

Contextualizing

This project, completed by three graduate students of varying ages, social backgrounds, and life experiences, investigated how visual structure shapes the meaning of data visualization. Each of us processed the data in our own way—reducing, adding, and merging data—before visualizing each data point separately. Finally, we combined our designs. During the exploration, we treated tables as research objects, discovering that even seemingly neutral tables, through data filtering, transformation, and translation, reveal the author's thought process. In the second week of iteration, we experimented by having different people process the same data, comparing the data processing logic and confirming our idea that subjective choices exist even behind seemingly neutral tables. Furthermore, different readers, when faced with the same table, will interpret it from different angles, such as readability, metaphor, or aesthetic style. We raised the question: when visual aesthetics intervene in data presentation, does it guide the reader's interpretation of the information? Data tables are not only containers of information but also reveal the creator's understanding of the data.

In the required reading, the chapter on Census, Map, and Museum in **Imagined Communities** discusses how census rules shaped an order that, through which people were restricted and colonized. Census rule-makers attempted to create distinctions of identity by categorizing people. I believe this was an action they took in the present to predict future outcomes. However, when unexpected categorization occurs, class construction is somewhat hindered. When dealing with the climate crisis, we need to think across different scales and time resolutions. We will be dealing with actions on a scale of days, hours, or even minutes, yet the impact will last for generations. We need a deeper understanding of historical and current data, using data on past actions and present results to infer what future actions will lead to. Considering potential future problems may help mitigate such situations. This makes me more cautious when handling metadata; simply showing the increments over time is ineffective.

The discussion of diagrams in OMA office work helped me re-understand the "neutrality" of tables. The text mentions that the authority of charts is conveyed through structure and arrangement, conveying information and data hierarchy. In our project, tables were initially viewed as neutral entities. However, after three people sifted through and reorganized the same set of data, we discovered that the chosen structure itself contained human consciousness. OMA's perspective made us realize that charts are not merely passive presentations of data; they actually contain the designer's intentions, conveying information through this seemingly objective presentation.

The charts in W. E. B. du Bois's **Data Portraits: Visualizing Black America** provided a reference for table visualization. Through maps, bar charts, and linear tables, data is transformed into rhythmic visual images. Some charts organize data through color, density, hierarchy, and metaphorical information, allowing readers to quickly understand population distribution or social change visually. This visual strategy helped me transform data into tables in my project. In our experiments, I tried to visually represent the metaphors I wanted to convey, using contrast and structure to convey the crisis and oppression brought about by carbon emissions.

The book **Critical Visualization: Rethinking the Representation of Data** also confirms our ideas. It mentions that quantified data reveals itself. Recording personal data through devices and displaying it in charts helps people better understand and improve themselves through technology. However, the choice of data itself reveals the author's intention. The colors used to distinguish different data also hint at the author's bias. In visual design, icons already suggest what is correct, what is important to focus on, what is normal, and what is abnormal.

The book **Exercises in Style** demonstrates how a unified core can produce different texts through different filtering methods. We applied this to data visualization. In the second week of the project,

we used tables that others had already visualized, trying to re-visualize them from a different perspective. We tried transforming flat tables into tables with a three-dimensional feel, or converting set tables into symbols. Referring to *Exercises in Style*, we posed a question to the same set of data and then tried to visualize it. We named each filtering method according to the book.

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