasts in tonal value</u> - areas of high tonal contrast, for instance borders between black and white, have high salience
>
> -<u>placement in the visual field</u> - elements not only become heavier as they are moved towards the top, but also appear "heavier" the further they are moved towards the left, due to an asymmetry in the visual field
>
> -<u>cultural factors</u> –ex. the appearance of a human figure or a potent cultural symbol–thus they are culturally determined.
> (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 212.)

4.3.3 Framing = connectedness

Framing involves the degree to which elements of an image are disconnected or connected together. Various devices are used to join elements or separate them from each other. This can indicate whether or not they belong together. The stronger the element is framed, the more it is an isolated source of information. Framing signifies individuality and differentiation while without framing the elements are seen more as a group. Framing can be accomplished by dividing lines, actual frame lines, discontinuities of color/shape, and empty space. (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 215- 216.)

4.4 Response from visual community

The response to visual design grammar has been mixed. In summary it seems as if it has been received as a bold attempt to harness a vast field yet it falls short in many areas. One indication of the reception Reading Images has received is the lack of response from the visual community. If visual design grammar really is, as the back cover suggests, "an invaluable "tool-kit" for reading images", then I would have expected to find more than just a few articles about the topic.

Esa Sirkkunen found visual design grammar to be a broad and ambitious tool to interpret images. He believes it offers a consistent method to approach the multiple meanings and levels that images hold. He used the third metafunction, spatial composition, to analyze a photojournalistic article in Helsingin Sanomat. (Sirkkunen 1996, 24-35.) In most of the articles I found on visual design grammar it has been utilized only in part – most often the ideas concerning composition. I have yet to find a thorough analysis of images using all three metafunctions.

Nicholas Addison addresses the topic of semiotics in art and design education. He believes that the art world is "fearful of methodological contamination". He describes the caution connected with attempting to force images into categories and thus narrow their meaning. The use of the word grammar may scare people off from the beginning, as they fear it will define and thus limit and control.   Addison believes that visual design grammar is important in art education because it stresses the <u>use</u> of images, not just their description. This could be a key element in any art program that stresses the importance of the social context. Addison also states that semiotics incorporates a variety of mediums, i.e. word, image, sound, which is a very current theme with the advent of multi-media, etc. (Addison 1999, 37.)

Elina Lahti used visual design grammar in her Masters thesis to analyze 60 advertisements in a Finnish magazine. Her goal was to see how the theory would work in practice and what it would reveal about Finnish advertising. She

found that visual design grammar brought to light the many levels and detailed structure by which advertisements strive to communicate. The ideas of Kress and van Leeuwen proved to be an extremely useful tool for analyzing images. (Lahti 2001, summary, 102.)

Hugh Aldersey-Williams wrote a highly critical review of visual design grammar. He was disappointed that the theory did not show any evidence for their claims in the beginning of the book that not being visually literate will attract social sanctions and that visual literacy will be a matter of survival. He believes that the rules of this grammar are already obvious or intuitive to good designers. Aldersey-Williams criticizes the language used in the text as being difficult to understand. In opposition to Kress and van Leeuwen's academic jargon, he prefers the clearly written work of Rudolf Arnheim to describe many of the same topics. *Reading Images* offers analyses of images as examples. As Aldersey-Williams comments, the interpretations vary so much that the power of these to offer a comprehensive grammar of design is questionable. (Aldersey-Williams 1996, 44-45.)

Veikko Pietilä thoroughly critiqued *Reading Images* soon after it was published. He found areas that are in need of further clarification. *Reading Images* is based on the assumption that pictures can stand alone. They can be interpreted in a context-free manner that can be then enriched with contextual realities. Yet in their analyses of images, Kress and van Leeuwen do not keep to this strict line and sometimes resort back to the context of the images to find initial meaning. Pietilä finds loopholes in the explanation of narrative representations. There are instances where there are actors, actors and goals but what about images that have only goals or movement without actors and goals? Kress and van Leeuwen admit that pictures are made up of multiple levels of meaning and interpretation. This may be contradictory to their grammar or taxonomy where it seems that images fall neatly into their categories. If both narrative and conceptual qualities exist in a work, how will it be categorized? How to know where the limits between categories are? Reading an image depends on what the interpreter stresses. (Pietilä 1996, 78-82.)

Concerning the interpretation of images, Pietilä points out that compositional structures do not produce meaning in and of themselves. The meaning is a result of social interaction. He also questions if some of the compositional structures even function as the theory describes. Pietilä sees a more serious point to be that an interpretation based solely on compositional structures can turn out to be very misleading once the context is taken into consideration. (Pietilä 1996, 78-82.)

Pietilä echoes the fact that visual design grammar does not offer any revolutionary new ideas. What *Reading Images* does offer is a systematic framework of established compositional structures. He states that some of their analyses felt surprisingly competent and offered interesting insights. The theory shows that with a relatively simple knowledge of composition, one can see images in a different light. *Reading Images* offers an approach to image analysis that will help uncover the significant cultural phenomena that images hold. Pietilä sees visual design grammar as an important step in the right direction and he hopes it will spur further development in this field. (Pietilä 1996, 78-82.)

Kress and van Leeuwen's ideas are not all new and innovative. They admit themselves that they "provide inventories of the major compositional structures which have become established as conventions" (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 1). They take them one step further and show how they produce meaning. What they offer then is a unique framework for looking at images. This framework is lacking in some areas. Kress and van Leeuwen claim that visual design grammar covers all forms of visual images yet their examples were, in large part, from popular media. I was often left wondering i.e. how a Mark Rothko painting would be analyzed as 'ideal or real'. The section on salience was left amazingly sparse. The other sections went into more detail as to how meaning is produced. Here, for example, it is merely mentioned that color has an effect without looking at the wide amount of research available. The ideas here could be developed considerably. The work of famous psychologist of art Rudolf Arnheim, among others, would be a crucial addition to substantiate the theory.

The Reading Images theory is of course broader and more in depth than just the ideas I have presented here. The various metafunctions and the subsections are not meant to be interpreted as strictly 'either … or'. Images represent the above ideas in a matter of degree and one image may contain numerous 'sub-images'. This creates meanings in a multi-level fashion that makes their interpretation challenging.

Kress and van Leeuwen have undertaken a massive project and realize themselves the limitations involved. Trying to describe how meaning is communicated in various settings is so varied that it can never be neatly categorized to represent the "richness of the actual semiotic world" (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 264).

5 Summary of image analysis section

This section offers a look into the world of image analysis. The in-depth study of visual images has been chosen as the basis of a discussion course for polytechnic students. This topic relates to visual literacy and the importance of visual images in today's information society. A curriculum in image analysis hopes to go beyond the spontaneous reaction to seeing while balancing on the borders of media and art education. Studies show a need for instruction that stresses verbal communication and the development of critical analysis skills.

Image analysis cannot be neatly defined into a single lesson plan. The area of interpretations is as vast as our visual environment. The goals of image analysis indicate which path the interpreter will follow. The theoretical framework for the thesis pilot course is visual design grammar. This controversial social semiotic approach will hopefully open up the world of visual images to students and encourage them to participate in group discussion

Part two will look at the choices made concerning research methodology and instructional planning for the image analysis course. Action research provides the means to develop curriculum while controversial issues, looking at images and group work steer classroom activities.

PART II

METHODOLOGY IN RESEARCH AND COURSE PLANNING

6 Action research model

The endless possibilities of how to study something and the methodology involved are daunting. I knew I wanted to concentrate on the area of teaching and involve the students' reactions, opinions and evaluations as a part of my work. I looked into questionnaires and discourse analysis but they seemed to only touch a part of the whole. Marjo Räsänen's doctoral dissertation, *Building Bridges* (1998), introduced me to the idea of action research. This form of inquiry seems to be an appropriate means to develop pedagogical methods.

6.1 Definition

Kurt Lewin is often given credit to coining the term *action research* during his work in post-war social problems in the 1940's (Suojanen 1992, 9). Lewin believed in group dynamics and action cycles of analysis, fact-finding, conceptualisation, planning, implementation and evaluation. He is quoted as saying, "research that produces nothing but books will not suffice" (McKernan 1996, 9-10).

James McKernan offers the following definition of action research:

> "Action research is the reflective process whereby in a given problem
> area, where one wishes to improve practice or personal understanding,
> inquiry is carried out by the practitioner – first, to clearly define the
> problem; secondly, to specify a plan of action – including the testing of
> hypotheses by application of action to the problem. Evaluation is then
> undertaken to monitor and establish the effectiveness of the action taken.
> Finally, participants reflect upon, explain developments, and
> communicate these results to the community of action researchers.
> Action research is systematic self-reflective scientific inquiry by
> practitioners to improve practice" (McKernan 1996, 5).

Wanda T. May describes action research as "the study and enhancement of one's own practice" (1993, 114). This simplified description stresses the fact that action research is applied in actual situations where the practitioner strives to deepen his/her understanding of daily functions in the work environment. It is also implies that the topic and purpose for action research comes from the researcher him/herself. It is not governed by external or superior sources.

also implies that the topic and purpose for action research comes from the researcher him/herself. It is not governed by external or superior sources.

Theory and practice can be seen as opposing each other, but this is not the case in action research. Everyday work and research are occurring simultaneously. The idea is to acquire information that will develop the situation being researched. (Anttila 1996, 153.) When combining action research and education, the teacher becomes simultaneously the researcher as well. This dual role may be further complicated when dealing with art education. Räsänen tells of the triple-role that she played in her doctoral dissertation; that of teacher, researcher and artist (Räsänen 1998, 312).

A key feature of action research is the cyclical nature by which it examines the research topic. It is not a method that rigidly adheres to a prescribed route of actions; rather it thrives on the nature of reflection and adjustment to react to situations that arise during the course of research. Räsänen compares the cyclical nature of action research with the experimental learning cycles of David Kolb (Räsänen 1998, 154-155).

Another characteristic feature of action research is the localized nature of its use. The intention is to gain knowledge about a certain situation as opposed to creating generalized theory that could be applied to a variety of situations. The participants in the study are limited and not necessarily representative of a larger population. Action research also does not strive to be confined within the limits of constant variables. Due to these facts, the research is useful to the teacher and students of this particular course. It cannot be assumed that these types of studies will produce scientific knowledge on a larger scale. (Anttila 1996, 320, 322.)

Action research strives to develop new skills and/or approaches to specific topics and solve problems (Anttila 1996, p. 321). I see my own research as falling into the second category. My intention is to approach visual image analysis from a new viewpoint by using the controversial reading images theory as a means to discussion.

In using the previously mentioned definition of action research by McKernan, I would define my research in the following way (my version in brackets):

> action research is the reflective process whereby in a given problem area,
>
>> (the discussion of visual images in the classroom)
>
> where one wishes to improve practice or personal understanding, inquiry is carried out by the practitioner – first, to clearly define the problem;
>
>> (how to raise discussion of visual images in the classroom)
>
> secondly, to specify a plan of action-
>
>> (introduce visual design grammar in an image analysis course)
>
> including the testing of hypotheses
>
>> (visual design grammar, a controversial theory of image interpretation, will spark discussion and deepen understanding)
>
> by application of action to the problem. Evaluation
>
>> (course evaluations by students, image analysis exercises and instructor's observations)
>
> is then undertaken to monitor and establish the effectiveness of the action taken. Finally, participants reflect upon, explain developments, and communicate these results to the community of action researchers. Action research is systematic self-reflective scientific inquiry by practitioners to improve practice" (McKernan 1996, 5).

6.2 Cycles of research

According to Stephen Kemmis the spirals of action research include four phases: planning, action, monitoring and reflection. Action research usually includes many of these cycles as the development of the research is based on comparing the relationship between the observations and reflections of the earlier cycle with those of the following cycle. The insights gained from the

The general **planning** of an action research project is not intended to be exhaustive in the beginning. It is important that it is flexible enough to adapt to the findings of the study throughout the project. In the same way, the **action** taken, which is guided by the general plan, must also be sensitive and responsive to the situation. Appropriate risks should be taken and a critical viewpoint maintained. Discussion and compromise are essential. The **monitoring** of the study sets action research apart from the daily work in question. The various methods of observation and data gathering are the basis for critically evaluating the effects of the study on the actions and environment. While it is essential to carefully plan the methodology of action research ahead of time, the researcher must be open to adaptations during the study. Self reflection includes taking into account the pitfalls and failures that were observed during the study. The purpose of **reflection** is to describe what happened throughout the research in relation to the research question. It is a process of evaluation where the researcher speculates on the meaning of the study and strives to evaluate the results. (Suojanen 1992, 41.) Figure 3 illustrates the above ideas.
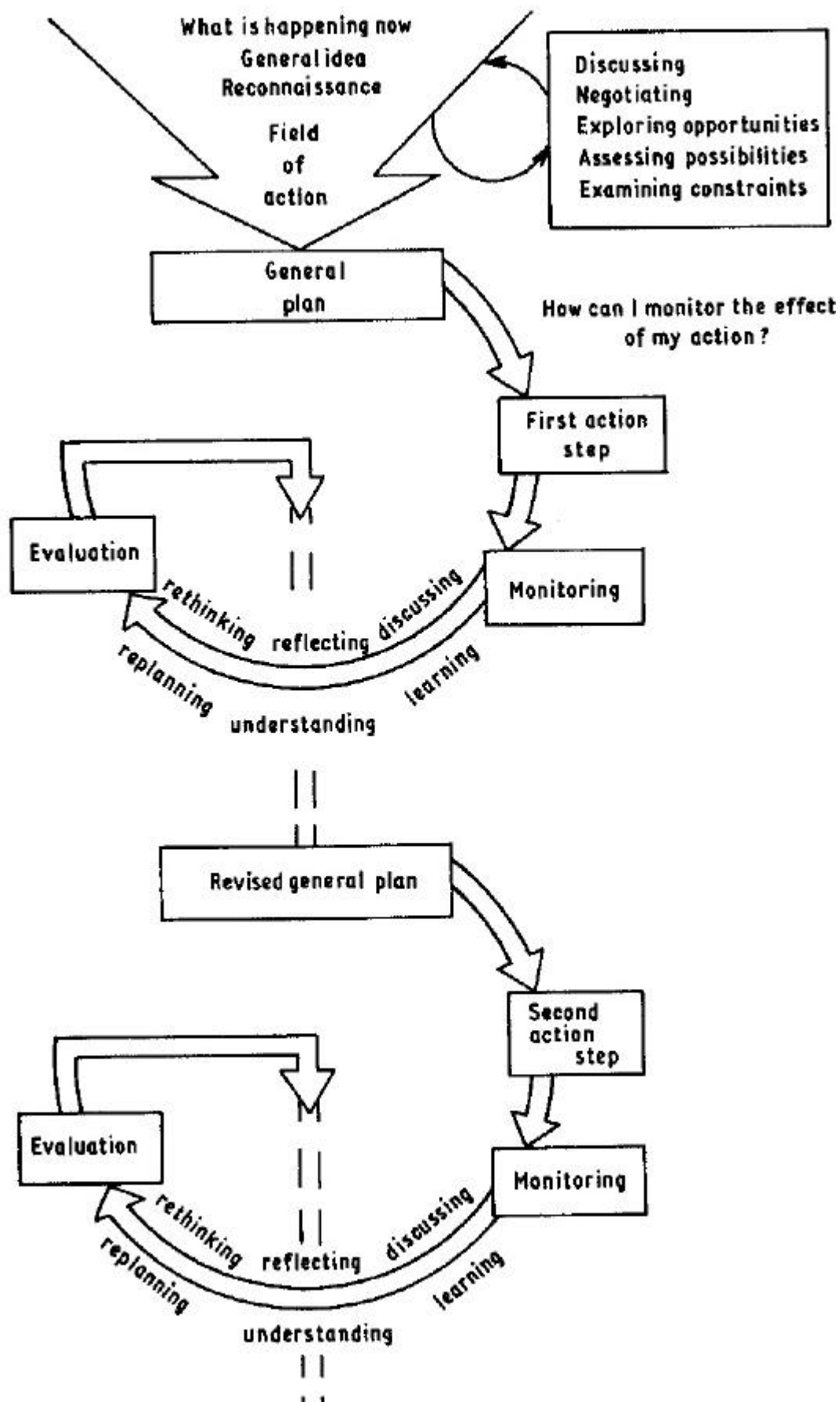
Figure 3. Stephen Kemmis' action research spiral (Walker 1985, 196)

6.3 Methodology

This section looks at the specific techniques used to carry out action research. For my study they include critical trialling, case study, course evaluations from the students, and field notes.

Critical trialling

Critical trialling is a technique of action research that is appropriate when a curriculum project concerns the testing of new ideas. The purpose of this technique is to "gather informed data about the appropriateness, impact, effectiveness, etc. of an innovation while it is being field tested through trials, so that the innovatory project, innovation or action response may be improved" (McKernan 1996, 211). This enables the teacher to gain and evaluate practical experience about the effectiveness of their proposal.

Points to keep in mind:

> - the new procedures/ideas being tested should be given enough time to see how effective they are

> - more than one attempt at using the idea may be necessary to iron out the details

> -all parties involved should be asked to give feedback. Illuminative evaluation or case study may be appropriate to achieve this.

> -copies of the new material should be available to revise and comment on. (McKernan 1996, 212.)

Case study

The case study format is a descriptive evaluative style of reporting. It refers to a "formal collection of evidence presented as an interpretive position of a unique case, and includes discussion of the data collected during field work and written up at the culmination of a cycle of action, or involvement in the research" (McKernan 1996, 74). It is important that a variety of research methods is used to gain a well-rounded description of what happened in the classroom. A case study is not just a report of what happened and when. It strives to interpret and

explain the situation at hand. (McKernan 1996, 78.) The following steps are involved with case studies (adapted from McKernan 1996, 78-80):

> 1. Define the study group
> 2. Define the focus of the study – research question
> 3. Characterization of participants
> 4. Read case studies beforehand
> 5. Negotiate entry to the research setting
> 6. Development of a research plan – breakdown of who will be studied, when (timeline) and why.
> 7. Statement of hypotheses – reading images, a controversial theory of image interpretation, will spark discussion and deepen understanding
> 8. Review literature related to the case
> 9. Detail the methods of inquiry – how to collect information about the study?
> 10. Collect data and record systematically
> 11. Begin formal analysis of data
> 12. Write a case report

The methodology of action research tends to be qualitative or interpretive in nature because studies are performed in actual situations and the goal is often to improve and enhance one's understanding of their actions while exploring what occurs in the classroom but goes undetected in the hurried pace of instruction. Thus such methods as journals, diaries, participant observation, interviewing, dialogue, audio taping, gathering and evaluating documents and students' work give importance to the feelings, narratives and values of the participants in the study. (May 1993, 118.)

Students' course evaluations

As the students and their learning experiences are of the utmost priority, they are in an important position to evaluate and give feedback as to how the course went. The questions on these forms can either be multiple-choice or open-ended questions. Open-ended questions often require more reflection from the person answering and may offer a deeper look into the subject at hand. These questions are more challenging to analyse than multiple-choice, but they are appropriate for action research as they stress reflection and deliberation. (Suojanen 1992, 60.)

Field notes

As this study takes place in an actual classroom setting, an essential method of inquiry is field notes. It is important that the instructor takes notes during or right after instruction. This immediate feedback is a way to capture what occurred during the lesson and record the failures and successes. While there is no strict form for this, the field notes should contain all the relevant information such as detailed explanations of research stages, observations of how study is progressing, feelings and reactions of the researcher, reflections and explanations of events, details of setting, time, etc. (Suojanen 1992, 60.)

6.4 Evaluation and analysis

Analysis of data in research begins much earlier than the end of a report. Matters concerning the evaluation of data should be taken into consideration in the planning stages of a study. A comparative analysis is on-going in action research and should not wait until all of the data has been compiled. It is important to be critical when thinking and reflecting about the research. (McKernan 1996, 219,221,223.)

McKernan breaks the process of analysis into four parts:

> 1. Processing data It is important to make sure that all feedback has been collected and completed. Interpretation should be performed uniformly. Coding can be used to assign a number/letter to similar responses. In this way patterns can be distinguished among the data. In my case the students will probably be answering open-ended questions so that I will have to survey all the responses and create a coding among similar answers.

> 2. Mapping the data This stage involves charting the frequency of responses in tables, graphs, etc. McKernan uses the words "statistical description" (226) to describe this phase. Showing percentages and graphic representation of data will help to draw conclusions in the following steps.

> 3. Interpreting the evidence Now it is time to gather meaning and discover how the findings relate to each other. This is not a clear-cut process and requires continual review of collected data and reflecting on various hypotheses. The emerging patterns are the

basis for model-building. A single clear analysis will not be obvious from the data. This requires the researcher to be creative and look for connections that are convincing.

4. <u>Presenting the results</u> The audience must be kept in mind when clearly reporting the process and results of the study. The following questions could also be addressed: How do these findings "fit" into the context of the study? How do they relate to similar studies? How has the research question/problem been answered or resolved? How could research in this area be continued? (McKernan 1996, 223 – 228.)

6.5 Validity

When looking at the validity of research the question to be answered is how well did the research methods and evaluation tools reflect the phenomenon that was being researched. The reliability concerns the ability of the methods and evaluation tools to give results that can be found trustworthy. The more evaluation tools used, the more convincing the information is. (Anttila 1996, 402, 405.)

In my study the phenomenon in question is the discussion of visual images in the classroom. I chose the action research method because I felt it was flexible enough to react to the changing pace of instruction. I wanted to be able to reflect, evaluate and adjust the teaching to reach the goals I had set. This is the basis of action research – constant adaptation where necessary. The evaluation tools include course evaluations from the students and image analysis exercises. Along with this is the instructor's field notes to record observations in the classroom. I hope this will give a well-rounded documentation of what occurred during the course.

The validity of action research relies on the fact that one's own observations and experiences are reflected in the views of others who have experienced similar situations. A group is always involved when engaging in action research. It is important to have a group of people who will act as supporters and opponents. Through this interaction it is possible to find the problem points as well as the positive solutions and alternatives. (Anttila 1996, 414 – 415.)

Action research involves the use of systematic feedback. The various cycles of research must be looked at from various angles. The research material is not acquired all at once rather it is the culmination of many cycles where theory, concepts and classifications along with the process intermingle towards a final result. (Anttila 1996, 415.)

Validity is based on the successful interaction of various sources of information. Action research offers the possibility to combine experience-based knowledge, empirically proven experimental knowledge (observation based) and hermeneutic interpretive knowledge (based on interpretation of phenomena) and results. If all of these areas are sound in and of themselves, it raises the validity of the study as a whole. The validity of action research can be considerably increased by the systematic inclusion of objections and questions regarding the study. These should be included early on in the process as to improve the final outcome. (Anttila 1996, 416.)

Theory and practice are intertwined in action research and thus theories are validated during the practical workings of the study. As the results of action research do not rely so much on scientific proof, it's validity is concerned with the way the results can help teachers (in my case) perform more "effectively, skilfully and intelligently" in their specific work. (McKernan 1996, 4.)

Action research offers possibilities to approach a practical topic in a flexible way. The researcher is able to be creative and take advantage of personality traits that support his/her work. On the other hand, action research demands openness and honesty in examining the study topic. Researchers must be able to analyse their own actions as well as those of the study participants. Group work is of essential importance with all its benefits and challenges. (Anttila 1996, 416.)

7 Discussion methodology

As the course *I look but do I see?* is based on discussion, it is important to develop the coursework with tools which will aid students to orally communicate. One of the reasons visual design grammar was chosen as the theoretical framework for the course is that it is not widely accepted. This chapter will look at research regarding the use of controversial ideas in the classroom. Another point of this chapter is to look at reasons why image analysis offers an encouraging atmosphere to discuss. The final point concerns the use of small group discussions.

7.1 Controversial issues

When I introduced my thesis idea in the laudatur seminar my ideas were met with some skepticism. Why would I present such 'extreme' views to students in an introductory course? Fellow seminar participants brought up individual points of visual design grammar that they felt could not be true. Others refuted what they had to say. The discussion was quite brisk. I was satisfied. It was just what I had imagined. Visual design grammar spurred discussion after a superficial introduction to the topic. If not as visual design grammar says then what? What influences interpretations?

Kress and van Leeuwen go out on limb to propose that they have created a framework to analyze all Western visual design. Such a bold assumption is easy to react to. Visual design grammar may thus create controversy in a discussion setting. A controversial issue is a topic "for which society has not found consensus, and it is considered so significant that each proposed way of dealing with the issue has ardent supporters and adamant opponents" (Johnson and Johnson 1995, ch.9:7).

The Johnson brothers are probably most well known for their development of cooperative learning where small group members work together and share responsibility for their success and learning. They have also devoted their research to the study of controversial topics in the classroom. Their basic findings are that controversial topics assist in learning.

Thus in the course, *I look but do I see?* the basic controversial issue concerns image interpretation where some believe that art is free and unpredictable while others claim that Western culture has reoccurring patterns of representation that are detectable. Other potential types of conflict in the course involve the various interpretations of images among students and when the views of the students meet the ideas of visual design grammar. Academic controversies "create interest in subject matter and motivate students to investigate issues and points-of-view they would not ordinarily be interested in" (Johnson and Johnson 1995, ch.9:7). Conflict can support creativity, high-level reasoning and cognitive development. Constructive conflicts can result in growth, development and change. (Johnson and Johnson 1995, ch.1:12.)

When the controversial issue is image analysis it is not essential or even possible that students will come to the right or best interpretation in their discussions. Thus I believe that at the core of the whole course is the idea that the value of the controversy is the attention and thought processes it arises. More cognitive processing may occur when students are exposed to more than one opinion, even if the point of view is incorrect. "Hearing opposing views being advocated, furthermore, stimulates new cognitive analysis and frees individuals to create alternative and original conclusions" (Johnson and Johnson 1995, ch.3:9-10).

Controversy is not always a positive source of change. A cooperative context is necessary to achieve constructive controversy. This environment includes a supportive climate, dealing with feelings as well as ideas, defining controversies, recognizing similarities and differences while valuing the accurate conveying of information and controversy. (Johnson and Johnson 1995, ch.3:17.)

The Johnson brothers make the claim that academic controversies result in 1) increased achievement and retention, higher quality problem solving and decision making, more frequent creative insight, more thorough exchange of expertise, and greater task involvement, 2) closer and more positive relationships, and 3) greater social competencies and self-esteem. In order to achieve this, students should engage in the following process:

> 1. "Individuals are given a problem to solve, a decision to make, or a question to answer. They have an initial conclusion based on categorizing and organizing incomplete information, their limited experiences, and their specific perspective.
>
> 2. Individuals present their conclusion and its rationale to others, thereby engaging in cognitive rehearsal, deepening their understanding of their position, and discovering higher-level reasoning strategies.
>
> 3. Individuals are confronted by other people with different conclusions based on other people's information, experiences, and perspectives. The result is that individuals become uncertain as to the correctness of their views. A state of conceptual conflict or disequilibrium is maximized when students a) are free to express their opinions, b) accurately perceive opposing information and reasoning c) are not overloaded with information d) see opposing information as useful e) are challenged by a majority of group members and f) are challenged by valid information.
>
> 4. A state of uncertainty, conceptual conflict and disequilibrium motivates an active search for more information, new experiences and a more adequate cognitive perspective and reasoning process in hopes of resolving uncertainty. Divergent attention and thought are stimulated.
>
> 5. A new, reconceptualized and reorganized conclusion is derived by adapting their cognitive perspective and understanding and accommodating the perspective and reasoning of others. Individuals incorporate others' information and reasoning into their thinking, change their attitudes and position, and use higher-level reasoning strategies. Novel solutions and decisions that, on balance, are qualitatively better are detected "
> (Johnson and Johnson 1995, ch.3:20).

Students who are working together and openly sharing their ideas, information, reactions, intuitions, resources, and materials will inevitably be met with differences and disagreements. They are an essential element for creative insights and fruitful work in a cooperative setting. Controversy, within successful group work, means that participants' opinions need to be looked at in detail, more information needs to be gathered and group thinking needs to be looked at from a different perspective. (Johnson and Johnson 1987, 122.)

Johnson and Johnson believe that initiating controversy in the classroom increases students' interest and motivation. This includes the sharpening of students' opinions, offering new possibilities and deepening the level of analysis and insight. (Johnson and Johnson 1987, 123.)

7.2 Image analysis

How does image analysis offer a fertile ground for discussion? Art educator David Perkins claims that looking at art offers a suitable environment for forming thinking dispositions. A disposition is " a felt tendency, commitment, and enthusiasm" which enables students to mobilize their mental powers. (Perkins 1994, 4.)

Works of art require reflection in order to uncover what they have to reveal. They are also entangled with social and personal aspects of life that affect us. Perkins suggests that art offers an opportunity to develop thinking dispositions due to the following 6 features:

> 1. <u>Sensory anchoring</u> There is a physical object to focus on whether it be an original or copy.
>
> 2. <u>Instant access</u> One is able to go back to the object to confirm or dispute ideas. One can find a new perspective by looking from another angle – figurative or non-figurative. You don't have to rely on memory or read a chapter to check out perspectives.
>
> 3. <u>Personal engagement</u> Art is made to capture our attention and stimulate a reaction. This helps to prolong our reflection.

4. <u>Dispositional atmosphere</u> Looking at art in a contemplative way creates a heightened affect suitable to allowing customary thinking.

5. <u>Wide-spectrum cognition</u> Art not only engages looking. It also involves visual processing, analytical thinking, posing questions, testing hypotheses, verbal reasoning, etc.

6. <u>Multiconnectedness</u> Art often encourages connection with many different facets – social themes, philosophical conundrums, formal structures, personal anxieties and insights and historical patterns. (Perkins 1994, 4-5, 84-86.)

Although Perkins continuously refers to art, I would venture to say that the above could be applied to a wide variety of visual expressions in our society. In other words we can physically hold images in the classroom and refer back to them as new perspectives arise within discussions. They can be the focus of our attention for an extended time as often they have been produced to attract and motivate the viewer. Continued exposure to experiencing and interacting with images may allow for the formation of developed patterns of thinking. Various realms of society can be drawn into the discussion and stir us to ponder, question and gain a deeper understanding.

7.3 Group work

The use of group discussion as a form of instruction has been researched from a number of different perspectives. John Brilhart and Gloria Gaines summarize some of these studies in their book *Effective Group Discussion.* It has been found that group work is often more effective than lecture, video or learning alone. It works with students of varying ages. Meaningful and productive discussions arise when members share differing perceptions of the same phenomena and when the discussion relates to the personal concerns and experiences of the members. The purpose of group discussions is not so much to come to a correct decision or interpretation as it is to aid in the growth and enlightenment of it's members and to appreciate and understand other points of view, perceptions, an interpretations. (Brilhart and Galanes 1995,347, 352-353.)

Other studies have shown that the most influential interaction on student performance in the classroom is when students are interacting among themselves. (Johnson and Johnson 1987, 2.) While not all critics are so convinced of this data, few seem to dispute the fact that a discussion group will usually produce more personalized emotional effects of an educationally desirable nature and that discussion groups are effective if the goal is attitude formation or opinion sharing (Hill 1977, 15).

The use of controversial topics to aid in the interpretation of visual images by discussing in small groups is the approach I used in the pilot courses for this thesis. Part three will look at the action research project in detail and examine the effectiveness of the methodology chosen.

PART III

I LOOK BUT DO I SEE?
AN INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION COURSE IN IMAGE ANALYSIS AS
PART OF A 3-TIERED ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

8 Overview of the project

The action research project for my thesis began in December of 2002 and was completed in January of 2004. It involved the planning, execution and evaluation of an introductory image analysis discussion course. This course was taught 3 different times at two educational institutions in Jyväskylä: the Vocational Teacher Education College and the training center for the Finnish Association of People with Mobility Disabilities. The main focus of my study is on the course at the teachers college. For the first course (tier 1) at the training center, I had less than a week notice to prepare. Due to this, my ideas were put to the test in a spontaneous manner. It was an excellent opportunity to swiftly convert my thoughts to action and get immediate feedback. The last course at the training center (tier 3) began while my main course at the teachers college (tier 2) was still underway. This provided fertile ground to quickly adapt and adjust the exercises and activities from the main course.

8.1 Access

Through my years of teaching experience in Finland I have discovered that students who have completed high school English courses generally have a good foundation to discuss in English. Due to this observation, I designed the course for post-high school students. The polytechnic level of education offers a wide variety of "hands-on" study options for high school graduates. I felt my course would fit this practical approach and so I approached the Jyväskylä polytechnic to see what kind of opportunities existed to carry out my action research project. Through a contact I have there, I e-mailed 3 departments that I thought could benefit from such a course - the School of Cultural Studies/ Fashion and Media Design departments and the Vocational Teacher Education College. This was in early October 2003. Unfortunately most departments plan their study schedules already the spring before the upcoming school year. Although there was interest in the course, it was not possible to schedule it mid-school year. The exception to this case was the Vocational Teacher Education College. Their scheduling is more flexible and they were in need of optional courses in English to offer their international group. Thus a match was made.

I gained access to the groups at the Finnish Association of People with Mobility Disabilities by answering an Internet recruiting ad for a communicational skills teacher. They were looking for a native speaker to teach a 1 credit unit English course to students in a communications program. After a round of interviews I was chosen to begin teaching the next week.

8.2 Course ideology

The course was called *I look but do I see? - an introductory discussion course in image analysis.* The course was held in English and combined theory and practice. We analyzed still printed images with an emphasis on advertisements. Classroom time was spent working in small groups. The discussions were based on image analysis worksheets that the group members filled out ahead of time. The course was designed to serve two interactive functions:

> 1. to acknowledge and discover that visual images can function at a variety of levels and be interpreted in many ways.
>
> 2. to develop the confidence, courage and ability to participate in group discussions.

Although the visual design grammar theory encompasses three metafunctions, I only adopted the last two into my course work. With limited contact hours in an introductory course, I felt that quality was more important than quantity. Even with just using the last two metafunctions we had 13 points to cover which was more than enough. In many studies I have read where visual design grammar has been applied, the first metafunction is left out. Despite numerous attempts to understand and apply the ideas of the ideational metafunction, I was left in a confused state with more questions then when I started. The ideas of the last two metafunctions, which acted as the theoretical framework for the course, can be found in table 1.

Table 1. Visual design grammar framework

Visual design grammar points	Idea in a nutshell
1. Eye contact	direct eye contact=demand, no direct contact=offer
2. People close or distant	close=intimate, medium=social, long=impersonal
3. Products close or distant	close=involved, middle=touch but not use, distant=no direct involvement
4. Perspective	subjective attitudes via choice of angle
5. Horizontal angle	frontal=involvement, oblique=detachment
6. Vertical angle	high=viewer power, low=person in picture power, eye level=equality
7. Modality or truth value	the more an image is represented like we normally see it-the more it is considered real
8. Information values	left=given, right=new
9. Information values	top=ideal, bottom=real
10. Information values	center=important, margin=subservient
11. Triptych	the middle acts as a mediator
12. Framing	the stronger an element is framed; the more it is an isolated source of information
13. Salience	elements draw attention to themselves and thus create levels of importance

Visual design grammar provided the theoretical framework for the course but the intention was not necessarily to memorize it or even accept it. It was offered as a viewpoint from which to compare one's own ideas and the collective thoughts of the group. Before the small group discussions took place, each participant was asked to bring two print advertisements that include an image (photo, illustration, painting, etc.). The images in both ads should include a person/people. The first advertisement was to be somehow pleasing or interesting and had a positive effect on the student. The second one should not be pleasing. It could be boring, uninteresting or for some reason raises negative reactions. In other words, if the advertisements were postcards, you would buy the first one and leave the second one on the shelf.

The decision to concentrate on ads in the beginning was made for a few reasons. As it was an introductory course in a foreign language (for most participants) I wanted to start slow and sure. Ads are familiar to all of us and are easy to collect. I wanted the first "genre" of visual imagery to be the same for all so that there was some comparison point. If everyone could have brought in any type of visual image, then I think in the very beginning it would have made discussion more difficult to compare i.e. a Helmut Newton nude to an ad for Finnair. Through reading other studies I knew that visual design grammar could be often effectively applied to advertising (ex: Lahti, 2001). These beginning exercises with ads would give students familiarity to the theory and help with the interpretation of more challenging visual images later on. While artist and educator Eva Saro believes that advertisements often offer a poor aesthetic environment and depict stereotypes, she thinks that they are interesting in that they help us understand society and their analysis can be enlightening (Kinturi 2002, 21).

The students were to bring both ads they preferred and disliked, as the comparison of the two may be more fruitful than only looking at those images which please you.[10] The students then copied their ads and gave the copies to a partner. Now each student had 4 images – two of their own (liked and

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[10]Idea inspired by the teaching of Kaj Franck, see Salminen, Antero 1992. The teacher in Franck, Kaj 1992. Kaj Franck: Muotoilija. Porvoo:WSOY.

disliked) and two from their partner (liked and disliked). This was to 'force' them to look at images that they might not have chosen themselves (their partner's ads) and also to consider the application of the theory through a number of images. I considered having the student's change images for each worksheet but decided that a thorough look at a few images may be more fruitful in our 'picture flooded' society. I wanted the students to collect their own ads so that we began analysing images from their personal visual environment. This expanded when they interpreted their partner's ads and then again later when they chose visual images from non-advertising sources.

Professor Lauri Routila states that a goal of art education is to "increase the recipient's ability to understand works that he has not understood at all to begin with" (Routila 1995, 117). While I don't equate poor advertisements with masterpieces in art, I think the many forms of visual expression we encounter are worth exploring and understanding. According to Routila, visual images that don't bring us pleasure can be described as falling into two categories. On the one extreme there are banal works or images that offer us no surprises. We understand it immediately and fully comprehend what it entails. We soon become bored and tired with it. At the other end of the spectrum are works that have maximum originality. We lack the skills to interpret it and there are an infinite amount of stimuli we can't make sense of. Without being able to comprehend, our interest weakens. Through exposure and interaction with visual material we can possibly find new dimensions in banal images and something to grasp on to in complex original works. (Routila 1995, 116-117.) By looking at images that don't please as well as images that other's find interesting, I hope that students will develop their skills to appreciate our visual environment.

The examples that are chosen to interpret are very significant. They say something about the person that chose them. The students are making a statement about what they consider "good" and "bad" and reveal in this way something about their relationship to visual images. (Pääjoki 1999, 97.)

Five- step image analysis cycle

Work in the classroom consisted of the following 5-step image analysis cycle that repeated itself many times throughout the course:

1. <u>Completion of image analysis worksheets</u>
Students were given an image analysis worksheet that has a list of questions pertaining to visual design grammar. The theory is not mentioned anywhere on the paper. The idea is to evoke student's own reactions to images in such a way that their answers can be compared later on to the theory. This does not mean that they are manipulated to give a certain answer, rather an answer that can be compared and contrasted to the answers' of other students and has relevance to the visual design grammar point in question. In order to illustrate this point there is an example below from the coursework in tier 2:

Questions from image analysis worksheet:
1. Is there direct eye contact between the people in the image and you, the viewer?

Student's answer: *yes, very clear and sharp*

2. What kind of effect does that have? What do you think the producer of the image is attempting to do?

Student's answer: *The eyes' contact in this picture involves a lot of hidden communication. The woman's eyes and look are/is very expressive. The producer of the image may have wanted to develop our own impression of the woman, position, hidden thoughts or talk.(232)*

The visual design grammar theory says that when people in an image look directly at the viewer's eyes it creates a visual form of direct contact with the viewer. The producer tries to do something to the viewer. An example of this kind of 'demand' is to come closer or pay attention. It is as if the viewer should form some kind of relation with the person/people represented in the image. The student above says that direct eye contact creates a form of hidden communication and the producer wants us to form our own impression of this. When it comes to stage 4 in the cycle the group can talk about the meaning of direct eye contact being a demand

(as the theory says) vs. direct eye contact being a form of hidden communication (as the student says).

The number of these worksheets varied from course to course depending on the amount of contact hours. The worksheets covered most of the points listed in table 1 (page 56).[11] Describing in words on paper what the students see helps to heighten and stabilize perception (Perkins 1994, 40).

In addition to visual design grammar, inspiration for the image analysis worksheets was gained from the photo analysis worksheet of the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration[12] and the work of Art Silverblatt in his book *Media Literacy: keys to interpreting media messages* (1985).

2. Small group discussion before theory

After the students had analyzed the 4 images via the image analysis worksheet they came together to discuss. There were 3-4 people in a group so in addition to each student's partner there were one or two others. The discussion model was that one person would present their two images to the group via the image analysis worksheet questions. Their partner would react and give feedback based on the worksheet he /she filled out for his/her partner's images and then there would be spontaneous feedback from those who were seeing the images for the first time. This would continue until all had presented their images.

The idea was to show that what is obvious in an image to one student might not be obvious to others. The "baggage" (culture, beliefs, socioeconomic status, age, etc.) that we bring to an image can be possibly seen in our interpretation. These frames of reference strongly affect what we perceive. Our interpretation of a situation depends not only on objective characteristics but also on the viewer's needs and history. Each

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[11]see appendix 1 for all image analysis worksheets
[12]http://www.archives.gov/digital-classroom/lessons/analysis-worksheets/photo.html referred to 16.1.2003

frame of reference allows for perception in some areas while at the same time closing perception in other areas. What we expect or know often takes precedence over what we see. (Eisner 1972, 68-69, 71.) By hearing other opinions and perspectives it may broaden one's view of image interpretation. This type of discussion provides a forum to fulfill people's basic need to express opinions and receive feedback.

3. Hearing the theory

After the images had been discussed from a variety of perspectives, I showed a transparency of the visual design grammar points that corresponded to that day's image analysis worksheet.

4. Small group discussion after theory

The students went back to the small groups and compared their answers with the theory. Did they agree or disagree? Was each image an independent case with nothing in common with the other images or was there some kind of underlying framework that could fit a number of images? Could they draw any kind of "conclusions" from their pool of images? Why or why not? What factors did they take into consideration?

5. Expanding horizons

After having looked at their ads from these various viewpoints, the assignment was to take those visual design grammar points that were discussed in the lesson and try to apply them to non-advertisement images. Example: After hearing the ideas concerning eye contact, the students would explore photojournalistic images from the front pages of newspapers and see how the eye contact theory holds up in a new genre. They were given the task to try to "prove" the reading images theory right or wrong or somewhere in between via non-ad images.

This 5-step process begins with the students' own reactions and feelings about an image. The process continues with the addition of various other viewpoints that will allow for a closer inspection of the original spontaneous reactions. This exposure to other ways of thinking is essential to gaining a well-rounded

interpretation of images. Art educator Doris Dondis argues that to see is natural, to make and understand visual messages in part is natural but to be effective in any of these areas requires study (Dondis 1973, 10). Exposure to and discussion of images will allow this 'database' of experiences to increase.

One aim of this discussion based approach to image analysis is to offer an alternative to the actual *making* of images in order to understand them better. The claim that visual images become significant only when one creates their own visual images is sometimes heard (ex. Räsänen 1999, 198). Although I strongly support the 'making and creation' in art education, I don't believe that it is exclusively necessary. One can learn a lot and experience the wonders that our visual world has to offer with out ever having to pick up a paintbrush, pencil, etc. The fruitful means to approach the analysis of images by creating art brings with it a whole other dimension. The making of images can bring with it a fear of failure and school time anxiety where there was no choice but to paint the arrangement of fruit in front of you. To obtain aptitude in drawing or painting requires years of practice. I believe that just as important as doing is seeing, acknowledging and discussing visual images. Somehow I believe this puts the students on a more equal level, where artistic competence does not get in the way of sharing and developing opinions.

Sirkku Tuominen researched the teaching of communications and media skills in Finnish comprehensive schools. The core findings of her study included:

> - The goals of communication/media education include critical thinking, the skills to express oneself and information finding.
> - Teachers of communication courses believe that appropriate teaching methods include ones that stress the students' own participation such as cooperative learning and experimental methods.[13]

Although her study concentrated on younger students, I think these findings can be applied to a wider audience. The five-step process was designed to

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[13]http://www.uta.fi/~jv46809/vipe/raportti/tiivistelma.htm referred to 10.3.2004

enhance critical thinking and expression through participation in self reflection and group work.

The beginning stages of the five-step approach resemble a receiver-centered approach to image analysis. This model places importance on the perspective of the viewer and sees the image as a subjective experience. Thus different people experience images in different ways. The resulting reflective conversation reveals the content of the image that the viewer creates. (Anttila 1996, 264.) The last stages of the five-step approach hopefully create an opportunity to develop and expand on initial reactions.

Educational models

Some elements of experiential learning can be found in the above-mentioned 5-step cycle. David Kolb, a leading name in art education, published a book called Experiential learning. Experience as the source of learning and development in 1984. His theory is based on experiential learning, which is illustrated in a spiral like process where at first the learner's direct experiences are taken into consideration. Reflective observation follows which leads to abstract conceptualization. The result can be active experimentation. A major component of this model is that of self-reflection. This form of instruction is used with adult learners who have years of life and work experience to draw on. The central elements of this theory include the support of personal and social development, the increase of students' self-awareness, being conscious of how one learns, of learning how to learn and views concerning the subject matter. The role of the instructor is one of supporter and coach. (Leppilampi and Piekkari 1998, 9.)

The role of the teacher in the course, *I look but do I see?,* is not very visible in the traditional sense. With exception to step 3 in the 5-step image analysis cycle where visual design grammar is reviewed and explained, I play a role of small group discussion facilitator and organizer. The emphasis is on students' self-discovery and self-expression. Of course it cannot be forgotten that the students have been directed in this course in quite a strict manner.

The constructivist approach to teaching and learning is another important theory in education. Some of the basic ideas of this area of thought include the importance of the students' earlier experiences, being active in the processing of information and approaching new information in an authentic and conducive setting. Learning is both an individual and a social process. Students construct for themselves meaningful knowledge as a result of their own activities and interaction with others. Both the constructivist and experiential learning methods encourage students' reflection and focus on personal development. Independent negotiated learning or group work are a basis for problem or project-based learning. (Leppilampi and Piekkari 1998, 8.) With the help of these current trends in art education I hoped to create a learning environment conducive to finding a deeper understanding of our visual environment.

8.3 Tier one – Baptism by fire

The idea for my thesis had been slowly evolving ever since my seminar presentation in 2002. I knew I wanted to develop a course in image analysis based on the visual design grammar theory but the specifics were unclear. A fellow student, who knew of my thesis plans, forwarded a recruiting ad to me. The Finnish Association of People with Mobility Disabilities was looking for a native English speaker to lead a discussion course in the area of communications. The course began the next week.

The setting

The Finnish Association of People with Mobility Disabilities (Invalidiliitto) has a training center in Jyväskylä. They offer a variety of study programs that prepare students for future employment or further studies. My course was a part of the communications program, which concentrates on various media and art related subjects. The aim of the association is "to promote and support equal

opportunities and human rights and to oppose discrimination among people with mobility disabilities" [14]

The students

Due to the nature of the students' disabilities, the study groups are quite small. There were 7 students attending the course, 5 women and 2 men. They were all Finnish and I assume that the majority of them were in their mid 20's. While some of the students' disabilities were noticeable i.e. wheelchair, the majority of the students function as in any other educational institution. Their background in English was variable, anywhere from university studies to basic school English requirements.

The course specifics

The one credit unit course was called English communicational skills. We met for 3 hours at a time, 2 days a week for 7 weeks from December 12, 2002 to January 31, 2003. The course consisted of 39 contact hours. The goal was to stress verbal interaction among the students, thus we concentrated on class discussions. There wasn't any homework so the pass/fail grading was based on attendance and participation.

8.4 Tier two – The real thing

The course in the first tier came as a surprise. It motivated me to meticulously plan for the next course. I may have taken this too far as I realized during the second tier that the pitfall of being so entangled in your own plans is that you forget the necessity of allowing room for creativity and leeway for the unexpected. Luckily action research is based on the idea that the study can and should be adapted as the course progresses.

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[14] http://www.invalidiliitto.fi/in-english-main.html referred to 11.2.2004

The setting

The course was held at the Vocational Teacher Education College in Jyväskylä, which cooperates with the Jyväskylä Polytechnic. Students who successfully complete the 35 credit units of the vocational teacher education will acquire general pedagogical teacher qualification in Finland. The college concentrates on educating teachers for vocational schools and institutes of higher education. The college in Jyväskylä offers an internationally oriented group whose study language is English. At the time of this course it was the only program of its kind in Finland. It is open to international and Finnish students who demonstrate proficiency in English. The entry requirements for the college include a Master's degree or the highest level of education available in the field to be taught. Three years work experience is also necessary before an application is accepted. The aim of the Jyväskylä Vocational Teacher Education College is "to support the professional growth of reflective teachers who are able to continuously develop new approaches to their work." [15]

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[15]http://www.vte.fi/rng/teach/teach.html referred to 10.2.2004

The students

While the students in the first and last groups of the study were homogenous in many respects, that can't be said about the participants in the second group. (see appendix 2 for questionnaire format.)

It was a male dominated group of 18 students where 22% of the participants were female.   A clear majority of participants were in the age range of 30 to 50 years old (see figure 4).

They came from twelve different countries with Finland having the single highest number of participants (see figure 5). With this kind of group it is a misleading question to ask where they are from. Many of them have lived abroad for years so they may feel more connection to a country other than the one they were born in. Western societies were dominant.

The majority of the students work full-time. Most of them are already teaching without certification. Their work backgrounds are as varied as their teaching subjects (see figure 6).

Native English speakers accounted for 33% of the group. In practice though, all participants were very fluent in English. They have studied it in school for many years and the majority of the students use English in daily life.
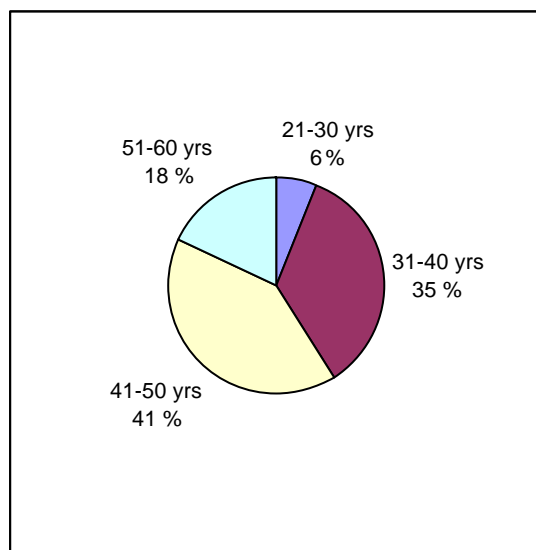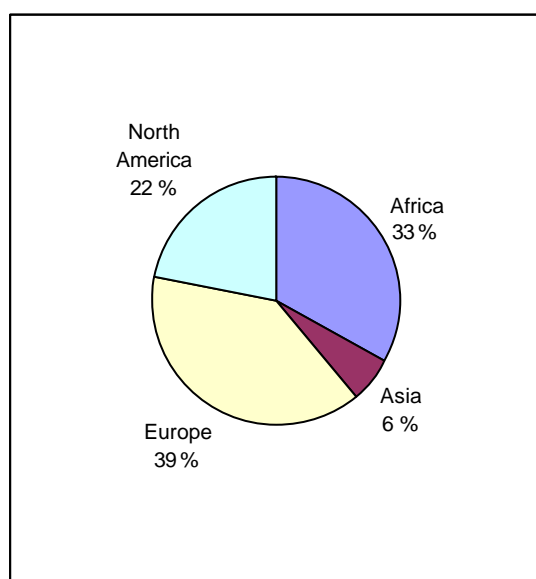
Figure 4. Participants' age distribution

Figure 5. Participants' native continent

Africa	Morocco-1, Egypt-1, Kenya-1, Burundi-1, Sierra Leone-1, Ivory Coast-1,
Asia	Lebanon-1
Europe	Finland-5, UK-1, Russia-1
N. America	Canada-2, USA-2

(continental divisions taken from
http://www.worldatlas.com/cntycont.htm
referred to 10.2.2004)
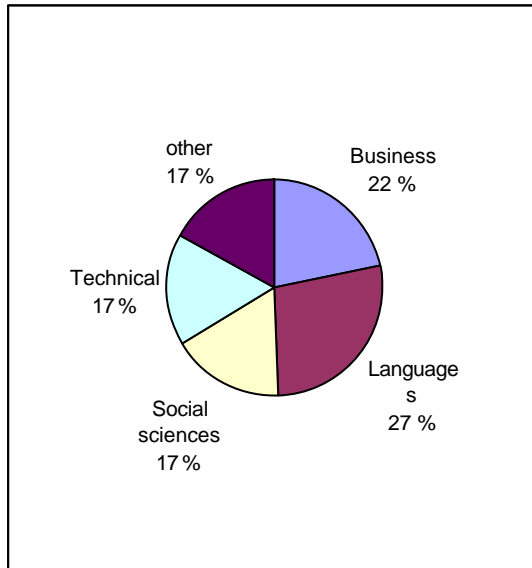
Figure 6. Participant's teaching subjects

Business	marketing, business math, international business, finance and administration
Languages	English-3, French literature, acad. writing
Soc. science	sociology, social development
Technical	IT/IS, navigation, surveying-comp. software
other	media-digital art, nature studies, tourism
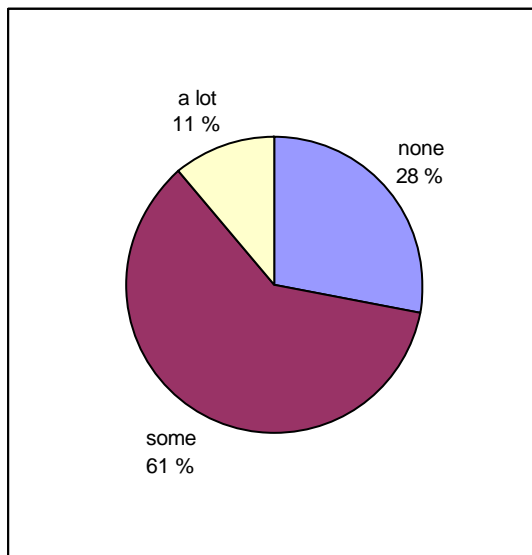
Figure 7. Participants' image analysis experience

Most participants had some image analysis experience (see figure 7). When asked the question - what comes to mind when you hear the words image analysis? - they responded:

-reflexive feelings

-semiotic

-taking closer look of a picture and thinking what the picture is presenting

-patterns in image and graphic design

-art

-my photographing hobby

-making sense of them

-…go into more depth to see the ideological, subjective, and constructed realities that all images are.

-what values are connected to the film or product

-art history

-your personality is under the analyses

-shape analysis

-interpretation

-analyse and interpret the colours, lines, people (their expressions, position, ..) the over all focus of the picture, etc.

-an investigation of the meaning of the image, its context in surrounding culture. Could also mean a theoretical explanation of the structure of the image, composition, mood, technique.

-what makes the image what it is- the component of the image, how the picture speaks

The course specifics

I look but do Ii see? an introductory discussion course in image analysis was offered as an elective course alongside the mandatory studies to become certified teachers. Due to the fact that the students hold down full-time jobs, contact hours are limited to a few days a month. We met five times from November 2003 to January 2004 for a total of 16 contact hours. The students were to complete image analysis worksheets before every session. While the main focus was on advertisements, the final exercise dealt with non-ad images. Successful completion of the course was based on attendance and completion of image analysis worksheets and a final exercise.

8.5 Tier 3 – Fine-tuning

As the first course at the training center of the Finnish Association of People with Mobility Disabilities was successful, I was offered a chance to teach the course again. The setting is the same as tier 1. There were 7 students (2 women/5 men). We had 33 contact hours from December 12th, 2003 – February 6th, 2004.

9 Course findings

The research question for this study is: How does visual design grammar function as a teaching framework in an introductory image analysis discussion course? My assumptions before the course began were that visual design grammar would help students to acknowledge and discover that visual images can function at a variety of levels and be interpreted in many ways. I also believed that the ideas of Kress and van Leeuwen would act as a catalyst to express one's opinions and as a result of this develop the confidence, courage and ability to participate in group discussions. As a teacher, I am interested in the practical application of ideas in the classroom. Thus another aspect is the pedagogical means used to achieve the above goals. These three areas are the central focus in my study.

In order to make the findings of this action research clearer, I have analyzed the material from the above perspectives. These categories are further broken down chronologically. The division between the areas is a little artificial as they depend and rely on each other. The overlapping of ideas within the sections shows this interdependence and interaction. The basic model of data division is as shown:

> 9.1 (goal 1)To acknowledge and discover that visual images can function at a variety of levels and be interpreted in many ways.
>> 9.11   Tier 1
>>
>> 9.12   Tier 2
>>
>> 9.13   Tier 3
>
> 9.2 (goal 2)To develop the confidence, courage and ability to participate in group discussions.
>> 9.21   Tier 1
>>
>> 9.22   Tier 2
>>
>> 9.23   Tier 3
>
> 9.3 (goal 3)Pedagogical aspects
>> 9.31   Tier 1
>>
>> 9.32   Tier 2
>>
>> 9.33   Tier 3

The material used in this chapter is from the written feedback forms the students filled out, image analysis exercises and my own observations in the classroom. Although most of the feedback forms covered the whole course, exercises related to visual design grammar were so dominant that I believe the responses are competent in describing the effect of visual design grammar. The text in italics is students' comments from the course feedback forms and image analysis exercises. The numbers after the quotes refer to my archives.

9.1 Image interpretation

This section looks at how visual design grammar acted as a tool **to acknowledge and discover that visual images can function at a variety of levels and be interpreted in many ways.** As this was an introductory course it was assumed that most of the students did not have considerable experience in interpreting images.

9.1.1 Tier one

After having thought about the course and goals for quite a while it was exciting and daunting to put my thoughts into action. Would visual design grammar work in the classroom as I had imagined?

General plan

My general plan for the first course was to have the students analyze two advertisements of their own and two from their partner. Through filling out image analysis worksheets I felt that they would develop a more thought-out opinion than if they just had to react spontaneously to an image in front of them. By answering the same questions for 4 different images (some that the student was able to chose themselves, and some that the students had no control over) I hoped that the students would begin to see a framework behind the images, or the lack of. Is there some consistency or are visual images completely arbitrary? By hearing feedback from other classmates on these same images I

assumed that the students would be exposed to a variety of interpretations including some that they had not considered before.

The students filled out image analysis worksheets 1, 2 and 3 for both their own images and their partners. Then we took one image at a time in front of the whole group and the one who chose it gave his/her interpretations first, then came his/her partner's reactions and then comments from the rest of the group. Visual design grammar was then introduced and that gave a new perspective to our conversations.

Critical interpretations

The process of deciphering the images went pretty much as I assumed. There was discussion and it was clear that interpretations were differing from each other, which added to the interest and sparked participants to comment on or defend their opinions. The importance of critically looking at an image and acknowledging that there is room for a variety of interpretations can be seen in the following students comments.

> -It was nice to hear peoples' opinions on different things. (a51)[16]

When asked if the students look at images in a different way as a result of this course, two students said yes:

> -I think about who has made this image, for whom and why? I pay more attention to details (a31)[17]

> -I pay more attention to images, i.e. in magazines (a33)[18]

One student answered:

> -maybe I haven't yet really thought about it (a32)

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[16] *Oli mukava kuulla ihmisten mielipiteitä erilaisista asioista (a51)*
[17] *Mietin kuka on tehnyt kuvan, kenelle ja miksi? Kiinitän enemmän huomiota yksityiskohtiin.(a31)*
[18] *Kiinitän enemmän huomioita kuviin esim. lehdissä. (a33)*

It is one thing to pay attention to certain aspects of images in a structured classroom setting and another thing to have this experience make a change in how someone views images in everyday life. This question of looking at images in a different way as a result of the course would maybe be more appropriate to ask a few weeks after the course has finished.

It was not my intention that students should leave the course being able to fluently apply the visual grammar theory to all images they come across. My hope was that through the theory their own ideas, which they expressed beforehand, would be 'tested' and that would challenge them to consider other options. Even if their reaction was one of self-confirmation in their own ideas and a rejection of the visual grammar theory, then I think the course was successful in providing a deeper analysis of our visual world. My goals for the course do not mention the theory. I use it mainly as a tool, not as an end in itself.

Revising

As far as revising my plan for the next tier, I think the main points that needed to be reworked were some details of the worksheets. This will be explained in detail in section 9.3. Visual design grammar seemed to raise issues that the students noticed on their own and also brought about new interpretations and perspectives. From my observations I think the theory applied to the majority of their images. I don't remember any case where the theory didn't apply to any image. At times discussion was quite 'heated' as students challenged each other's views.

9.1.2 Tier two

How did visual design grammar function in its role to help students to acknowledge and discover that visual images can function at a variety of levels and be interpreted in many ways in tier two?

General reaction

Visual design grammar is a relatively new theory. As chapter 4 shows, it has not been readily accepted into the creative community. One's attitude about the theory could influence how he/she reacts to the discussion exercises based on the theory. If the majority of participants' do not hold the theory in high regard then the ensuing discussions could be fruitless.

After having heard and used the theory in small group discussions, the participants' were asked to give their overall opinion of visual design grammar. The participants' answered this open ended question and then I placed their response into one of three categories; accepting, neutral (yes, but…) and sceptical.[19] Those whose answers indicated an accepting attitude towards the theory were 27% of all responses, neutral responses where participants' saw both positive and negative issues accounted for the majority or 60% and 13% of respondents were sceptical. Figure 8 shows this healthy attitude where the majority of students were open to the ideas of Kress and van Leeuwen. They did not take it to the extremes of holding it in such high esteem or discounting it totally that it would have kept them from forming their own ideas. I believe this critical approach is an asset when discovering the many levels and interpretations inherent in images.
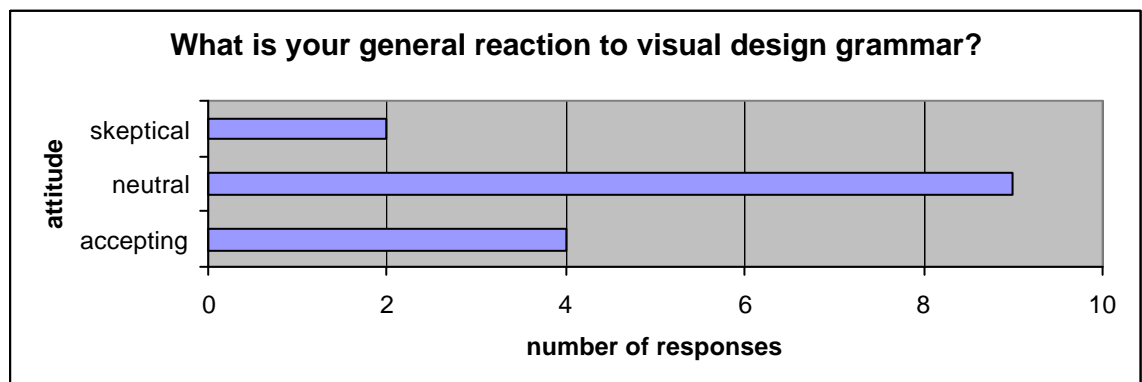
Figure 8. What is your general reaction to visual design grammar?

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[19]For a complete listing of their answers see appendix 3.

Kress and van Leeuwen make the claim that their visual design grammar can be applied to all types of contemporary visual design in Western culture (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 3). This point is one that many students' pointed out as extreme and unbelievable.

> *-I accept, I mostly agree "the theory". I think the field is interesting. On the other hand: the outcomes are quite standardized, "normal". Many times contradictions and extremes are targeted in ad's also.* (c18)

> *-In a general context, I would say that the theories are correct, however, I question to what extent it can be applied.* (c111)

> *-I feel it is a valid theory, but more for advertising and less for photojournalism and least for visual art. It is, however, relevant to teaching materials.* (c115)

I think the group's collective response to this question is a reflection of what went on in the small group discussions when the theory was applied to their own images. If their ideas and the theory were far from each other most of the time then I think they would have reacted more negatively to the theory.

Aware and critical

The first goal of the course could also be described as deepening the students' critical analysis skills and uncovering the vast level of meanings images hold. When I asked the students the question: Has visual design grammar changed your way of looking at images? If so, how? If not, why?, I was hoping to receive responses that could indicate their experience (or lack of) of becoming more critical and more aware.

The participants answered the above open question and then I categorized the answers as yes, yes/no or no. As figure 9 shows of the 14 responses, 11 answered (76%) in the yes or yes/no category. In order to see how the course changed the participants' way of looking at images, I extracted their reasons from the feedback forms into the below columns.[20] Of those that answered yes

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[20]For a complete listing of their answers see appendix 4.

or yes/no, 64% commented that visual design grammar made them more aware of images while 36% said the grammar made them more critical. Three respondents said that visual design grammar has not changed their way of looking at images and the main reason was that they had a lot of prior experience in analyzing images and this theory does not change their viewpoints. The answers to this question seem to coincide with my expectation that the use of visual design grammar acts as a tool to expose the many levels and interpretations of images.

Has visual design grammar changed your way of looking at images?
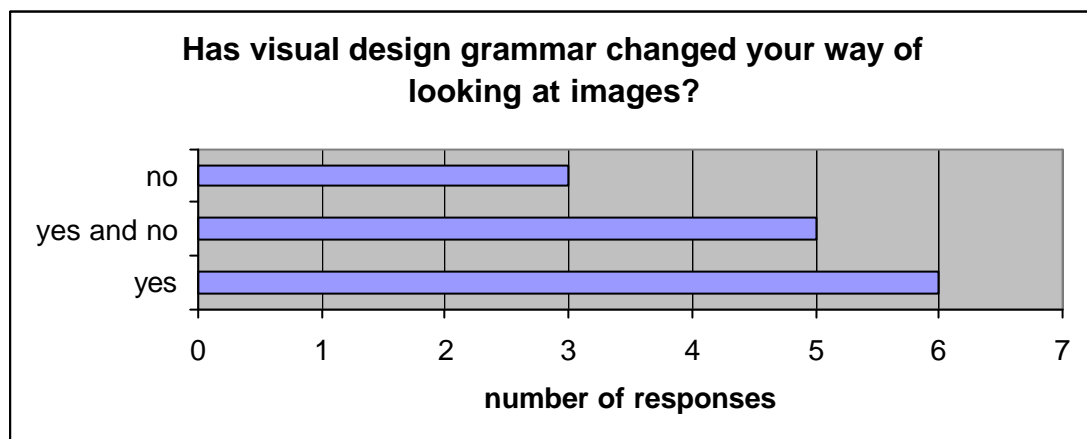
Figure 9. Has visual design grammar changed your way of looking at images?

If yes or yes/no, how?

<u>become more aware</u>
(reasons from 7/11 yes or yes/no responses)

- … before I didn't pay much attention to the meaning and contents of what an image can represent. (c33)

-…I have been introduced to a different way of looking at things as well where to look and how to translate. (c35)

-…after this course I believe that I will take a closer look of the advertises. (c37)

-…Images which prior to this looked so obvious acquired a different meaning. (c314)

-… Perhaps I use aspects of it to understand images, but I also have other concerns (i.e. how all images are constructs, what is left out/edited, the propaganda of images…) (c34)

-…maybe I am unconsciously trying to find out these theories from the images, don't know for sure. (c36)

-…I now better understand why ad's are like they are.

<u>become more critical</u>
(reasons from 4/11 yes or yes/no answers)

- *Has made me more accurate/critical in looking at images...* (c31)

- One important conclusion is that it has introduced a critical way of looking at images which would otherwise be taken for granted. (c314)

-… it surely deepen it and my critic more profound and disciplined. (c32)

-…Made me think more about the significance and meaning of image design and placement in a more analytical manner. (c315)

If no, why not?

<u>have prior experience in analysing images</u>
(reasons from 2/2 "no" responses that listed a reason.   One student responded no but did not give a reason)

-…because I used to analyze images more or less like that when needs be. (c310)

-…I believe that I already have a quite well developed visual vocabulary, and I don't find that I need this framework – especially as I am not convinced that it is 100% correct. It is almost like saying that every image created by any person will always follow these guidelines – which must be untrue! Composition and content depend on context, time, place, social conditions, etc. Possibly I may now "try out" these ideas and see if they work . I expect that some of the time they may, as these are quite general concepts. (c312)

In other answers on the feedback forms, including the question what was a positive point of the course, participants made similar comments concerning becoming more aware and critical.

-Through reading images theory more doors are open in our attempt to understand the picture and deconstruct it to reconstruct it in a more meaningful way. (c42)

-" Image analysis theory has helped me to understand how photographers, artists, painters, etc use different shots, camera angles and lighting to present particular realities to target audiences. Distinctive use of shadows, angles and close-ups conveys ideas, feelings and emotions. "In the light of image analysis theory, I can conclude that it is only by examining the structures and features of a range of visual images and texts and by critically examining the messages presented, that we can better understand the world. Fundamentally therefore, the crucial question concerning any given image or text is that, What does it tell us about our culture and about expectations and standards or ways of operating in our world? After the course "a picture is worth a thousand words" (I Look but do I see?) I have come to realize that my images were an attempt to tackle this crucial question!" (e10)

-In conclusion, the image analysis theory is relevant, though that sometimes some images might vehicle obvious meaning; I believe that when it comes to a close analysis of an image it important to have some formal guide line such image analysis theory. For my concern, I am very happy to come across it. I learn a new way looking at images. (e16)

-It was very interesting to learn different positions starting(relating?) the photographer and to the picture itself. (d61)

-It was good to stop and look at images-how they are constructed, manipulated, etc. It actually inspired me in the way that I found some good ads for my media course. (d64)

-new ideas, more understanding. (d68)

-Basic structures to locate pictures, analyze their meaning in a more subtle way. It gives more awareness and sensitivity in a nice discreet manner. (d69)

-Made me think with new way how to look advertisements and other pics. (d62)

-After this course, when I can see some images, I always compare them with theory. I think it's interesting. (d612)

-Introduces some new ideas on how to see some images. (d613)

Blindly accepting?

Some of the preliminary reactions of the course participants' after hearing the theory surprised me. Some people felt confirmation of their beliefs - "yea, I was right" type of thinking. This seemed to me that they held the theory in high regard and wanted to 'jump on the wagon'. I also observed some groups trying to 'fit' their images into the reading images theory, i.e. "this woman must be demanding something of us because she is looking directly at us". I was expecting a more rebellious reaction and was a bit disappointed that they accepted the theory without much criticism or objection. This proved for the most part to be just an initial reaction as the results of the feedback form at the end of the course show a much more critical approach. In small group discussions later on in the course the students took the theory and maturely pondered how it fit their image and it did raise discussion.

The theory was presented in the classroom via overhead transparencies and immediately afterward the participants went back to their small groups to discuss the applicability of the theory to their images. There was not much time to form opinions about visual design grammar after initial exposure to it.

The influence of the teacher, especially in an introductory course, cannot be forgotten. If the teacher ('expert') is offering a theory to the group it can of course be considered as the 'best' or 'right' alternative. Although I mentioned on several occasions why I chose the theory for the course (controversial nature, platform for discussion, raise formalistic and contextual qualities), in the future I would reiterate these aspects more often.

Western beliefs

An interesting aspect of visual design grammar is that it is based on western beliefs. I was hoping that non-western approaches to images would surface with this group. There was only one participant from Asia. As Lebanon is in the Middle East and that participant has lived many years in Western countries, I think in reality it is fair to say that all participants represented Western societies. Of course the term W*estern* is an undefined concept in Kress and van Leeuwen's theory. One thing all the participants had in common is that they live in Finland. Some have lived here for more than 20 years and some were newcomers.

Part of the initial assignment was to select two advertisements preferably from their native country. Due to the variety of nationalities and backgrounds of the participants I thought international images would put the Western-based visual design grammar to the test. In practice the participants chose their images from the following publications: Helsingin Sanomat, Image, National Geographic, Hola, Koti, Education, Keski Suomalainen, Suomen Kuvalehti, Playboy, Utne Reader, Macleans, Savon Sanomat, Time, Tekniikan Maailma and Vene. Other sources were the Internet and Finnish photographers. Needless to say the colorful background of the group members did not shine through in their choice of advertisements. Despite this fact their cultural backgrounds were very apparent in the small group conversations.

Hesitations

After the glowing feedback concerning how the theory acts to increase awareness and a critical perspective, it is good to see the hesitations that students expressed in regards to visual design grammar.

In the final exercise for the course, students examined the visual design grammar theory from a number of other 'genres' outside of advertising i.e. fine art photography, snap shots, postcards, etc. Their experiences seemed to indicate that the theory does not hold up very well outside of an advertising context. There was also doubt as to the importance of visual guidelines and the limitations of visual design grammar. These types of discoveries and realizations are a critical part of the learning process.

> *-Finally I would like to say that, there are no absolute ways of measuring determining what position is the most perfect. I believe that most people are more interested in the information found on an image regardless of the way it is positioned, for example, nowadays, when surfing the internet people are more interested in bits of information found in these little columns rather than the front page ones because some of the front page information in most cases are just bunch of lies. I disagree with the fact our brain construction has something to do with the position of attraction on any image.* (e19)

> *-Because art and photojournalism seek to "break free" of such paradigms, it will naturally and more frequently fall outside its range of relevancy. Theory should attempt to limit its relevancy to Western print media advertising only. Then it will be more applicable (not perfectly, but with greater frequency and reliability)* (e13)

> *-distinctly got the impression that the theory as presented to us implied that we were interpreting messages that somehow wanted to appeal mostly to our desires and not to any other emotions.* (e9)

Revising

Improvement points for tier 3 include repeating the purpose of the theory more often to the students. This may avoid the blind acceptance of what the teacher offers. Also in section 9.3 I go into more detail of practical arrangements of students visual images choices. Some participants in tier 2 felt it was too monotonous to always concentrate on the same advertisement. Thus in tier 3 I gave the students the freedom to continue with their same ad or choose a new one. The amount of time devoted to explaining the theory in tier 2 was limited. This resulted in some confusion and misconceptions. In tier 3 I decided to spend more time describing visual design grammar and use an ad in front of the group as an illustration of Kress and van Leeuwen's theory.

9.1.3 Tier three

With two courses behind me it was interesting to go into the third tier and refine my ideas. The group consisted of 4-5 students so we were able to discuss together and compare and contrast images. I was able to lead the discussion more closely and help the more quiet students participate. Due to the fact that our lessons were held in the computer room we had instant access to a wide variety of images through the Internet. This was an effective way to look at the visual design grammar theory outside of the advertising context.

General reaction

As in tier 2, I asked the students to give their general reaction to visual design grammar. Once again I feel their attitude to the theory influences the discussions. Four out of the five students (80%) responded positively to the question. One student (20%) gave a neutral response. The reasons given in the positive responses included that the theory is interesting, fun, gives a new point to look at images, one can always learn something new and surprising things can be found in images when you look at them in detail.[21] The neutral

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[21]for a complete list of answers see appendix 5.

respondent indicated that *It is a useful tool, but nothing to get stuck on* (b24). This shows a critical viewpoint towards the theory.

Aware and critical

The students responded to the question: Has it (visual design grammar) changed your way of looking at images? If so, how? If not, why? I then categorized their answers into yes, neutral and no. 3/5 of the respondents fell into the yes category (60%) while 40% replied negatively. The reasons given for those who responded positively are similar to tier 2 – becoming more aware and critical.[22]

> *-It has influenced at least a bit. I look at images with "new eyes"(b41).*[23]
>
> *-Yes. Now your can look new angels of pictures.* (b42)
>
> *-Yes, maybe I look a more analytically and critically, I get more out of the images. (b43)*[24]

Among those that answered negatively to this question, one explained that *I look at images as I did before (b45).*[25]

The results of tier 3 seem to comply with the preceding two tiers. Even though the class size, duration and frequency of lessons, and course participants' backgrounds varied, it didn't seem to affect the participants' response to visual design grammar.

9.2 The art of discussion

Equally important as image interpretation in the course was the goal **to develop the confidence, courage and ability to participate in group discussions.** In the first and last tier the students were all Finnish. Due to the varied level of

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[22] for a complete list of answers see appendix 5.
[23] *On ainakin vähän vaikuttanut. Katson kuvia "uusin silmiin". (b41)*
[24] *Kyllä, ehkä katson niitä nyt analyyttisemmin ja kriittisemmin, saan kuvista enemmän irti. (b43)*
[25] *ei ole muuttanut. Katson kuvia niin kuin ennenkin. (b45)*

spoken English competence, the focus was more on daring to speak. In the second tier there were some native English speakers. I was afraid this would hinder the participation of non-natives. This was not the case. The majority of the group members spoke very fluent English and thus the concentration was on discussion of the topics not i.e. wondering which verb tense to use.

9.2.1 Tier one

In this first tier the main emphasis of the course was discussion in English. Image analysis was a means to achieve this. In many courses I have taught over the years in Finland to high school graduates, the students are a bit shy and nervous at the beginning. They often have studied grammar for many years but the oral side of learning English has been overshadowed by the need to perform in written and understanding exercises. Once they get a chance to gain some confidence in speaking, the majority of students can convey their ideas without major problems. The students in tier one were not an exception to this.

When asked if they had developed the confidence, courage and ability to participate in group discussions, all the students responded positively:

> *- Yes. I have also achieved my personal goal, which was participation and daring to speak. The size of the group helped. (a11)[26]*

> *- It has brought back some of the courage I used to have at speaking Engl. (a12)*

> *- Yes. I am more courageous to speak English. I still can't express myself fully in English but better. (a13)[27]*

When asked to list the positive points of the course, 2/3 mentioned discussion related topics.

> *- encouraging atmosphere, -easy to talk in more relaxed way (a52)*

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[26] *Kyllä. Olen myös saavuttanut henkilökohtaiset tavoitteeni, jotka olivat juuri <u>osallistuminen</u> ja se että <u>uskaltaa puhua</u>. Ryhmän koko auttoi (a11).*
[27] *Kyllä. Olen rohkeampi puhumaan englantia.. En tosin vielä osaa täysin ilmaista itseäni englanniksi mutta paremmin (a13)*

> *- you didn't need to be afraid of making mistakes, you can learn*
> *from them! (a51)[28]*

The most active discussions resulted when the opinions of the students differed. When they first had the chance to form their own opinions and write them down, it seemed to give them the courage to challenge someone else who had written down differing viewpoints.

9.2.2 Tier two

In some ways it is difficult to compare the different groups as in tier one and three there were an average of 4 students present each class. This of course provided a different environment for discussion compared to the 15+ participants in tier two. In tier one and three we met twice a week while in tier two we met on two consecutive days once a month. There was more control of seeing how the students understood the theory in tier one and three and the whole group could discuss together. The few times I tried an open forum discussion in tier two it was frustrating. A few people dominated the discussion while others waited with their hands in the air for their turn. The people in the back couldn't hear what the students in the front said. In addition to these there were other complications so I decided to limit the discussions in tier 2 to the small groups, as contact lessons were so few.

An advantage in tier two, concerning the development of discussion, was the varied background of the participants. Images are full of codes in need of interpretation. These codes are obvious to some and hidden to others due to culture, age, gender, familiarity with current events, etc. Due to this it is an immense benefit to decode and interpret visual images in a group of diverse participants. (Barrett 2003, 10.)

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[28] *Epäonnistumisia ei tarvinnut pelätä, vaan niistä oppi!(a51)*

Agreeing and disagreeing with each other

Once students had analyzed their images via the image analysis worksheets, they came together in the small group to discuss their interpretations. If their ideas were always the same or never the same I think it might hinder the discussion. In order to see what kind of opinion exchange there was, I asked the students the following question: How would you rate the small group discussions (opinions of group members) in general concerning the interpretations of the images based on the worksheets (the discussions before you saw the theory)? They should circle a number between 1 (we never agreed with each other) and 5 (we always agreed with each other). The average rating given was 3.27. Figure 10 shows this balance between agreeing and disagreeing with each other. Even though their cultural backgrounds differed from each other they still found common ground for analysing images.
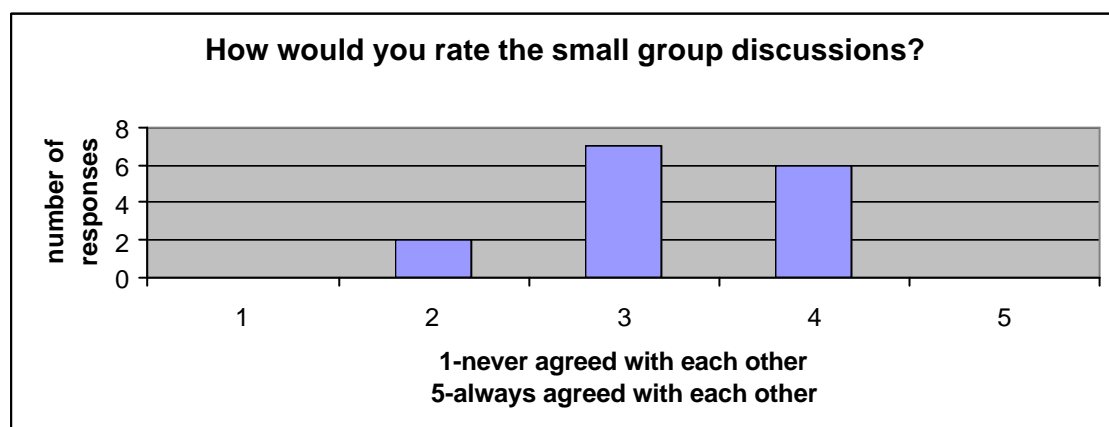
Figure 10. How would you rate the small group discussions?

When asked to list a positive point of the course, some of the comments centered on the discussions:

> - Enriching my critical spirit and my ability to share point of views with others in respect of others' point of views. (d63)

> - Open discussions. different interpretations. rich and different cultural backgrounds in images interpretations. opened up more possibilities of seeing and interpretating images. (d67)

> - Interesting. Visual discussions :+ (d66)

Agreeing and disagreeing with visual design grammar

When I first introduced visual design grammar in my laudatur seminar presentation, there was some scepticism from fellow students that this kind of theory could be functional. If this were true than the ensuing discussions after the theory was introduced would be negatively influenced by the theory's lack of credibility.

I asked the participants of tier two: How often did your own image interpretations agree with the reading images theory? They could circle a number from 1 (never agreed with the theory) to 5 (always agreed with the theory). The average rating was 3.2. Figure 11 shows that their opinions just as often agreed as disagreed with the theory. This would seem to indicate that there was enough substance in visual design grammar to hold interest in the students' attention yet not so overpowering that they felt they should accommodate their own ideas to match visual design grammar.
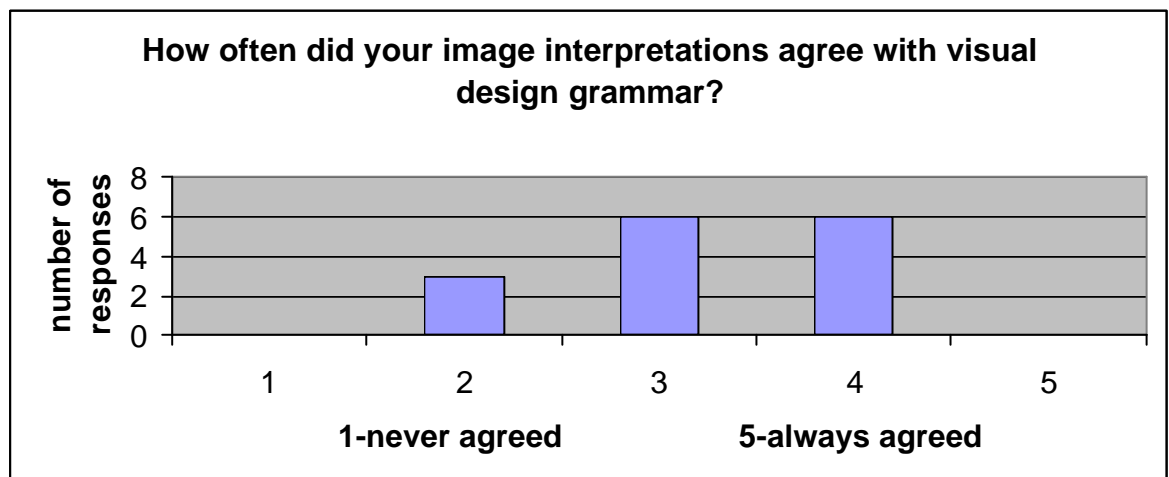
Figure 11. How often did your image interpretations agree with visual design grammar?

Students commented on the theory and discussions in the following way:

> *- It was a pleasant experience for me to get to know the theory and different aspects of its application. Small group discussions were*

an important forum for co-operative learning and diverse opinions and interpretations. (c414)

-It was interesting to get "the theory" in a short form: in literal form. It was interesting to see and hear that most of the group members thought about images about the same way: no big differences. Some differences coming out from the culture background could be seen. Worksheets differed somehow, depending on the culture background. (c48)

Raising discussion

The participants in tier 2 were unanimous in their ideas that visual design grammar does work as a platform for discussion of visual images. They answered the question: How does visual design grammar work as a platform for discussion of visual images? Then I placed their answers into 3 categories: it doesn't work, neutral and it does work. Figure 12 shows that almost three fourths (73%) of the respondents indicated that it does work while 27% were neutral (yes, but…). None of the respondents indicated that the theory does not raise discussion.[29]
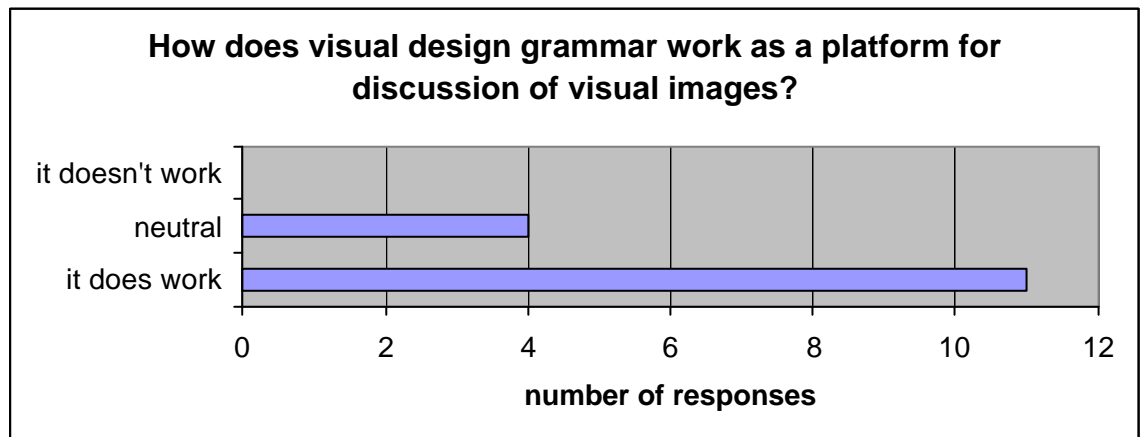
Figure 12. How does visual design grammar work as a platform for discussion of visual images?

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[29] For a complete listing of their answers see appendix 6.

How does the theory go about rising discussion? Among their ideas raises the doubts once again as to the "one size fits all" attitude of Kress and van Leeuwen. Extracts from student responses:

> *- It provokes questions of a more critical analysis on the image. (c22)*
>
> *- It creates a constructive way of analysing and discussing. (c25)*
>
> *- As a platform for discussion, it did work when we were in groups. When analysing images alone, it served to raise questions. (c211)*
>
> *-… we can take what we consider to be credible enough and leave the rest for others to decide. (c23)*
>
> *-… Matches with reality, mostly. The basic views, standards, I think, are quite easy to understand. I believe, they are "statistically" true- but not in every case. (c28)*
>
> *- It helps as a theoretical basis reference. Although it is not applicable to any case in the same way. (c210)*
>
> *- Very well. Serves as a basis to discuss the theory's validity and how that validity is limited to certain fields. (c215)*
>
> *- I think this can very well be used. It makes sense. I have been using these methods daily, when I have been reading newspapers. Sometimes it is impossible and I have been trying to find reasons for that. This left-given,right-new, top-ideal, bottom-real composition does not always fit to the images I have seen. But this is a fascinating system to evaluate images. You only have to get experience to use it right. (c213)*
>
> *-As stated above, the theories can be useful for analysis, but I am not convinced that they hold up under investigation. Of course, any way to start a discussion about an image can be useful, whether it leads to the "truth" or not – the truth being the artist's intention. (c212)*
>
> *- It all depends on the above-mentioned factors as well as the purpose and how it is applied in various situation. Interaction, common understanding and dialogue are all important elements here. (c214)*

Some participants suggested improvements to make the theory even more effective as a discussion tool.

> *- If it is pressed to a little shorter time, I think that it can be usefull. (c27)*

> *-…though it did get a bit repetitive to look at the same images over and over – it would be more interesting to look at many images to "test" the theory. (c24)*

When sharing opinions with others it is inevitable that you expose a part of yourself. This can be both a rewarding and challenging experience as the following comments show:

> *-Group discussions is a humbling process because you have to accommodate your point of view with others and it is not always easy. (c410)*

> *- Discussions were very critical and arguments were very enriching for me. (d33)*

Revising

One of my original ideas was that the course would take an in depth look at images. It was a form of protest against the short viewing times that we encounter in our daily lives. I may have taken this idea to the extreme, as students seemed to become bored with analysing the same images. In tier 3 I allowed the students to use their same images for the 5 image analysis worksheets or chose new ads.

9.2.3 Tier three

The teacher who is observing discussions as an outsider may see another reality compared to the experiences of the participants who are speaking a foreign language. In order to hear their opinion concerning the use of visual design grammar as a basis for discussions I asked the following question: How does it (visual design grammar) work as a platform for discussion of visual images? All of the participants responded positively with varying degrees.

- Gives a good direction what to discuss. (b32)

- Quite well – there were as many viewpoints as there were participants (b33)[30]

- It is a useful starting point for discussion. (b34)

- Quite well. My own language skills were sometimes a deterrent in the discussions. (b31)[31]

- no suggestions for improvements. Works quite well (b35)[32]

When asked to list the positive points of the course, all the students mentioned the discussion aspect of the course.

- The vocal use of english language. (b54)

- teacher led well and clear the discussions, it was rewarding when I succeeded in expressing myself in English)(b53)[33]

- Good teacher. Led the discussion well. I am not very satisfied with my own performance but it is always good to practice language skills (b51)[34]

- Discussion (b52) (positive points)

- + group work + tasks + developing language skills + flexible (b55)[35]

When I planned the course I assumed that the participants would have the equivalent of a high school background in English. My teaching experience in Finland has shown me time and time again that this level of education offers a solid structural background from which to develop discussion skills. Unfortunately this assumption of previous English skills did not hold true in

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[30] *Ihan mukavasti – juttua ja näkökantoja tuli yhtä monta kuin oli osallistujiakin. (b33)*
[31] *Suhteellisen hyvin. Tosin oma kielitaito oli esteenä välillä keskusteluissa. (b31)*
[32] *Ei parannusehdotuksia. Toimii kohtuullisesti. (b35)*
[33] *Opettaja johdatteli hyvin ja selkeästi keskustelua, oli palkitsevaa, kuin onnistui Imaisemaan itseään englanniksi. (b53)*
[34] *Hyvä opettaja. Johti keskustelua hyvin. En ole kovinkaan tyytyväinen omaan suoritukseeni mutta on aina hyvä harjoittaa kielitaitoaan. (b51)*
[35] *+ ryhmätyö+ tehtävät, +kielen harjaannuttaminen, + joustavuus(b55)*

every case. For those with a lower level of English, the course proved difficult as the following comment shows.

> -it is of course good that we speak alot of English in the lessons as we should in English class! But on the other hand there are those that don't speak English as well as the others, like me…)(b65)[36]

As discussion was the main goal of the first and third tiers, it was important to see how the participants felt they achieved this goal. I asked the participants: The goal of the course was to develop the confidence, courage and ability to participate in group discussions. How well was this goal met for you? They were asked to circle a number between 1 (this goal was not met at all for me) to 5 (this goal was met very well for me). The average rating was 3.8 so it seems they felt quite confident that their discussion skills had improved.

9.3 Pedagogical aspects

The goals of image interpretation and discussion are but lofty ideals without a solid plan as to how to achieve this in practice. That is where the pedagogical aspects come in. The responses of the students in sections 9.1 and 9.2 were for the most part positive. Much of the critique of the course concerned the daily operations. In this section we can find the areas most in need of improvement.

9.3.1 Tier one

Converting my ideas into practical lessons in a few days resulted in some clumsiness in the image analysis worksheet design. All in all though the worksheets seemed to fulfill the purpose of giving a direction to the discussions.

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[36] *On toki hyvä että kurssilla/tunneilla puhutaan paljon englantia niinhän englannin tunneilla pitääkin puhua! Mutta toisaalta on näitä jotka puhuvat hieman huonommin englantia, kuten minä…(b65)*

Drowning in paper

My original ideas were that the students would analyze their own pictures as well as that of a neighbor. I imagined that by filling out a worksheet on the images beforehand, it would force them to look at an image in a more in-depth manner. As this course concentrated entirely on contact lessons, there was not any homework. All worksheets were to be filled in the classroom. This limited the amount of discussion time, which required that I make the worksheets as effective as possible.

The image analysis worksheets proved to be a bit confusing and because the students analyzed 4 images via the multi-page worksheets there was a lot of paper flying around. In order to streamline the process for tier 2,some questions were reworded and I split the worksheets into two sides vertically. This meant that the students could analyze two images on the same paper and compare their answers, which were side-by-side.

Classroom exercises

In order to get a feeling for how the students experienced the type of activities we did I asked them to describe the classroom exercises of the course. Their answers seemed to reflect a positive attitude.

> *- We analyzed images and what is "behind the image". Images were used as the basis for discussion. (a21)*[37]

> *- Interesting and fun exercises (a23)*[38]

> - interesting new ways to look at images, advertisements etc. (a52)

> - Well prepared lessons. There was always something to do, interesting topics, I learned a lot. (a53)[39]

> *- theoretical framework was often very complicated, but well explained I didn't have much difficulty with the exercises (a22)*

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[37] *Tutkimme kuvia ja sitä mitä on "kuvien takana". Kuvia käytettiin keskustelun pohjana. (a21)*
[38] *Mielenkiintoisia ja hauskoja juttuja. (a23)*
[39] *Hyvin valmistellut tunnit. Aina oli tekemistä kiinnostavia aiheita. opin paljon (a53)*

This last comment hints at the difficulty to understand the theory. This same participant commented on the feedback form that *perhaps a little too much theory (a22).* In writing the theoretical overheads for the course I tried to keep in mind that the audience may not have any prior experience with analyzing images and thus the information must be expressed very clearly. Of course the danger with this is oversimplifying the ideas of visual design grammar. The students did not have a lot of time to absorb the information before we used it.

When asked to rate the course in general on a scale of 1(poor) to 5 (excellent) , the average rating was 4.35 (a4) So despite the repetition in some areas (i.e. image analysis worksheets), it seems as if the students were satisfied and met the goals of the course.

9.3.2 Tier two

In all honesty the context of this course must be remembered. For me, it was the execution of my thesis idea that I had thought about for years. I was very meticulous in planning the learning environment and had tried to be very thorough. For the students it was an elective course in addition to the demanding compulsory courses of the teachers certification program. Most the students held down fulltime jobs, had families, and traveled from all over Finland to attend this training. The importance of this one course for the students had a lot of competition from many sides.

Rocky beginning

It was a new challenge for me to teach a course where the contact hours were so few and far between. In a traditional course, which meets i.e. once a week, the first few lessons can often be spent getting to know the participants and introducing the topic. In the *I look but do I see?* course the first meeting consisted of 40% of all contact hours. That put pressure on me to be very organized and it meant that the students had to come prepared to the first meeting in order for us to make the most out of our contact hours. I sent out an

information letter to the participants two weeks before. This letter contained assignments that the students should prepare before the course began and a personal data sheet that was to be emailed back to me. As it was an elective course there was not a confirmed list of course participants. Less than half of the participants prepared beforehand. Some students did not register at all ahead of time and walked into the classroom saying "What is the name of the course?" This caused frustration for those who had prepared, as we had to spend valuable time going over the contents of the information letter. There was also frustration among those who came empty handed to the course. We began analyzing advertisements in that first lesson. Those who did not have advertisements had to choose from some that I brought to class and then react spontaneously to the exercises. The border between how much can be expected of students and how much flexibility needs to be built into course planning was a point of reflection for me that first week.

It was a rocky beginning to looking at visual design grammar. My planning may have been too rigid and we were not able to cover all the material I had hoped to. This, in connection with the absences of different participants at different times, caused some confusion. My original idea was that students would work in small groups and give each other feedback on their image interpretations. Not all students studying for teaching certification attended this course. Thus the *I look but do I see?* course was scheduled at the end of the day after the mandatory courses when many people were tired and/or needed to travel back home. This was reflected in the attendance of the course and it was impossible to maintain the same small groups. These frustrations can be seen in the students' comments:

> *-The lack of people each time makes it difficult to progress at work with groups as I have been with different ones each time and we where suppose to do the exercises with the same ones. (c45)*

> *-At the first class a number of people either had not brought images or had mis-understood what type of image to bring, which of course affected others work – especially, as in my case, that I then had to compare a non-commercial image with my own adverts. (c412)*

> *-The course was badly scheduled! It is a pity. (d79)*

- At this stage of the course I am still waiting for the results/outcomes. I do not know if they come afterwards. How can I utilize this in my teaching work? I do not know! (c46)

- We should have got more information before the exercises what is the real meaning of this kind of image analysis. Also it would be nice to know how can I use this in my teaching. (c47)

When asked what improvements they would make in the course the students answered:

- To be organized and more focused from the beginning about the aim. (d713)

- tasks could have been more clear. (d78)

- The main goal of the course should have been represented little earlier. (d72)

-To be more focused and ability to match easily a theory with practicability. (d73)

The lesson to be learned from this is that there must be more flexibility built into instruction. It must be assumed that some participants will be absent at different times. This should not hinder those who are attending. If it is unrealistic to expect that students do work before a course begins then it means that in-class activities are of a more spontaneous manner and reflective activities are given as homework.

Right and wrong

As I was using visual design grammar as a springboard for discussion, I did not intend for the students to whole-heartedly accept what Kress and van Leeuwen have to offer. In light of this I gave the students a task to try to 'prove' the reading images theory right or wrong or somewhere in between via non-ad images. This proved to be detrimental to the spirit of discussion. Being right or wrong creates a judgemental environment where value is assigned.

Some students took this to an extreme where they made Excel-type charts of visual design grammar and tried to show statistically how often it applied to their

images. One student's end result was that visual design grammar more often did not apply than applied to his images and he gave the impression that because of this it is not a good theory. There was an uncomfortable feeling of failure in the air. As if maybe the course was in vain if 'things don't work'. It was a graphic example of the destructive use of right and wrong / success and failure. I had hoped that after analysing images via visual design grammar, students would have a new or deeper appreciation and/or understanding of images. By asking questions from a certain perspective (that of visual design grammar) the purpose was to encourage participants to probe new possibilities and see images in a different light. Fortunately the calculated type of interpretation mentioned above was not very prevalent.

Some wise comments from students show a more holistic approach:

> - *These 13 elements of images theory help more to make sense of extracting ideas and meanings from images than putting the theory on the wrong or right side of an image. They are more likely optimal tools in helping us analyzing and making assumptions when we are looking at images. I can already notice that I became myself more aware, critical and, having insight looks at images but how close or far from their real meaning I am in my judgment is a different issue!* (e17)

> - *We have studied many ways of analyzing images. A theory was given out of many exercises and assignments. But above all, it is important to keep in mind that the act of representation is a subjective one. Therefore, it has always an intention to communicate. To decipher the intention is difficult, because you must take into account many factors: the historical context, the cultural context, the personal context, etc… In addition to that, it appears from these few illustrations above that although a theory can help in analyzing material, people must also use their intelligence to go beyond the sticto sensu theory and understand what is going on beyond the theory. (Diane put text in bold)* ***When a picture, or any kind of image is not reflecting exactly what we have learned, it doesn't mean that the theory is not exact. It can mean that the theory has been surpassed by the artist, it doesn't mean that the theory is not anymore valid. Theory is somehow a milestone which help to compare, to relate and finally to admire with some common references.*** (e12)

Needless to say I will change the whole concept of right and wrong to a more open ended assignment of i.e. how do your non-ad images correspond to visual design grammar? How do you justify your interpretations? What factors influence these interpretations?

Alone and together

The idea of allowing students to form their own ideas and then test them against the other participants' ideas and the theory seemed to be effective. This enabled the students to see the ideas from a variety of perspectives.

> *- It's quite interesting to discuss the images at first and the compare results with theory. (c49)*
>
> *You may not know but I have worked for XXX as a research executive. I carried out quantitative research. I saw also qualitative researchers in their work. Group discussions I understood, but these projective technics I still doubt. But this your technic makes sense. (c313*

The specifics of how this happens are in need of improvement as the next section shows.

"Beating the dead dog"

The above comment is a quote from my observation notes. It describes the feeling of trying to get more out of something that has already reached the saturation point. While students seemed to discover new ways of looking at images and small group discussions were at times lively, there was too much repetition built into classroom work. Examples of this could be seen in:

1. Having students analyze the same images for the whole course

2. Having students discuss only in small groups sometimes with the same members for the whole course.

3. Having students fill out many similar type image analysis worksheets.

Same images

The first point of 'over saturation' involved the images and how much to examine one image. Students made the following comments:

> *- More different kinds of images – the pace slowed down when we had a limited amount of images to examine – perhaps we could have created our own images to test the theory and see if it works? (d74)*

> *- I think, however, it has been interesting to pick images apart, but maybe we needed more variety in the images. (c44)*

In addition to the above comments some students made verbal suggestions that a course of this type should include viewing hundreds of images. I feel as if that is what we do in our daily lives. We are exposed to a flood of visual images. In a way it is numbing. Can we make sense of them if we don't slow down and see what is behind a few? In that way we can approach the mass in a more informed way. I could increase the number of images we look at when I describe visual design grammar to the students. I still think it is important that they analyse a few images from a number of perspectives. In order to increase their exposure to a wide variety of images we could do away with analysing a partner's image ahead of time. Partner's images could be spontaneously discussed in small groups. The small group members could be different each class which means everyone looks at new images each lesson and that may bring the necessary 'freshness' to the classroom.

I purposely refrained from offering students images to choose from. I did have a box of some so that students who forgot their own could have something to look at. I wanted the images to come from the students' own environments, areas of interests, cultures, etc. The choice of *what* to look at is such a strong element that directs the rest of the analysis. I wanted the images to be from the students' world not mine.

Then there is the question of sticking only to advertisements in the beginning. Some students did not follow these instructions and brought in i.e.

photojournalism examples from the beginning. It did not seem to hinder the conversations in tier two. The group members seemed to be 'thirsty' for a wide variety of images. It must be remembered that this was a mature group. With younger students it may keep the analysis more focused if the initial assignment is to look at advertisements. They offer a common ground to compare (i.e. ads are made for the same purpose) and then after the theory is familiar the students could expand their analysis to other type of images.

Same small groups

There were comments concerning how limited it was to always talk in a small group sometimes with the same people.

> *- Small group working dull – too much time. Large group discussions better and more interesting. (d75)*
>
> *- The work we did in class, I (and the others in my group) would have preferred to have more open discussion with the other groups, and not be given so long to go over and over our own images. It was good to discuss with others from very different backgrounds(c412).*

Concentration on small group discussions was discussed earlier in this thesis. The idea that your partners are always the same was based on the idea that a partner has interpreted your image beforehand with the image analysis worksheet and can give contemplative feedback. That idea backfired with attendance problems. I would definitely change the small group structure in future courses. Analysing with the entire group together brings about more perspectives but it often got out of hand as described earlier. How to have a discussion with 19 people? Some members inevitably dominated, spoke out of turn, etc. Maybe I am too democratic minded but if we have a group discussion then all should have a chance to participate. In practice it is impossible and some members inevitably are not able to express their opinion. As a teacher in front of the class I could see frustration on the faces of those who had something to say but were not willing to interrupt those who dominated. The shear numbers made my role of giving people turns to speak difficult.

In the future I think I would leave out the task of analysing a partners' images beforehand. Everyone would analyse their own images and new groups would be formed each lesson depending on who is present. Members would give spontaneous feedback to each other. There would be fresh images and viewpoints each lesson. As far as whole group discussions. I think that before I give out the image analysis worksheet I could take one image and ask the questions of the worksheet to the whole group. People could give various opinions and at the same time I could check to see that they understood the questions. I did this in tier 3 and it was very effective. When they went to fill out the worksheet for their own images they had a much better idea of what was expected.

Same worksheets

In addition to the repetition of images and group members there was the issue of filling out similar type image analysis worksheets. Some of the students responded to this in the following way:

> *- I think the worksheets are somewhat repetitive, and become boring to fill in. (c412)*

> *- The worksheets were quite repetitive, so it was difficult to stay motivated to analyse the same images over and over again. I'm wondering how I'll be able to apply this in my own teaching.(c44)*

There were many pages of image analysis worksheets with similar types of questions. First students were asked to classify their image and then they should give their opinion of this classification. Although these classifications concerned different aspects, the procedure of filling out the worksheets seemed to become too routine. I think this could be avoided by filling out an example worksheet together as a class about an example image that I choose. Hopefully this would clarify which of the 13 aspects is presented for that lesson. Another point that might illustrate visual design grammar without total concentration on the worksheet would be to have the students do hands-on experiments with images. An example of this would be to cut up the image and

try to recreate the same type of message with a new composition. These hands-on activities would add variety and support the worksheets.

Introducing visual design grammar

Visual design grammar was introduced to the group via overhead transparencies after the small group discussions concerning the participants' own interpretations. I wanted the students to form their own opinions and listen to others feedback before they heard how Kress and van Leeuwen view the subject. Due to time constraints there was not a lot of time to discuss the theory. I broke visual design grammar in 13 parts and explained the main highlights of the theory. The small groups were then given a copy of that day's theory and the students could later on retrieve the information from a web-based learning environment. This quick exposure was not a solid base to immediately discuss images as one student commented: *On the course I did not get a very clear conception of the theory. Maybe, I would have had needed more time to learn and assimilate it. (c41)*

It was not the intention that all images should or even can be interpreted through all 13 points. This was obviously not made clear and there was some frustration expressed that students' images could not be interpreted from all 13 perspectives. This is illustrated in comments such as: *The picture does not fit with the normal theory because there is no role of the face nearly at all. (e6)* As if to say that if there is not a face with which to compare the eye-contact theory of visual design grammar then the theory is proven wrong. These misconceptions are a result of too quickly going over the ideas of Kress and van Leeuwen. A means to correct this could be to show a few examples of images interpreted via visual design grammar. This would illustrate the theory in practice and hopefully help it to become more understandable. Another idea would be to make a chart with the basic ideas.

In the very beginning stages of course planning I had intended to supplement visual design grammar with alternative image analysis theories. The time constraints did not allow for a broader analysis of images. This created an

obvious void in the course. When asked what they would improve in the course two students commented on this topic:

> *- Introduce competing theories? Other concepts of image analysis, time permitting, of course. (d711)*

> *- Taking into account that different subject areas have different interpretations or use for the image analysis theory. (d77)*

Meeting course goals

If we take an overall look at the main course of my action research project, tier 2, it seems that the goals of the course were met successfully. The students were asked the following question: The course has been designed to serve two interactive functions.

> -to acknowledge and discover that visual images can function at a variety of levels and be interpreted in many ways.

> -to develop the confidence, courage and ability to participate in group discussions.

> How well were the course goals met for you?

Figure 13 shows that the average rating among the 15 respondents was 4.0. Thus it seems that despite the repetition in images, small groups and worksheets, the students were exposed to images in a new light and discussion was a means to express these interpretations.
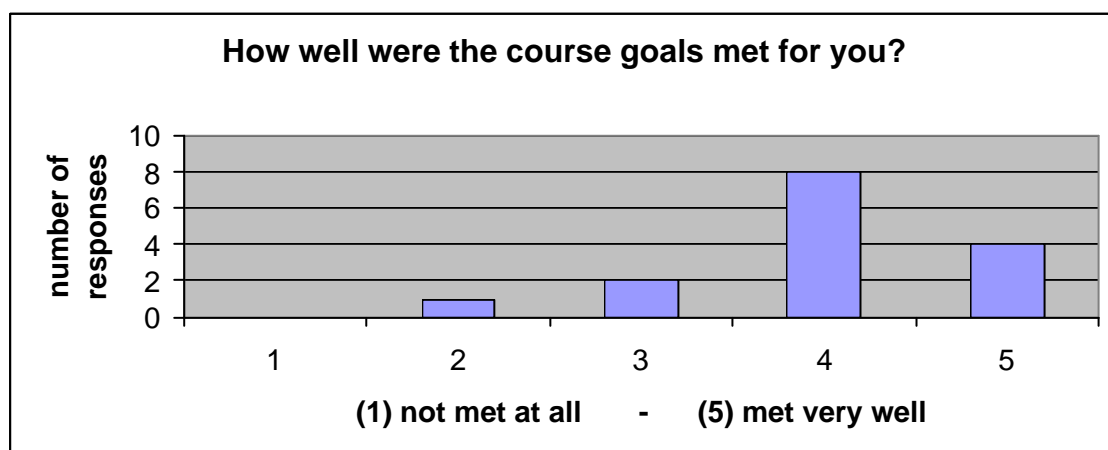
Figure 13. How well were the course goals met for you?

The honest feedback and dialogue with participants in tier 2 provided the means to contemplate the development of the course. Much of the data received needed time to reflect and ponder its meaning. As tier 3 began while tier 2 was still in session, it was not possible to realize all of the changes that were necessary.

9.3.3 Tier three

We went through the image analysis worksheets together with the group in tier 3 before they used them to analyze their own images. I asked the group how they would answer the questions for an example image that I showed them. It seemed to help clarify what aspect of the image we would concentrate on for that lessons' theory. It seems that this made it easier for them to approach the worksheet for their own images.

The worksheets themselves did not change much. I didn't have a chance to instigate the hands-on exercises mentioned in 8.32. Students in tier 3 seemed to agree with students in tier 2 that the repetition of the worksheets needs to be adjusted. Two of the five students mentioned the exercises when asked what they would improve in the course.

9.4 Validity

The research method used in this thesis was action research. It's cyclical and reflective nature is well suited for pedagogical study as coursework repeats itself and offers a chance to reflect on methods and materials used in the classroom. The evaluation tools were feedback from the course participants and teacher observations. This gives a double-sided approach to reporting on what happened throughout the lessons. Both the research method and evaluation tools reflect the experience of the course *I look but do I see?.* They provide results that coincide and support each other. The feedback and reactions of the students are reflected in the observations of the teacher. The group work nature of action research is enhanced by the interaction to uncover the problem areas as well as finding viable solutions and alternatives. The

suggestions for these areas of improvement came openly from the course participants.

The feedback for this study came at various intervals throughout the 3-tier project. This systematic gathering of data offers feedback from different perspectives. Validity is based on the successful interaction of various sources of information (Anttila 1996, 416). The sound documentation of information collected in the course *I look but do I see?* raises the validity of the study as a whole.

The interpretations for this study were based on data that was collected from various feedback forms, image analysis exercises and observations in the classroom. There was a high rate of return, which increases the validity of the study. The chart below shows the percentage of participants who completed the forms/exercises

form/exercise[40]	percentage of participants who completed
Feedback form for tier 1	3/7 = 43%*
Feedback form #1 for tier 2	15/18 = 83%
Feedback form #2 for tier 2	15/18 = 83%
Image analysis exercise for tier 2	18/18 = 100%
Feedback form for tier 3	5/7 = 71%

*When thinking of validity of responses to questionnaires one may wonder about tier1 when only 3/7 respondents are included in the course findings section. In reality almost all course participants filled out the feedback. Some of them returned it to another teacher and those questionnaires were lost. In talking to this other teacher he confirmed that the responses to those he saw were in line with the 3 feedback forms that I received. Thus I feel that the generalizations based on feedback that I made for tier one are valid.

The validity of my thesis is not based on scientific proof. Its validity is concerned with how the results can help educators perform more effectively in their work. I think my thesis offers some insights into successful image analysis instruction.

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[40] See appendixes 7-10 for feedback forms

PART IV

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

10 Conclusions and summary

Visual design grammar offers a perspective from which to examine visual images. It not only suggests a framework of what to look at it, it also provides an interpretation of what these perspectives mean. The course *I look but do I see?* was based on looking at images from 13 aspects of visual design grammar.

A 5-step process of image analysis was used in the classroom. That first look at an image is influenced by whom we are. We can acknowledge those meanings we find in an image (step 1) and then share them with others. Through these types of discussions (step 2) it may become apparent that what we see is not necessarily what others pay attention to. They may look at the same image and see something else. What at first seemed obvious is now questioned. The so-called 'evidence' in front of us is now seen in a new light. This setting of contrasting views is a fertile environment to express and exchange ideas. The stimulant for this discussion is in a non-verbal form that everyone can receive in some way. Then bring in an outside 'authority'. Visual design grammar offers a relatively simple set of ideas to digest and explore (step 3). How do the collective views of the small group stand up to a supposed framework found behind western images? This comparing and contrasting of the reading images theory with group experiences (step 4) will be a second chance to test one's own initial ideas. Then it is time to examine new forms of visual expression in light of the theory (step 5).

How does visual design grammar function in the classroom? As the results of all 3 tiers in my study seem to coincide with each other I think the following conclusions can be made.

Image interpretation

How did visual design grammar act as a tool to acknowledge and discover that images can function at a variety of levels and be interpreted in many ways? The students' reaction to visual design grammar was of a neutral nature. That meant they could make interpretations without relying too positively or negatively on the theory. The majority of course participants reported that they look at images in a more critical and aware manner after having looked at images from the 13 points of visual design grammar. When the theory was first introduced there was a tendency to accept it at face value. As the course progressed and the students were able to ponder the ideas of Kress and van Leeuwen at length a more critical approach was evident. The most contested aspect of the theory was that it could be used to interpret all forms of Western visual images.

It seems from the above results that visual design grammar succeeded in making the students' more aware of the vast interpretive potential that images hold. Many students did not have much if any experience in image analysis. By stopping and concentrating on images they acknowledged that image interpretations could vary quite a bit. They moved on from this initial reaction and discovered how images from a variety of genres could be compared to earlier interpretations. A more critical approach may have arisen from the fact that opinions differed and the experientially gained realization that images are not 'innocent creations'. They have been constructed by someone, for someone, within a context, etc.

Although Kress and van Leeuwen believe that their theory can be applied to all Western images, in practice their ideas are most fitting for popular print media and in particular advertisements. The exploration of other forms of still images is not fruitless with visual design grammar but the ideas cannot be applied as readily.

The art of discussion

How did the *I look but do I see?* course act to develop the confidence, courage and ability to participate in group discussions? The response from the students indicates that there was an encouraging atmosphere to exchange opinions. There was an equal balance of agreeing and disagreeing with each other that may have kept the discussions interesting. There was also an equal balance of how students' image interpretations agreed or disagreed with visual design grammar. This seems to indicate that there is some substance to the theory, which creates a common ground for discussion. The overwhelming majority believed that visual design grammar is an effective platform from which to discuss visual images.

In the final evaluation of their own performance, students rated how they felt they met the goals of the course. The average rating on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest, was 4.   Thus they believed that they had become more proficient. From the teacher standpoint it was encouraging to see the improvement of those students who were very timid and shy in the beginning. Towards the end of the course they sometimes offered their opinions openly, not only when they were directly asked questions. In my opinion the students did not learn mechanical skills of discussion, i.e. grammar, in my course. They already had the ability to discuss and I attempted to offer an encouraging environment where these skills could be used and developed in authentic situations.

Pedagogical aspects

The effective use of visual design grammar requires some adaptations to the original idea of the course *I look but do I see?.* A general streamlining of ideas into a more fluent approach would serve the needs of the course. This includes a clearer version of the image analysis worksheets. Classroom exercises could begin by discussion based on the worksheets but a more hands-on approach of experimenting with images (i.e. changing composition to see effect of) would add some diversity to the course. A definite improvement for the course would

be the exclusion of strict judgement. This means avoiding the use of 'right' and 'wrong' in favor of a more holistic approach where interpretations are compared and related. Freedom must be built into the course to offer a wider exposure to images and classmates' opinions. Visual design grammar could be introduced in a more illustrative way and with a less dominating role.

General comments

The purpose of this thesis was to attempt to answer the question: How does visual design grammar function as a teaching framework in an introductory image analysis discussion course? I believe that visual design grammar played an essential role in realizing the two main goals of the course. It opens up the visual world to students and concentrates on aspects of an image that the casual viewer wouldn't pay specific attention to.

Educational goals are only mere rhetoric in the classroom without a sound plan for implanting them. Thus the pedagogical aspects of realizing these goals take an important place. I think my 3 courses show that it did raise discussion and the students became more aware of visual communication but the way in which I went about this has room for improvement. Students should be encouraged to tap into their life experiences in interpreting images but this initial reaction is not enough. Continuous comparing, discovering and reasoning of ideas are necessary to become literate in the visual world.

I believe that visual design grammar helps students become aware of the fact that images are not copies of reality. Images give us only hints and a framework on which the viewer creates a lifelike visual observance. Someone has "seen" already on our behalf and arranged the scene according to their own agenda. These aspirations to influence the viewer may go unseen. (Hietala 1993, 11-12.) Visual design grammar offers one way to decode these methods of influence. Whether one agrees with these interpretations is not as important as the awareness they bring about.

Development areas

Discussion is one key element of the course and controversy is one means to achieve this goal. Controversy can be aroused by differences in the participants, i.e. personality, age, sex, social class, experiences, backgrounds, etc. The greater the heterogeneity among groups members, the more diverse interaction patterns and resources for achievement and problem-solving (Johnson and Johnson 1995, ch.3:18). Thus a direction for developing this course would be to gather a diverse population into the classroom. This could be achieved by simultaneously offering this type of instruction as an elective course to a wide variety of study programs. The fact that it is held in English would allow for Finnish and foreign students alike to attend.

A negative side of using this theory in an introductory course is that for those students with little prior knowledge and experience in image analysis and/or those lacking in critical analysis skills visual design grammar may appear as the truth and rule. In this case it is important to stress the controversial role of visual design grammar as a platform for discussion and offer alternative viewpoints.

The use of visual design grammar is increasing in the classroom. More and more I have noticed it on the reading lists of visual communication courses. Kress and van Leeuwen hope that their theory will be used to increase awareness and knowledge of visual literacy. I'm skeptical as to how widespread Reading Images will be accepted. Educators must incorporate this theory into their teaching for it to become commonplace. I'm afraid it won't be adopted by the masses due in part to their style of writing. I have read the book many times over the past year and every time I pick it up I feel the need to start from the beginning. Their organization and style of writing is confusing. I had to translate what I read onto paper in a more readable fashion before I began to understand it. One would need a solid background in written grammar to get the full impact of the book. Through practice and experimentation their ideas become clearer.

The intense concentration on visual design grammar in the pilot courses and this thesis is not meant to imply that images should only be approached from this perspective. Of course other viewpoints are welcome and necessary. I believe visual design grammar touches on many approaches and could open discussion for other perspectives. An example of this is the salience section. It offers a few examples of formalistic interpretations but hardly scratches the surface. This could give direction for a much deeper look into design elements and principles.

Perkins describes the reflective intelligence necessary for a fuller perception of images. This guided looking brings up dimensions that might have otherwise been overlooked in experiential intelligence. The 13 points of visual design grammar offer these kind of guidelines or framework to draw one's attention to. They are not exhaustive. Perkins suggests other perspectives such as: compare the work with another, make mental changes to the work to see what effect that may have, look for mood or personality in the work, what is the symbolism, etc. The choice of what to look at or for is always biased. Identifying the perspective from which to examine is an important acknowledgement. (Perkins 1994, 52-53, 64-65.)

Visual design grammar offers a possible starting point from which to explore visual images. It may motivate students to look farther into the levels of interpretation and fill those gaps that visual design grammar leaves open. The consideration of other image analysis viewpoints would be a valuable addition to coursework. The ability to read images requires that we can critically evaluate our visual environment. The fruitful interaction of many perspectives is one way to increase our understanding and appreciation of our rich visual culture.

In image analysis, as in most other areas, we are not concerned with the uncovering of the single truth. As is a goal of arts education, art talk is a means to express and deepen an understanding of our visual world. Through discussion we can articulate our own ideas and get feedback from others. My

Pro Gradu thesis reveals that visual design grammar can be an effective tool to spur this kind of verbal interaction among students.

Even though Reading Images does not live up to the statement on the back cover "..comprehensive account of visual design", I do think that it is a bold attempt to systematically uncover the many faces images hold. It does this in an almost naive way. This vulnerability makes it appealing and raises questions, which lead to discussion. Through verbalizing opinions, sharing them with others and getting feedback, the vast world of visual images may become a bit more familiar. Even if one decides to throw the interpretation tool away once an analysis of an image is ready, it has still been valuable in opening up new channels of thought. In this way it also shows that there is not an absolute truth on which to base ideas in visual analysis.

While action research is meant to study a localized case and not to produce generalities to be applied in all situations, I think my study offers suggestions or at least a perspective from which to develop discussion based curriculum in image analysis. Visual design grammar is a viable alternative to ignite discussion about our very visual world.

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Appendix 1. Image analysis worksheets # 1-5

<u>Image Analysis Worksheet #1</u>

(in this exercise *image* refers to the whole advertisement)

your name: _____

source of image: _____

publishing date: _____

give the image a name/title: _____

1. Study the image for a few minutes so that you can form an overall impression. Write a couple of sentences to describe the image - what you see, feel, think etc.

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Divide the image into 4 equal parts. Study each section and use the chart below to list people, objects, activities and other things you see.

<u>people</u>	objects	activities	other

3. Based on what you wrote in no. 2, list some things you might assume about this image.

_____

_____

4. What questions does this image raise in your mind?

_____

_____

5. Who has produced this image?

_____

6. How has it been distributed?

_____

7. Who is the intended consumer or for whom is the image produced?

_____

8. What values, experiences and perspectives are shared by the audience?

_____

_____

9. In what ways does the image reflect cultural attitudes and values?

_____

Image Analysis Worksheet #2

your name: _____

image name/title:

_____ | _____

1. Is there direct eye contact between the people in the image and you, the viewer?

_____ | _____

2. What kind of effect does eye contact or no eye contact have? What do you think the producer of the image is attempting to do by this?

_____ | _____

_____ | _____

_____ | _____

3. How close are the people in your image shown – close (ex. close-up of face), medium (ex. from the waist up), long (ex. people are distant in the picture)?

_____ | _____

4. What kind of effect does the closeness of people have? What do you think the producer of the image is attempting to do by this?

_____ | _____

_____ | _____

Image Analysis Worksheet #3

your name: _____

image name/title:

image 1	image 2

1. How close are the objects/products in your image shown – close (ex. see only part of the product), medium (ex. see the whole product and it covers most of the image), long (ex. products are set back)?

_____

2. What kind of effect does that have? What do you think the producer of the image is attempting to do?

_____

_____

_____

3. An imaginary viewer is someone who could feasibly see your image in a "natural setting". Who (what sort of person) and where could this person be to see this scene in this way?

_____

_____

_____

Image Analysis Worksheet #4

your name(s): _____

image name/title:

_____|_____

 image 1   image 2

1. How would you describe the horizontal angle of your image – frontal (as if you are looking directly ahead) or oblique (as if you are looking from the side)?

_____|_____

2. What kind of effect does the horizontal angle have? What do you think the producer of the image is attempting to do?

_____|_____

_____|_____

_____|_____

3. How would you describe the vertical angle of your image – high (ex. you are looking down to the image), eye-level (ex. you are looking straight on) or low angle (you are looking up to the image)?

_____|_____

4. What kind of effect does the vertical angle have? What do you think the producer of the image is attempting to do?

_____|_____

_____|_____

Image Analysis Worksheet #5

your name(s):   _____

image name/title:

_____|_____

 image 1   image 2

1. How real, true or factual do you think the image shows things as they really are?

(ex. it would be possible for someone to walk out in the street and see this scene) (circle a

number below)

image 1

1	2	3	4	5
(not real at all)				(extremely real)

image 2

1	2	3	4	5
(not real at all)				(extremely real)

2. How much is the image represented as we normally see it?

(ex. someone might think that a photo represents a car as we normally see it more than a

painting of a car)

(circle a number below)

image 1

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all as we normally see it)				(exactly as we normally

see it)

image 2

1	2	3	4	5
(not at all as we normally see it)				(exactly as we normally

see it)

3. How would you compare the contents of the left side with the contents of the

right side of the image?

_____|_____

_____|_____

4. How would you compare the contents of the top half with the contents of the

bottom half of the image?

_____|_____

_____|_____

Appendix 2. Student personal data form

Please fill in the following information or choose from the options below. The data will be used for forming discussion groups and research purposes only.

1. name:

2. age:

      under 20

      21-30

      31-40

      41-50

      51-60

      over 60

3. sex:

      male

      female

4. Where are you from?

5. work experience:

6. subject you teach/will teach:

7. English language background:

      native speaker

      non-native

      (If native speaker, don't need to answer next two questions)

      How much did you study English in school?

      How much do you use/have you used English in practice?

8. What comes to mind when you hear the words image analysis?

9. How much experience do you have with analysing images?

      none

      some

      a lot

10. What is your motivation for attending this course? What do you hope to learn / do / concentrate on?

Appendix 3. Answers to question 1, feedback form #1, tier 2

The grammar of visual design is a relatively new framework for analysing images. What is your general reaction to it?

This was an open question and I placed their answers into the following categories.

accepting

> *Interesting. Near to the basic psychological knowledge of visual interpretations.* (c11)

> *On some principles, it is exactly what I have experienced by my own: importance of foreground to the detriment(?) of background, frontal or oblique viewing, etc…* (c110)

> *It gave me totally new ideas of understanding images. This K&L approach seems to be very interesting. I have not earlier thought of eye contact or horizontal and vertical angles. The world of images opened to me in an interesting way. Left side and right side comparisons are also fruitful.* (c113)

> *I think it makes sense depending on a number of factors such as personal perception, cultural background and individual interpretations. In my view, I think I can use it to promote something like tourism in Kenya.* (c114)

neutral

> *Not that new, I think. Maybe there are some new perspectives or ways to look at things in the image.* (c12)

> *Images can appear in different styles, colours, sizes, patterns, forms etc. however I find it somehow difficult to accept the fact that they could conclusively be defined or analysed. There are some images that do not make sense at all. The point of focus, positioning ("left=given, right=new", contents of representation, measurements, color patterns, etc. all of these could be interpreted from other angles. However, since the grammar is just a new framework for analysing images it would be interesting to learn more about it.* (c13)

> *I think it is a new philosophical way of analysing images, I think too that we can not have rules or points to follow as every one has his/her way of seeing things.* (c15)

First it was little confusing, but when we were doing more exercises it started to "open". (c17)

I accept, I mostly agree "the theory". I think the field is interesting. On the other hand: the outcomes are quite standardized, "normal". Many times contradictions and extremes are targeted in ad's also. (c18)

I don't think it's a new framework for analysing images, but it might give you help for analysing images. (c19)

In a general context, I would say that the theories are correct, however, I question to what extent it can be applied. (c111)

Most of the concepts discussed seem to be useful for analysis of an image, rather than for actually creating a new image. I don't believe that any artist or designer will think (like this) why they create such and such a composition. It is a bit like body gestures – once someone has explained theories of arm position, eye movement etc, you become so self-conscious that it is hard to do anything! Artists "learn" to instinctively know if something works or not in a composition. Possibly these theories would be more useful for advertising designers who have to appeal to mass audience. (c112)

I feel it is a valid theory, but more for advertising and less for photojournalism and least for visual art. It is, however, relevant to teaching materials. (c115)

skeptical

It seems rather limiting – I find it hard to believe that this can be applied to <u>all</u> images – or is it significant when an image doesn't fit the criteria? Does it take into consideration exceptions? – is there any explanation for that? (c14)

I do not understand why we should analyse these images. What is the point? What are the outcomes of this? (c16)

Appendix 4. Answers to question 3 from feedback form #1, tier 2

Has it (referring to visual design grammar which was mentioned directly before this question in the feedback form) **changed your way of looking at images? If so, how? If not, why?**

This was an open question and I placed their answers into the following categories.

yes

> *Has made me more accurate/critical in looking at images. Still, images effect on emotions, and you still have those feelings.* (c31)

> *In a sense, yes, it has changed my way of looking at images. Well, before I didn't pay much attention to the meaning and contents of what an image can represent.* (c33)

> *Yes, as I have been introduced to a different way of looking at things as well where to look and how to translate.* (c35)

> *It has changed it a little, but after this course I believe that I will take a closer look of the advertises.* (c37)

> *Yes it has! Images which prior to this looked so obvious acquired a different meaning. One important conclusion is that it has introduced a critical way of looking at images which would otherwise be taken for granted.* (c314)

> *Yes, somewhat. Made me think more about the significance and meaning of image design and placement in a more analytical manner.* (c315)

yes and no

> *It does not change my way of looking at images, I admit. But it surely deepen it and my critic more profound and disciplined.* (c32)

> *For the purposes of this course, yes, but I haven't really applied it I my daily life. Perhaps I use aspects of it to understand images, but I also have other concerns (i.e. how all images are constructs, what is left out/edited, the propaganda of images…)* (c34)

> *Yes, maybe I am unconsciously trying to find out these theories from the images, don't know for sure.* (c36)

No! I think now I have thought for 30 years. Of course I now better understand why ad's are like they are. I think, people see images and pictures as they have seen for "million year" Gestalt Psychology! (c38)

In the short term, I think that I may look at images differently, but in time I think I will just revert to what and how I look at images before. (c311)

no

It hasn't changed much my way of looking at images. (c39)

It did not, because I used to analyze images more or less like that when needs be. (c310)

I believe that I already have a quite well developed visual vocabulary, and I don't find that I need this framework – especially as I am not convinced that it is 100% correct. It is almost like saying that every image created by any person will always follow these guidelines – which must be untrue! Composition and content depend on context, time, place, social conditions, etc. Possibly I may now "try out" these ideas and see if they work – I expect that some of the time they may, as these are quite general concepts. (c312)

Appendix 5. Feedback form with answers from tier 3

English communicational skills
course feedback, Invaliidiliitto 02/04

5 students responded out of 7

1. The goal of the course was to develop the confidence, courage and ability to participate in group discussions. How well was this goal met for you? Please circle a number below.

1	2	3	4	5
this goal was not met at all for me				this goal was met very well for me

        1. 4, 2. 4, 3. 4, 4. 4, 5. 3, average rating 3.8

2. The grammar of visual design theory is a relatively new framework for analysing images. What is your general reaction to it?

> 1. Se oli ihan mukavaa ja kiinnostavaa. Asiat olivat mielenkiintoisia. Aina oppii jotain uutta. (It was nice and interesting. Things were interesting. Always learn something new)

> 2. Gives a new point of view to look at images.

> 3. Se oli hauskaa, yllättäviä asioita löytyy kuvista, kun niitä tarkastelee tarkemmin. (It was fun, surprising things can be found from images when you look at them closly)

> 4. It is a useful tool, but nothing to get stuck on.

> 5. Kuvallinen teoria..ihan hyvä, parempi kuin teksti. Toki muiden kielienopiskelu sanallisestikin on tärkeää(tässä tapauksessa englanti). (Pictorial theory..OK, better than text. Of course other kinds of language study including written is important (in this case English).

3. How does it work as a platform for discussion of visual images?

> 1. Suhteellisen hyvin. Tosin oma kielitaito oli esteenä välillä keskusteluissa. (Quite well. My own language skills were sometimes a deterent in discussions)

> 2. Gives a good direction what to discuss.

> 3. Ihan mukavasti – juttua ja näkökantoja tuli yhtä monta kuin oli osallistujiakin. (Quite nice, there were as many opinions and stories as there were participants)

> 4. It is a useful starting point for discussion.

> 5. Ei parannusehdotuksia. Toimii kohtuullisesti. (no suggestions for improvements. Works quite well)

4. Has it changed your way of looking at images? If so, how? If not, why?

> 1. On ainakin vähän vaikuttanut. Katson kuvia "uusin silmiin". (It has inluenced at least a bit. I look at images with "new eyes".)

> 2. Yes. Now your can look new angels of pictures.

> 3. Kyllä, ehkä katson niitä nyt analyyttisemmin ja kriittisemmin, saan kuvista enemmän irti. (Yes, maybe I look a more analytically and critically, I get more out of the images)

> 4. Not much.

> 5. ei ole muuttanut. Katson kuvia niin kuin ennenkin. (It hasn't changed. I look at images as I looked before.)

5. Positive points of the course:

> 1. Hyvä opettaja. Johti keskustelua hyvin. En ole kovinkaan tyytyväinen omaan suoritukseeni mutta on aina hyvä harjoittaa kielitaitoaan. (Good teacher. Led the discussion well. I am not very satisfied with my own performance but it is always good to practice language skills)

> 2. Discussion

> 3. Opettaja johdatteli hyvin ja selkeästi keskustelua, oli palkitsevaa, kuin onnistui ilmaisemaan itseään englanniksi. (teacher led well and clear the discussions, it was rewarding when I succeeded in expressing myself in English)

> 4. The vocal use of english language.

> 5. + ryhmätyö+ tehtävät, +kielen harjaannuttaminen, + joustavuus (+ group work + tasks + developing language skills + flexible)

6. Points to be improved:

> 1. Monipuolisempia tehtäviä. Olen ihan tyytyväinen. (more versatile tasks. I am satisfied)

> 2. Tasks

> 3. ?

> 4. −

> 5. On toki hyvä että kurssilla/tunneilla puhutaan paljon englantia niinhän englannin tunneilla pitääkin puhua! Mutta toisaalta on näitä jotka puhuvat hieman huonommin englantia, kuten minä…(it is of course good that we speak alot of English in the lessons as we should in English class! But on the other hand there are those that don't speak English as well as the others, like me…)

Appendix 6. Answers to question 3, feedback form #1, tier 2.

How does it (visual design grammar) **work as a platform for discussion of visual images?**

This was an open question and I placed their answers into the following categories.

it does work

>*It provokes questions of a more critical analysis on the image. (c22)*

>*It works as a platform for discussion of visual images in the sense that we can take what we consider to be credible enough and leave the rest for others to decide. (c23)*

>*It creates a constructive way of analysing and discussing. (c25)*

>*If it is pressed to a little shorter time, I think that it can be usefull. (c27)*

>*Quite well. Matches with reality, mostly. The basic views, standards, I think, are quite easy to understand. I believe, they are "statistically" true- but not in every case. (c28)*

>*I started to have a look at the images with the theory as a base. (c29)*

>*It helps as a theoretical basis reference. Although it is not applicable to any case in the same way. (c210)*

>*As a platform for discussion, it did work when we were in groups. When analysing images alone, it served to raise questions. (c211)*

>*As stated above, the theories can be useful for analysis, but I am not convinced that they hold up under investigation. Of course, any way to start a discussion about an image can be useful, whether it leads to the "truth" or not – the truth being the artist's intention. (c212)*

>*I think this can very well be used. It makes sense. I have been using these methods daily, when I have been reading newspapers. Sometimes it is impossible and I have been trying to find reasons for that. This left-given, right-new, top-ideal, bottom-real composition does not always fit to the images I have seen. But this is a fascinating system to evaluate images. You only have to get experience to use it right. (c213)*

Very well. Serves as a basis to discuss the theory's validity and how that validity is limited to certain fields. (c215)

neutral

Might be a good platform. If you knew/had adopted the theory thoroughly. (c21)

Because we had the questions, it did generate some discussion – though it did get a bit repetitive to look at the same images over and over – it would be more interesting to look at many images to "test" the theory. (c24)

These theories seem to be obvious, some are not. (c26)

It all depends on the above-mentioned factors as well as the purpose and how it is applied in various situation. Interaction, common understanding and dialogue are all important elements here. (c214)

it doesn't work

(no responses)

Appendix 7. Feedback form from tier 1

course: English communicational skills, 1 credit unit

goal: To develop the confidence, courage and ability to participate in group discussions.

topics: art, communications, media, information technology

dates: 02.12.02 - 31.01.03

days: Wednesdays and Thursdays

times: 12.15 - 14.30

instructor: Diane Ruppert, ruppert@pp.inet.fi

1. Do you feel you met the above goal in this course? why or why not?

2. One of the main topics in this course was image analysis.   How would you describe the exercises?

3. Do you look at images in a different way as a result of this course?

4. How would you rate the course in general?

1   2   3   4   5
(poor)   (excellent)

5. positive points of the course:

6. points to be improved:

Thank you!

Appendix 8. Feedback form #1 from tier 2

Feedback on:
<u>Reading Images: The grammar of visual design</u>

This feedback sheet is meant to gather information on the use of reading images theory as a basis for discussion of visual images. In addition to my own observations, my thesis must show the response of the participants in this course. Thus your honest opinions and constructive criticism are of the utmost importance.

1. The grammar of visual design is a relatively new framework for analysing images. What is your general reaction to it?

2. How does it work as a platform for discussion of visual images?

3. Has it changed your way of looking at images? If so, how? If not, why?

4. Other comments on reading images theory / small group discussions / worksheets/ etc:

Thank you.

Appendix 9. Feedback form #2 from tier 2

Course feedback

1. The course is called: *I look but do I see? - an introductory discussion course in image analysis.*

How well do you think the course lived up to its name? Please circle a number below.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

the course name did
not fit the contents at all

the course name fit
the contents very
well

why? why not?

2. The course has been designed to serve two interactive functions.

-to acknowledge and discover that visual images can function at a variety of levels and be interpreted in many ways.

-to develop the confidence, courage and ability to participate in group discussions.

How well were these goals met for you? Please circle a number below.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

these goals were not
met at all for me

these goals were
met very well for me

why? why not?

3. How would you rate the small group discussions (opinions of group members) in general concerning the interpretations of the images based on the worksheets (the discussions before you saw the theory)? Please circle a number below.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

we never agreed
with each other

we always agreed
with each other

4. How often did your own image interpretations agree with the reading images theory? Please circle a number below.

1   2   3   4   5

never agreed   always agreed
with the theory   with the theory

5. How much has this course given you inspiration / ideas that you can adapt in your own teaching?

1   2   3   4   5

no inspiration / ideas   a lot of inspiration / ideas

6. Positive points of the course:

7. Points to be improved:

Thank you very much and I have enjoyed working with you.

Appendix 10. Feedback form from tier 3

English communicational skills
<u>course feedback</u>

1. The goal of the course was to develop the confidence, courage and ability to participate in group discussions. How well was this goal met for you? Please circle a number below.

1   2   3   4   5

this goal was not   this goal was
met at all for me   met very well for me

2. The grammar of visual design theory is a relatively new framework for analysing images. What is your general reaction to it?

3. How does it work as a platform for discussion of visual images?

4. Has it changed your way of looking at images? If so, how? If not, why?

5. Positive points of the course:

6. Points to be improved:

Thank you very much and I have enjoyed working with you.