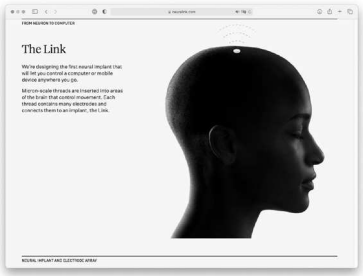
Dr. James Langdon
Fuldastrasse 40
Berlin 12045

Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung Karlsruhe
Lorenzstraße 15
Karlsruhe 76135

**Professur für Design in den Bereichen visuelle Kommunikation und Forschung**

24 September 2023

Dear members of the appointment commission
Dear students of the HfG Karlsruhe








*Communication design promises magical futures*

## WE ARE WORLD-BUILDERS NOW

The practices that have historically been called *graphic design* appear inseparable from the ongoing techno-capital processes that continually shape and reshape our world. As I write, *communication designers* conjure spectacular images of NEOM, a smart city for the global elite under construction in the Saudi Arabian desert, and present Elon Musk's Neuralink brain augmentations as innocent, pastel-coloured accessories to a digital life well-lived. In one very possible future, communication design's persuasive representation of reality in image and text transforms *itself* into an all-consuming *virtual* reality, in which the world and its mediation become one and the same.

## WHY DO THE BEST COMMUNICATION DESIGNERS WORK IN CONTEMPORARY ART?

I trained as an artist in the 1990s, and my communication design practice has been defined by the cultural context of contemporary art. I have achieved significant recognition in that field, winning the GfZK Leipzig's INFORM award in 2012, and lecturing in the Walker Insights Series, at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, in 2015. Between 2008 and 2018 I was a founding director of Eastside Projects, an internationally-recognised contemporary art space in Birmingham, and in 2022 I completed a PhD reflecting on communication design and contemporary art in the design department at RMIT University in Melbourne. I maintain my conviction that independent publishing, friendly interdisciplinary collaboration between artists, designers, and writers, and self-initiated research are vital parts of a progressive communication design culture. These permissive contexts encourage experimentation, coordination, and dissenting criticality, all of which we need more of. I do not believe, however, that a responsible, outward-looking communication design pedagogy can concern itself only with the narrow appeal and precarious working conditions of artistic production.



*2023's computational gestalt*

## LET'S NOT SAY SELF-INITIATED, LET'S JUST TAKE THE INITIATIVE

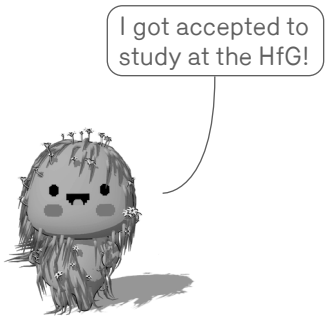
We have all noticed that communication design has become very easy to do. It has long been the case that capital desires the visual simplification of communication design so as to better enable its technical automation: modernism's reductive, gridded aesthetics are the prototypical case in point. Today's sophisticated digital templates and AI content generators only accelerate that tendency, while ushering in a new, computational, gestalt. The consequences of computerisation for the sociology of communication design practice must continually be theorised in order to reflect contemporary conditions. In Renaissance Europe, printers (with typesetters and illustrators in their employ) performed an essential editorial role in the politics of making knowledge public, deciding what would be published and qualifying texts with printed marginalia. In our digital culture there are no such gatekeepers, for better and for worse. Amateur content creators are empowered by access to tools and decentralised publishing networks, and yet the information space is made infinitely more corruptible. On these topics there is much more to say, but, perhaps the most urgent question we must confront as communication designers is this: *How will we create the opportunities to do important work?* We simply cannot wait to be asked.

## NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN PEDAGOGY

I recently completed a six year, 67% W3 professorship in the communication design department at the HfG. I have taught across Europe and beyond, and the HfG is the most constructive pedagogical environment that I have experienced. I am applying for this 100% position not as an over-committed practitioner intending to teach on the side, but as an educator, writer, and designer primarily concerned with responding to the provocations set out in this document.

In order to envision what the HfG might become, it is important to recognise what it is now. The HfG provides its students with generous study-time within which to explore and grow; its convivial atmosphere keeps students in social contact with their peers; its teaching culture imposes no uniform visual style on its students; and, in the ZKM, it makes available an exceptional resource for digital culture and its histories. The HfG locates its students outside the major capital cities — advantageous in their developing autonomy and perspective — and its interdisciplinary conditions are inherent, emerging from the informal camaraderie of the students, the dynamics of the school's temporary professorships, and its lack of rigid curricula. Building on these foundations, the introduction of a 100%, long-term professorship in communication design is an opportunity to add some sustained and recurring elements into the programme, beyond the intensity of single seminars.

In this respect, my initial priorities are three:




**Hi there! Welcome!**

# 1) BASIC SKILLSETS

**We have long been told that designers should learn to code, but now we hear that AI is coming for the coders' jobs first. What skills will a designer need in the 2030s? One thing is for sure, we must not be led around by Adobe, Midjourney, and OpenAI.**

**BASIC COURSE: PROPORTIONAL GRAPHICS**

It is vital that all students learn to use Adobe's industry standard software, and the HfG already has a successful model in which older students and alumni teach these courses. But Adobe's tools reinforce conventional, *skeuomorphic*, conceptions of graphic space, optimised for economies of the page that have hardly evolved in the past 500 years. There is a need for alternative tools and metrics, especially in digital publishing contexts. I have been developing technical resources for a basic course in *proportional graphics*. Reference materials for this course are gathered here — https://www.are.na/james-langdon/proportional-graphics



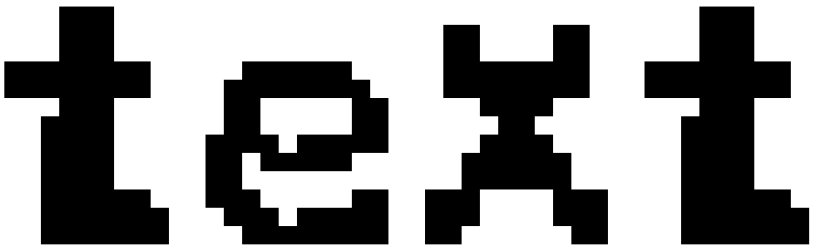



Image and text sized so that they occupy the same *surface area*.
Made using tools developed for Word Class Langdon, HGB Leipzig, summer semester 2023.









**BASIC COURSE: WRITING AS A SUPERPOWER**

The ability to write critically, imaginatively, and persuasively is invaluable for communication designers, and is a prerequisite for practitioners in the broader creator economy. Writing has become a central element of my own practice, enabling me to reflect on my work and the field of communication design at large. As an educator, I have encouraged students to use writing to refine their positions and develop autonomy. At the HfG my influence has been evident in the standard and sophistication of writing in recent diploma projects.

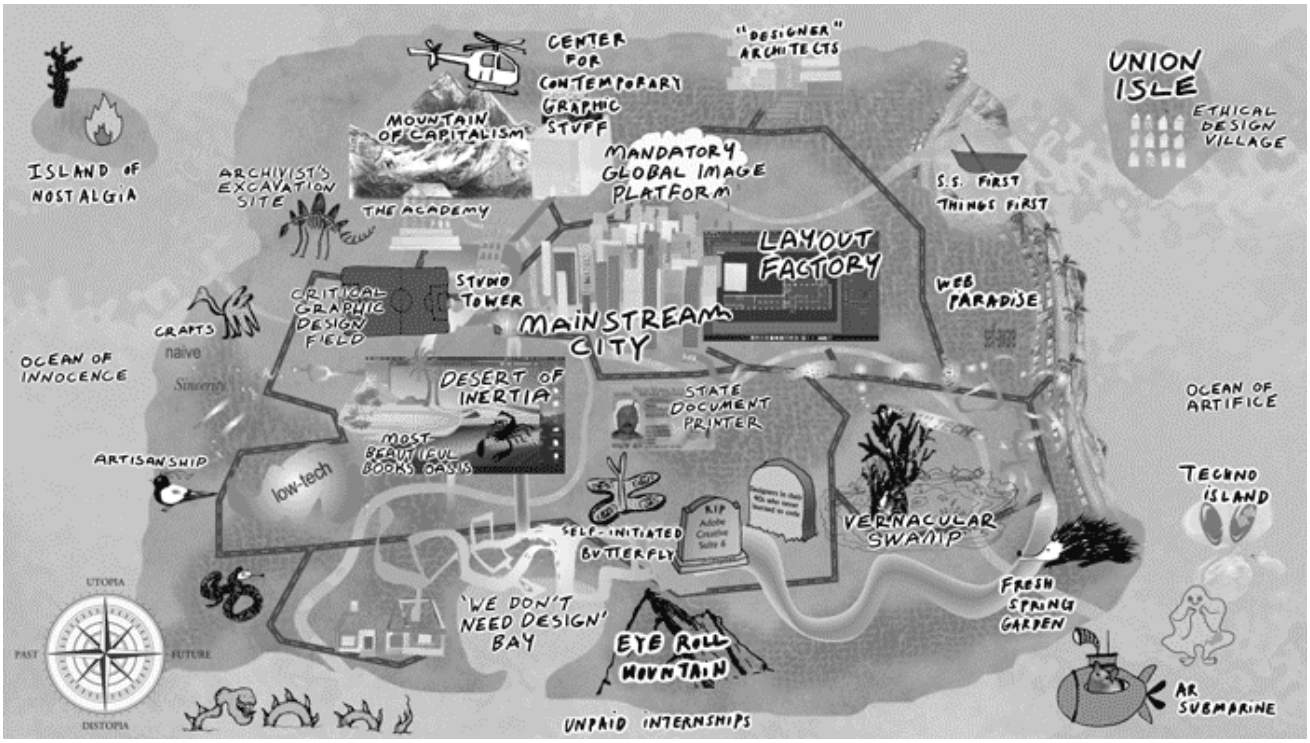
**Don't worry, dear Ersti**

# 2) MEET IN THE STUDIO

**Let's do some regular meet-ups, outside the seminar programme, open to the whole department and beyond. The content of these sessions might include:**

### ZEITGEIST MAPPING

We should maintain a moodboard of contemporary communication design's aesthetics, economies, sociologies, and technologies.




A zeitgeist map that I made with students at EKA, Tallinn, summer semester 2023.

### REAL TALK

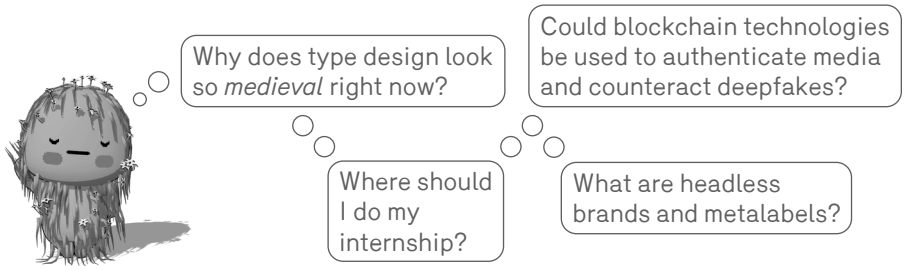
Should you ever work for free? How do you prepare an invoice? Do you need a portfolio website? Are you really expected to respond to emails at the weekend?

### SQUAD WORK

Do you want feedback from the group about a design decision that you can't resolve? Intrigued about what people are working on outside school?

### READING GROUP

We have to start with Chris Lee's fascinating book 'Immutable: Designing History'. Let's invite Chris as our guest! Next up, I propose we choose between Kei Kreutler's new work on memory, or Ruth Catlow and Penny Rafferty's 'Radical Friends' … Let's start a shared document for suggestions.



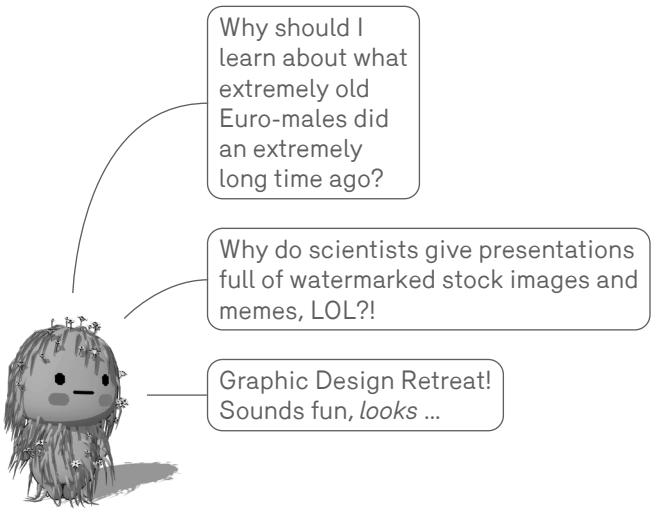

**What's on your mind?**

# 3) DESIGN AND …

**At the HfG, interdisciplinary work can be taken for granted. Students in KD will design graphics for students in MK, students in ADSZ will conceive spaces for students in KuPhi, who will write texts for students in PD, and so on, in ever-changing relationships, naturally. But transdisciplinary work is categorically different — initiating meaningful, knowledge-producing collaborations outside the art school requires an approach informed by research and historical context.**

**CONFERENCE/**
**COUNTER-CONFERENCE**

I propose to organise a series of neuroscience conferences at the HfG. I would invite a group of scientists (from a small cohort with whom I conducted interviews during my PhD research) to introduce us to their laboratories. Students would develop concepts and assets for the communication of their work. I would fundraise for and organise public conferences around current research in connectomics, brain imaging, and the ethics of the rapidly-accelerating neurotech industry. We might also work with the neuroactivist community in Berlin to develop *counter-conferences*, exploring critical narratives outside the purview of grant-funded scientific research. Such collaborations might take several years to productively establish, and would need to persist outside of the per-semester rhythm of HfG seminars.




**This might be outside your comfort zone at first**



Gilbert's teaching methods are novel. Students, you will need a digital wallet.

***GILBERT'S GRAPHIC DESIGN RETREAT***

Gilbert is a pedagogical alter-ego, a digital profile born in the on-screen oblivion of the pandemic, and Graphic Design Retreat is a virtual environment where Gilbert decodes communication design's historical entanglement with technology and capital. Gilbert recently rewatched *Minority Report* and has tried on an Apple Vision Pro — he sees where communication design is heading, and it's dystopian. If you know where you're going, however, it can change your perspective on where you've been. This ongoing programme will expose Johannes Gutenberg as a witless technician, and establish Anna Atkins as the true visionary protagonist of communication design!



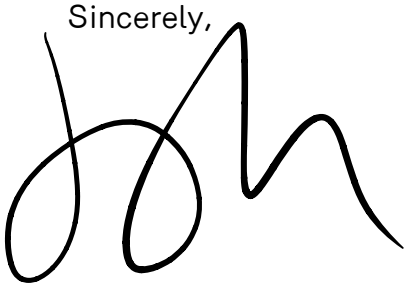
**PROGRAMME NOT PERSONALITY**

Having recently experienced teaching in the class system at HGB Leipzig, I am appreciative of the HfG's energetic seminar programme, in which group dynamics are continually refreshed and students and teachers are able to follow their motivations and interests. It would be my privilege to develop new seminars in close cooperation with the exceptional team in the department and the HfG. My current research interests include:

– community as medium: squads, DAOs and digital governance
– profilicity and the maintenance of digital selves
– permissionless culture and the future of intellectual property
– adversarial practices: design and negativity
– blockchains and supply chain provenance

I would be delighted to have the opportunity to attend a hearing, to elaborate on my ideas, to present my teaching methods, and to respond to your questions.

Sincerely,



James Langdon

In this document, the student was represented by
Ed Fornieles, *Fini #5895* (2022)
Animated character, non-fungible token on ethereum
Collection James Langdon

