



DESIGN BASIS

Thesis 2026 International Master
of Design UIC/HGK Basel
mdesbasel.ch

Marked Days: The Calendar as a Feminist Data Visualization System
Claire Roberts

Marked Days is a series of three screen-printed feminist data visualization calendar posters mapping femicides, the gender pay gap, and endometriosis across 2017, 2027, and 2037. Placed side by side, the three posters reveal how the data shifts or fails to shift across two ten-year gaps. Each poster translates a year of invisible systemic violence into 365 cells, inviting the viewer to read time, accumulation, and the slow pace of change at a glance.

Marked Days is a series of three screen-printed feminist data visualization posters produced as part of a Master of Design in Graphic Design at HGK Basel / FHNW. Each poster maps a calendar year — 2017, 2027, and 2037 — onto a grid of 365 cells, using three visual symbols to represent three feminist datasets: femicides, the gender pay gap, and endometriosis. Designed to be read as a triptych, the three posters are intended to be compared directly: placed side by side, they make visible how these three forms of gendered inequality have evolved or persisted across two ten-year gaps. The project sits at the intersection of critical graphic design, feminist theory, and data visualization, and draws on a lineage of activist design practice that uses visual form to make structural inequality legible.

The theoretical foundation of the project builds on Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze and John Berger's analysis of how women are seen versus how men act. These frameworks are extended through the lens of feminist data practice, drawing particularly on Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein's Data Feminism, which argues that data is never neutral: that, in fact, what gets counted, how it is visualized, and who produces the visualization are all political acts. In this context, Marked Days is not merely a design project but a form of feminist counter-cartography: mapping the lived experience of women onto a structure, the calendar, that appears universal but is experienced very differently depending on one's gender.

The project is based on the work of feminist graphic designers who came before. Sheila Levrant de Bretteville's practice of designing with and for women, rather than about them, informs the approach of the project to data selection and visual language. The Guerrilla Girls' use of statistics as political provocation, their famous deployment of numbers to expose institutional sexism, is a direct precedent for the way Marked Days weaponizes data through form. Each of the three datasets was chosen because it represents a form of gendered violence or inequality that remains largely invisible in mainstream visual culture: femicides are underreported; the pay gap is disputed; endometriosis is under-researched and under-funded.

Communication Matters

Thesis Exhibition 2026 of the Institute Digital Communication Environments
HGK Basel FHNW

With the title Communication Matters for this year's thesis exhibition, we intentionally invite a range of interpretations. On the one hand, matters refers to materials, objects, and subjects. The written thesis, the practical thesis, and the thesis process documentation developed by the Bachelor's, Master's, and Master of Design students all consist of analogue and digital materials and are intended to be disseminated through analogue and digital communication channels. At the same time, the thesis projects can be understood as explorations of communication, encompassing a wide variety of themes and concerns — the many matters of communication.

Embodied Interfaces – Counter-Choreographies with Generative Typography
Desirée Solenberger

Peering beyond the static, polished surfaces of computers, this thesis proposes embodied interaction as a graphic design method. Bodies are reintroduced to design practice through the subversive use of computer vision algorithms as a typographic tool. Influenced by choreographic methods, the resulting toolkit includes counter-choreographies to interface with computers. Generative typography inherits a material dimension when formed by craft gestures and returned to relational space. With the performative tools, typesetting becomes a spatial, playful, and collaborative practice.

Today's field of graphic design is ever so tethered to computers. Opaque software performances distance designers from their tools. Corporeal computer interactions regulate movement and produce static, controlled bodies. This disembodied setting of design tools was not always the case. In the craft history of design practice, bodies were inseparable from the actual process. Embodied Interfaces returns kinetic bodies to design practice.

The research meshes fragments from adjacent fields of interaction design and dance to build a theory for embodied interfaces. Choreography is used as a method to subvert standard technological movements. The design space defines new relations: computers as props, surrounding space as a stage, and designers as performers. This performative act reveals a body, deconstructed by computer vision algorithms, that becomes an input for interaction. Working between bodies, movement data, and typography, the following question guides this thesis: how do embodied interfaces influence the composition and form of generative typography?

A porous collection of typographic experiments, installations, and objects form a choreographic toolkit. The proposed counter-choreographies are inefficient, exaggerated, and unfamiliar, bringing awareness to how we move or do not move with computers. The resulting performative design tools address composing strategies and formal strategies. Typography emerges as an unstable medium that can be formed, molded, and choreographed, and inherits a corporeality despite its digitality. The iterative experimental framework results in a two-person collaborative typesetting tool and typographic sculptures molded by hands on screen. These performative processes critically embrace new technologies into a designer's toolkit. In embodied interaction, designers may break away from invisible technological performances and — through movement — enliven formal outcomes and collective practice. It is the imperative of graphic design to untether from our desktops and step onto the collaborative stage of space, bodies, and action.

The visual system is deliberately consistent across all three posters. Each year is represented by the same 16-columns by 23-rows grid and the same three graphic symbols: a filled square for endometriosis appointments, a circle for unpaid days, and a cross for femicides. What changes across the triptych is the spatial organization of these symbols, reflecting a different internal logic for each year, and the quantity of each symbol, which shifts in direct proportion to the data. This means that a viewer standing in front of all three posters can immediately perceive the difference: more crosses in 2037 than in 2017, fewer circles as the pay gap slowly narrows, a smaller cluster of squares as endometriosis diagnosis improves. The comparison is the message. The year is printed as a final glossy layer over the data, using a pixel-art typeface built from the grid cells themselves, anchoring each poster in its moment in time.

The data for each year was carefully sourced and, for 2027 and 2037, projected from established trends. Femicide figures draw on the French collective Féminicides par compagnons ou ex and NousToutes; pay gap data from INSEE Focus; and endometriosis data from EndoFrance and Inserm. The endometriosis data represents the number of medical appointments a woman with the condition attends per year, including unanswered consultations, repeated referrals, post-diagnosis care, and chronic pain management, rather than the diagnostic delay alone. This grounds the data in a concrete, recurring presence in a woman's calendar rather than an abstract statistic.

The posters are produced by screen printing, with each data layer as a separate PDF for individual ink passes. This cumulative, physical process mirrors the central argument of the project: inequality accumulates. Each layer must register precisely onto the one before, just as each dataset sits in relation to the others across time. Viewed together, the three posters form a timeline, not of progress, but of the rate of change, and of what remains stubbornly unchanged.

Marked Days argues that the calendar is a political form. A year looks different depending on who you are. Placing 2017, 2027, and 2037 side by side makes that difference and that persistence impossible to ignore.

On the other hand, the title emphasizes that communication matters: it is important and makes a difference. This statement asserts that the creation of every message is an act of interpretation, and that the way we interpret matters profoundly influences how audiences perceive a topic. It also highlights a central aspect of professional expertise in visual communication: an awareness of how a message is read within a specific historical and cultural context and of the responses it may evoke. Having considered the multiple meanings of matters, we may now turn to communication — the first word in the title of this year's thesis exhibition. Recent paleoanthropological studies identify three primary motivations underlying the development of human communication: (1) to request something from another individual; (2) to inform another individual or a group; and (3) to share the internal emotional state (Tomasello, 2008, p. 87).



Each of these three motivations can be associated with a particular field of visual communication. (1) Advertising seeks to persuade audiences to purchase the products or services of a company or provider. (2) Pictograms, maps, charts, and data visualizations are primarily concerned with communicating information within a community. (3) Illustration and visual storytelling, whether in static or dynamic form, enable designers to express and communicate their emotional experience. Beyond this simplified categorization, successful examples of visual communication — and successful thesis projects — often integrate all three motivations. Designers want their visual messages to be noticed; accordingly, objects of visual communication are created to attract attention. We are drawn to visual works that deviate from what we have encountered before. We are intrigued by thesis projects that reveal something previously unknown or present familiar topics from an unexpected perspective. Such works challenge the viewer rather than offering immediate comprehension. They invite contemplation and stimulate a vivid internal dialogue.

This engagement on the part of the viewer corresponds to the first communicative motivation described above: the visual message motivates another person to invest attention and cognitive effort. Yet novelty alone is insufficient. If a visual message does not promise information, insight, or some other meaningful reward through contemplation, its unfamiliarity may exceed what the viewer can interpret. Therefore, novelty and deviation are only meaningful in relation to existing visual conventions and shared cultural knowledge. How, then, does a viewer decide whether a work is worth engaging with? Surprise alone, or even the promise of reward, is not enough. What is equally required is the authenticity and integrity of the visual message. These qualities encourage us to discover what the work seeks to communicate. If we understand every visual message as an interpretation, then its authenticity lies in expressing an individual perspective and, directly or indirectly, reflecting the designer's internal emotional state. The thesis projects presented in the exhibition bring these three dimensions together. They are surprising, authentic, and marked by integrity. They provide points of departure for contemplation while promising new perspectives and insights. We congratulate the graduates on this achievement and on the successful completion of their MDes studies.

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