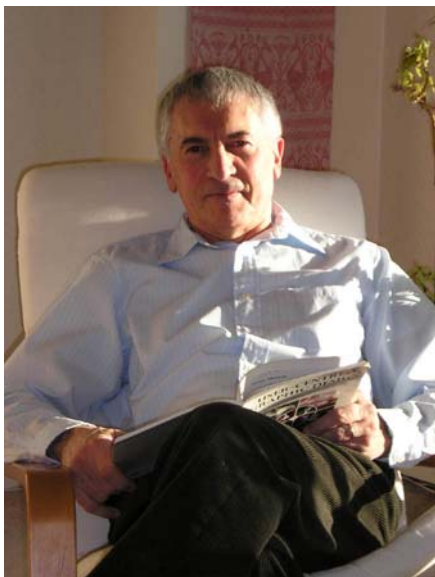


Professor Jorge Frascara

Department of Art and Design | University of Alberta – Canada



Professor, Department of Art and Design, University of Alberta; Fellow of the Society of Graphic Designers of Canada; Member of the Icograda Past-Presidents Forum; Member of the Editorial Boards of Design Issues (Carnegie Mellon University/MIT), Information Design Journal (John Benjamins), and Tipográfica (Buenos Aires, Argentina); International Fellow, Society for the Science of Design (Japan), Board of Directors Member, Communication Research Institute of Australia (CRIA); Advisory Committee Member, Doctorate in Design, University of Venice.

Jorge Frascara has organized several international conferences and design education projects, has been advisor and reviewer of several design education programs and has lectured and made presentations in twenty-five countries.

He has published several monographs and articles on design and art and design education, and is the author *User-Centred Graphic Design, Mass Communication and Social Change* (Taylor & Francis, London and Washington, 1997); and editor of the ISO Technical Report 7239, *Design and Application of Public Information Symbols* (ISO, Geneva, 1983), of *Graphic Design, World Views* (Kodansha, Japan, 1990), and of *Design and the Social Sciences, Making Connections* (Taylor & Francis, 2002). His new book, *Communication Design* (Allworth Press) will be published early in 2005. He has published three books in Spanish.

He has juried many design exhibitions and competitions and has conducted research with the support of various Canadian organizations. His professional experience includes illustration, film animation, advertising and graphic design, and now concentrates on research and development of visual communications for safety and other social concerns.

1. When, where, how and why did your interest in information design emerge? Why did you choose it as your main research area?

The notion of researching in information design systematically emerged from a meeting I had with Herbert Spencer in early 1974, when he was directing the Typographic Research Unit at the Royal College of Art and I was on an extended visit from Argentina, studying design education in Britain. At that point he described to me his research on legibility, and I became interested in using his research methods for the investigation of the effectiveness of educational materials. I developed these ideas as field research in Buenos Aires in 1975, and the results were published in English some years later as "The Relative Effectiveness of Three Alternative Methods for the Transmission of Information in Primary Schools", *Design Papers*, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981, 4-19.

I emigrated to Canada in August 1976, and in 1977 I was appointed Convener for the Working Group 2, SubCommittee 1, of the ISO Technical Committee 145 (Graphic Symbols). I had already contributed to this Committee in 1975 from Buenos Aires, carrying on a symbol comprehension test based on Ron Easterby and Harm Zwaga research method. Between 1977 and 1984 I contributed to the generation, testing and evaluation of graphic symbols for public information, and led the development of research on the implementation of symbols. This resulted in my editing of the *ISO Technical Report 7239, Development and Principles for Application of Public Information Symbols*, Geneva, 1984.

I stepped down from the ISO in 1985. I did this because I was at that time taking on the role of President of Icograda and was Chairman of the Department of Art and Design at the University of Alberta. When I ended my term as Chairman, I decided to move into the problems associated with design for social issues, a topic I had been attracted to since the 1975 ICSID congress 'Design for Need.' In 1987 (the year I co-organized *Graphic Design for Development*, Icograda/Unesco Conference, Nairobi, Kenya) I started researching on traffic safety communications, and since that time I have been dividing my attention between information design and persuasive communications.

2. Your approach towards information design shows that you are deeply concerned about social issues. Could you comment on how social factors influence information design and how infodesign could have a social contribution?

As I indicated above, I make a distinction between information design and persuasion design. I believe that many times one can contribute to the reduction of certain social problems through the dissemination of information. This is the case many times in connection with safe practices about personal hygiene or the preparation of food. It has been extensively proven, however, that information alone many times is insufficient when cultural practices, attitudes, value systems, and beliefs have negative effects on the health and safety of people. I am an enthusiastic supporter of information design, but with a clear notion that in some cases information alone is not enough.

Information design always has to be culturally sensitive. When people started writing about information design in the late 1970s, it was often believed that there was a way of making information clear. Today we cannot hold that belief any longer. Cognitive styles vary from group to group, and what is clear for a given group is not necessarily clear for another. Abilities to process complex information, written information, visual information or numerical information vary from people to people. In every case, the cognitive capacity of people is culturally contextualized.

3. In 1999, Robert E. Horn [in Jacobson (ed.) - Information Design] stated that information design was not yet an integrated profession. Although graphic design, information graphics, business graphics, scientific visualization, interface design, signage, wayfinding... have different interests, many of their core concerns and practices are similar. The author pointed out that there was an increasing tendency to "march under the new banner of info design". Do you think this is already taking place? How is the situation nowadays?

I think that information design is an important area of visual communication design, and I think it would be a mistake to just change the name of the activity in the hope that some magic is going to happen and professional practice will get better if we call it information design. What I do in traffic safety communications planning falls clearly away from information design. From research on the cultural values of high-risk groups, to the recommendations regarding support programs by police, community groups, educational systems and the Health Ministry, all this activities cannot be understood as part of information design. Information design is some times a part of the package, but the package as a whole I would rather call communication design, and it involves as much printed and broadcast materials as the actions of different groups of people, as well as modifications to physical environments.

4. Do you think information design practitioners are really benefiting from the knowledge "generated" by research in this area?

Research in this area is indispensable for the maturity of the practice. One arrives at a first solution to a

problem on the basis of existing knowledge. Getting into the practice of information design without the tools of a researcher, that allows one to systematically test existing knowledge against the specific demands of a given situation, will always generate half-way solutions. The practice of information design requires an integration of design with research.

5. Globalization has brought a need for universally comprehensible information-design projects. There has been a continuous effort to produce universal symbols and warnings, for example. On the other hand, researchers and designers are also concerned with producing culturally-appropriate information design. Do you think there is a paradox or the two views could be complementary?

Universal design is always possible up to a point. I think universal design provides a good starting point. Without sensitivity to context of implementation the effectiveness of information design will be in many cases quite limited. I always see more productive to think in terms of complementarity than in terms of mutual exclusion.

6. How would you rate the current situation of information design in Latin America? And projections for the next, let's say, 10 years? Do you see any emerging area(s) of research within the field?

Latin America has not been a leader in information design or in the development of a culture of information design. There are individual practitioners that produce good work, but I think they are very few. The creation of a Brazilian journal on the subject can have a good impact in the area, but it will be all the better if it were published in Portuguese and Spanish as well. English has a very restricting access in Latin America.

7. Comment on your current research interests/projects

My current research is in traffic safety communications, both in connection to how to communicate with the public in order to reduce the magnitude of the problem and how to communicate with government in order to persuade them to allocate sufficient resources to the increase of safety.

In terms of information design I admire the work of David Sless and Karel van der Waarde, because I think they have made a significant contribution to the development of both working methods and areas of intervention. Personally I have been working on the way in which communication planning works, and how a richer connection between design and the social sciences could provide us with better tools to confront the tasks ahead. The two last conferences I organized "Design and the social sciences" (1999), and "The creation of communicational spaces" (2003) discussed the importance and structure of the frames that contextualize communications and potentialize or constrain their effectiveness.

8. Could you anticipate some of the issues to appear on your new book "Communication Design"?

My new book ("Communication Design" Allworth Press, New York) is expected to appear early in 2005. It is mainly directed at students, but I think it can be useful for any junior communication designers interested in engaging in a reflection aimed at defining with some precision the roles that we play in society. I think it is a good grounding for basic issues. Readers interested in more advanced discussions can refer to other of my writings, such as *User-Centred Graphic Design: Mass Communication and Social Change*, Taylor & Francis, London, 1997; *Design and the Social Sciences, Making Connections*, Taylor & Francis, London, 2002; "The dematerialization of design/La desmaterialización del diseño" *Tipográfica*, November 2001, pp 18-25; "Diagrams as a Way of Thinking Ecologically", *Visible Language*, 35.2, 2001, pp.164-177; J. Frascara, "Cognition, emotion and other inescapable dimensions of human experience", *Visible Language*, 33.1 1999, pp 74-89; "Information Design and Cultural Difference", *Information Design Journal*, Milton Keynes, vol.9 # 2-3, 2000, pp. 119-127; and "Communications for Change: Strategies and Difficulties", *Design Issues*, vol. XII No. 3 MIT pp 44-59.