

BAIVM Year One

Tuesday 8 October 2024

CONSTRUCTING TASTES: Signs & Semiotics

For more information about this presentation
please contact: chingli.chew@arts.ac.uk
& e.searson@lcc.arts.ac.uk

We might think of visual communication as sharing meaning.

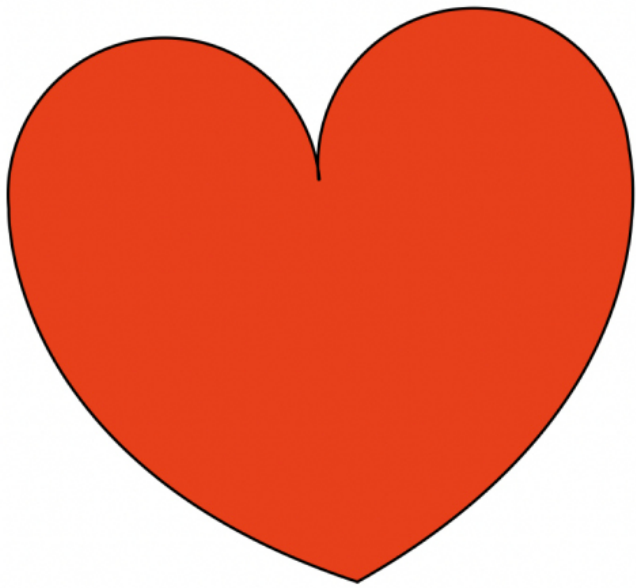
Communication, or shared meaning, sits at the heart of design and taste. As illustrators, we are often tasked with developing visual communication strategies to share an idea, message, emotion, or association to an audience.

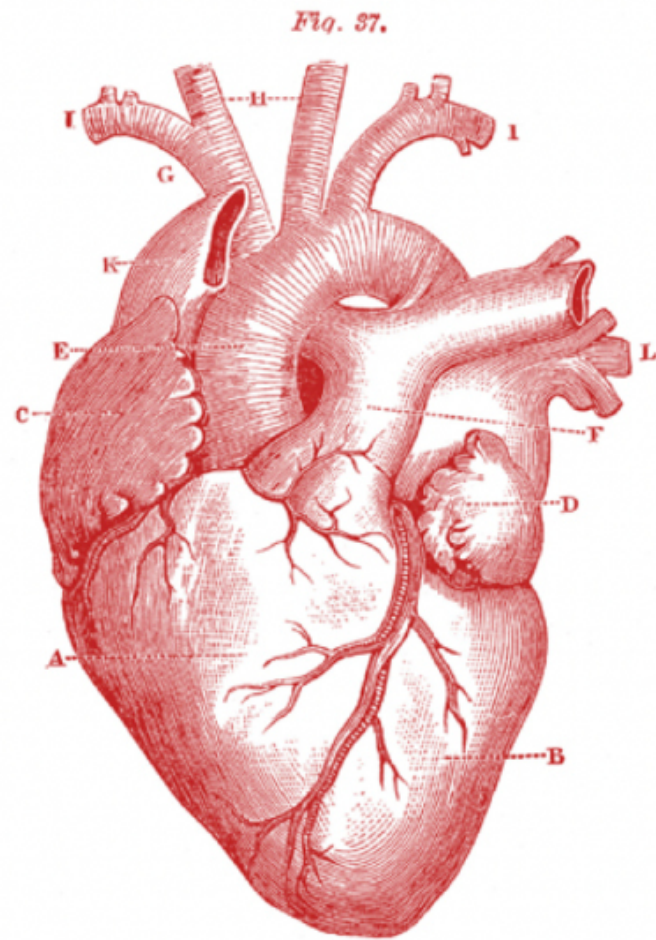
In this session we will be introduced to the study of *Semiotics*, and begin to consider how tools of representation can affect communication.

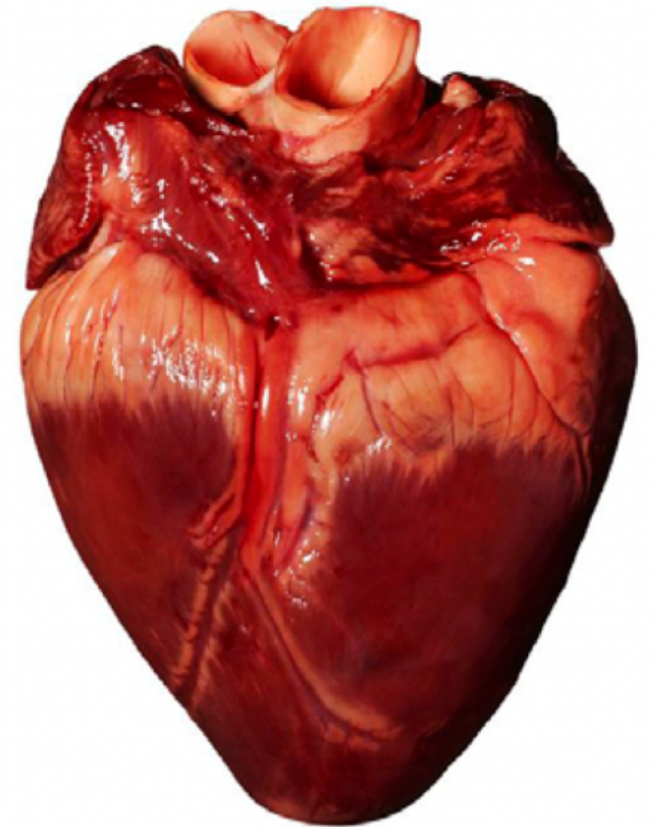
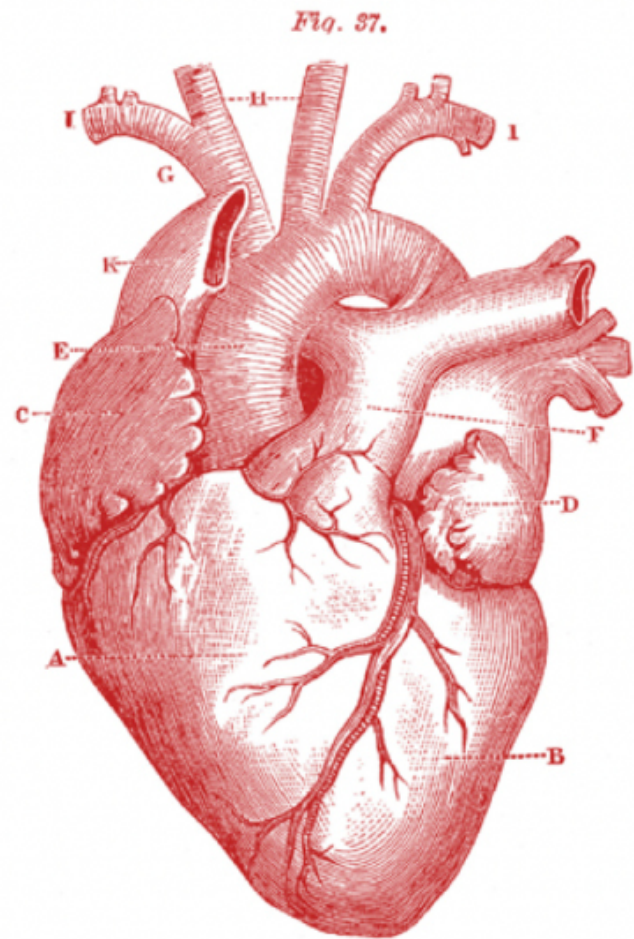
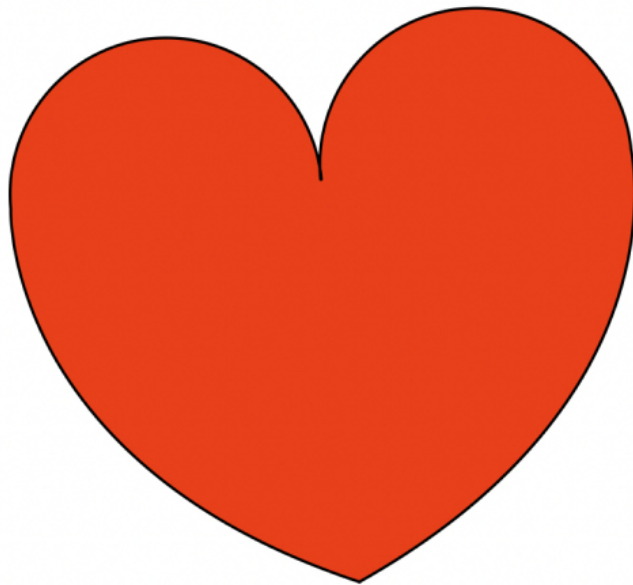
Semiotics is the study of signs

"Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not necessarily have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands in for it."

Umberto Eco (1976) Theory of Semiotics







We use the word 'sign' to talk about something that stands in for something else

If we are to think about this linguistically, a word becomes a sign. A sign often has no inherent link to what it signifies, but we learn to read signs in culture.

"From an early age we are taught the relationship between the **signifier and the **signified**. This is not something we are conscious of, but it remains one of the most fundamental building blocks in the structure of language."**

David Crow (2010) Visible Signs, p.16

Who's this?



Why is he red?



Imposter





Taking semiotics beyond linguistics

In the late 19th Century, a theorist called Charles Sanders Peirce began to explain the role of semiology in visual language. Rather than suggesting that the **signifier** never has a link to the **signified**, Peirce suggested that there can be ways in which **signifiers** sometimes link to **signified** words...

Icon

An icon has a physical / literal resemblance to what is signified.



Symbol

A symbol has no logical connection between the sign and what it signifies.



Index

An index shows evidence of what is being signified. These signs are often caused by what they signify.



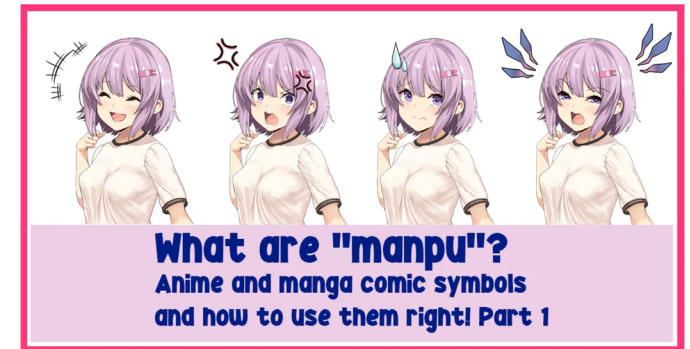
Iconic images are designed to be understood universally. If an image is not 'iconic', it can be assumed that it has been designed for a specific audience.



Keith Haring, *Untitled (Dance)*, 1987

This is because many visuals are often context and/or culture specific and change from culture to culture or from society to society.

As designers, we must be aware of this and think carefully about the audience we are designing for.



Anime Art Magazine, *What are "Manpu"?*, 2022







Style and communication

We can't rely solely on our individual illustrative 'style' or tastes when we have a message to communicate to an audience.

The objects you have brought in today might be cute, utilitarian, decorative, or plain. They might function as symbols, icons, or indexes. How we represent these objects through drawing can change their meaning, message, and function.

Observation and drawing: Analogue and digital

We will now work through various observation and drawing tasks to help us better understand how we can utilise semiology when creating images.

Becoming fluent and flexible with semiotic thinking will enable you to utilise your individual drawing skills to cater to a wide range of audiences and uses.

Colour and representation

First, we want you to observe your object and note down all of the colours you see in it. Note these colours down as swatches either in your sketchbook or on your device.

If my object is my iPhone, here are the colour swatches I observe:



Colour and meaning

Next, we want you to reflect on your colour palette and consider whether the colours are illustrative of your taste towards the object. If you think there is a colour with a more symbolic or indexical meaning related to your object, add this colour to your swatches.

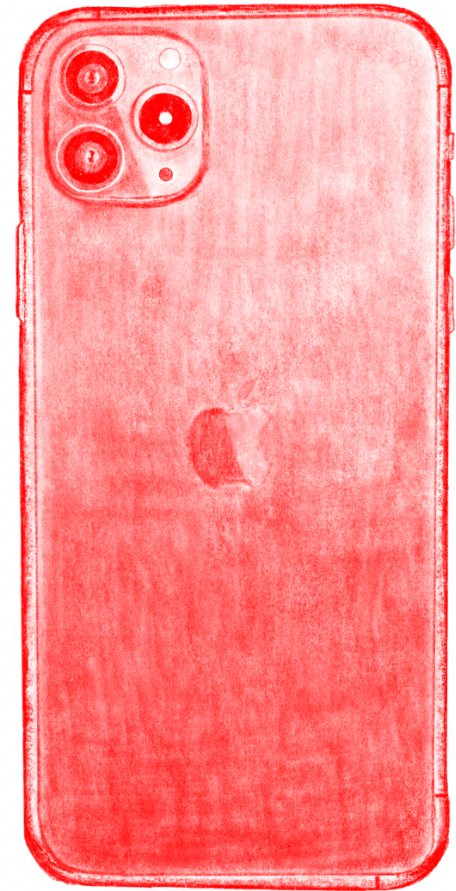
*Today, I am angry at my iPhone, so I will add the colour **red** to my palette. The actual colours of my object are too neutral in comparison to my feelings.*



Observational drawing

Select 1 colour from your collection of swatches and make an observational drawing of the object using only this colour. Pay attention to form and recognisability when making this drawing. Do you wish for the drawing to clearly and directly depict the object's features? Or do you want the drawing to play with our expectations of how the object could be interpreted?

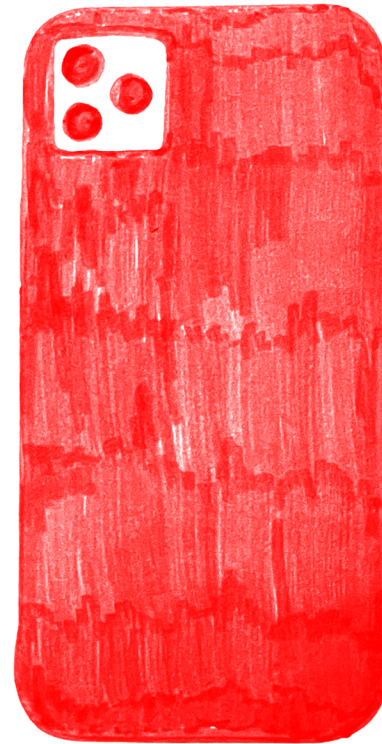
Here I have attempted a classically representational drawing, but could my anger towards this object have been better described with a more scribbly line?



Distilling the image

Reduce your observational drawing into basic blocks. For this task, you can only use block shapes and solid colour... no line work. Try to reduce the image to it's most basic details only, whilst maintaining the ability to recognise the object in the drawing.

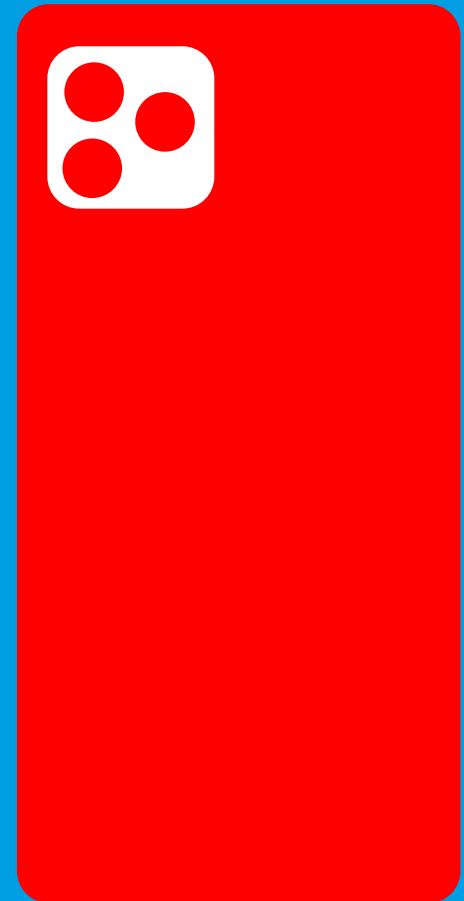
If your observational drawing utilised gestural mark-making (*i.e. if you went for the scribbly iPhone approach*), you can try silhouetting these forms, as demonstrated here:



BREAK 30 mins

In the next part of the session, we will be using Adobe Illustrator on our laptops.

If you don't have a laptop with Illustrator on it then please use the break to borrow one from the library.



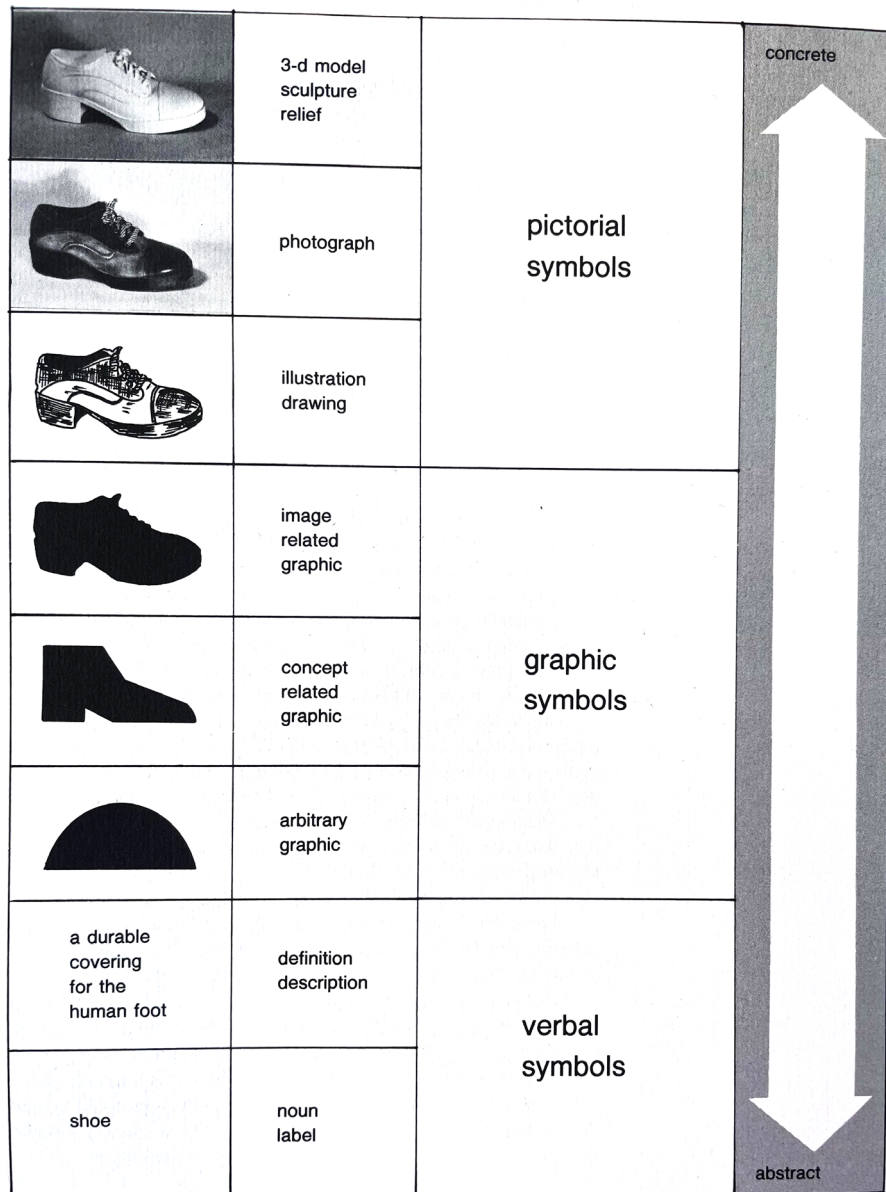


Figure 2. Ways to represent objects

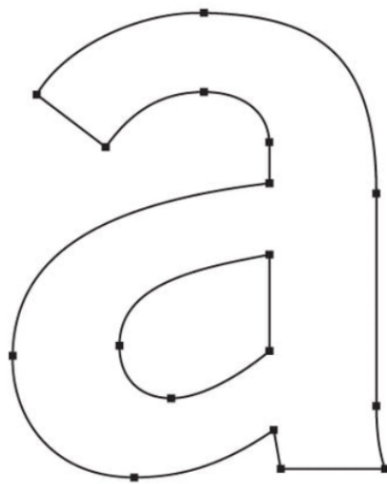
Ways to represent objects

Where do the drawings you've just made sit on this scale?

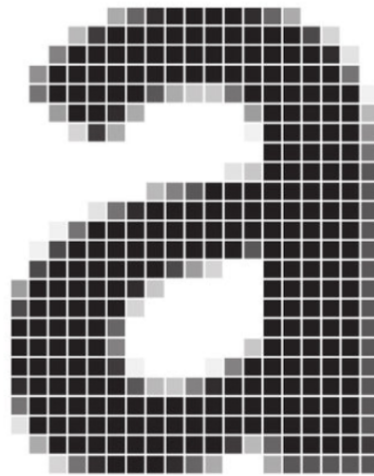
We will now use a digital tool to recreate your graphic symbols as vectors, in order to observe how digital drawing can distill an image further.

Vector vs Raster

What's the difference?



VECTOR



RASTER

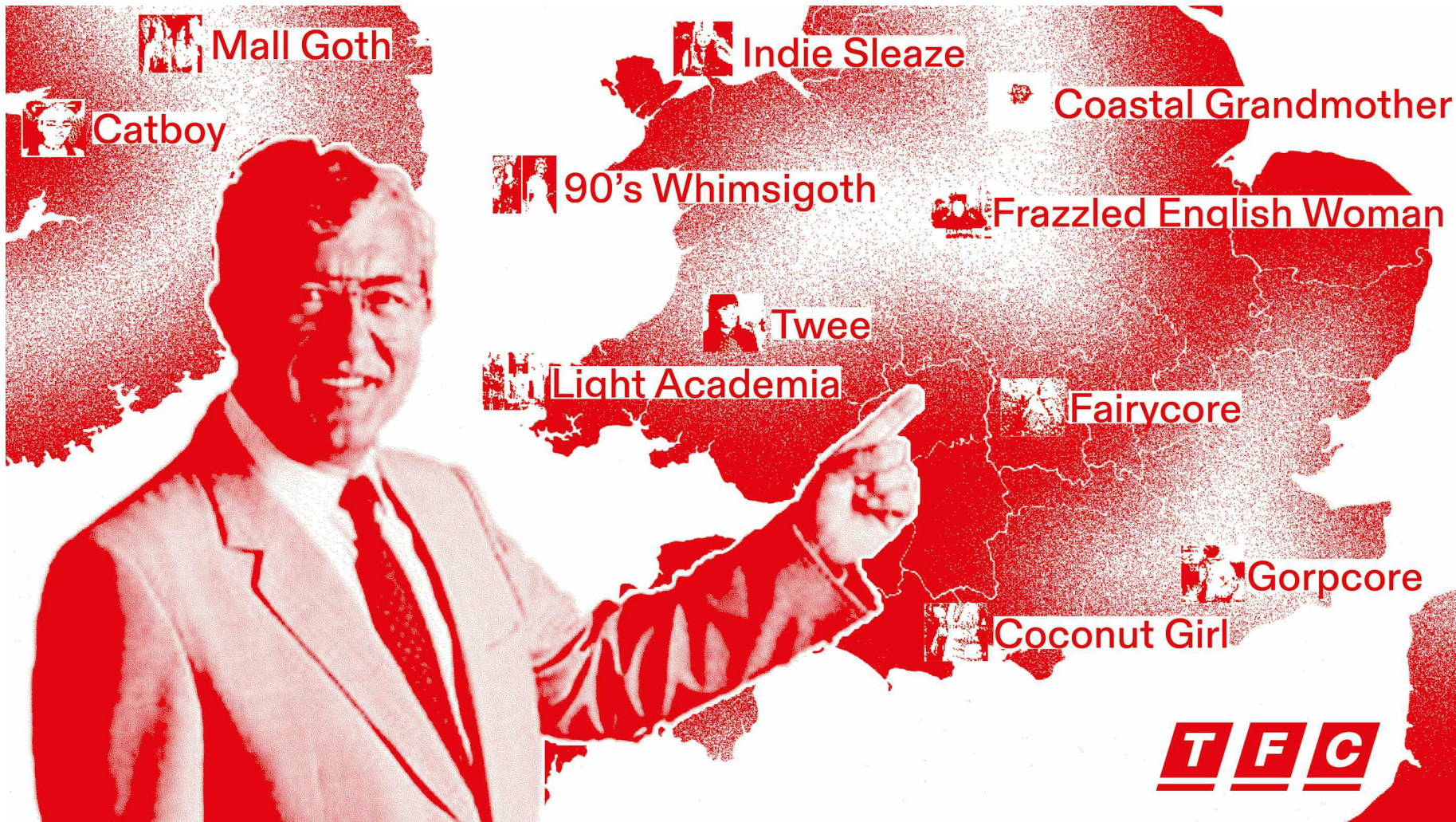
Artwork in Illustrator is vector based and can be resized to any size without any loss in quality.

Digital task

In Illustrator: Using your previous drawings as a guide, we will draw your image as block shapes in Illustrator.

We will be guiding you on-screen and taking you through step-by-step. You can work alongside the demo or take notes. During the demonstrations we will be looking at drawing basic and gestural mark-making.

You will be making these in black and we'll explain in the demonstration how to change the colour later.



*Cloudy With a Chance of Mall Goth
(THE FACE Interview with Sean Monahan)*

Where does our taste come from?

Cultural heritage? Consumerism? *Vibe-shifts*? Music? Politics?
Fundamental needs? The algorithm?

In today's session, we have explored how *cultural heritage* can affect our understanding of images. We have also looked at how *consumerism* changes the way we make meaning and decipher imagery in the world.

Reflecting on our understanding of images on a semiotic basis, we might better understand why we are more drawn to certain images — and where our taste comes from.

With this knowledge, we can also consider the way in which our audiences understand our illustration practice more precisely.

Project Content [weeks 1—4]

Week 1

Tuesday 1 October Project Lab: Project briefing

Thursday 3 October Coaching tutorials

Week 2

Tuesday 8 October AM Project Lab: Printmaking introduction, Signs & Semiotics workshop

Tuesday 8 October PM Library tours

Thursday 10 October Coaching tutorials, printmaking sign-up deadline

Week 3

Tuesday 15 October Project Lab: Student Support visit, Type & Image workshop

Wednesday 16 October AM Digital Skills: Exploration & Play focus

Wednesday 16 October PM Printmaking inductions

Thursday 17 October Coaching tutorials

Week 4

Tuesday 22 October Project Lab: National Portrait Gallery guided visit

Wednesday 23 October AM Digital Skills: Exploration & Play focus

Wednesday 23 October PM Printmaking inductions

Thursday 24 October Coaching tutorials, Contextual & Theoretical Studies (CTS) rotation

Independent study task

Go to the library at some point this week and find a book that excites you. The book could be about taste, or illustration — but it could also be about cats, or race-car driving. Whatever moves you in the moment.

Find a sentence/quote/statement inside the book that you find snappy, and interesting. Write this sentence in your reflective log and bring it to our next Project Lab on Tuesday 15 October.

You might want to make some drawings that illustrate your sentence, or collect some images around it... but this is not compulsory.