

Homework 1a: Deconstruction

Scott Thatcher

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1 Introduction

Consider the two graphs in Figures 1 and 2 below, which use the elements of design very differently. In this assignment, your goal will be to use the elements present in the graph to create a new collage. In the collage, you are no longer trying to represent data using the graph elements, but rather your goal is to create a pleasing/interesting/disquieting (you decide) arrangement of the elements. Your collage could be representational or abstract. You might draw inspiration from some of these artists and styles:

- [Vassily Kandinsky](#)
- [Geometric Abstraction](#)
- [Piet Mondrian](#)

You may create your collage in a number of ways, whichever works best for you. Some suggestions include:

- Print the graph on a color printer and cut out the shapes. Arrange them on actual paper. (This may be more trouble than it's worth.)
- Use the provided computer files to move and position the shapes, then make a screenshot or export to PNG when you're done.
- Sketch freehand using markers/colored pencils/etc., trying to be true to the shapes and forms in the original graphs.

As you make your collage, feel free to rotate objects, place objects in front of or behind other objects, and (of course) move them around.

Finally, as you make your collage, you may choose to alter one design element (color, size, shape, line, etc.) if it helps to make things hang together the way you'd like. **The limitation to one element is, of course, an artificial constraint, but constraints can force artistic inspiration!**

2 Technology

If you choose to use technology to complete this assignment, I suggest trying out the .svg files using Inkscape. Inkscape is a very capable open-source vector drawing program, available at inkscape.org. I've found it to be a very useful tool in my toolbox as I deal with making conference posters, editing graphics for publication, or just having fun.

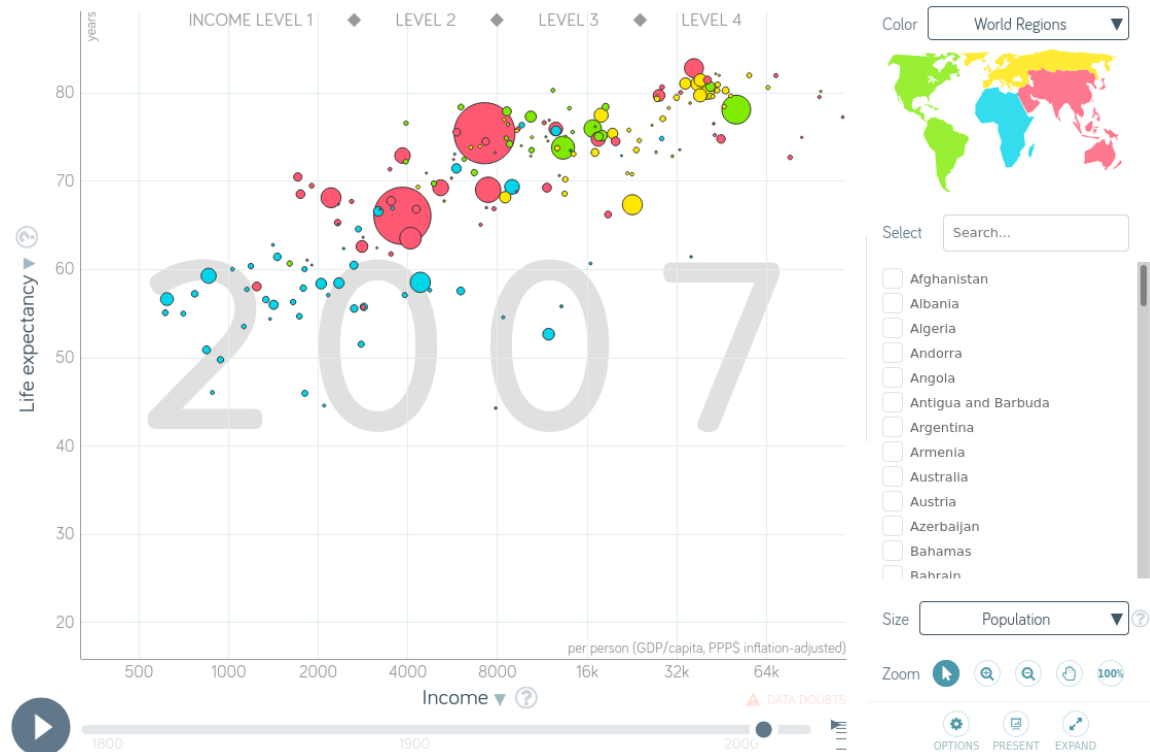


Figure 1: Gapminder graph of life expectancy vs. personal income (gapminder.org).

I've also included PowerPoint files with the shapes. I find PowerPoint a bit more difficult to use for this purpose, but if you're very good at PowerPoint, you might disagree.

Whichever program you use, make sure to find out how to rotate objects and bring them forward or backward (over and under other objects) on the page. In Inkscape, clicking an object once with the arrow cursor gives you move and resize options, but clicking it a second time gives rotation options. After clicking an object to select it, the Page Up and Page Down keys move an object forward or backward relative to other objects. There are of course many other things you can do, and part of this assignment is to explore those options!

Finally, I've include files with fewer objects that you should feel free to use if the originals seem a bit overwhelming. Some might find a use for every circle or line, while others might prefer to use the forms, but have fewer of them.

3 Completing the Assignment

Once you're made your collage, you should complete the assignment by doing the following things:

- Obtain a PNG or JPG file with the image of your final result. This might be done through scanning a physical page or exporting your computer file to a PNG image. The goal is to obtain an image of your final work that can be uploaded to Blackboard as a displayable image.
- Submit an image of the collage itself in the Module 1 discussion area. (See the link in the assignment on Blackboard.)

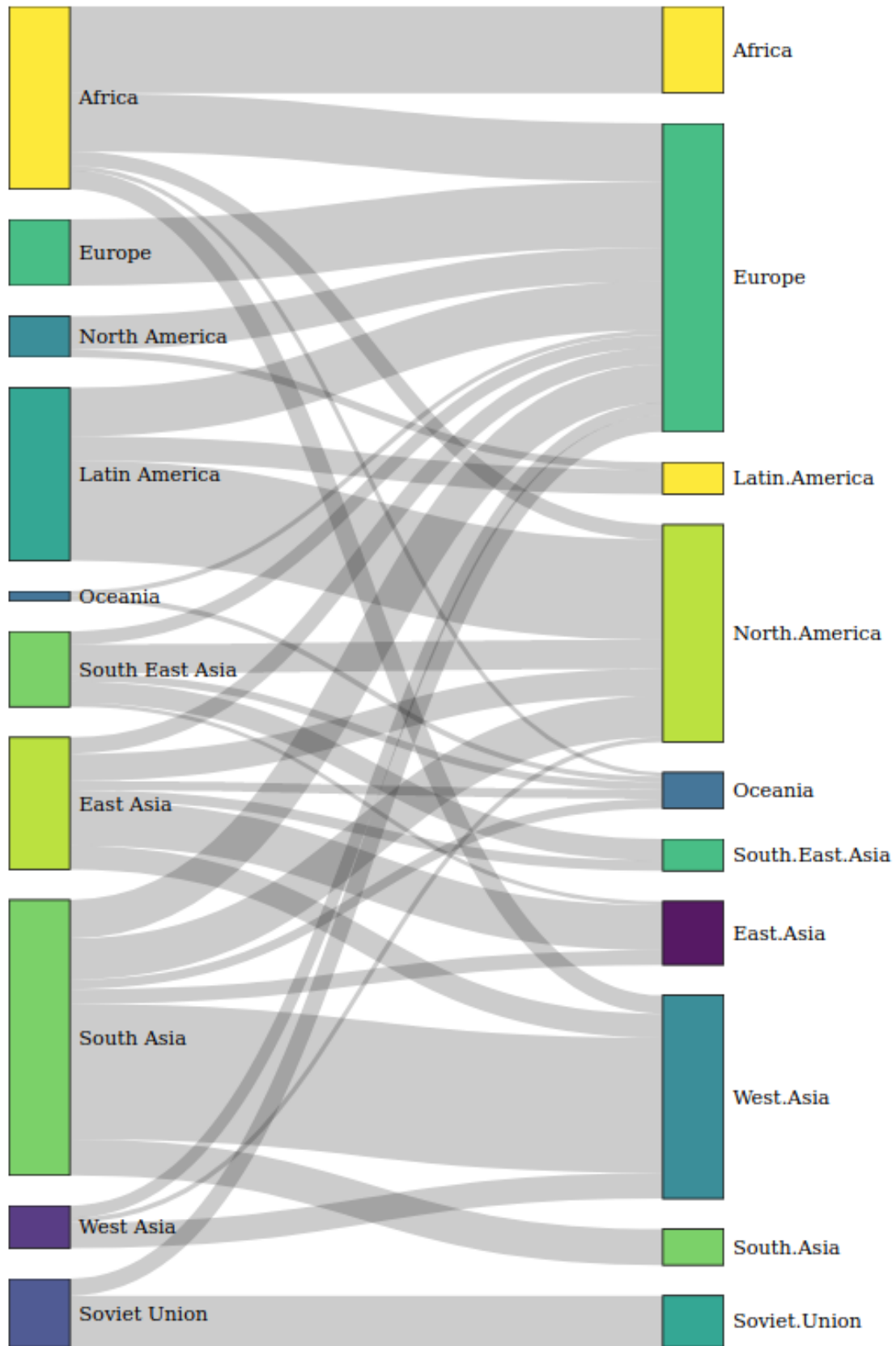


Figure 2: A Sankey diagram of global migration (www.r-graph-gallery.com).

- In the same discussion post, write a short description of your piece that highlights what you saw as the most important design elements and discusses how you chose to arrange them. You might talk about the individual pieces or the characteristics of the final product, or both. If you changed any design element, make sure to explain what you did and why. There is no one right answer here, but the goal is to gain practice using the vocabulary in a meaningful way to describe what you see and what you did.
- Once you've made a post, you'll be able to see the posts of others. Post comments/critique on the work of other members of the class.
 - A good comment should reference specific aspects of the work, and might highlight aspects that worked particularly well, aspects that stood out to you but were not mentioned in the original write-up, or aspects that didn't quite work for you.
 - As you're doing critique, remember that we're not talking in absolutes. A comment such as "line placement was bad" is both non-specific and also making an absolute claim about the work. Compare to "The second line's slope gave the work an unbalanced feeling to my eye. Note that the lines almost, but not quite, meet at the same point. Was this the effect you intended?"
- Make sure to check back to see who has commented on your submissions—let's keep the conversation going!

4 Points and Grading

Points for this assignment will be determined as follows:

Points	Description
20 pts	Your collage itself. Should show some evidence of effort.
15 pts	Written description of what you did. I'll be looking for correct and specific use of terminology.
5 pts	Responses/critiques of others' work. Substantive and constructive.