Design as criticism: methods for a critical graphic design practice

by

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Abstract

This practice-led research is the result of an interest in graphic design as a specific critical activity. Existing in the context of the 2008 financial and subsequent political crisis, both this thesis and my work are situated in an expanded field of graphic design. This research examines the emergence of the terms critical design and critical practice, and aims to develop methods that use criticism during the design process from a practitioner's perspective. Central aims of this research are to address a gap in design discourse in relation to this terminology and impact designers operating under the banner of such terms, as well as challenging practitioners to develop a more critical design practice. The central argument of this thesis is that in order to develop a critical practice, a designer must approach design as criticism.

Adopting a mixed methods approach to research, this thesis draws on *action research* (Schön, 1983) and is aligned with the proposition of 'problem setting' instead of the established 'problem solving' approach to design, using the following methods: 1) workshops at the Royal College of Art, Sandberg Institute, University of Westminster and London College of Communication; 2) selection of projects from professional practice; 3) self-initiated research projects; 4) critical writing, including essays, reviews, interviews and in particular the publication *Modes of Criticism.*

Following the theorisation of the terms critical design and critical practice, historical survey of criticism, politics and ideology in relation to graphic design, and reflection on the workshops and methods detailed above, this thesis proposes a critical method consisting of three dimensions: visual criticality, critical reflexivity and design fiction. It argues that criticism as design method offers a fundamental opportunity to develop a reflected and critical approach to design, and more importantly, society. This method creates opportunities to develop a critical practice; one that shapes a continuous agency and interest in wicked, systemic and infrastructural problems with a constant ability to critically adapt and research their multi-layered nature. That will on the one hand help the designer to become a substantial agent of change and on the other, in particularly difficult circumstances of conflicted personal, private, disciplinary and public interest such as commercial practice, to find opportunities for criticality.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

This practice-led research is the result of an interest in graphic design as a specific critical activity. Existing in the context of the 2008 financial and subsequent political crisis, both this thesis and my work are situated in an expaded field of graphic design. This research examines the emergence of the terms critical design and critical practice, and aims to develop methods that use criticism during the design process from a practitioner's perspective. Central aims of this research are to address a gap in design discourse in relation to this terminology and impact designers operating under the banner of such terms, as well as challenging practitioners to develop a more critical design practice.

In an interview conducted with the Dutch designer Jan van Toorn—one of the key figures in Dutch design and critical practice—he argues that "method is what transforms a critical opinion into an operational critique." (Van Toorn to Laranjo, 2014) Therefore, this research asks two main questions: what is the role of criticism, particularly criticism in practice, in the graphic design process? And, which methods, both existing and new, can be used to foster a critical graphic design practice, following the emergence of the terms critical design, speculative design and design fiction?

This research pursues two main goals: a disciplinary and a personal one, both of which are intrinsically connected. At a disciplinary level, this research aims to propose a critical methodological approach to graphic design practice, which is the practice of a theory of criticism. At a pesonal level, this research builds upon earlier work and is an examination and investment in my own practice towards a more substantial contribution to the discipline and society. The thesis' contribution to new knowledge is twofold: first, a theorisation of the recent term critical design within graphic design, which was inexistent to date and second, a series of critical methods that are a consequence of the first. The theorisation put forward here is made in tandem with design practice through a variety of methods described below with a constant reciprocity, and establishes the framework of the critical method proposed at the end of this thesis.

Methods

This research adopts a mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2003), employing primarily action research (Schön, 1983). Schön explains different kinds of knowing in action and this research is concerned with *reflection-in-action*, namely the permanent framing and reframing of problems. This is a process in which "the practitioner's effort to solve the reframed problem yields new discoveries which call for new reflection-in-action. The process spirals through stages of appreciation, action, and reappreciation." (Schön, 1983, p. 132) The present research uses a variety of methods (such as workshops, self-initiated research, professional practice and critical writing) that both inform and are informed by the theorisation (used inductively) developed in Chapters 2 and 3, as the triangulation of information gathered expands an understanding from one method to another. These seek to develop a critical method, one that promotes a critical graphic design practice. The reason to apply a mix methods research is due to the nature of graphic design and the difficulty in quantifying with precision the effectiveness of the methods proposed here. Mixed methods allow converging distinct data sources. In this sense, the propositions outlined in Chapter 5 are the result of a triangulation of the data collected through the methods detailed below.

Action research is used because it makes the design processes visible (Swann, 2002), which is aligned with the definition of criticism shaped here and critical design's aspirations of public debate and accountability. Likewise, as this thesis investigates methods for a critical design practice, action research is relevant because it obliges the designer to become a researcher in the context of—and during—practice (Swann, 2002), and adopts a position of continuous flexibility instead of proposing reflection solely based on what happens after an event or the completion of a design project. A key principle of action research according to educational researchers McNiff and Whitehead, is "that people's practices are not fixed but can be changed to produce more ethical, socially just or sustainable outcomes." (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006 cited in Crouch & Pearce, 2012, p. 143) This mirrors the aspirations of design as criticism as explored and proposed in the present research. The way in which the specified research methods are used in this thesis, all of which are aspects of design practice, are as follows:

1) Workshops at the Royal College of Art, Sandberg Institute, University of Westminster and London College of Communication. Feedback from the participants, a case-study and reflective analysis constitutes qualitative data. Workshops are chosen as a research method because they provide an invaluable platform to conduct experiments before, during and after the design process. They were designed in order to investigate how exercises could embed criticality in the design process, namely addressing ideology and politics, as well as promoting debate. Feedback from the participants is only indicative of the plausible impact of the methods explored in the workshops, which aim at long-term impact. Reflexivity and collaboration, an important aspect of 'symmetrical communication' in action research, demands that everyone is considered equal. In this sense, the workshops aimed at creating an environment of co-research with feedback being predominantly provided in an informal, honest conversation at the end of each iteration. The workshops build upon Schön's assertion that "the designer constructs the design world within which he/she sets the dimensions of his/her problem space, and invents the moves by which he/she attempts to find solutions." (Schön, 1992, p. 11) The relevance of these is validated by observing the impact they have on the students' ongoing projects, as well as in the capacity to demonstrate a greater understanding of complex contexts when repeating the workshop more than once.

2) Self-initiated practical research in the form of action research informing both the workshops and professional practice, acting as a 'parallel lab' working model to professional practice. This method serves to reveal the importance of developing a 'parallel lab' to a designer's professional practice as well as highlighting and informing the workshops' model detailed above. Projects under this banner, such as *Ghost Markets* bring to the fore the way in which this parallel-lab can influence professional practice, as it is applied in the professional practice design project for the *Occupied Times.* Feedback from collaborators and observers is key to validate the pertinence of these, as well as their impact in designing methods.

3) Selection of projects from professional practice, investigating the research developed in 1, 2 and 3. The projects detailed here include the book *New World Parkville,* the visual identity *Designing for Exhibitions* and the *Occupied Times* 24. To complement reflective analysis, external feedback is provided in the form of interviews. These projects are used to highlight the influence of points 2 and 3.

4) Critical writing, editing, publishing and public debate, including a paper presented at the University of South Australia (2013), essays and reviews published on *Design Observer*, *Eye*, *Grafik*, *Pli*, IDEA and series of talks, an exhibition and discussion panel

held at the London College of Communication, debates at Central Saint Martins, Royal College of Art, Kingston University, Universities of Lisbon and Porto, and in particular, the publication *Modes of Criticism (MOC),* which incorporates the collaborative and participatory dimensions of action research. *MOC* explores design practice in my role as commissioner, editor, (self-)publisher, designer and writer, constituting a key method in this thesis. In-depth interviews with key figures operating in design practice associated with the terminology debated in this thesis, provide contextual material for *Modes of Criticism.* These include Jan van Toorn, Els Kuijpers, Anthony Dunne, Michèle Champagne, and James Langdon, which complement and inform secondary research, namely bibliographic sources and historical survey. The criteria for selection is the prominence in the design discipline via publications and presence in design discourse and practice. These are made available as transcripts or in the form of essays in *MOC*, in print and online. The growing presence of *MOC* in design discourse, referenced by writers, researchers and students in the field, evidences the impact of this method in the discipline. By addressing a gap in design discourse in relation to criticality in graphic design as well as the research questions, and investigating a variety of methods and approaches to design as critique, *MOC* constitutes a contribution to new knowledge.

This research is practice-led and not practice-based. My practice led this research through professional projects, self-initiated research and its methods transferred to workshops, as well as critical writing and publishing. These two terms, however, exist in a contested territory (Niedderer & Roworth-Stokes, 2007), with recurrent overlaps and shared methods, and often used interchangeably (Mäkelä & Nimkulrat, 2011). It is then important to clarify their differences and acknowledge their overlaps. While practice-based research is an "investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice", practice-led research, underlining the emergence of the 'practitioner-researcher' (Winters, 2013; Mäkelä & Nimkulrat, 2011) is "concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice." (Candy, 2006)

A purposeful approach to practice-led research should make practice subservient to research and a "definition of practice-led research should concentrate on how issues, concerns and interests can be examined and brought out by production of an artefact. In a research setting, the knowledge associated with the artefact is more significant than the artefact itself." (Rust & Mottram & Till, 2007, p. 12) The idea of the practitioner-

researcher, is also theorised by the scholar Stephen Scrivener, who notes the importance of 'research-in-design' (Scrivener, 2000) in correspondence with Schön's theory of design as reflective practice, and in particular, reflection-in-action. Scrivener "emphasises that in each 'researching-design' project, systematic documentation and reflection-in-action play a crucial role as it supports the practitioner's reflections and brings greater objectivity— or critical subjectivity—to the whole project. He also stresses the importance of the final reflection—or reflection-on-action—that it should reflect not only on the project as a whole in relation to the issues explored but also on the goals attained and the reflection in action and practice itself." (Mäkelä & Nimkulrat, 2011, p.2) Seeing critical writing as practice—indeed reflection-in-action—allowed mulitple opportunities for criticality, in particular at the intersection of reflection-on-action with the thesis.

The methods applied in this thesis—which are detailed and contextualised in Chapter 4—are also used to bring to the fore the connections and overlap between them, offering different lenses on the subject. In this sense, they do not follow a strict chronology nor sequence, but develop a critical approach to an object of study precisely because of not adopting a prescribed formula. As the next iteration of action research using the methods detailed above, they aim at developing a critical method, comprised of visual criticality, critical reflexivity and design fiction, as proposed in Chapter 5.

Context

This research builds upon earlier work produced at the Royal College of Art (RCA) while studying for a Master of Arts, and exists in a specific political, social and cultural context. In other words, this thesis takes a Portuguese and European context, and exists in response to the uncritical state of the discipline during the early 2000s. During my studies at the RCA, the focus of the work I produced recurrently balanced between disciplinary and societal issues. Invariably, the work highlighted their connections, complicities and shortfalls. By trial and error, these explorations either relied on criticism in writing, as an essay I wrote titled *Shock(ing)-gun* (2008), or criticism in practice [Figures 1 & 2] as the series of posters exploring visual forms of graphic design criticism (2008). The latter were a consequence of an intuitive process until reaching a formal synthesis that captured the essence of the critique. These provided generic and vague messages. The present research challenges the limitations of a closed, simplifying and authoritarian approach to criticism.

The disciplinary attitude that was the object of my research at the RCA, generated an outpour of over-playful, formalist and often performative approaches to design (the work of the design collective Åbäke is an example). The scarcity of critical discourse that challenged and questioned such a state of design contrasted with the overabundance of playful approaches to graphic design. Buzzwords such as 'fun' and 'creativity' were appropriated by advertising agencies and pop culture. The designer and guest tutor at the college Daniel Eatock, with his several logos and advertising for the TV show *Big Brother* is an example of this. The end of the influential design magazine *Emigre* in 2004 and the rise to popularity of *Dot Dot Dot* in 2001 also accompanied this process of depoliticisation: indeed a new definition of criticality. This shift will be discussed in detail in this thesis, namely from criticality to post-criticality, by debating key contributions within design discourse. In response to this emerging trend in graphic design, the work I produced at the RCA investigated the overlap between criticism in writing and criticism in practice. The result were a series of essays and practical work, ranging from installations, illustrations and large prints that accompanied the MA dissertation, and that continued to be developed after graduating. This research builds upon this earlier work, by dealing with the process of criticism in practice in a rigorous, reflective and systematic manner.

Figure 1. *The direction of graphic design (and society) at the beginning of the 21st century.* Screenprint, 70 x 100 cm, 2008.
Figure 2. *Pink, yellow, orange, greeen.* Digital print, 70 x 100 cm, 2008.

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The present research also explores a gap between writing criticism and criticism in practice. A methodological approach to design as criticism, it is proposed here, produces a critical awareness of the context in which graphic design operates and the strategies that are used to address it, bridging the aforementioned gap. A critical method, this thesis argues, can effectively overlap these traditionally distanced operations, namely by putting criticism, politics and ideology at the centre of design practice. If the first decade of the 21st century saw profoundly traumatic events on a global scale, of which the September 11 attacks in 2001 was the one receiving the most media attention, it was the global financial crisis towards the end of the 2000s that reignited—or at least made even more obvious—the urgency and need for criticism in Western society, the importance of politics, as well as the superficiality, but also the potential of design. Soon after the financial services firm Lehman Brothers collapsed in 2008, economics occupied a central position in the media. For decades, the financial sector had been driving a process of de-politicisation of society. However, the exposing domino effect caused by the auto-destructive nature of capitalism allowed it to continue suppressing an already fragile public, political discourse. Terminology such as 'subprimes', 'derivatives' and 'collateralised debt obligations' headlined public statements and TV reports, as infographics attempted to explain what had *really* happened.

As European countries started to implement severe policy measures and cuts in all areas of public life, civil unrest was imminent. This took form as an outburst on behalf of the people, in response to the pressure exerted by banks, the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission, to which society felt both powerless and not responsible. Government arrangements with the financial sector under neoliberalism became the norm, attempting to establish a consensual, inevitable state of affairs managed by technocrats. The condition of eliminating the "proper political", philosophers such as Jacques Rancière and Slavoj Žižek call the 'post-political.' Proper politics exists "whenever the count of parts and parties of society is disturbed by the inscription of a part of those who have no part." (Rancière, 1998, cited in Swyngedouw, 2011, p. 21) Throughout the media, a shift in the discourse emerged. There was one reality before the global financial crisis started and another one after it begun. A 'pre' and a 'post'-global financial crisis. These prefixes are recurrently used to mark the before and after of a social, political and cultural event in time.

Since the financial crisis emerged in 2008, a profoundly negative effect in the most affected countries and their population is evident as a result of the failure, even bankruptcy, of the current political system. This demise is recurrently contested in many cities around the world, as demonstrations are literally protests for the future; a future that many cannot imagine. In fact, geographer Erik Swyngedouw says in *Designing the Post-Political City and the Insurgent Polis* (2011) that "rarely in history have so many people voiced their discontent with the political designs of the elites and signalled a desire for an alternative design of the city and of the world, of the polis. Yet rarely has mass protest resulted in so little political gain." (Swyngedouw, 2011, p. 8)

What the term post-political also opens up, as any other term using the 'post' prefix, is a questioning of the meaning of the word it is leaving behind: politics. Jacques Rancière clarifies what are 'true-politics', defining it as "a community of interruptions, fractures, irregular and local, through which egalitarian logic comes and divides the police community from itself. It is a community of worlds in community that are intervals of subjectification: intervals constructed between identities, between spaces and places. Political being-together is a being-between: between identities, between worlds... Between several names, several identities, several statuses." (Rancière 1998 cited in Swyngedouw, 2011, p. 26)

This in-betweeness is important to this thesis because of identifying the complex political contexts of the artificial, the *natural* habitat that design helps constructing. The design theorist Tony Fry argues that the "artifice does not arrive without design and design and artifice combine to render 'the world of our dwelling' political, and thus contestable." Everything touched by humans, has "consequences on the form of the future." (Fry, 2010, p. 5) This framework, which is aligned with that of this thesis, finds an important parallel in Ontological Design. The design theorist Anne-Marie Willis has most succinctly detailed its goals and specificities in *Ontological Designing – Laying the Ground* (2006). She suggests that everything "we deliberate, plan and scheme in ways which prefigure our actions and makings—in turn we are designed by our designing and by that which we have designed (i.e., through our interactions with the structural and material specificities of our environments);" (Willis, 2006, p. 80) In short, the world we design, designs us back. While this is grounded in sustainable design studies, it makes evident that design is political.

This realisation is pertinent to design because of outlining the need for an agonistic dimension in the discipline, if it wants to more actively contribute to an egalitarian and democratic condition. As importantly, the aforementioned realisation also draws attention to the mediating role of graphic design and its difficult, but inevitable space for action: the in-between as an inherently political space. The 'political' that feeds a critical approach to design, in opposition to a submission to—and unconscious manipulation by— 'politics'. Tony Fry explains with clarity the difference between them: "politics is an institutionalized practice exercised by individuals, organizations and states, while the political exists as a wider sphere of activity embedded in the directive structures of a society and in the conduct of humans as 'political animals'". Effectively, he continues, politics "takes place in the sphere of the political wherein the agency of things— material and immaterial—is determined and exercised as they are perceived, and become directly or indirectly influenced, by a political ideology." (Fry, 2011, p. 6)

If the movement *Occupy Wall Street* that quickly spread all over the world following the 2008 financial crisis, taught us something, as cultural critic Naomi Klein argues[1], is that it adopted a more resilient, permanent protest in comparison with previous anti-globalisation demonstrations that only lasted a few days or weeks. This shift from a temporary to an indefinite state of protest and debate points to the necessity of assuming a permanent state of crisis. Such condition, will be argued, is fundamental to the development of a critical design practice. This research draws on precedents rooted in art—especially at the birth of the discipline—and is aware of the occasional and contemporary overlaps with the definition of critical design and design as criticism, as noted by Krause (2011) and Mesch (2013) for example, namely on art as politics. However, this research is firmly rooted in graphic design.

This research has also been influenced by the 2014 disclosure of the global surveillance programs run the US National Security Agency, by the whistle-blower Edward Snowden. The revelations rapidly brought to the public's attention[2] the extremely dangerous depth of control that corporations and governments have over citizens and the struggle for privacy. The rise of big data and pre-emptive

1   Klein gave a speech at Liberty Plaza (New York, US, 2011), which was published in its entirety in *The Nation.* [Internet] Available from: ‹http://www.thenation.com/article/163844/occupy-wall-street-most-important-thing-world-now#› [Accessed 20 August 2014]

2   While diverse media published documents such as *El País* and *Der Spiegel, The Guardian*—via the journalist Glenn Greenwald—had privileged access to Snowden (2013). [Internet] Avaialble from: ‹http://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2013/nov/01/snowden-nsa-files-surveillance-revelations-decoded› [Accessed 23 April 2014] *The Intercept,* co-founded by Greenwald, continued to publish material related to surveillance until the date of conclusion of this thesis.

personalisation are important for design. They alert to an increased acceleration of automatisation, one that can, self-servingly, render the traditional role of the séc graphic designer redundant and close opportunities for criticality.

The present research is undertaken from a privileged vantage point. To have the opportunity of conducting funded research on design and criticism in such difficult societal conditions—and from a Western, more precisely European perspective—is a privilege. Examining power structures critically became an important concern of the methods investitaged in this thesis, offering a variety of perspectives on criticality beyond an overwhelmingly dominating Europe and North America. Many of the institutions in which the methods were developed and tested, are particularly well-informed focus groups, with participants that would hardly constitute what could be considered as a typical graphic designer or design student. The Visual Communication department at the RCA and the Design Department at the Sandberg Institute are examples of this. However, education institutions such as the London College of Communication and the University of Westminster offer a more nuanced setting to be able to generalise and extrapolate the found results. The hypothesis and propositions put forward in this thesis cannot be and are not universal, neither standardising nor prescriptive. They are situated in a European context, despite the use of sources and references from North American authors. This highlights a dependence on the dominant centres of design theory and criticism production. Contemporary Portuguese design has been largely influenced by Modernism and international design discourse, often ignoring its tradition in political satire and criticism.[3] This is reflected in Portuguese graphic design education and in my undergraduate degree in Communication Design at ESAD – Escola Superior de Artes e Design. In this sense, and even though this research is not about design education, it also challenges my own theoretical and practical education as a designer. Being time-specific—namely the EU financial, social and political crisis—this thesis responds to the conditions mentioned thus far, and aims to make a contribution to knowledge from a practitioner's perspective, building upon an expanded role of the graphic designer.

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3   See for example *Design Gráfico em Portugal – Formas e Expressões da Cultura Visual do séc. XX* (2012) and the collection *Design Português* (2015).

Structure

This thesis is divided into five chapters (see diagram 1). Following the introduction, Chapter 2 frames the emerging terminology of critical design and critical practice, thereby providing a context for the expanded role of the graphic designer. Chapter 2 traces the terms' pioneers, key actors within graphic design as well as its critics. Chapter 3 presents an account of the current state of design criticism, while analysing its intrinsic relation to idealism, politics and its heritage, from critical theory to cultural studies. These theories of criticism are used to introduce the idea of design as criticism. Chapter 4 brings together four methodological approaches: workshops, professional practice, self-initiated research (parallel lab) and the design writing project and magazine *Modes of Criticism*. Chapter 4 critically analyses their potential, whilst giving an account of emerging research methods in the context of new terminology such as critical design, speculative design and design fiction introduced in Chapter 2. Finally, Chapter 5 proposes a theory of criticism in the form of a critical method towards the development of a critical graphic design practice. This latter chapter constitutes therefore the conclusions of this thesis. While enunciating the findings, it also indicates aspects of this thesis that can be expanded through further research, as well as demonstrating their impact for the discipline.

The elements that are presented as part of the PhD are all the projects, exercises and theorisation that inform the methods proposed in Chapter 5. These include *New World Parkville*, *Occupied Times 24*, *Designing for Exhibitions*, *The Architecture of Gambling*, *Modes of Criticism*. This thesis' main contributions to knowledge are: 1) the theorisation of the terms critical design and critical practice in relation to graphic design; and 2) the methods visual criticality, critical reflexivity and design fiction, which both inform and are informed by the aforementioned theorisation. The central argument of this thesis is that criticism as a method for graphic design practice is fundamental towards the development of a more meaningful contribution to the discipline and society. In other words, to develop a critical design practice, a designer has to approach design as criticism.

Diagram 1. Thesis structure.

CHAPTER 1 — Introduction
Political and disciplinary context.
Introduction to methods. Research
questions. Thesis structure.

Notes
— Chapter 3 informed the
theorisation put forward in
Chapter 2.
— The methods investigated in
Chapter 4 are a direct consequence
of Chapter 2 and 3, while assiting
the theorisation beind developed
in them.
— Highlighted in grey are the key
contributions to new knowledge.

**CHAPTER 2 — Defining critical
design and critical practice**
Rise of critical design to
popularity. Historical survey and
relation to graphic design.
Criticism of current definitions.
Definition of critical design
and critical practice.

**CHAPTER 3 — Idealism, ideology
and design as criticism**
Investigation of the basis of
criticality. Historical survey of
criticism. State of design criticism.
Defining criticism and criticality.
Mapping of various strategies
applicable to design.

CHAPTER 4 — Research methods
Introduction of methods:
1) workshops; 2) self-initiated
research; 3) professional practice;
4) critical writing.
Planning, description, analysis
and conclusions.

CHAPTER 5 — Critical method
Description of the critical
method as a direct consequence
of the theorisation and practice
developed in Chapter 2, 3 and 4.
Visual Criticality, Design Fiction
and Critical Reflexivity.
Summary of findings,
further research and conclusions.

Modes of Criticism 1

Modes of Criticism 2

Chapter 2 – Defining critical design and critical practice

This chapter investigates the recent terms 'critical design' and 'critical practice', their history, meaning and precedents. The term critical design in relation to graphic design has, to date, an unmapped history. The main factor contributing to its ambiguous use in design discourse is the lack of defined criteria through which a graphic design project can be associated to the term. If within product design the term is now accepted and developing as a field, within graphic design even the existence of the term as a category is challenged. Designers such as Stuart Bailey and James Goggin reject the need for such categorisation, while at same time their work can be identified within the terminology they challenge. This survey proposes to clarify and shape a definition of the terms being examined here, critical design and critical practice.

Even though what is going to be examined here is critical design in a graphic design context, it is important to first identify its origins and connotations. The term's rise to popularity through the work of product and interaction design team Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, builds upon earlier design practices from, for example, product designer and artist Krzysztof Wodiczko (author of *Critical Vehicles*, 1998), as acknowledged by the duo. Similarly, the discussions around the concepts of 'design authorship,' which explored the role of the designer as author instead of a service provider bound to a client, remain foregrounded in the discourses of product, interaction and graphic design. These discussions will be used to understand the shared agendas and history of product/interaction design and graphic design in relation to this emerging term, and subsequently, a field.

In order to evidence the ways in which this discourse has evolved and the key practitioners involved, this section will focus on the exhibition *Forms of Inquiry: The Architecture of Critical Graphic Design* (London, 2007). Its detailed analysis and critique builds upon design critic Rick Poynor's essay *Critical Omissions* (2008). Due to the fact that this was the first exhibition to have the term 'critical graphic design' in its title, its participants were precariously attached to the term. In other words, and in the absence of other literature using the same term, the exhibition curators possibly established

an inconsistent canon within graphic design. By analysing the works exhibited and contributions to the exhibition's publication, it is intended to investigate and clarify the validity of such an attachment. This section is particularly relevant for understanding the validity of attaching specific practices and designers to these terms. The *Forms of Inquiry* section will be key to understand a distinction between critical design and critical practice, as explored later in the chapter. The aforementioned section will also be relevant to investigate what does 'critical' mean within graphic design.

This activity's historical precedents will be traced, drawing upon fine art practices at the birth of the term 'graphic design,' from its contributors and pioneers (El Lissitzky, Rodchenko, Moholy-Nagy) to key figures in graphic design, including Jan van Toorn. To close this chapter, contemporary discussions will be explored as well as those individual practitioners who have rejected claims of 'critical design' practice within their own or other designers' work. The conclusion will summarise and clarify the meaning, connotations and current dialogues around the two terms introduced in this chapter, by critically identifying the forums and publications in which they take place.

This chapter investigates an expanded role of the designer as author, editor, and researcher within contemporary graphic design. Not only does this chapter aim to map and contextualise recent terminology within the discipline, but also use this investigation to situate my own ideological position and practice as a graphic designer within an emerging disciplinary discourse. This research aims to place an emphasis on the three theoretical-practical levels I operate in as a designer—self-reflexive, disciplinary and public—thereby identifying the aforementioned expanded role of the designer and situating my practice within this (as detailed in Chapter 4). The following section aims to define the key terms and the context in which they emerged, as appropriate to this research. These terms and examples of practice have their roots in other disciplines such as product design, interaction design and fine art, with important precedents within graphic design. The goal of this section is to provide a broader context of this research.

Rise of critical design to popularity

The term critical design was popularised by product/ interaction British design team Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, primarily through the publication of Dunne's book *Hertzian Tales* (1999)[4]. Rebelling against an established view of design as a tool of seduction and to fuel economic interests, they argue for a more critical role of design. By this they mean the need to develop a disciplinary ethos, which aims to question culture and social habits, rather than affirming market and consumer trends. Dunne has been reflecting upon these issues in an increasingly clear manner:

> Conventional roles for design include addressing problems set by industry, designing interfaces that seduce the user into cybernetic communication with the corporate cultural values embodied in the emerging environment of digital objects, and finding novel applications for new technology. To do this, designers could become more like authors, drawing from the narrative space of electronic object misuse and abuse to create alternative contexts of use and need.
> (Dunne, 1999, p. 75)

Dunne and Raby have been conducting a design practice that embraces fiction as a means to extrapolate and challenge the status quo and physical, social or political laws, instead of affirming them[5]. In the book *Design* Noir (2001), which followed *Hertzian Tales*, they devote a subsection to 'critical design', as an indication of the maturation of the term for them in the context of the development of their practice. It is important to note that this subsection is part of a heading titled *Designer as Author*, which indicates a shared terminology with graphic design discussions from the early 1990s. Their definition of critical design was then clearer. The book explores more fully what the term 'critical design' means in relationship to their own practices, but also the general movement that was beginning to gain momentum within the discipline. Dunne remarks that "critical design, or design

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4　The book *Hertzian Tales: Electronic Products, Aesthetic Experience and Critical Design* was originally published by the Royal College of Art's Computer Related Design Research department in 1999, and authored by Anthony Dunne, constituting his PhD thesis. It was then revised and republished in 2005 by MIT Press.

5　They argue that the "fit between ideas and things, particularly where an abstract idea dominates practicality, allows design to be a form of discourse, resulting in poetic inventions that, by challenging laws (physical, social, or political) rather than affirming them, take on a critical function. Such electronic objects would be conceptual tools operating through a language of functionality that is entangled in a web of cultural and social systems that go beyond appearance." (Dunne, 1999, p. 42)

that asks carefully crafted questions and makes us think, is just as difficult and just as important as design that solves problems or finds answers. Being provocative and challenging might seem like an obvious role for art, but art is far too removed from the world of mass consumption and electronic consumer products to be effective in this context, even though it is of course part of consumerist culture. There is a place for a form of design that pushes the cultural and aesthetic potential and role of electronic products and services to its limits." (Dunne & Raby, 2001, p. 58)

This kind of concern within an authorial design practice has an important precedent. Influential work that informed and paved the way for critical product and interaction design (as acknowledged by Dunne and Raby in *Hertzian Tales*) was that of artist and designer Krzysztof Wodiczko. Born in Poland but living a nomadic life between Canada, US, Australia and France, he developed a practice focused on the creation of what he called 'critical vehicles.' The word 'vehicle' according to Wodiczko, is associated with the concept of a carrier, while the word 'critical' suggests judgment, an act of pointing out shortcomings, defects, or errors. (Wodiczko, 1998, p. xvi)

His work started as a reactive and survival attitude towards the social conditions of Poland in the 1970s, which he calls an oppressive psycho-social machine. The works he produced were then structures that sought to help the many times oblivious followers of a disguised autocratic regime. Wodiczko argues that he attempts "to detect and trace conditions of life under the illusion or delusion of freedom—the hypocritical life we lead when we take refuge in the machine of a political or cultural system while closing one eye to the implications of our own passivity or, frankly speaking, complicity." (Wodiczko, 1998, p. xii) This was amplified by a thriving capitalist North America in the 1980s, where he established the Interrogative Design Group at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at the MIT Media Lab. Wodiczko writing in his book *Critical Vehicles* (1998) explains:

> A critical vehicle is, therefore, a medium; a person or a thing acting as carrier of displaying or transporting vital ingredients and agents. It is set to operate as a turning point in collective or singular consciousness. (...) In short, the critical vehicle is an "ambitious" and "responsible" medium—a person or piece of equipment—that attempts to convey ideas and emotions in the hope of transporting to each human terrain a vital judgment toward a vital change. (Wodiczko, 1998, p. xvi)

To Wodiczko, democracy's wheels and cogs must be "lubricated not with oil but with sand". (Wodiczko, 1998, p. xiii) Only then will this disruption maintain its legitimacy through a kind of disorganised ethical turbulence. As Wodiczko argues, subjects of the aforementioned psycho-social oppression are themselves often unaware of the extent to which they are an active component—a vital cog or gear—in that very machine. Therefore, he notes that his work attempts to "heal the numbness that threatens the health of democratic process by pinching and disrupting it, waking it up, and inserting the voice, experiences, and presence of those others who have been silenced, alienated, and marginalized." (Wodiczko, 1998, p. xiii)

By carefully designing and deploying these objects and later large-scale projections, often in the public domain, Wodiczko contributed to the development of methods of critical analysis and the idea of communicative vehicles as a platform to open dialogue across the social and economic boundaries that divide the city. The idea of developing objects that could alert for the petrification of humans in "jungle capitalism" (Wodiczko, 1998, p. xiv) had then a fundamental impact on the critical product design that gained more attention at the beginning of the 2000s, primarily through the work of Dunne and Raby.

Dunne and Raby's insistence in trying to defend that design, too, can be provocative and challenging and not be labelled as art, had already been mentioned in *Hertzian Tales*. Dunne gives as example[6] the work of Wodiczko, arguing that even though they saw his work as a design proposal, not an artwork, to hold a design view where electronic objects function as criticism, one must move closer to the world of fine art practice. Indeed, this has been a recurrent discussion within design discourse when an exhibition focuses on this kind of critical work. As soon as a design work does not address a problem with a functional solution, it is considered redundant, abstract, self-serving or simply a manifestation of self-expression, thereby forcing a tension and crossover between design and art.[7] However, as explained more fully in the next section, this discussion becomes at least as problematic—if not more—when looking at the term 'critical' in relation to graphic design.

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6   Dunne gave as examples the objects *Personal Instrument* (1969) and *Alien Staff* (1992). He argued that "with their use of simple electronics and their emphasis on invention and social and cultural content, [they] are rare examples of how product design and the electronic object can fuse into critical design. (Dunne, 1999, p. 63)

7   For a comprehensive discussion on the subject, see *Designart* (2005) and *Design and Art* (2007).

Yet, Dunne and Raby manifest an effort to clarify misconceptions about critical design and the possible confusion with other marginal forms of design, such as experimental design. This attempt to clarify this term highlights the vagueness and overlaps with other terms such as speculative design and design fiction:

> Critical design is related to haute couture, concept cars, design propaganda, and visions of the future, but its purpose is not to present the dreams of industry, attract new business, anticipate new trends or test the market. Its purpose is to stimulate discussion and debate amongst designers, industry and the public about the aesthetic quality of our electronically mediated existence. It differs too from experimental design, which seeks to extend the medium, extending it in the name of progress and aesthetic novelty. Critical design takes as its medium social, psychological, cultural, technical and economic values, in an effort to push the limits of lived experience not the medium. This has always been the case in architecture, but design is struggling to reach this level of intellectual maturity. (Dunne, Raby, 2001, p. 58)

Two examples through which this design approach gained more exposure were product design exhibitions *Don't Panic* (The Yard Gallery, London, 2007) and *Designing Critical Design* (Z33 Gallery, Hasselt, 2007). Invariably, the participants of such events are key figures within critical design: Dunne and Raby, Jurgen Bey, Martí Guixé and Elio Caccavale. Critical design continued having permanent attention after Anthony Dunne's appointment as Head of the Interaction Design department at the Royal College of Art, both in the academic community and within a broader public sphere through his exhibitions until his departure in 2014.[8]

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8   The exhibition *What If…* at the 1st Beijing International Design Triennial (2011) with 36 participants is an example of this. The PhD thesis by Matthew Malpass proposing a taxonomy of critical product design at Nottingham Trent University completed in 2011 is also important to note, as it reflects the attention being given to this specific field and maturation within a product design context. Malpass' division between associative, speculative and critical design is not productive in a graphic design context. Even though he indicates an overlap with design activism and culture jamming, the rich legacy of graphic design in protest and satire, for example, asks for a different theorisation. The work of the The Extrapolatory Factory, (co-headed by a design interaction alumnus, Chris Woebken) is another example of Dunne and Raby's influence at the RCA.

A definition of critical design within product design has thus been witnessing a continuous maturation, through publications[9], exhibitions[10] and academic work.[11] It was in this context and sequence of events that the project *Design Act – Socially and politically engaged design today – critical roles and emerging tactics*, was initiated in 2009. Initiated by Magnus Ericson[12] (project manager of Iaspis – Swedish Arts Grants Committee's International Programme for Visual Arts) and Ramia Mazé (senior researcher at the Interactive Institute in Sweden), this project encompassed a series of lectures, interviews, seminars, online archive and a book.[13] The publication compiles the most important information gathered throughout the project as well as providing a selection of key texts related to critical design such as Dunne and Raby's article *Designer as author* (2011), which placed an emphasis on product, interactive and architectural design.

By the time Dunne and Raby presented their project *United Micro Kingdoms* (2013) at the Design Museum (London), critical design was a term invariably used as interchangeable with speculative design (which their book *Speculative Everything* (2013) reinforced) and design fiction. As Dunne admitted, design fiction is more prevalent in the US via authors such as Bruce Sterling and the east-cost tradition of science fiction, while speculative design is more present in Europe. (Dunne to Laranjo, 2014) Both speculative design and design fiction's typical output has to do with constructing hypothetical futures, normally dystopian, aiming to raise debate about the effects of technology on society. These are often labelled as 'cautionary tales' (Dunne & Raby, 2001). Speculation and the use of fiction in the design process became components of critical design. But while critical design presupposes a critique, speculation and design fiction are more vague in its aspirations, and therefore, can be more unaccountable. Criticism of the kind of critical design that Dunne and Raby advocate was nearly inexistent until 2013. The blog *Design and Violence* is a key example, curated by Paola Antonelli, senior curator of the

9   See: Walker, B. (2005) *The Taxonomy of Thrill and Thrilling Designs*, Aerial Publishing; Moggridge, B. (2006) *Designing Interactions*, MIT Press; Antonelli, P & Aldersey-Williams, H. (2008) *Design and the Elastic Mind*, New York: MoMA.

10   These include not only the ones mentioned in this section, but also the annual design interactions exhibitions at the Royal College of Art under the leadership of Anthony Dunne and *Design and The Elastic Mind* (MOMA, 2008) curated by Paola Antonelli.

11   Designer Revital Cohen's *Life Support* (2008) and the work developed by research students Elio Caccavale and Björn Franke at the Royal College of Art are examples of this. Jurgen Bey's appointment as director of the Sandberg Institute (Amsterdam, 2010) also reinforces this maturation.

12   Magnus Ericson was also the co-editor of the book *The reader – Iaspis forum on design and critical practice* (2009), which explored the same object of study, but with a focus on graphic design through the exhibition *Forms of Inquiry* (2007), explored in the next section. This indicates that attention also started to be given to this discipline and its relation to the terminology under scrutiny.

13   *Design Act* (2009) [internet]. Available from: ‹http://www.design-act.se› [Accessed 28 January 2015]

Department of Architecture and Design (MOMA) and Jamer Hunt, director of the graduate program in Transdisciplinary Design, Parsons The New School for Design. While this blog had occasional comments, it was the post *Republic of Salivation*[14] written by John Thackara about the work of Michael Burton and Michiko Nitta that paved the way for more sustained criticism. Design researchers Cameron Tonkinwise and Luiza Prado— who are contributors in the first issue of *Modes of Criticism*, as well as Ahmed Ansari— provided critiques of the white, middle-class European, male, privileged point of view of traditional works operating under the banner of critical design. Prado, with the paper *Privilege and oppression: towards a feminist speculative design* (2014) and Tonkinwise with a critique of Dunne and Raby's approach in *How we intend to future* (2015), which is a review of their book *Speculative Everything* (2013) are important examples of such criticism. Within this chain of events, graphic design, too, dedicated more attention to critical design practices, as will be outlined in the next section.

Forms of Inquiry

At the same time critical design was gaining momentum with consecutive exhibitions and media attention within product design, exhibition *Forms of Inquiry: The Architecture of Critical Graphic Design* (2007)—hereafter *FoI*—opened in London, at the Architecture Association School[15]. Curated by the designers Zak Kyes (who is also AA's Print Studio Director) and Mark Owens, this exhibition proved to be pivotal to rekindle and promote to a bigger audience discussions about critical graphic design practice. *FoI* happened in a particular setting: the AA School has a rich legacy of design fiction, as it was home of British architecture group *Archigram* from the 1960s, focusing on hypothetical architecture.[16] The exhibition—which after its opening in London travelled to Utrecht (Netherlands), Valence (France), Stockholm (Sweden), Zurich and Lausanne (Switzerland)—was complemented by a series of talks, reading rooms, on-line archive[17] and a publication.

14   Thackara, J. (2013) *Republic of Salivation* [internet]. Available from: ‹http://designandviolence. moma.org/republic-of-salivation-michael-burton-and-michiko-nitta/› [Accessed 12 January 2015]

15   Also in 2007, the exhibition *Products of our Time* curated by graphic design professor Daniel Jasper, took place at the Goldstein Museum of Design at the University of Minnesota. In it, authorial design work was displayed, with work on social and political issues. Yet, the *Forms of Inquiry* exhibition was the first one to carry the term 'critical graphic design' in its title.

16   Italian radical architecture studio Superstudio is also important to mention in relation to speculative architecture. Although their ideological stance (namely challenging modernist orthodoxies) differed from those of Archigram, they shared 'hypothetical architecture' as an output of their work, often in book form.

17   *Forms of Inquiry* (2007) [Internet] ‹http://www.formsofinquiry.com/› [Accessed: 15 April 2014]

From the outset, the goals of the exhibition were unclear. They were introduced in the book by its curators as aiming to highlight an "increasingly fertile relationship" between graphic design and architecture, with "attention to a number of recent developments" in the former discipline (Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 11). However, they failed to name these developments, expecting that the works displayed in the exhibition and reproduced in the book, along with the related events would perform this task. The works, which involved prints, books and installations were displayed in an informal manner [see Figure 3]: either mounted on basic exposed wooden structures, and books inside cabinets for a closer reading experience or available for perusal on a shelf.

Figure 3. Installation shot of FoI, AA School, London, 2007.

The first major tension is in the title of the exhibition. Kyes and Owens avoid the use of established terminology (such as 'research'), replacing it with a more casual and vague word such as 'inquiry'. By doing so, and because they were selecting work that "mobilises graphic design as a specifically *critical* activity," (Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 11)

It is also worth noting that as the exhibition travelled, more contributors were added to the exhibition. These include Francesca Grassi, NORM, Lehni-Trub, Hoon Kim, Sara de Bondt, Kasia Korcsak, Liam Gillick (the presence of a conceptual artist amongst graphic designers contributes to the confusing goals and definition of the terminology in question), Julien Tavelli and David Keshavjee, Martin Frostner and Jonas Williamsson, Laurenz Brunner, Xiao Mage and Chengzi and Ryan Gander.

they enter in conflict with a word so prominently present in the title of the exhibition: 'critical'. The lack of clarity in the curators' use of terminology only served to further confuse the viewer's understanding of what might be understood as 'critical graphic design'. By avoiding the word 'research' and its methodological tradition, and opting to use the term 'inquiry', the curators tried to suggest an intuitive investigation through design. The appropriateness of the word 'critical', so often mentioned in the introduction, is then questionable. To be critical, consciousness is a mandatory element. Furthermore, an investigation is inherently analytical.[18] Therefore, their intention to part away from more quantifiable means to evaluate quality and pertinence, seemed to be an easy excuse to navigate a complex and evolving territory of graphic design, without being associated to both the history and baggage that the used terms are intrinsically connected to.[19] (cf. Appendix G4)

Each participant of the exhibition submitted an example of their practice and a "written inquiry into an architectural subject" (Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 12) forming a series of newly commissioned prints" commission by the AA. By this, the curators meant a visible (or visualised) investigation that highlighted intersections between graphic design and architecture, while simultaneously attempting to identify the 'architecture' of what is considered 'critical graphic design'. In the vast majority of the 'inquiries' submitted to *FoI*, the connections are either vague or literal illustrations of architectural elements. This looseness will be more evident in the review of the three sections of the book detailed below. The apparent informality—perhaps as to constitute an ambiguous, thus safer statement—of the exhibition is bluntly expressed in an insert provided with the book. In it, it is possible to read: "the work contained within is united by a shared impulse to reframe the circumstances surrounding contemporary graphic practice by using intuitive modes of investigation to explore the mutual exchange and shared lineage between graphic design and architecture." (Kyes & Owens, 2007). The words impulse and intuitive further reinforce the intentional distance from any form of rigorous analysis. (cf. Appendix I1)

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18   In an interview published in *The Reader* (2009), Metahaven commented on this issue. They argue that "it is tricky to say «research» if it is used to indicate almost everything in design which is not made for clients; when simply means «self-initiated projects». The word «inquiry» may sound less pretentious, but it leads to the same question; what are we inquiring about? Research, like inquiry, means that you ask questions. It presumes more of a method for verifying the results. Inquiry presumes an immediate and practical interest, more of a curiosity." (Metahaven cited in Ericson & Frostner, 2009, p. 249)

19   This view is reinforced by the designer and writer Randy Nakamura in *Curation, Cataloging and Negative Capability*, published in *Modes of Criticism 1* (2015). See Appendix G4.

The publication produced to accompany the exhibition is divided into three sections: 'Typographics,' 'Modes of Production' and 'Methodologies.' Comprised under the first heading are the works of Radim Peško, Jürg Lehni, Hudson-Powell, Paul Elliman, a collaborative work between Karel Martens and David Bennewith, and Michael Worthington. Their work will be discussed in the context of the exhibition being examined here. Particular emphasis will be put on trying to investigate why the work present in *FoI*, was attached to the word 'critical'. A selective analysis of both their contributions to the exhibition, but also the work they put forward as representative of their practice will be key to understand an eventual dissonance between the title of the exhibition, the curators' intentions and the designers' work and their motivations.

Figure 4. *The Overlook.* Radim Peško, 2007.

Foi: Typographics

Radim Peško's work "looks at the way in which graphic elements from [Stanley] Kubrick's *The Shinning* are used within architectural spaces to suggest emotional and mental spaces." (Peško cited in Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 17) This 'inquiry' took the form of a poster, more precisely "a possible construction for a film's future poster design." (Peško cited in Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 17) The poster [Figure 4] uses three different carpet patterns, which are visible in the aforementioned film and are represented in their respective order of appearance. Peško's poster is a rule-driven visual exercise in response to the film, with the underlying intention of making a reference to an architecture element in order to satisfy the graphic design/ architecture relation the exhibition's curators wished to highlight. Another work from Peško was also presented

in *FoI*. Following an unfinished work by the artist Sol LeWitt, consisting of 122 views of "unfinished cubes made from wooden planks", (Peško cited in Kyes & Owens, 2009, p. 17) Peško created a tridimensional typeface. The "ability to recognise letters in seemingly abstract compositions" (Peško cited in Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 17) is then proposed to the audience, in another example of a design exercise that only reveals an intention or pretext to know LeWitt's work.

Hektor is the portable computer-driven spray paint output device created by designer Jürg Lehni. His contribution to the exhibition consisted on a series of posters generated during the private view, in London. The images created by Lehni for *FoI*, make a reference to architecture patterns used to represent different materials and construction methodologies. This project makes an obvious link to supergraphics, large-scale graphic elements applied to built environment,[20] but it seems to be a rationalisation for its presence in the exhibition. Lehni says in *Forms of Inquiry* that *Hektor* "was created with a certain attitude towards design and the use of tools." (Lehni cited in Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 20) However, that attitude is never fully explained, only outlining that *Hektor* extends the reach of software Adobe Illustrator by putting "the tool back into the hands of the user and confronts a closed product with an open source philosophy" and arguing that by doing so, it forms "a comment on today's desktop publishing…".

British designer Paul Elliman work focuses, as the majority of the contributions to *FoI*, on the relation between graphic and architectural space, implicating the human voice[21]. This is an example of his explorations and studies of the voice and technology. He has been studying the voice, language and their relation with the built environment for many years.[22] Having the mandatory connection between graphic design and architecture of the exhibition, Elliman used the opportunity to explain in writing the 'whispering gallery' sound effect present in London's St. Paul's Cathedral. His poster [Figure 5], titled *Voices Falling Through the Air*, is however a typographic composition that advertises a fictional

20   For more information on the history of this term, see *Supergraphics – Transforming Space: Graphic Design for Walls, Buildings & Spaces* (2010), edited by Tony Brook and Adrian Shaughnessy.
21   Elliman has a particular interest in exploring the power of the human voice. A podcast radio programme narrated by Emma Clarke (voice of the London Underground) is the work by Elliman in the exhibition's book. A printed (either by description or transcription) compilation of this interest is also present in the book *Wonder Years* (Werkplaats Typographie, 2009) under the title *Phantom Radio – The Typographical Voice.*
22   See for example, *Designed Screens* published in *Dot Dot Dot* 2 (2001). Elliman was a regular contributor of *DDD* with articles in issues 2, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 19. Some of his contributions were also compiled in the publication *DDDG – Extended Caption* (Roma Publications, 2009). *The Voice or Something* which is divided in two parts, in *Metropolis* no. 2 (2009) is another example of his continuous focus on the subject.

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event in St. Paul's Cathedral's 'whispering gallery'. The composition appears to be made using typographic effects available on the software Microsoft Word, which is a reference to the kind of DIY announcements available in churches. This can be an illustration of interests—even his awareness—but it is not critical.

Figure 5. *The Whispering Gallery of St Paul's Cathedral, London.* Paul Elliman, 2007.
Figure 6. *Notre Dame du Haut Ronchamp*. Karel Martens and David Bennewith, 2007.

As it happens with all the other contributors in the book, a project contextualising the designer or studio's practice precedes the 'inquiry' submitted for the exhibition. In the former, Karel Martens and David Bennewith's work is the result of a commission for the Philharmonic Building, in Haarlem (US). While the work is undoubtedly a result of an inquisitive design process, it would be inaccurate to classify it as 'critical design', as that would dismiss an investigative and inquisitive approach in any other serious design project. In other words, it is not appropriate to classify a design work or a designer's approach to design as critical, simply because the project shows evidence of questioning throughout the design process or in the final outcome. Questioning is an intrinsic part of the design process and would constitute therefore extremely loose criteria to attach a project or designer to the term 'critical design'. The editors argue that the projects showcased in this section, take an expanded understanding of typography as the "starting point for a variety of material, phenomenological and technical investigations." (Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 15) This is surely the case. Yet, these seem to be components to be taken into consideration in any serious graphic design project. Martens and Bennewith's 'inquiry' [Figure 6] consists of a poetic exploration in response

to the particularly intriguing window composition of the chapel Notre Dame du Haut (Ronchamp, France) designed by Le Corbusier in 1954. The poster can be seen as a graphic reading of the building, with its windows represented graphically, sometimes repeated and blurred while being a platform to study the architect's thinking. As in the previous examples, it is not evident why the word 'critical' is attached to this work.

In the second section of the book, titled *Modes of Production*, the editors outline that the nature of the graphic design discipline is primarily concerned with giving shape to ideas and information provided by others. Aiming to break away with this old notion, they ask: "But what happens when the designer assumes the role of editor, publisher and distributor outside the constraints of the familiar client/designer relationship?" (Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 45) They challenge an established view of graphic design as a service-oriented discipline by arguing that the designers in this section of the book engage in other activities such as writing, editing, distribution, self-initiated publishing projects or "local DIY outreach initiatives". (Kyes and Owens, 2009, p. 45) Here, this alternative way of looking at the discipline is presented as novelty, when history provides examples of similar intents.

The digital type foundry *Emigre* created by the designers Rudy VanderLans and Zuzana Licko in 1984 is a case in point. With an investigative approach to type and graphic design, questioning the medium itself, technology and the discipline, they are an example of critical design practice. The eponymous magazine published from 1984–2005[23], was a key element contributing to this practice. *Emigre* magazine started as a platform for typo/graphic experimentation, pushing and questioning the boundaries of typography at a time when new technology (the Apple Macintosh) was producing a radical change in graphic design. By commissioning writers, engaging with university lecturers and academic programs, *Emigre* produced one of the most important design magazines operating in what can be considered as critical practice in during the 1980s and 1990s.

This engagement was not only achieved through discussions, exhibitions and lectures, but also by simultaneously investigating through practice. Issue number 10, to name just one, is an example of this, with contributions from Cranbrook Academy students and key figures of the literary-fuelled graphic design discussions and work on deconstructionism, such as Andrew Blauvelt, Ed Fella, Allen Hori and Jeffery Keedy.

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23   A book with an overview of all the editorial work of *Emigre* magazine, titled *Emigre No. 70 – The Look Back Issue*, was published in 2009 by Gingko Press, and edited by Rudy VanderLans.

Emigre magazine adapted and reacted to content, developments in design discourse, changing its format, while keeping a reflexive attitude towards graphic design, linking it to other disciplines (music, film or literature) and positioning its activity within a wider cultural, social and political context

The ability to continuously question design tools and their impact, to be self-reflexive and inquisitive of one's practice and the discipline in which one operates, while traversing the wide spectrum of fields graphic design intersects and influences through publication and many other platforms, *Emigre* is therefore an example of critical design practice. Here, it is important to note the word *practice* after critical design, as the distinction between critical design and critical practice will become clearer further ahead.

To conclude the analysis of the first category set by the curators of *Forms of Inquiry*, it is possible to see that a typographic approach is the only characteristic unifying the participants. It is also clear that Lehni and Elliman are working on issues of language at a technological and semantic level, thereby reflexively operating on a disciplinary level. The same cannot be said of Worthington's poster, with an obvious illustrative attitude. This realisation is an important contribution to an understanding of such practices against the theoretical framework of critical practice developed in the next section of the chapter. It highlights the scope of the research and its agenda, which is useful to define criticality in the tradition of theoretical frameworks such as critical theory, as it will be explained in Chapter 3.

Foi: Modes of Production

The curators of *Forms of Inquiry* selected the following designers and design collectives for the second section titled 'Modes of Production' which included Dexter Sinister, Task (Emmet Byrne, Alex DeArmond and Jon Sueda), Åbäke, DeValence, Project Projects and Will Holder. All of these build on practices that find important precedents in the past, both stemming from a design practice (*Emigre*) or from fine art (Fluxus, for example). The difficulty, as will be possible to acknowledge, will be to define, or indeed effectively measure, how much 'criticality' one needs to have in order to be positioned or labelled as developing a critical design practice. In other words, how critical is *critical*?

What the next selection of works categorised under the banner of 'Modes of Production' reveal are that the criteria put forward by the curators to consider a design work critical, are as ambiguous as in 'Typographics'. Yet, it highlights important historical connections within graphic design and develops an understanding of the design approaches perpetuated by this group of designers.

Dexter Sinister (New York, us) formed by Stuart Bailey and David Reinfurt is a 'just-in-time workshop' and bookstore. They argue that writing, design, production, printing and distribution are normally "handled discretely by specialists as the [design] project processed through a chain of command and production". (Bailey & Reinfurt cited in Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 46) Their goal is to collapse these activities in their studio basement in New York. This way of operating is a consequence of the ease of access to printing since the beginning of the 21st century. It is also relevant to note that the attitude present in this positioning of the designer as a content generator, finds a strong parallel with the discussions on design authorship and entrepreneurship. *Dexter Sinister*'s poster includes several scattered printed documents without an apparent or intended narrative. Some of these include business cards of the studio, a photo of the entrance to their basement and other printed ephemera.

Task Newsletter, which is a magazine created by Emmet Byrne, Alex DeArmond and Jon Sueda[24], "uses design as a starting point to talk about other things." (Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 52) The intention of approaching other subjects that have design as a starting point is not new. The same could be said of *Dot Dot Dot*, for example, amongst other precedents. *Typographica* magazine, edited by designer Herbert Spencer between 1949 and 1967, is an example of this. Even though the magazine focused on typography, it was used many times as a starting point to investigate related disciplines. Spencer's approach to publication, editing and his expanded view of the role of the designer, make *Typographica* a relevant publication to mention. In the book *Typographica* (2001), Rick Poynor remarks in a section he titled *The Designer as Editor*:

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24   Sueda wrote about 'speculation' in *Task Newsletter* 2 (2009) by asking seven designers to talk about "(un)realized futures" through a series of questions. In the seven surveys, to which Sueda called *All Possible Futures: (Un)realized projects*, the following designers submitted contributions: Peter Bilak (co-founder of *Dot Dot Dot* magazine), Sean Donahue, Dunne & Raby, Daniel Eatock, Mr. Keedy, Lust, Zak Kyes (co-curator of *Forms of Inquiry*) & Wayne Daly.

On other occasions, a designer or writer with a particular enthusiasm would propose an article, as did Alan Bartram after discovering the work of Italian painter, graphic designer and photographer Franco Grignani. Spencer readily agreed. Such a combination of strategies for generating material – by idea, by discovery and by proposal– is typical editorial practice. In addition, like many editors of small magazines, Spencer would sometimes, having identified a subject, choose to write about it himself. (Poynor, 2001, p. 25)
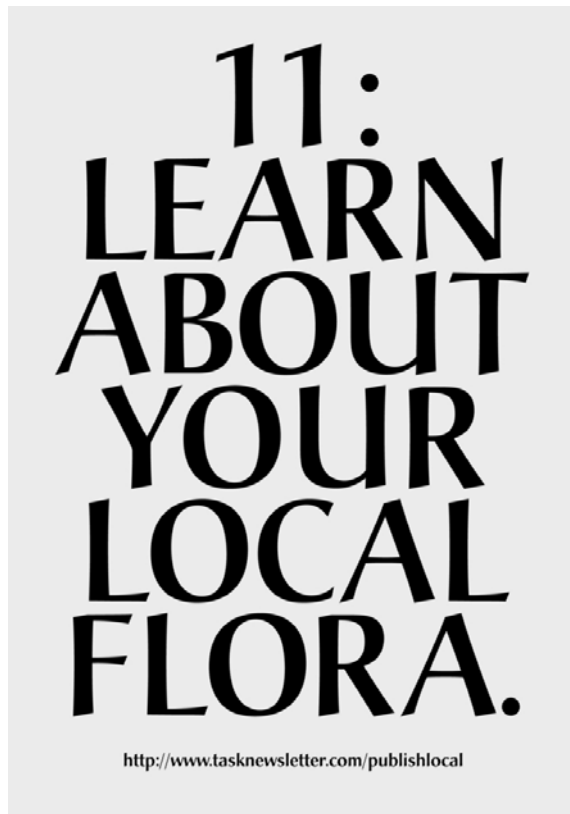
Figure 7. *A Pattern Language.* Emmet Byrne, Alex DeArmond & Jon Sueda, 2007

This use of editing, publishing, investigation and the use of writing as part of a design practice, finds parallel in *Dot Dot Dot* and *Task Newsletter*. As for the contribution to *FoI*, *Task* used architect Christopher Alexander's *Green-Making Sequence* pattern as a starting point to initiate a series of posters which incite the audience to "translate them into any personal relevant context...". (Task cited in Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 54) The fifteen typographic posters [see one example in Figure 7] try to encourage people to be autonomous and problem-solvers. They were made available online on a PDF format for a wider distribution.[25]

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25   The fifteen posters can be seen on *Task Newsletter's* website: [Internet] Available from: ‹http://www.tasknewsletter.com/publishlocal› [Accessed 15 April 2015]

The publication *Marie Louise* (2006–2007)[26], produced by French design studio deValence, was used as a tool to analyse the visual environment in which they work. With articles on typography, designers and interviews, this publication is undoubtedly a contribution to the design discourse. Yet, the poster submitted to *FoI*—as in the case of other participants—tries to make a direct connection with architecture in order to be aligned with the exhibition's title. DeValence mention the architect and designer Jean Prouvé and a house he designed (*Maison Standard*, in Meudon), as a working method they relate to as graphic designers. This modernist architect's focus on the economy of means and the one-metre wide modules with which the aforementioned house could be constructed in forty-eight hours, served as a principle to be visually illustrated in a poster format. The resulting output is then a succession of 209 stylisations of the house, suggesting a progression of its construction. Problem solving is important to deValence, as that is what they say they admire in Prouvé's work ethic: "We admire the way in which he dealt with problems. For us, the solution often lies in the brief itself, in the question posed by each commission. Our first step is therefore to bring this question to the fore and respond to it." (deValence cited in Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 66) While this position is rooted in a Modernist tradition it does not constitute or mount a critique, but represents an inquisitive posture, which can be expected in a traditional approach to design.

Project Projects (PP), a New York-based studio, presented a poster that only provided a very subtle trace of their intentions. In the black-and-white print, it is possible to observe a photograph of a page of a book. Closer inspection reveals that it is a reproduction of a hand written letter by artist Diter Rot to poet and Fluxus Group artist Dick Higgins. The print itself – albeit the poetic nature of the letter – leaves no trace of its origin, thereby closing off further inspection. However, the posters in this exhibition are not to be seen in the traditional notion of the poster, that of transmitting a message to an audience. As will be explained in a following section, designer Stuart Bailey argues that the premise of the exhibition is useless, insofar as it forces an architectural relation to graphic design with no clear end. Accordingly, the posters are, too, useless in the sense that they do not address any specific audience nor do they articulate a clear argument. They are, however, gateways that allow—with the help of the talks, writings and the publication—to understand the interests and motivations of a group of particularly inquisitive designers, thereby pointing to their design process. This does not dismiss, however, the looseness of criteria set by the curators and the cryptic visualisations and illustrations by the participants.

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26   The bilingual magazine (French and English) has since been renamed to *Back Cover* and is published by Éditions B42.

If the poster designed by PP is opaque and ambiguous, the same cannot be said of the rationale behind that formalisation. They presented the book *Fantastic Architecture* – from which the page reproduced is taken – published in 1969 by German painter Wolf Vostell and Dick Higgins through his publisher Something Else Press. With contributions from members of the Fluxus Group, the book compiles several critiques on architecture through utopia, including the presence of "informal postcards, letters or notes directly responding to the editors' call for projects, thus rendering the book's editorial process transparent." (Project Projects cited in Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 70) Higgins' captions, which work as "mini-manifestos" throughout the book, are also mentioned, denoting a critical editing process made visible through design.

For the book *Who Cares* (2006) designed by PP and showcased as an example of the studio's work, they highlight the intention to allow an expanded reading experience through the use and design of image and textual annotations. By connecting these two design works, PP shows an interest in overlapping disciplines, while revealing an influence and references of their design process.

PP's exhibition design, identity and newsprint publication of *OURS: Democracy in the Age of Branding* (The New School, 2008), is a particularly relevant project to note. [Figures 8 & 9] The design of the exhibition establishes a dialogue with its content, constructing a critical context, which promotes debate and self-awareness amongst its visitors. The authoritarian design identity, as they call it, asks visitors at the entrance to choose one of two red and blue stickers. This forced segregation makes a direct connection with the also bi-coloured works present in the exhibition. Through the employment of "dislocative processes and visual form", the disposal of such tags or badges would therefore become a political act. PP continues, saying:

> Throughout the exhibition, the dichotomy between the colors red and blue offer the appearance of alternatives. This nod to agency proves to be illusory: color is used arbitrarily to both package identical contents, as well as to suggest choice between incomparable objects. (...) The *OURS* design system is totalizing and open-ended, monolithic and chaotic, autocratic and motley. Through these unresolved contradictions, the design acts to extend, question, and comment upon the show's concept and contents. (Project Projects, 2008)[27]

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27   Project Projects. (2008) [Internet blog] Available from: ‹http://www.projectprojects.com/projects/ours_democracy_in_the_age_of_branding› [Accessed 7 February 2015]

Figure 8. Entrance to the exhibition *OURS: Democracy in the Age of Branding*. ©Project Projects, 2008.
Figure 9. Detail (stickers) in *OURS: Democracy in the Age of Branding*. ©Project Projects, 2008.

The intention to problematise the exhibition's content and its proposition, while promoting dialogue, disruption and opening/ making visible the presence of design and of their work as graphic designers, undoubtedly makes of this project an example of critical design. The self-reflexive nature of PP's work, together with a constant engagement with academia (namely through partner Rob Giampietro, who teaches at the Road Island School of Design despite leaving PP in 2015) and design writing in *Dot Dot Dot* and on the blog *Design Observer*, indicate elements that can constitute a critical practice. The other partners, Prem Krishnamurthy's curatorial work in the gallery P!— later renamed K—and Adam Michaels' Inventory Press further reinforce this attitude.

Foi: **Methodologies**

The third and final section of the book is titled 'Methodologies' and includes the work of design studio Metahaven, Julia Born, Mevis and van Deursen, Experimental Jetset, John Morgan, Manuel Raeder and James Goggin. Here, the curators argued that the work presented inverts the traditional way in which graphic design manifests itself: that of the finished artefact. Kyes and Owens say that the designers featured in this section treat graphic design as an "open and methodological and material process," (Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 81) rather than simply producing a finished product. According to them, this is achieved not only by questioning the conditions "under which the need for design arises in the first place," but also through the generation of "speculative

proposals, models and research programmes that set forth conditions of possibility rather than criteria to be met." (Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 81)

The speculative dimension that characterises—according to the exhibition curators—the work of Dutch design studio Metahaven, identifies a key term that has important aforementioned precedents. Metahaven which is comprised of Daniel van der Velden and Vinca Kruk, use writing as a pivotal element of their design research process, which they describe as having a symbiotic relationship focusing on identity[28] and the political. Metahaven make perhaps the most explicitly critical statement in the *FoI* book, by highlighting the importance architecture plays in their work, whilst framing the context for their contribution to *FoI*. Starting with the title *Models for the Political* in the text that contextualises their practice, Metahaven clearly explain the connections between architecture, iconography and the political, which is key to their work. The first example given is the project *Sealand* (2004). The North Sea wartime platform—which was claimed as a sovereign principality by Major Paddy Roy Bates in 1967—was used by Metahaven as a starting point to question the perverse political and juridical authority arising from the creation of this micro-nation and the relation with its built, and very iconic form. From 2003 to 2005, they worked on speculative design proposals for Sealand's national identity (including maquettes, passports or stamps, for example), as a means to question issues and agents involved in the construction, operation, exploration and exploitation of the principality.

Building 7 [Figure 10] was the title of their contribution to *Forms of Inquiry*, using the medium of the poster as a platform to investigate, question, map and represent the explanations[29] to justify the collapse of the World Trade Center's Building 7. The two posters are complex and dense compositions of scattered blocks of information gathered while conducting research about the event. Metahaven's research output, despite providing little insight into their working method, seems to point to a fundamentally different aspect from the other previously mentioned designers, namely the use of fiction, but also that of visualising the elements and actors involved in the issue at stake.

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28   Their first book, titled *Uncorporate Identity,* was published in 2010, and investigates the geopolitical connections present in corporate identity through design fiction, with several essays from a variety of contributors.

29   Metahaven gives as example the fact that the BBC World "told its viewers that the Salomon Brothers Building had collapsed more than 20 minutes before it actually happened." (Metahaven cited in Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 84)

Figure 10. *Building 7*. Metahaven, 2007.
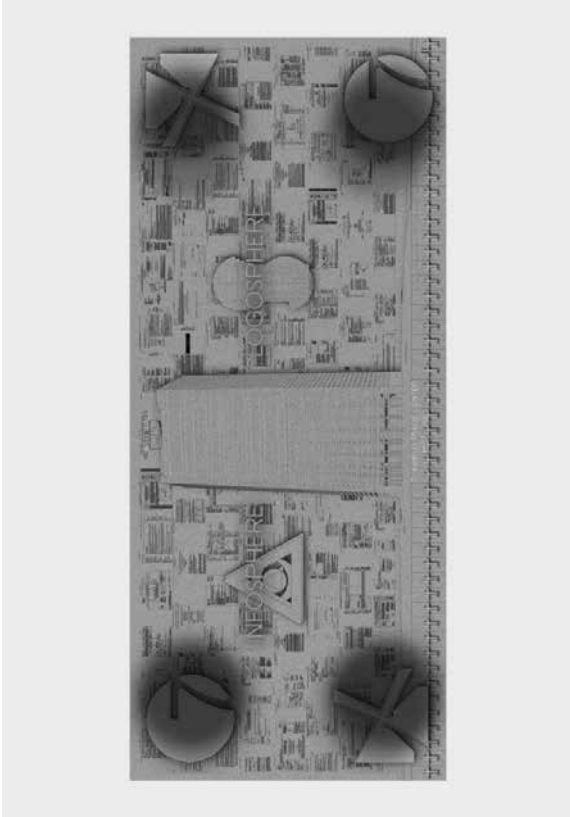
Before introducing their contribution to the exhibition, the Dutch design duo Armand Mevis and Linda van Deursen, a design project is showcased in the book, in order to illustrate their design ethos. The visual identity designed for the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum (Rotterdam, The Netherlands) is reproduced along with a description from its authors. Due to the fact that the museum's name has two Bs and its building has "different shells added over time", (Kyes & Owens, 2007, p. 94) the logo is an outlined B that can have many behaviours. This section of the book titled *Methodologies* suggests that it would be possible to observe a design method, when in this case what it is observable is a very broad rule creation that will guide formal typographic behaviours.

The Dutch design studio Experimental Jetset chose to present the headquarters' building of the French Communist Party, designed by Brazilian modernist architect Oscar Niemeyer. Once again, it is possible to observe that the identification of—and subsequent visual response to—a building was recurrently seen as the way to address the subtitle of the exhibition. They chose the aforementioned building due to its symbolic dimension, with its roots in Modernism, a long-standing interest of the studio.[30] The poster has a highly contrasted photographic depiction of the building in

30   See for example *Drip-dry Shirts: The Evolution of the Graphic Designer* (2005), p.62.

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black and white. Owing the use of just one colour, black, and the strong contrast applied to the image, omitting all mid-tones or shades of grey, the building is read as a flattened two-dimensional representation.

Designer James Goggin focused on post-September 11 construction proposals for the *ground zero*, in New York (US). Interested to question the decision of building new towers, a commercial and office space, Goggin pointed other proposals such as that from artist Ellsworth Kelly. Collaged over an aerial view of the site, Kelly placed a green rectangle, suggesting a large mound of grass. Goggin's poster for *FoI* is then a result of a captioned collection of the many proposals he cites, together with other images (such as *Leap into the Void* (1969), a photomontage by Harry Shunk of an Yves Klein performance).
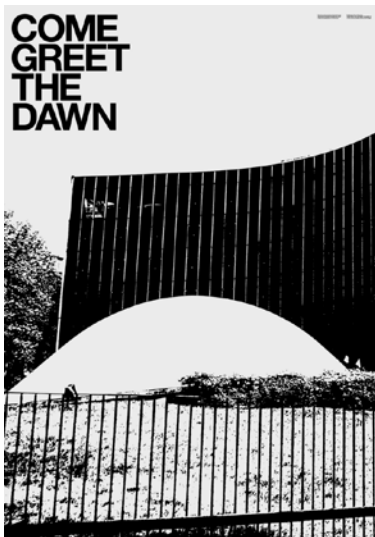
Figure 11. *Headquarters of the French Communist Party*. Experimental Jetset, 2007.

Figure 12. *Ground Zero Zero*. James Goggin, 2007.

The problem arising from categorising designers with distinct approaches under the same heading makes a possible classification such as the one sought in this chapter more complex. What this particular group of designers participating in *Forms of Inquiry* demonstrate is a different range of 'levels of criticality' evidenced in their practice, at the same time it reveals that some designers do not seem to categorically deviate from a traditional design practice. It is important to note the different results in output when a designer seeks a critical attitude in a professional setting and in self-initiated research. The limitations and politics involved in the former due to the existence of a client, are

substantially different in the latter, thereby traditionally allowing more expansive and emancipatory results, whereas the former has almost inevitably to operate in a much more subtle manner. This does not dismiss, however, the responsibility and ambition that must be present in the former. One cannot exist at the expense of the other. In other words, it has to struggle to find opportunities for criticality. Another issue that clearly emerges when observing these works and reading their motivations, goals and interests, is how difficult it is to justify the word 'critical' in relation to most projects. This will be addressed in the following section, but *Forms of Inquiry* does underline the ambiguity and overlapping of terms such as reflexivity and criticality, between seeing 'critical' as critical thinking and 'critical' as mounting a critique. Even though there is a complicity between these, they all cohabit under the banner of 'critical graphic design', rendering many times the term inappropriate, unclear or simply unjustifiable as it will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

Clearly, the exhibition was timely but not for the reasons the curators intended. In other words, it served to denote the diverse, disperse interests and motivations of many leading practitioners within graphic design, forced to do links with architecture in a poster format and generating confusion and ambiguity around the term 'critical graphic design'. The output observed in this exhibition is not representative—with some exception, such as Metahaven—of the designers or studios' practices. They are in their majority self-directed, vague visualisations or subtle references to what the designers were interested in discovering or exposing, using *FoI* as a pretext to do it.

It is possible to observe some methodological patterns, such as rule-creation to define form. Peško, Task, Lehni or DeValence's posters are an evidence of this.[31] This cannot, however, be considered a critical methodology. As it will be seen in the next section, a division of 'criticality' into three dimensions, personal, disciplinary and public, is an important model to evaluate methods and map a design practice and the inevitable levels a designer navigates and influences.

It was possible to see in this exhibition that with the exception of Metahaven, the projects on display under the banner of 'critical graphic design', did not evidence a critique and developed a sustained argument. A critique presupposes taking a position and arguing in its defence. Goggin addresses a public issue and his questions end

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31   See Andrew Blauvelt's *Conditional Design: Workbook* (2013), which gives attention to this kind of process.

up, inevitably, identifying an ideological position. Even though this result could be interpreted as a critique, it is clearly not his implicit intention, as he argues at the beginning of his text. Therefore, the greater number of the contributions could be placed in the personal/ self-reflexive dimension of a design practice.

The designers participating in *FoI* presented little to no evidence of the methods used to develop the criticality claimed by the curators. They talk about their intention, interests, but not about how they get to the formalisations, their goals and effect. The exceptions are, as previously mentioned (Lehni or Pesko, for example), when technology or a predefined rule is guiding the work. In an open letter in *Dot Dot Dot* 20 (2010) Stuart Bailey says that the only designer or studio, which could perhaps be attributed the term 'critical graphic designer', are Metahaven. Yet, even Metahaven describe themselves (on their website, for example[32]) as a design research studio, not a critical graphic design studio, unlike what happened in the past.[33] By categorising and being vague about the criteria that is or can be used to attach the word 'critical' to graphic design, the curators mystified the term with a veneer of ambiguity and lack of historical context, rather then clarifying it. They gathered however an exceptional group of leading designers, allowing an exposure and understanding of the directions, interests and pluralism that identified a generalised and contaminating design practice at the turn of the first decade of the 21st century. Even thought it may not have been intentional, this exhibition accidently—and wrongly—attached a great number of designers to a term they were not able to explain, thereby creating an inappropriate canon of critical graphic design.

Designer as author and producer

In order to continue investigating the expanded role of the designer detailed in *FoI*, this section identifies important precedents within graphic design history. In the seminal article *The designer as author* (1996) by American designer Michael Rock, it is possible to identity key elements that occupied most of graphic discussions of the late 1980s to the mid 1990s, that of the emancipation, evolution and autonomy of the role of the designer. *The designer as author* was republished in *The Education of a Graphic Designer* (1998) with the

32   Metahaven. [Internet] ‹http://www.metahaven.net/› [Accessed 24 April 2014]
33   In the promotion material announcing a talk done at the AA School in 2010, they are described as a "studio for critical graphic design." [Internet] Available from: ‹http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/VIDEO/ lecture.php?ID=1286› [Accessed: 10 May 2014]

title *Graphic Authorship.* In 2005, Rock published on his website a reply to his own original article, titling it *Fuck Content.*[34] In it, he defends that his goal with the original article was "an attempt to recuperate the act of design itself as essentially linguistic—a vibrant, evocative language." However, he found "that it has often been read as a call for designers to generate content, in effect, to become designers and authors, not designers as authors." This essay has since been published in several books, and anthologised in the exhibition catalogue of *Graphic Design: Now in Production* (Walker Art Center and Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, 2011).

The emergence of an interest in authorship existed in the context of not only technological developments such as the introduction of the Macintosh computer in the mid-1980s, but also of discussions within literature, namely Post-structuralism and Deconstructivism via the work of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida respectively. With the Cranbrook Academy leading the way in exploring design practices that went beyond service provision and solution seeking, much of the discussions triggered at the time cannot be dissociated from the aspirations of critical graphic design. The way Rock refers to the word 'author' in relation to the designer has in fact many similarities with how Rick Poynor refers to critical design in *Critical Omissions* (2008a). Here, he challenges the absence of historical context for the use of the term by the curators of *Forms of Inquiry.* As Poynor was cautious do define the word 'critical' as a prefix to graphic design, Rock is careful to define 'author'. He says:

> The word has an important ring to it, and it connotes seductive ideas of origination and agency. But the question of how designers become authors is a difficult one and exactly who are the designer/authors and what authored design looks like depends entirely on how you end up defining the term and criterion you chose to determine entrance into the pantheon. (Rock, 1996, p. 44)

Indeed, the same could be directed at critical graphic design. What seems to be the specific factor distinguishing critical design as an evolution of design authorship—or more appropriately, an independent category altogether—is the particular goal (and methods) of addressing societal, political and cultural issues, namely shifting from the designer as author to the designer as researcher.

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34   Rock, M. (2009) *Fuck content.* [Internet] Available from: <http://www.2x4.org/ideas/2/Fuck+Content/> [Accessed 12 February 2015]

In the exhibition *Designer as Author: Voices and Visions* (1996) and a set of related talks held at the Northern Kentucky University (us), it is possible to observe that the design discipline was already attempting a compilation of work differing from the norm.

> A recent call-for-entries for a design exhibition entitled *Designer as Author: Voices and Visions* sought to identify 'graphic designers who are engaged in work that *transcends* the traditional service-oriented commercial production, and who pursue projects that are personal, social or investigative in nature." (Rock, 1996, p. 53)

The focus on work of personal, social and investigative nature cannot be dissociated from the domains of activity of critical design. This new term builds upon the expanded role of the graphic designer developed by the 'designer as author' discourse, and the principles advanced then. It is a key step towards the autonomy of the graphic design. The film-related *auteur* theory mentioned by Rock in *The designer as author*, can be used as initial model to identify critical design work. This theory argued that film directors must meet three essential criteria do be considered authors: 1) demonstrate technical expertise; 2) have a stylistic signature over the course of several films; 3) demonstrate a consistency of vision and evoke a palpable interior meaning through their work. The third criteria can help identifying the kind of work related to this recent term. It also anticipates the clarification made at the end of this chapter between critical design and critical practice. As it will be seen, the names Rock mentions as deserving of such connotation, are the same that can be considered to develop a critical practice such as Jan van Toorn or Pierre Benard.

American designer and educator Ellen Lupton, too, put forward another reading of the authorship discussions during the 1990s. In *The designer as producer*[35] (1998), she used German theorist Walter Benjamin's seminal text *The Author as Producer* (1934) to propose this terminology in opposition to the designer as author. She writes:

> The avant-garde movements of the 1910s and 1920s critiqued the ideal of authorship as a process of dredging unique forms from the depths of the interior self. Artists and intellectuals challenged romantic definitions of art by plunging into the worlds of mass media and mass production. (...) In detailing an agenda for a politically engaged

35   Design Historian Victor Margolin also published an article with the same title in 2002 (International Council of Societies of Industrial Design News). The article focused on the seeing the designer as entrepreneur, namely exploring the new possibilities of increasingly cheaper and more accessible means of small-scale production and distribution.

literary practice, Benjamin demanded that artists must not merely adopt political 'content,' but must revolutionize the means through which their work is produced and distributed. (Lupton, 1998, p. 214)

The provocative alert to the potential dangers of an authorial (self-centered) designer, was previously suggested by Michael Rock in *The designer as author*. The emancipating role of the producer however, seems to be even more aligned with the goals of critical design practice. The highly inquisitive responsibility of the producer, and its incessant need to frame, contextualise and study his surroundings in a critical manner as per Benjamin's writings, find similarities in discussions revolving around critical design, both in product and graphic design.

Lupton puts forward proposals for how design education can embrace Benjamin's view of the producer. These suggestions echoed in Dutch design, where the discussions about authorship were happening under the banner of the 'designer as editor', namely in establishing the idea that the designer unavoidably adds his or her viewpoint to the content he or she deals with and designs. Still, the proposition of having language as the raw material—and especially writing and criticism—for the designer to navigate the media society, remain as relevant now as they were then:

> Language is a raw material. Enhance students' verbal literacy, giving them the confidence to work with and as editors, without forcing them to become writers.
>
> — Theory is a practice. Foster literacy by integrating the humanities into the studio. Infuse the act of making with the act of thinking.
> — Writing is a tool. Casual writing experiences encourage students to use writing as a device for 'prototyping,' to be employed alongside sketching, diagramming, and other forms of conceptualization.
> — Technology is physical. Whether the product of our work is printed on paper or emitted from a screen, designers deal with the human, material response to information. (Lupton, 1998, p. 216)

These discussions paved the way for an emancipated view of the role of the designer, namely in claiming autonomy, legitimacy and exploring the responsibilities beyond a client-serving activity. It was upon these premises and this liberated position that critical design gained more attention, setting the stage for a critical practice. In the next section, the shared heritage between the two terms will be examined, as well as clarifying their differences.

Utopia and pioneers of criticality

Critical design aims to challenge the *status quo*. Therefore, its practice will always have to be marginal. To become mainstream would be paradoxical, losing its *raison d'être* and effect. Yet, this utopia has been imagined and attempted in the past, laying the foundations for a socially, politically and culturally engaged design practice. Although still being today generally identified as an artistic practice rather than a design activity, critical design positions itself at the margins of the graphic design discipline, by both living in and stretching the discipline's boundaries on the quest for cultural, political and social change. Historically, these goals have been envisioned as early as the 1920s within the design discipline. To trace the early discussions outlined in this section, is relevant to this thesis. Not only its key actors (namely El Lissitzky) are an important influence of pivotal practitioners such as Jan van Toorn—as it will be evidenced in the next section – but also because of the contemporary use of fiction by graphic designers (Metahaven, for example) find important parallels in those put forward during the birth of the graphic design discipline in the beginning of 20th century, helping to identify the roots of the terminology explored in the present chapter.

In order to make such a claim for the design discipline, the following artists and designers will be considered: El Lissitzky, Alexander Rodchenko and László Moholy-Nagy. They were pioneers of a critical design practice, namely for trying to develop a design practice for social change at a time when American typographer William Addison Dwiggins first coined the term 'graphic designer' (1922).[36] Before identifying the constructivist avant-garde's intentions, it is relevant to note an important precedent. French theorist Henri de Saint-Simon's views on the artist and its role within society, dating back to the 1820s, can be seen as influential in creating some relevant

36   See *New Kind of Printing Calls for New Design* (1922), in *Looking Closer 3* (Allworth Press), p. 16.

foundations of the revolutionary thinking on art and design that Lissitzky, Rodchenko and Moholy-Nagy developed and expanded a hundred years later. Saint-Simon, says the design historian Victor Margolin, proposes a triumvirate in which "the artist's role was to envision the future of society, while the scientist would analyze the feasibility of visionary ideas, and the industrialist would devise administrative techniques for putting them into practice. Thus the triumvirate would be responsible for the invention, analysis, and execution of all social initiatives." (Margolin, 1997, p. 1)

By seeing the artist as having a direct and active role in shaping society, Saint-Simon opened up the possibility of what can be considered the emancipated artist. The constructivist avant-garde aimed to bridge the gap between the envisioning and the acting.[37] As Margolin says:

> What is evident in the Saint-Simonian formulation is that artists had the power to envision possibilities, while they remained dependent on others to translate their ideas into practical activities. The ambition of the artistic-social avant-garde, however, was to close the gap between discursive acts, which were confined to postulation and speculation, and pragmatic ones, which involved participation in building a new society. (Margolin, 1997, p. 3)

These three designers had different social contexts because of having different origins with distinct social realities. El Lissitzky and Rodchenko were born in Russia. The former studied in Germany and travelled widely throughout Europe, while the latter completed his studies in his birth country. Moholy-Nagy was born in Hungary and met El Lissitzky and Rodchenko in Germany. The reason why it is pertinent to relate these three individuals to critical design is because—as Victor Margolin argues—they belonged to the first generation of artists clearly operating as designers, who were in a position to test the relation of a radical art language to a terrain of revolutionary social practice. [38]

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37   Margolin argues that "Habermas delineates two kinds of practice: communicative action functions in the sphere of discourse, while instrumental action refers to social control, whether of elements, materials, or individuals." (Margolin, 1997, p. 3)

 38   Margolin notes that "as artists, all three rejected the received traditions of representational painting for a new visual language of abstraction. They also moved from the purely discursive sphere of art to various pragmatic forms of design." (Margolin, 1997, p. 4)

Even though El Lissitzky intentionally distanced himself from political partisanship[39], his intrinsic goal to produce work as a means for social change as well as his intentions can undoubtedly be considered political. The unwillingness to subordinate art to utilitarian ends, which was disputed by theorists Alexei Gan or Boris Arvatov, is just an example of the struggle to maintain a humanist approach, while not committing to irreversible constraints. The level of commitment towards systematisation, but especially to the use of exhibitions as a space to outline, expose, share and discuss their goals, their societal aspirations while promoting collaboration, seems to be reminiscent of an early 21st century critical design posture. A refusal of the use of media simply to channel an idea in opposition to a symbiotic and simultaneous exploration of concept, convictions and medium can also find parallels with late 20th and early 21st century concerns within design education and within critical design practice with designers such as Jan van Toorn. The ideas that Van Toorn came to articulate when championing designers (who he calls 'practical intellectuals') to embrace a critical practice and the way reflection and praxis, finds precedents in Moholy-Nagy[40], Rodchenko[41] and El Lissitzky[42].

Within a particular social context (namely during Lenin's late years in power), Moholy-Nagy adopted a political and revolutionary posture, asserting that it was the avant-garde's role to help the proletariat to reach the "contemporary standard of mankind." (Margolin, 1996, p. 65) This belief accompanied him until the end of his career in the early 1940s, after moving to the US in order to head a new art school based on the Bauhaus model, the New Bauhaus. Here, he strongly defended the holistic over the

39   In the introduction of the first issue of the periodical *Veshch* (Object), Lissitzky said: "'Object' stands equally aloof from all political parties, because it is not occupied with the problems of politics but of art. This does not mean, however, that we are in favour of an art which stands outside of life and is apolitical in principle. On the contrary, *we cannot imagine a creation of new forms in art unrelated to the change in social form...*" (Lissitzky 1922 cited in Lissitzky-Küppers, 1968, p. 345)

40   In an essay under Moholy-Nagy's name in *De Stijl* 5 (1922), he "focused on man's senses, which, he said, it was art's task to refine to the limits of their capacity. Artists would accomplish this through experiments that challenged conventional uses of different media. Moholy-Nagy distinguished between *production*, the creative use of a medium itself, and *reproduction*, which was simply the transmission of content through a medium." (Margolin, 1997, p. 64)

41   "The sharpest difference between Rodchenko's design strategy and that of the Stroganov teachers (mainly decorative in style), however, centered on methodology rather than end products. For Rodchencko, design was not a matter of aesthetics; instead, it was a synthesis of ideological, theoretical, and practical factors. The combination of purpose, technique, and material formed the political process of object production." (Margolin, 1997, p. 89)

42   "Our generation has set itself the aims of working precisely in accordance with commission. But practice has shown that the work of true artistic worth can be created only when the artist sets his own objective (the internal social commission)." (Lissitzky 1941 cited in Margolin, 1997, p. 163)

vocational, arguing that school should be a place for finding one's own position in the world, engage in wider societal issues and incorporate such values in its production.

Rodchenko, too, directed his efforts to an industry-focused work, encouraging students to produce the kind of new objects a "revolutionary society required". (Margolin, 1996, p. 82) The struggle between the liberating power of art, the pragmatism and immediacy a revolution needed, produced however many disagreements and tensions. If on the one hand El Lissitzky and the Hungarian Construtivist Group had push art into a practical application and work on the limits of the discipline, on the other hand the role of the artist and its political agenda was distinct, as Margolin notes.

> While both groups (International Faction of Constructivists and *Ma* Group) espoused a visual language of elemental forms, they were sharply divided as to the social implications of those forms. Van Doesburg, Lissitzky, Richter, and their colleagues wanted to demonstrate methods of collaboration that would transform the practice of art while the Hungarians envisioned a radical new society the artist would help to bring about. (Margolin, 1997, p. 63)

It is relevant to note that at the birth of the design discipline, a more 'pragmatic (but not less political) art', was seen as a catalyst of social change, whereas design with the same attitude today is generally seen as inhabiting art's realm. While art in the past struggled and surely still struggles with political affiliations,[43] what these designers showed is that design is a discipline that cannot afford to have such a seclusive positioning.

Critical design and critical practice

A key figure of critical graphic design practice is Dutch designer Jan van Toorn. He has been arguing for the emergence of a critical designer since the 1950s. Van Toorn urges designers to question their role and power in society, while championing social emancipation and fighting against an established ideological crisis within communication design through the generation of research and debate. Concerned with the entanglement between organised economic interests and its unquestioned persuasive staging activity, Van Toorn sees the public sphere as a space for moral

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43   This can be seen, for example, in Herbert Marcuse's *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1978), in which he argues that art should transcend politics.

resistance. His body of work—with strong connections but not restricted to the cultural sector—spanning through commercial practice, edited books, articles and a impactful academic presence and influence, constitutes a fundamental call for critical reflective design practice as it will be evidenced in this section.

Van Toorn sees the designer as an "expert on the socio-cultural context". In other words, he frames his "personal and professional activity in relation to social reality, in relation to the smaller and large contexts of human activity". (Van Toorn, 1994, p. 141) Therefore, he argues that his thinking "should be operational in this; a construct of notions and arguments which enables me – as a person, as a social being and as a professional – to deal with the complexity of our life world." (Van Toorn, 1994, p. 141)

What it is important to note here, is not only his realisation of an inevitable social dimension and consequent responsibility of the designer, but his division intro three dimensions to be considered by the designer: personal, professional and social. This has been previously mentioned in this chapter, when Van Toorn referred to the dimensions a design student and design education institutions should address: individual freedom, disciplinary discourse and public interest. The clear parallel with the personal, professional and the social is then revealed. The awareness of these three dimensions thus appear to form the foundation of a critical design practice; one which, according to Van Toorn, every designer should strive for.

To make this intention a reality, Van Toorn had to make his thinking operational. In other words, he had to find ways in which he could explore an emancipatory and discursive attitude through professional work. *Critical Practice* (2008) is the title of the book Van Toorn's work, written by British design critic Rick Poynor. The author poses the unavoidable question at the beginning of the book, that of whether it is possible for a designer to be critical while working for a client:

> So where does that leave the designer who takes the view that design, as a means of public communication, should be about more than merely providing promotional endorsement for our current version of reality? While many designers envy the freedom of artists to follow their own agendas, designers are required, by contrast, to focus their skills and commitment on the transmission of their clients' messages. Leaving aside overt forms of graphic protest, is it

possible (was it ever possible?) to embed an alternative or contrary way of thinking in the everyday commercial practice of design? (Poynor, 2008b, p. 79)

Poynor's separation, leaving aside "overt forms of graphic protest" is particularly important to underline. It seems to indicate that such kind of graphic manifestations—political printed matter and propaganda—does not necessarily constitute an identification of critical graphic design practices. Indeed, these can be generally considered examples of graphic design being used in a traditional manner, only having as 'client' an explicit political agenda. This is where a division between 'critical design' and 'critical practice' is perhaps once again evidenced. A 'critical practice' as evidenced by Van Toorn's posture points to the struggle to articulate the three aforementioned dimensions in a commercial practice over a sustained period of time. On the other hand, critical design seems to be a term with a different setting (exhibitions, or publications for example), although sharing agendas and the public sphere.

To eschew the possibility of all politically engaged graphic design work being critical design would be imprudent. The boundaries that can define whether a work of propaganda to be a 'critical design' project will be frequently blurry. An analysis of these within graphic design, will always have to consider the political/ social context, the politics involved in the project (e.g. if it was commissioned, and produced by a graphic or non-graphic designer). This can be clarified with three examples that reflect the differences – but also the inevitable overlaps – that happen when seeking a possible distinction. The iconic poster *Lord Kitchener Wants You* (1914) designed by Alfred Leete is a clear example of propaganda, without the emancipatory or questioning layering a critical design would be expected to have. The *First Things First Manifesto* (1964) by British designer Ken Garland, rebelling against the overuse of design skills to promote consumerism – was certainly an exercise that had an impact on design's disciplinary discourse. The discussions it generated and the lasting effect it had (it was republished in 2000 by *Eye*, *Items*, *Form*, *Adbusters* and *Blueprint* magazine, as well as the AIGA *Journal of Graphic Design*) still echoes, for example, in the visual illustrations published in *Adbusters* magazine. The poster magazine edited by British designer Tony Credland, titled *Feeding Squirrels to the Nuts*, is the third case in point. With three issues (1 (1995), 2 (1997) and 3 (1999)) published to date, it is

a magazine "addressing current issues of debate concerning communication and society" with contributions from international designers and critics. The posters, with written and visual contributions from designers such as van Toorn or Daniel van der Velden (Metahaven) engage in both disciplinary and societal issues, thereby being a clear example of critical design. Critical design is an emerging field with particular methods (such as speculation and design fiction) and aiming at debate, research and emancipation. Critical practice is the conscious articulation of the personal, disciplinary and public dimensions of design over a long period of time, providing a critique of the context and conditions in which design is produced and its effect on society, with particular attention to the public sphere.

In *Critical Practice*, quotes from Van Toorn are spread throughout the book, highlighting his ideological positioning, interest in the concept of 'reality' and influences such as German theatre director Bertolt Brecht or filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard. Jan van Toorn quotes the latter in the book, as Godard clarifies his definition of reality through film, with affinities with Van Toorn's view of visual communication becoming visible. In *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews* (1998), film director Roger Corman asks Godard why he photographed the director's clapboard several times during *La Chinoise* (1967). This question followed a previous answer in which Godard had emphasised that it is important he is aware that he is making a movie, not a dream. Godard replies that:

> "the real subject is not *La Chinoise*. It's a movie doing itself which is called *La Chinoise*. It's both together. The subject is not only the actors but the artistic way of showing them. Both together. They are not separate. There is a quote in *La Chinoise* which l would like to say. The young painter says, "Art is not a reflection of reality. It's the reality of a reflection." To me it means something. Art is not only a mirror. There is not only the reality and then the mirror-camera. I mean, I thought it was like that when I made *Breathless*, but later l discovered you can't separate the mirror from the reality. You can't distinguish them so clearly. I think the movie is not a thing which is taken by the camera; the movie is the reality of the movie moving from reality to the camera. It's between them." (Godard cited in Sterritt, 1998, p. 29)

This approach finds a parallel in Berthold Brecht's concept of 'defamiliarisation', which Van Toorn translates into making the designer visible in the design work, allowing the audience to be aware that is being manipulated. Van Toorn's theoretical and practical research, namely shaping concepts such as dialogic design, are important to this thesis. The research methods explored and examined in Chapter 4 build, in part, upon this practice (e.g. the *Occupied Times* 24 cover). He described the dialogic effect as "a storytelling structure, is a connective model of visual rhetoric that produces degrees of distinction – revealing the many opposing elements of the message so that they can be triangulated by the viewer." (Van Toorn, 2002, p. 326) A critical position, he argues, questions the "elements of the symbolic order of which our cultural reality is made up." (Van Toorn, 2003, p. 33) The commitment to criticism and public debate, to investigating the discipline's mechanics and willingness to expose its shortfalls and potential, makes of Jan van Toorn a fundamental example of critical graphic design practice. This was made evident in the exhibition *Staging the Message: The Open Work of Jan van Toorn* (Eindhoven, 2014), not only through his insight into his process, but especially the analysis of graphic design strategies in the form of a self-reflexive critique of graphic design in *Strategies in Communication Design – Staging and Rhetorics in the Work of Jan van Toorn* (2014), co-authored with Els Kuijpers.

In this publication, dialogism is described in a succinct manner, serving both as method and approach for a critical practice. It is an "aesthetic system and moral value in one", and a "reflexive, social strategy" that "aims to involve spectators in the communication in a recognisable and critical manner and thus to offer them counter-images dealing with reality." (Kuijpers, 2014, p. 14) Kuijpers—and Van Toorn in the interviews conducted in 2011, 2013 and 2014—underline the pivotal role of ideology and how method can be key in taking advantage of the opportunities for criticality in a "commission-bound social practice" as graphic design. Kuijpers says that "every language, and visual language is no exception – not only produces the subject/consciousness but also reproduces the ideology inherent in it, that is, the dominant frame of mind or regime of truth." (Kuijpers, 2014, p. 3) It is because of framing his approach to design in this particularly reflexive and critical manner that Van Toorn is key to this thesis and the way criticality is being investigated methodologically, specifically in Chapters 4. As Van Toorn argues, "method is a way of thinking." (Van Toorn to Laranjo, 2014)

Rick Poynor alerted to the seeming interchangeability between critical design and critical practice on the blog *Design Observer* when commenting on the avoidance of the baggage attached to the terms by the *Forms of Inquiry* curators. He argues that Kyes and Owens "insist on a distinction between "Critical Design" (capitalized), as a "categorical or polemical designation", and "critical practices" (lowercase), as explored in their exhibition. They seem curiously affronted by any attempt to link the two terms, despite the fact that (a) critical design (its originators don't capitalize it) began as a method of critical practice and the terms are increasingly likely to be used interchangeably; (b) they use the term "critical graphic design" in their exhibition subtitle; and (c) the key word in both coinages is, in any case, "critical." (Poynor, 2011)[44]

To extend this perspective, in the book *The Reader – IASPIS Forum on Design and Critical Practice* (Sternberg Press, 2009), the *Forms of Inquiry* exhibition is used as a case-study to question emerging terms and practices. Amongst many contributions from participants of the exhibition (Åbäke, Dexter Sinister, Metahaven) it is relevant to note design researcher Ramia Mazé's identification of three forms of critical practice. The first has to do with a critical attitude towards a designer's own practice. In other words, it can be seen as the effort to be self-aware or reflexive about what a designer does and why he or she does it. Mazé argues that this can be understood as a kind of internal questioning and a way of designers positioning themselves within their practice. She says:

> The reflective or critical practitioner might be thinking about what their unique concerns are, what their particular sort of knowledge or contribution might be within a particular situation. By reflecting on what they do and how they do it, and how that's different from what and how other people do things, they try to build the particular identity of, or idea behind, their practice. (Mazé, 2009, p. 389)

The second form is described by Mazé as a the "building of a meta-level or disciplinary discourse." It is a "criticality within a community of practice or discipline", and about trying to challenge or change traditions of paradigms". (Mazé, 2009, p. 389) Thereby, this second possible manifestation of criticality can be seen as the designers' act of being critical of their discipline, while actively and consciously working towards its expansion and evolution. Finally, the third possible manifestation of criticality can be

44   Poynor, R. (2011) *A Swedish perspective on critical practice.* [Internet] Available from: ‹http://observersroom.designobserver.com/rickpoynor/post/a-swedish-perspective-on-critical-practice/30068/› [Accessed 10 February 2015] The author refers that this article was originally published in the Swedish magazine *Tecknaren* in 2010, but it was on the blog *Design Observer* that it first appeared in English.

that of addressing pressing issues in society. The mounted critique is not targeted at a designer's own practice, at his own discipline or even design in general, but to wider societal phenomena or issues. What this division shows us is that it is difficult to only operate in one of these approaches or modes of criticality. They inevitably intersect, overlap and contaminate each other.

However, while a more design-centric criticality—as illustrated by Mazé's two first possible sub-categories—can be oblivious of, although nevertheless influential on, wider societal issues, the opposite is neither possible nor desirable. On the one hand, while immersed in a designer's own process or in the expansion of the discipline by focusing on specific media, all-encompassing perspectives on society can be ignored. On the other hand, if a designer is mounting a critique on a cultural, social or political phenomenon through design, it is counter-productive to not be self-reflexive about the mounting of such critique, as exemplified by Mazé's first form of criticality. The second mode of criticality is then where the two approaches meet, as they will be both expanding the design discipline as a consequence of their activity.

Ramia Mazé's realisation however, is not new. In fact, a direct connection can be made with Van Toorn's view on design pedagogy. He argues for the presence and creation of the awareness of the tension between private and public interests within design education. He argues that the "student must learn to make choices and to act without attempting to avoid the tensions between individual freedom, disciplinary discourse and public interest." (Van Toorn, 1997, p. 127) This assertion by Van Toorn can then be seen as an earlier ideological perspective of Mazé's division of criticality.

Critical practice in design education

Two influential design schools operate in between the aforementioned modes of criticality, with the clear intention of focusing on a critical design practice. The Werkplaats Typographie (part of the Arnhem College of Art, hereafter WT) founded by Dutch designers Karel Martens and Wigger Bierma in 1998 is one of them. The WT bases its Masters' educational model on a modernist reflexive practice, following the idea of 'workshop' developed by English typographer Anthony Froshaug and designer Norman Potter.

With a specific attention to typography as a point of departure to investigate and question a different number of briefs – normally through publication[45] – the WT's 'mode of criticality' can be placed between the first and second definition of 'critical practice' as put forward by Mazé. By investigating and challenging graphic design's tools and its long-established outputs (such as the book), the WT promotes discussion that start from (micro and macro) typography and end up expanding the discipline and its discourse through self-reflexivity and pubic discussion with the dissemination of various publications. British designer Stuart Bailey, a graduate of the first class of the WT, became an influential voice in design discourses exploring the role of the designer as editor, writer and publisher through the creation of the design journal *Dot Dot Dot* (2000–2010) he co-founded with Peter Bil'ak. Bailey belonged to the group of designers[46] participating in the *Forms of Inquiry* exhibition and has been a critic of the discipline and a champion of all the connections graphic design has with literature, music, or film. Yet, as we will see in the last section of this chapter, he positions himself against the need for a new category such as 'critical designer', manifested in an open letter in the last issue of the magazine he edited.

In *Subterranean Modernism: A Critical Retrospective* (2010), designers and writers Randy Nakamura and Ian Lynam provide an account of the legacy of the Werkplaats Typographie. The authors identify it as the prototypical 'ground-zero' for a critical graphic design practice for the past decade, arguing that it is reflective of a widely spread attitude on non-oppositionality, and the absence of rejection. While the WT tries to frame the designer "in relation to the world at large—the social, political or technological developments taking place in contemporary society," the key figures who are profoundly influential, Norman Potter and Anthony Froshaug, seem to promote detachment from them. The authors position these designers in between Modernism and Post-modernism, with a great focus on "process, the subjective and the local." (Nakamura & Lynam, 2010, p. 114)

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45   In the book *In Alphabetical Order* (2002), edited by Stuart Bailey, a section of the first prospectus is reproduced. There, it is clearly outlined the working model of the WT, as well as the multiplicity of activities its students engage in while researching and designing their projects. Bailey says: "A concrete assignment is always the starting-point, because answers to questions can immediately have a practical effect precisely in relation to the work. Further, the thematic approach to an assignment can result in a publication. The Workshop intends to produce regular publications that concentrate on typography. (...) Participants will write and/or edit, design and produce the publications that the Typography Workshop publishes. " (Bailey, 2002, p. 9)

46   It is important to note that designers such as Louis Lüthi, Radim Pesko, David Bennewith, Scott Ponik and Alex DeArmond are all graduates of the WT. The participation of Pesko and DeArmond in *Forms of Inquiry*, and the presence of Lüthi or Bennewith in *Dot Dot Dot*, reveals a tight circle of designers that have an assiduous presence in 'critical design' related publications and events.

The other design school with an assumed and active critical orientation is the Sandberg Institute (named after the influential Dutch designer Willem Sandberg[47]), part of the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, in Amsterdam. The Masters[48] of the Design Department is concerned with the development of a 'critical designer', with students seeking social engagement through work that explores design's role in relation to public and political discourse. Faculty members such as Rob Schröder, Annelys the Vet, and Daniel van der Velden, are important figures of politically-engaged graphic design. The Sandberg Institute's students are encouraged to produce design work with a constant goal of reaching the public domain through critical reflection[49] and debate, accepting often students with varied backgrounds, such as music and performance, for example.

Therefore, it is clear that the Werkplaats Typographie program puts more emphasis on the second mode of 'criticality' following Mazé's three distinctions, whereas the Sandberg Institute focuses more on the third. As previously asserted, if attention is given to the social-political criticality, a realisation that the two other modes are indispensable is important. Even though the word 'critical' is a common denominator of both *critical design* and *critical practice*, undoubtedly recurrently looked at as being interchangeable, they have different meanings. Critical design can exist as an isolated event, whereas a critical design practice has to be sustained through a long period of time. A design that casts a critique on a cultural, political or social issue, either through commentary, reporting or fiction, can be the result of a single project. Even though it is important to acknowledge that this kind of work normally reflects a more continuous and persistent political attitude from the designer or studio undertaking it, it is clear that it can exist as an isolated and temporary act. Critical practice on the other hand, entails a sustained and resilient commitment to all the three modes of criticality,

47   Willem Sandberg can, too, be considered to have had a critical graphic design practice. Sandberg had an active participation in rebelling against the German invasion of The Netherlands in 1940 through subversive document forgery, produced practical self-reflective work (*Experimenta typographica*, 1943), and had a prolific graphic design and curatorial production as director of the Stedelijk Museum.

48   It is pertinent to note that both these courses are taught at postgraduate (Masters) level. The emergence of design criticism MA courses at the School of Visual Arts, London College of Communication, and Royal College of Art seem to point to the fact that the act of being critical as a design specialism, is only taught at postgraduate level. This is perhaps due to the maturation of the discipline, working its way down, from specialism, to a more generic design education. Yet, as 'critical' becomes a buzzword, it is possible to observe courses in the both in Design of Fine Art realms at both postgraduate and undergraduate level with titles such as MA in Design – Critical Practice (Goldsmiths, University of London) and BA Critical Fine Art Practice (University of Brighton).

49   It is important to note the influential book *The World Must Change – Graphic Design and Idealism* (1999), co-authored by Leonie ten Duis and Annelies Haasee.

usually functioning in tandem and manifesting itself in the public sphere both through commercial, academic, curatorial and editorial work.

As for critical design, the task is less open to subjectivity. This is a non-commercial activity and therefore it is virtually impossible to sustain a living solely on it, with the exception of an academic/ research career (at least partially), and heavy-reliance on cultural funding. The output of critical design can be normally seen in museums, galleries, conferences, academia, and occasionally on the streets. A critical practice on the other hand, strives to articulate a dissident practice, a commercial activity and ideally a hybrid mode of both of these. What unites both is the presence of agency, the interest in challenging the status quo and expanding the boundaries of the discipline. It is no surprise that the practitioners operating in these margins of design are more than often involved in design education. This presence allows an idyllic place for research, experimentation, and contamination of new generations of designers. In *Deschooling and learning in design education* (1997), Van Toorn focuses on design pedagogy, seeing the school as a natural place to expand his research on the social-libertarian aspirations of design and help students to question the conditions under which they work. He says that "schools provide an excellent space for such reflective and operational research. It is precisely on the periphery of the worldwide media spectacle that there is room to develop an alternative practice. Students should learn to face the challenge of change because the school offers them the means to perceive, reflect, criticize and transform." (Van Toorn, 1997, p. 127)

Rejection of (critical) labels

The examination of *FoI* detailed above builds upon Rick Poynor's article *Critical Omissions* (2008), namely by providing an extensive critical analysis of both the exhibition, works on display and contributors' practice. *Critical Omissions* triggered a heated discussion with the exhibition's curators, as well as generating reactions from other designers labelled as 'critical.' Poynor acknowledges the timely pertinence of the exhibition, but alerts to the absence of fundamental referencing by its curators. He points out that they ignored the unavoidable design duo Dunne and Raby as leading voices related to the term they were using and that *Emigre* was a past example of what Kyes and Owens were presenting as novelty. Poynor also points to a comment by design educator Steven McCarthy, in which he notes that many of the notions put forward in

FoI and associated with the term 'critical design' find precedents in the design authorship discussions and its "philosophical foundations".[50]

The reply by Kyes and Owens reveals that Poynor's critique and remarks were valid. They define the exhibition with a loose and broad description of what they intended to do and deny the existence of any sort of ideological banner able to represent the group of designers participating in *Forms of Inquiry*. Their answer undeniably reveals the extent to which they overlooked a rich and diverse history of graphic design, namely by avoiding the broad content they argue the participants were interested, and that was present in magazines such as *Emigre*, *Eye*, *Design Issues*, *Zed* and the AIGA *Journal*, as Poynor points out in a subsequent reply.[51] The curators of *FoI* continuously avoid any association with the term they used in the subtitle of the exhibition, stating only that they gathered a series of inquiries made by inquisitive designers, with practices intersecting disparate fields and highlighting the strong links between graphic design and architecture. However, the most well articulated rejection of this terminology is made by the British designer Stuart Bailey, editor of *Dot Dot Dot* magazine, in issue 20 (2010). Due to the fact that Bailey is mentioned in the arguments between Poynor, Kyes and Owens, and also because of his affinity with them, his open letter aims at clarifying his position and underlining how distorted a reportage can depict a designer and his intentions. He starts by saying that the "stuff at the heart of that description is inherently slippery, and so the writing about it is accordingly elliptical." (Bailey, 2010, p. 79) Bailey quotes British designer James Goggin via his article *Practice from Everyday Life* (2008). Goggin notes that graphic design's everyday activities are typically nuanced and expansive enough to render such renaming unecessary. Bailey deems it then an unnecessary, misleadning and therefore superfluous rebranding. (Bailey, 2010, p. 80)[52] Stuart Bailey continues

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50   This comment was made in reply to design historian Alice Twemlow's review (titled *Some Questions about an Inquiry*) of the *Forms of Inquiry* exhibition on *Design Observer*. [Internet blog] Available from: ‹http://designobserver.com/feature/some-questions-about-an-inquiry/6577› [Accessed December 2013]

51   Poynor, R. (2008) *Critical omissions*. [Internet blog] Available from: ‹http://www.printmag.com/Article/Observer_Critical_Omissions› [Accessed December 2014]

52   It is also important to note that Goggin had previously raised a similar point of view in *Reader – Iaspis Forum on Design and Critical Practice*. In a discussion with design studio Europa, and when talking about the connection between French theorist Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of *relational aesthetics* and the emergence of the term 'relational design', he was weary of the attempt to pigeonholing design and associating to art. He said that "another problem with a direct Relational Aesthetics based appraisal of graphic design is that it feels like an attempt to fit graphic design into a discourse where design aspires to be art, or at least places design on the same critical footing as art. Graphic design now occupies a position where it should be confident enough as a discipline to be both a vehicle for fulfilling social needs and for expressing independent thought." (Goggin, 2009, p. 31)

saying that the majority of the designers participating in *Forms of Inquiry* do not have a commercial approach to design, but are instead interested in making "work that documents or otherwise organizes other people's work (and sometimes their own)…". Their work, he argues, is normally subsidised by the "cultural food chain." (Bailey, 2010, p. 80) Bailey suggests that the term 'critical design(er)', is only employed by journalists or curators, directing his statement at Poynor:

> I understand you're only trying to set up what "design" tends to mean for a broad audience, in order to pitch "critical design" against it, but I think this simplification is already too much of a distortion, or at the very least confusing. Further, I seriously doubt whether any of the participants would think of themselves as "critical designers," which is how it comes across. (Bailey, 2010, p. 80)

He finally poses a set of questions, which have as an answer an apparent apolitical and non-idealistic positioning by the group of designers participating in *Forms of Inquiry*. Bailey says that just because they are not doing something, does not mean they are against it, in order to ask: "if [they are] neither selling doodads nor busy criticizing the selling of doodads, what are these so-called critical designers doing. Or: what do they *think* they're doing? What's the point? What are they after?" Perhaps unsurprisingly, the answer is that "they don't yet know what they want, other than opportunities and occupations that accommodate their interests." (Bailey, 2010, p. 80) After rendering the premise of the exhibition "supremely useless" based on the fact that the contributors had to produce "architectural" posters with no apparent end, he argues that the event was timely although not for the reasons the curators intended. By reducing the goal of *Forms of Inquiry* to a format for people to meet, what was achieved was essentially an event that could be about anything, with anyone. However, Bailey acknowledges that this model is far from the accountability Poynor argues for, and although he is sympathetic with that claim, he says that there should be place for both.[53]

To close the argument, Bailey dismisses graphic design history by saying that *Emigre* magazine was an influence of him and his peers, but "no more or less than an independent record label, or a band, or your big brother doing a newspaper round in order to be able to buy his own bike."[54] By misinterpreting Poynor's provocation about

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53   See: Bailey, S. (2010) *Another Open Letter*, Dot Dot Dot no. 20, Dexter Sinister, p. 81
54   Bailey said that he agreed with Mark Owens, pointing out that they were "more fond of oour grandfathers, or stepfathers, or our friend's fathers, or indeed mothers." Bailey, Stuart (2010) *Another Open Letter*, Dot Dot Dot no. 20, Dexter Sinister, p. 82

Design as criticism. Francisco Laranjo, LCC, 2017

the intimate relation that architecture and art have with their history, he emphasises that they were interested in 'communication' and not in 'graphic design', thereby looking for a wide spectrum of sources, most obviously outside the discipline. It is because of this reason that these designers become "writers, editors, printers, publishers, distributors, shop owners, event organisers – all practical extensions of previous roles, taking matters into their own hands." (Bailey, 2010, p. 82)

Even though their positioning is based on a luminous, idiosyncratic and humorous kind of intelligence[55], their avoidance of history (and here I include terminology) – and particular disregarding their discipline's discourse – can only diminish the quality of the perpetuation of their interests and investigations. What this group of designers argues is that this new term is unnecessary because graphic design is for them an inevitably critical discipline and a tool they can use to investigate the most disparate interests. However, this terminology emerged due to a generally uncritical state of the discipline and is therefore important to help identifying different design approaches by attributing them new terms and allowing different ideological practices to be examined, discussed and scrutinised.

The post-critical

In 2003, almost seven years before this discussion took place, *Emigre* 64 – *Rant,* provides a series of critiques that help to frame the attitude described above. Commenting on the reality observable within graphic design after the period of substantial design discourse created during the mid-1980s and 1990s, design critic and curator Andrew Blauvelt produced a dark account of the state of the discipline. In the article *Towards Critical Autonomy* or *Can Graphic Design Save Itself?*, pluralism seemed to be, according to Blauvelt, the word that best described graphic design at the beginning of the 21st century. The discipline's constituent elements were so "scattered and destabilized", that for him, "any attempt at definitions becomes meaningless". (Blauvelt, 2003, p. 38) Blauvelt goes even further, by introducing an important term debated in this chapter: the post-critical. He points that "this situation of academic and marketplace pluralism, as well as a dearth of critical discourse, are actually related phenomena, each reflecting the condition of the other. Slowly but surely, any critical edge to design – either real or imagined – has

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55   He argues that they were deeply influenced by designer Paul Elliman and his approach to design/ life.

largely disappeared, dulled by neglect in the go-go nineties or deemed expendable in the subsequent downswing. However, the reason seems not a factor of cyclical economies, but rather the transfiguration of a critical avant-garde into a post-critical arrière-garde." (Blauvelt, 2003, p. 38)

It is against a described state of generalised 'post-criticality' that Blauvelt makes a call for a need of "critical autonomy" for graphic design. By autonomy he does not mean the "kind of freedoms the fine arts claim", but a design practice that "cannot divorce itself from the world". (Blauvelt, 2003, p. 41). He then proposes that: "graphic design must be seen as a discipline capable of generating meaning on its own terms without undue reliance on commissions, prescriptive social functions, or specific media or styles. Such actions should demonstrate self-awareness and self-reflexivity; a capacity to manipulate the system of design for ends other than those imposed on the field from without, and to question those conventions formed from within." (Blauvelt, 2003, p. 41)

The autonomous critical practice Blauvelt argues for is not concerned with personal expression, but is rather "dedicated to an inventive contextuality". In other words, that more focus should be put on "social and cultural contexts in which design finds itself." (Blauvelt, 2003, p. 42) He then continues, by asking the question: what is critical design? After quoting Dunne and Raby from their book *Design Noir* (2001), he explains:

> While Dunne and Raby work within, alongside and against the field of product design, their notion of critical design could easily apply to graphic design. Critical design is non-affirming, that is to say, it refuses or at least is sceptical of the conventional role of design as a service provider to industry. Critical design is polemical, it asks questions and poses problems for the profession and users alike, it is opposed to traditional notions of problem-solving, and it eschews the singularity of a medium in favor of the multiplicities of social agency and effects. (Blauvelt, 2003, p. 42)

The autonomy the author asks for aims therefore to create a space of reflection for graphic design that allows the opportunity of a critical examination of its practice. Another article in this same issue of *Emigre*, raises a relevant question concerning graphic design's increased interest in social and political issues at the beginning of the century. In *Design Modernism 8.0*, design writer, typographer and educator Jeffery

Keedy made a ferocious attack at *Dot Dot Dot* magazine, by describing the state of graphic design as the eighth update after the introduction of Modernism. A tougher description of the result of pluralism, sees a parallel with Andrew Blauvelt's article, whilst it is inevitably connected to an apparent convenient looseness by Stuart Bailey and the curators of *Forms of Inquiry.* He argues:

> Modernism 8.0 truly offers the worst of both worlds. From Modernism it takes systems, reductivism, and a dogmatic style, and from Postmodernism it takes relativism, low vernacular taste, and pedantic self-indulgence. Creating "systems" that can be used as both a crutch and shield, it is neither ambitious nor inspiring, aiming low to successfully meet its goal. (Keedy, 2003, p. 61)

However, Keedy goes even further, rebelling against the apparent disinterest in style and the formal aspects of and by *Dot Dot Dot*:

> If it's the ideas and social/political issues that really matter, and stylistic and formal communication is of little consequence, then what do we need designers for? Critical thinking and organizing data visually into useful information is something most educated people can master. And to have ideas or a social and political agenda is certainly not something unique to graphic designers. To further their own agendas, graphic designers have successfully held hostage the means of production of visual communication. But the liberation of the means of production is imminent, and graphic designers will have to make a convincing case for themselves to justify their existence. (Keedy, 2003, p. 67)

This is a bold provocation by Keedy. He is not defending the graphic designer as a cultural or technical gatekeeper but instead challenging political apathy and disinterest in form His argument can be seen as a reaction to the kind of apolitical positioning illustrated by *Dot Dot Dot.* Graphic design has a fundamental role in dealing with societal issues, and as style experts and contextual analysts, designers are in a privileged position to negotiate the private and the public spheres. What is also revealing is the fact that if the means of production have been liberated, the complexity of the agents generating, affecting, filtering, and digesting messages also grew exponentially. It can be said that such complexity asks, more than ever before, an expanded role of the graphic designer. The 'post-critical' description put forward by Blauvelt finds parallel in Keedy's

critique of the recurrent rebirths of Modernism: "Instead of wilfully ignoring the failure of Modernism, graphic designers should have faced Postmodern reality with critical optimism, not cynical detachment." (Keedy, 2003, p. 67)[56]

This cynical—but often interested—historical detachment, which paved the way for the prefix *post* to arise, is indeed aligned with the current social and political instability at the turn of the first decade of the 21st century. The late 2000s recession provoked great uncertainty in graphic design. A critical practice, the practice of critical design and the fundamental autonomy and space for self-reflexivity seem to be a fundamental attitude towards the restoration and the striving for a more meaningful contribution to society, in which graphic designers will play an important role.

An important parallel with the kind of approach described by Blauvelt and Keedy can be found in architectural discourse under the terms 'post-critical' or 'aesthetic critique'. In *Critical of What: Toward a Utopian Realism* (2005), architect and critic Reinhold Martin provides a succinct account of the manifestations of the post-critical within architecture. Martin constructs his argument by referencing and extending the article *'Criticality' and Its Discontents* (2004) by the architect George Baird. Martin characterises practices operating under the banner of the post-critical as "sharing a commitment to an affect-driven, non-oppositional, nonresistance, nondissenting, and therefore nonutopian, forms of architectural production." (Martin, 2005, p. 104) According to Martin, the kind of practice he described citing Baird, failed to deliver an actual, affirmative project, hiding instead behind adjectives such as easy, relaxed and cool.

Martin suggests that the post-critical may be seen as the shift from 'political critique' to 'aesthetic critique'. He argues that the former can be defined as "Frankfurt School-style negative dialectics" in reference to critical theorist Theodor Adorno, and associated with theorists like Manfredo Tafuri or Michael Hays. In other words, it follows a tradition of what the word critical is traditionally associated with: negation, resistance, emancipation. Hays has notably described critical architecture as "one which is resistant to the self-confirming, conciliatory operations of a dominant culture and yet irreducible to a purely formal structure disengaged from the contingencies of place and time." (Hays, 1984, p. 14) Martin notes, too, the disbelief and dismissal of architecture's potential by the post-critical, as it "usually winds up testifying not to the existence of a critical *architecture*, but to its impossibility, or at most, its irreducible negativity in the

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56   Keedy provided an upgraded version of this article in 2013, titled *The Global Style*, in *Slanted* 22.

face of the insurmountable violence perpetrated by what the economist Ernest Mandel called, some time ago, 'late capitalism.'" (Martin, 2005, p. 105) This is particularly important, as graphic design has to deal with (proportionally) similar political and economical constraints as architecture in its search for space for critical autonomy. Yet, the architect Peter Eisenman explicitly diverted his criticality, as Martin argues, towards the questioning of the discipline's internal assumptions and processes, thus resulting in what he calls aesthetic critique, and architects Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting call projective architecture. By demonstrating both disinterest and resistance towards the political, social and economic struggles architecture has to deal with at professional and academic levels, Martin says that Eisenman semantically changed what was understood as 'critical.' Using the rationalist architect Giuseppi Terragni who worked under the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini as an example, Martin alerts us to Eisenman's illusion that a "formal syntax could be separated definitely from its political semantics." (Martin, 2005, p. 107)

Conclusions

The terms critical design and critical practice share history and agendas, and will continue to be used interchangeably. They both try to deal with the struggles of existing in a highly mediated society, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Critical design actively sees utopia and speculation as a liberating exercise – not only to society, but also to the design discipline. Being an inherently marginal practice, operating against mainstream practices under the marketplace, the channels to practice such activity will remain open to appropriation by industry (due to its promises) and pop culture (due to its recurrent visual qualities). In the article *Designer as Author* published in *Design Act* (2011), Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby pointed other possibilities. The first has to do with the promotion of an increased awareness of the designer's social responsibility:

> One way this could happen is if the design profession took on more social responsibility and developed its own independent vision, working with the public to demand more from industry than is currently on offer. (Dunne and Raby, 2011, p. 46)

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Both authors continue their proposal, claiming that for this to happen, a shift on how professional design associations and organisations see the designer's role would also need to change. They then suggest that they "could follow the lead of some architecture institutions, and focus on the need to encourage diverse visions through competitions and workshops for practicing designers, as well as trying to engage the public through more challenging exhibitions and publications." (Dunne & Raby, 2011, p. 46) The second possibility lies in academia, according to Dunne and Raby, proposing that "rather than writing papers and seeking conventional academic approval, they [academic designers] could exploit their privileged position to explore a subversive role for design as social critique. (...) Design proposals could be used as a medium to stimulate debate and discussion amongst the public, designers, and industry." (Dunne & Raby, 2011, p. 46)

In both these proposals, it is possible to observe a parallel with Blauvelt's claim for a more autonomousa and critical discipline, allowing space for such activity to exist. What is also pertinent to highlight, is that the three dimensions suggested by Jan van Toorn and Ramia Mazé keep being put forward with different words and propositions: the individual, disciplinary and the public. The complicity and overlap between these three levels is recurrently revealed. This is particularly evident when arguing for a more socially aware and self-reflective designer, a shift in a disciplinary and professional orientation, a different output for design academics, and how all of these alert to the importance of promoting discussion with the public.

Regarding critical practice, Dunne and Raby propose, too, a challenge for this kind of attitude to survive in the marketplace: "Designers need to explore how such design thinking might re-enter everyday life in ways that maintain the design proposal's integrity and effectiveness, while facing accusations of escapism, utopianism or fantasy." (Dunne & Raby, 2011, p. 45) Even though this is mentioned under the banner of 'critical design', it is certainly aligned with Van Toorn's striving for an emancipation of the audience through a permanent struggle to find channels and opportunities to explore such intention in commissioned work, at the same time it evidences the interchangeable nature of the discourse around the two terms discussed in this chapter. While these have a common agenda, it is clear that critical design can be a key field in promoting the kind of self-reflexivity and criticism that can lead to the development of a critical practice.

The two terms critical practice and critical design are therefore inseparable, in the sense that they feed off each other and frequently step on and share common territory. As for the criticism of the existence of such denominations in the first place, the motivations for such reactions are now clearer. They came from figures aware of the importance of self-reflexivity for an informed practice and also interested in the broad range of disciplines graphic design intersects. In different ways—James Goggin is more reliant on self-reflexive and public level (in *Forms of Inquiry*) and Stuart Bailey on a disciplinary and discursive level—they both use graphic design as a critical tool and are aware of the importance of such attitude and study. For Bailey and Goggin, criticality in its many diverse forms is intrinsic to graphic design and therefore, such terminology is unnecessary. However, these terms are not only particularly important for designers who are not aware of the crucial relevance of criticality within graphic design, but also for those who are and can therefore help expand its discourse, methods, strategies and debate its effect.

Ultimately, the designers who reject such terms and the emerging fields, see them as superfluous, because for them, graphic design is as a naturally expansive discipline. Even though that is the case for them, it is unrealistic to think that the discipline is fully aware of its social, political, cultural, discursive and critical dimensions. Even if that was a reality, graphic design discourse can only benefit from tracing these discussions, while placing them in a wider cultural and societal context. Critical design is a rapidly developing field within product design. Matt Malpass' appointment as critical design research fellow at Central Saint Martins is a notable example. However, that should not come about at the expense of rigorous accountability and removing responsibility from the consequences of critical design work. In *Criticism and Function in Critical Design Practice* (2015), Malpass insists on ambiguity as central to critical design, saying that "the burden of interpretation is on the user." Dangerously, he notes that "any criticism of the [critical design] work can be perceived as debate and therefore can be seen as confirming its success." (Malpass, 2015, p. 64) The danger lies precisely in having the possibility of avoiding an analysis of the quality and pertinence of the debate, as well as its effect and achievement.

New researchers such as Luiza Prado and Pedro Oliveira (Universität der Künste Berlin), Matthew Kiem (Western Sydney University), Ahmed Ansari (Carnegie Mellon) and Gillian Russell (Royal College of Art), who are challenging critical design's shortfalls and proposing new approaches, are some examples of the maturation of this field within product design. Symposia such as *Critical Design/Critical Futures* (Rhode Island School of Design, 2015) further reinforce this. Other new terms used to describe this mode of practicing design, such as Adversarial Design[57] and Contestational Design[58] will surely help expanding the field, while being kept under scrutiny: Matthew Kiem's review of diSalvo's book, titled *If Political Design Changed Anything They'd Make it Illegal* (2013) is one notable example which questions the political effect that such projects, as well as the relevance of the proposed term can have on design and society.

Within graphic design, criticism of work operating under this banner and evidence of its impact is almost inexistent. The exhibition *All Possible Futures* (2014), curated by Jon Sueda, provides a continuation of the looseness present in *Forms of Inquiry*, namely in leaving undefined what is meant by speculative design. It also replicates many of its participants: Karel Martens, Mevis and van Deursen, Metahaven, Daniel Eatock, Experimental Jetset, Practise, Dexter Sinister, without debating differences, nuances and presenting criteria. After projects with high visibility such as *Wikileaks* (2011) and a long-term interest in surveillance and transparency, criticism of work by the studio Metahaven—arguably the most prominent studio operating under this banner—is virtually inexistent. Designers and studios that present themselves as being studios for design and research should present, debate and be publicly self-critical of their work and methods. It is important for design to be able to identify what and how new knowledge is being produced by the discipline when it operates as critical design, speculative design or design fiction. The humorous tumblr blog *Critical Graphic Design*[59] satirises a series of projects (such as Metahaven's *Sealand*) and visual styles that can be identified in the work of key practitioners, importantly drawing attention to a wider audience. But while it provides insight into the names of designer's whose work keeps being identified as critical, it does not expand nor exposes nuances and eventual disconnections between theoretically-grounded critique and visual output, ending up often being vaguely generic.

57   See Carl diSalvo's *Adversarial Design* (2012).
58   See Tad Hirsch's PhD thesis *Contestational design: innovation for political activism* (2008) at the MIT, which seeks to analyse a "design activity whose aim is promote particular agendas in contested political arenas." [Internet] Available from: <http://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/46594?show=full> [Accessed 23 January 2015]
59   See *Critical Graphic Design Tumblr* [Internet blog] Available from: <http://criticalgraphicdesign. tumblr.com/> [Accessed 4 January 2015]

Due to graphic design's rich history of politically-engaged design compared to product design, the discipline became easily sckeptical of the label 'critical'. The term critical graphic design became then synonym of a particular visual style by 2012, popularised by Metahaven, with visible influences in practices such as Pinar & Viola and the Design Displacement Group.[60] This added a pejorative connotation to the term and an over-focus on form, rather than issues at stake, methods and consequence. More recently, however, the (predominantly female) collective The Common Affairs has built upon Van Toorn's conception of visual journalism and used graphic design— and indeed critical graphic design's ambitions and its aims of design's expanded field—without repeating the many shortfalls that deserved criticism during the mid-2010s. The term critical graphic design had a short lived history, from 2007 to 2015, but allowed pertinent debates to emerge and an examination of the acritical state of the discipline. Despite its many shortfalls, the term opened up the way to a series of alternative approaches to design. Allowed, too, to identity methods and from its criticism and failings, to build a productive ground upon which new ways of practicing design can emerge and with them help expanding a shifting discipline.

Kim de Groot's *Image Management* (2012) and Katja Gretzinger's *In A Manner of Reading Design – The Blind Spot* (2012) are examples of an effort to use graphic design as an investigative tool while being self-reflexive. If the term wants to become a field that can challenge the discipline's assumptions and develop methods that can help graphic design to make a meaningful contribution to society, it has to adopt and build upon product design's efforts. Collaborative studio projects such as Space Caviar (Italy), mixing architecture, writing and graphic design to question technology, architecture and politics may be an inevitable—and perhaps useful—mode of practicing and investigating the potential of such mode of design. Critical graphic design work can benefit from being exposed to permanent, vigilant criticism that will keep designers under close scrutiny and accountability.

In this chapter the focus has been put on contextualising the terms critical design, namely through its rise to popularity via product design, before introducing it within graphic design. This was done by analysing the seminal exhibition *Forms of Inquiry*, which introduced the term to the discipline. In turn, this detailed analysis served to identify key precedents in design discourse such as discussions on design authorship, key figures such as Jan van Toorn as well as pioneers at the birth of the discipline, such

60   For a complementary mapping of graphic design in relation to critical design, see Appendix H.

as El Lissitzky to recent dismissals of these new terms. This critical historical analysis allowed to define a distinction between critical design and critical practice—the first is an emerging field and the second a way of practicing design.

Such contextualisation was key to address this thesis' research questions, namely in providing an understanding of the legacy and developments of the terms this research is analysing and defining. In the next chapter, focus will be put in examining what is at the base of criticism: ideology and politics. By reflecting on the state of design criticism and the foundations of criticism, the aim of the chapter is not only to create a theoretical framework that underpins the expanded role of the designer detailed in Chapter 2, but also to trace methodological strategies within design discourse that can challenge and inform the methods being explored in Chapter 4, and the critcal method proposed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 3 – **Idealism, ideology and design as criticism**

This chapter will investigate the importance of idealism and ideology in graphic design by identifying key discussions on the subject within the discipline's discourse and practice. This is done with two goals. The first is to argue that ideology is crucial for designers to engage in a critical practice. The second is to propose that criticism can be used as a key method to allow designers to not only be conscious and critical of ideology but also of the complex political, cultural and social issues inherent to any design project.

The first section draws out the theoretical framework upon which the methods developed in Chapter 4 and proposed in Chapter 5 are based. Idealism here is examined with the goal of identifying sources of action, generation of awareness and knowledge. The collapse of the Grand Narratives, announced by the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) questions the relevance of ideology at the end of the 20th century. When idealism has been hijacked from the avant-garde and technology creates conditions for everyone to be a designer on a technical level, criticism is here defined and proposed as a method through which to engage in ideology, paving the way for a methodological proposition.

This intention is aligned with the work of the German sociologist Max Weber. He was an important influence on critical theory and was sceptic of "treating practical matters in metaphysical terms." (Bronner, 2011, p. 33) He famously argued that "method is the most sterile of all concerns" and that "nothing was ever accomplished through method alone." (Bronner, 2011, p. 33) Building upon this assertion, this chapter aims to achieve an understanding of the mechanics needed to generate a critical methodological approach to design, providing the theoretical foundations and objectives of the workshops, professional practice, self-initiated research and reflexive activity outlined in Chapter 4.

Ideology in graphic design is a subject that it has not been substantially debated within the discipline, with the exception of the book *The World Must Change: Idealism and Graphic Design* (1999), a key contribution to the subject. Its editors, Dutch educators

Leonie Ten Duis and Annelies Haase, put emphasis on Dutch graphic design, which has been a key centre of politically engaged design since the second half of the 20th century. Most of its key figures have not only been influenced by the Bauhaus but also Constructivism. The social, political and cultural circumstances in The Netherlands in which most of the designers debated here practiced design are distinct from those found in the mid 2010s. This is applicable both to The Netherlands as well as to the rest of Europe. However, the problems in dealing with ideology, method and form remain valid for the arguments being developed in this thesis. The book traces the roots of politically engaged design from Modernism up to the date of its publication (1999), compiling a series of key essays. At that specific time, the authors noticed a demise of idealism in graphic design, pointing that "both the urge to use graphic design to influence particular social processes and faith in the power of one's own medium were typical of the times." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 3)

This condition, as well as the relevance of this thesis in the context of the time it is produced, has been explained in Chapter 1. The authors also state that their focus is on the image, and as such, purely typographic approaches, and indeed typography, has received less attention from them. After this assertion, they make a pertinent clarification in reference to a particular kind of political graphic design. This kind of design work that is highlighted by Rick Poynor in Chapter 2 as not being critical, but propagandistic, finds an important parallel in Ten Duis and Haase' words. When introducing idealism in relation to graphic design, Ten Duis and Haase say that the posters of social realism are only briefly mentioned in the book, "with their flags and banners, their clenched fists, their rugged faces and their clasped hands raised aloft to the rising sun", noting that "design of this kind has done little if anything to help the development of the profession." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 3)

The book opens with the seminal essay *Idealism: Idea, Ideal, Ideology, Logistics of Ideas* (1999) by the Dutch philosopher Henk Oosterling. The authors explain that the goal of it is to provide a view of idealism "in graphic design with a philosophical context in an effort to re-think idealism and redefine the nature of postmodern idealism following the demise of the great ideologies." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 3) It is important to note that in this book, ideology and idealism are frequently used interchangeably. While it serves to reveal the mutual influence between idea, ideal and ideology, a clarification is useful. By ideology it is meant the set of ideas that constitute one's motivations and

regulate action. By idealism, it is meant the pursuit of ideals, noting in this chapter the strong relation with ideology, as well as with form.

The World Must Change finishes with a key essay by Dutch design writer and editor Max Bruinsma. In *An Ideal Design is Not Yet* (1999), Bruinsma investigates the concept of idealism in graphic design, in order to propose and reinforce its need. He concludes by suggesting 'design as criticism' as an ideal approach to design practice. This is key to this thesis as it allows to trace similar intents, build upon them and create the foundations for the methods being developed in Chapter 4. As an activity, criticism will then be examined, specifically from a tradition of critical theory along with several other theoretical approaches suggested in design discourse (such as cultural studies or Sociology via the Actor-Network Theory). This survey of criticality will shape the theoretical framework for the methods developed in the Chapter 4.

Ideology and idealism in graphic design practice

In *Ideology: an introduction* (1991), the critical theorist Terry Eagleton says that nobody has yet come up with a single adequate definition of ideology. The term can be traced to many histories and produce different meanings. He therefore dismisses the possibility of doing a 'Grand Global Theory' of ideology. To propose the many different lineages attached to the word, he puts forward a list of different definitions in circulation, from which is possible to highlight the following. These summarise the crucial importance of ideology to human activity, which—this thesis argues—should be a key concern to design: 1) the process of production of meanings, signs and values in social life; 2) ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power; 3) forms of thought motivated by social interests; 4) the conjuncture of discourse and power; 5) action-oriented sets of beliefs; and 6) the process whereby social life is converted to a natural reality. (Eagleton, 1991, p. 2)

In *The World Must Change*, Ten Duis and Haase introduce the subject of ideology and idealism by, too, invoking the legacy of the Russian Constructivism (noted in Chapter 2) in the aftermath of the October Revolution (1917). They do this because the most notable pioneers of Dutch graphic design, namely designers such as Paul Schuitema and Piet Zwart, were influenced by the German school Bauhaus,

its tutors, as well as Constructivism. Yet, the authors note that while the Russian Constructivists were interested in toppling society, the Bauhaus was inclined to a more gradual change. (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 59) Putting emphasis on standardisation and believing in universality, functionality and affordable, machine-produced products for a wider public were central aims of this school, while taking advantage of technological advancements.

In the early 1920s, social idealism and graphic design seemed that they were made for each other. Reproduction on a mass scale and the possibility of reaching a large audience were aligned with the post-war hopefulness put on technological and societal developments. It is in this context that graphic design has its most important precedent in the use of the word *social* in relation to its practice. However, and building upon the definition of what is meant by 'critical' as explored in Chapter 2, it is important to clarify what the word *social* originally stood for. Both Schuitema and Zwart were designers who shared the educational goals promoted at the Bauhaus, thereby orienting their design practice "from a social perspective." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 62) The term social undoubtedly had a meaning that has changed over time, as the word has presently become associated with ecological and sustainable design, community-based projects, user-centred design, and the emergence of service design alongside projects with politically engaged design work. It reveals a much wider perimeter, but perhaps even more importantly, a potentially unproductive detachment from politics. Schuitema says that in the aftermath of the First World War, it was impossible to not be "fanatic about politics." (Maan, 2006, p. 10). Schuitema states:

> The war of 1914–1918 had demonstrated that fine words and slogans were nonsense, romanticism had ended in bloodshed, heroism and patriotism were only for profit. Everything had turned out to be dirty, mendacious and full of false pathos. The function of art was to reassume the lost position. Graphic art had to be extremely functional; print work had selling as its goal, it had to be clear and purposeful. In fact, it meant a marriage between typography and photography. (Schuitema cited in Maan, 2006, p. 11)

Likewise, Zwart observes that "the times, chaotic and full of contradictions as they were, called for a new creative activity. Every age had to shape its own typographical face and heave overboard the ballast of a persistent tradition." In fact, he described

in detail the formal qualities of such creativity, by saying that while the typography should be as "uninteresting as possible," and "colour was to be used as a functional eye-catcher, not as decoration." The same applied to the photograph, which had to be seen not as illustration but as an "integral and dynamic part of the composition." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 67)

Ten Duis and Haase argue that: "in his younger years he [Zwart] had read [Karl] Marx and [Friedrich] Engels, and he believed in the socialist view that the artist had a task to fulfil in society." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 67) This was done by producing more advertising, books, magazines and newspapers, which he saw as a tried and trusted means of achieving the education and emancipation of the masses. An awareness of the designer's social responsibility was then already clearly articulated by Zwart, alerting that the designer's focus should be on the consequences of his or her work: "Form and design are not a question of individual wishes, they are accountable factors in the community." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 68) The formal aspects that guided Zwart's view of functionalism, were also aligned with that of Schuitema. Ten Duis and Haase note:

> Zwart's notion of functionality was based on internal logic, on the appropriate use of technology, on eschewing needless trimmings. As a designer, however, he is very much part of the picture. Zwart leads his reader through the text, lets him experience the motions, makes him pause at a particular passage by using a colour accent, a larger type size or a pun, or reinforces the message with photographs. Absorbing information was a deliberate process. (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 68)

In the 1920s, graphic design as a commercial activity could be at the service of a social agenda. This was valid for advertising as long as it "did not conflict with the interests of the community but was in the service of the people and provided honest information." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 70) The willingness to actively engage in the production of advertising showed then a great social commitment. As the authors highlight, "the artist had to stop hiding away in his ivory tower: he had to take up his role in society— not through the medium of books aimed at book collectors, but through printed matter such as advertisements, pamphlets, brochures and posters. " (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 70) This commitment has almost vanished in contemporary graphic design, with

corporate branding dominating and highly controlling advertising, as well as political propaganda. While in the early years of the discipline designers and the avant-garde fearlessly took on commercial and advertising work, there is presently an easy refuge in cultural work by today's leading practitioners. However, the levels of control and hierarchies that filter today's graphic design production in the advertising sector—such as marketing departments and people filling their different ranks—are far more developed and difficult than those of the early to mid, even late, 20th century. If at the birth of the discipline there was more space to align an informative rather than a highly manipulative, deceptive design production, today the discipline is profoundly entangled between personal, disciplinary, private and public interest.

The educational system was a paramount channel through which "ideals were passed down." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 77) Following the formal restrictions by Paul Schuitema and tutor Gerrit Kiljan at The Hague Academy (The Netherlands), designer Jan Bons makes an important statement. After realising the formal impositions set by his tutors, namely the mandatory use of lower-case lettering, and the use of photomontage, Bons says: "a designer's sense of form was influenced far more strongly by typographical models of the past than by the political circumstances of the present and future." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 78) This assertion is particularly relevant. It reveals a critical tension between visual education and training, the social and political context, and the ever-changing need to deploy new design strategies. And, as importantly, it brings to the fore the need for the designer to have tools to counter and challenge that training which can hinder his or her design output in constantly evolving social contexts and conditions. Building upon this statement Jan Bons underlines the importance of typographic education in shaping a designer's formal approach to design: "I think that, more than politics, it was the letter forms, typography and printing methods used from block books up to nineteenth-century poster lettering that had the biggest effect on advertising designers—Ashley, Bayer, Cassandre, Colin, etc—were also good letter designers. Perhaps conversely, the job of designing had an effect on their idealism in other areas, in their political or social thinking." (Bons 1996 cited in Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 78) It is relevant to note here the potential of process as a platform to engage in, and activate, ideology and idealism.

An education based on the search for an ideal was already a reality at the Nieuwe Kunstschool (Netherlands). Bons recalls the classes by Swiss painter and designer Johannes Itten, "who began each lecture by ritually preparing body and mind, and in which the latest technical and engineering inventions were demonstrated – in short, it was not a production line on which students were made ready for society as it already existed, but a place at which they were stimulated into thinking about a 'desirable society'." (Bons 1996 in Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 83)

Ten Duis and Haase also note the formal relations, and indeed stereotypes, built around distinct political affiliations, by comparing Bons and designer Otto Treumann. They argue that "whereas Bons talked about 'rightist' and 'leftist' typography, to which he paid scant attention, as an extension of this there was symmetrical and asymmetrical typography. While Bons had no urgent desire to link his social beliefs to a particular kind of design, Treumann saw things differently. He endorsed the relationship between typography and social idealism, seeing in asymmetry the typographical translation of a progressive left-wing standpoint and in that way following in the footsteps of Zwart and Schuitema." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 91) The formal qualities were attached to different ideologies thereby making form become ideology and vice-versa.

Treumann saw in architecture an important parallel to graphic design. One which affirmed his typographic, formal and political beliefs. He says: "Public buildings designed to radiate power and dignity always have the entrance in the middle. They possess a stability which is based on peace and order. The more democratic a society becomes, the more often an asymmetrical solution will be chosen." (Treumann, 1996 cited in Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 91)

Idealism, however, can steer in every direction. If Stalinism and Nazism provide an extreme example of the relation between idealism and graphic design, the seminal discussion[61] between Dutch designers Wim Crouwel and Jan van Toorn reveals a more moderate one. Crouwel and the studio Total Design saw sober and clear design as a contribution to social improvement. Van Toorn on the other hand, realised the complex reality surrounding him, with his design approach having necessarily to challenge it, rather than affirming it through simplification.

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61   See in detail in *The World Must Change* (p. 115) and in *The Debate: The Legendary Contest of Two Giants of Graphic Design* (2015).

In relation to the modernist, socially committed[62] design education of designers such as Crouwel and Van Toorn, the authors of *The World Must Change* say that "once they had completed their studies, Van Toorn and his generation soon found 'that the world was not constructed the way our teachers thought'. The criteria of the International Style demanded of the designer so much adaptation and were so much divorced from the complexity of reality that 'as a result, the social democratic attitude of the idealistic designer came to be quite frustrated'." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 134) In this context, Van Toorn remarks:

> It wasn't that people abandoned their ideals, but it became increasingly difficult to put them into practice. As long as you continue to work in isolation, i.e. don't really take part in the social and economic process, you can keep your ideals intact, but the more you become involved – which is really what you want – the more you get that tension, and then it becomes clear that the International Style way of designing was a little too simplistic. […] You notice that your ideals are further and further away in a society that is developing so fast, but the dream stays, if you want to define the dream as the dream of enlightenment – liberation in the libertarian socialist sense. That dream never fades, even if in the course of history it does become frustrated. (Van Toorn, 1996 cited in Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 134)

Van Toorn puts emphasis on debating not only the meaning of the design being produced, but also of the 'meaning of the means.' This indicates an interest in reflecting and being critical about the process and methods used to design and to deal with reality. In this regard he says that "the main thing was that you might become a more significant designer who sat down and thought about things in a new way. That was a matter of learning by trial and error." (Van Toorn, 1996 cited in Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 139) The authors of *The World Must Change* write that the Crouwel and Van Toorn discussion "has often been simplified into a battle of two schools of though about form." This may be the case, but they are useful not only as an example of open, public debate about graphic design, but also to understand different ways of interpreting reality with similar ideological starting points, and especially the nuances and context

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62   Ten Duis and Haase reinforce the idea of interpreting social commitment through design in different ways by arguing that "both Total Design and Wild Plakken drew inspiration from modernism, but whereas Crouwel had taken the functionality, the neutrality and the so-called value-freedom of modernism as a shining example, Schroder and Ros were attracted not only by the efficient directness of its design but also, more particularly, by the modernists' social involvement." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 188)

of each practice. Despite the two pursuing socialism with distinct methods and formal approaches, Crouwel's visual language/ formula was notably appropriated by corporations because of its clear form and easy replicability based on grids and systems.

While in practice modernism was a social movement, argue Haase and Ten Duis, the resources used by the avant-garde led to an aestheticisation of society. To impose an universal worldview—indeed a strict formula—is both fiction and undesirable. Critical theory became then to Jan van Toorn a tool through which it was possible to critically examine reality. The authors explain that critical theory "showed that in society as it existed the citizen was manipulated precisely when he thought he was acting freely." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 140) Citizens were being manipulated and easy targets by commerce.

The critical attitude advocated by Van Toorn can be noted in his collaboration with the director of the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, Jean Leering. In a discussion published in *Vormgeving in functie van museale overdracht* (1978), a series of questions posed by Van Toorn before the design process started, reveal the result of his awareness, as well as the importance of having a client who shares the same agenda: "Adopting your own standpoint, both as designer and director of the management of the museum, and making that standpoint clear so that the public can respond to it and form its own opinion. What is the choice, and hence the role of the designer and the director? How do we make our standpoint visible? What is the context of the work of art?" (Van Toorn, 1978, p. 141)

As Poynor acknowledges in *Critical Practice* (2005), it was not always possible for Van Toorn to articulate his critical intentions, as they often were hard to read and even too subtle to be noticed. However, it is important to note that the kind of criticism in practice that Van Toorn advocates puts emphasis in the force of the argument, not in the emission of closed, authoritarian messages.[63] If posters, as stated by Van Toorn, allowed little space for arguments with often imperceptible and subtle parallel meanings, the catalogues, magazines, exhibitions and the iconic series of calendars for the printers Mart Spruyt (1960–77) allowed him to shape discursive works of design.

While Van Toorn focuses on dialogue and the liberation of the audience, Dutch designer Anton Beeke has a more self-interested interpretation of ideology in graphic

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63   This was mentioned in Chapter 2, in which it is argued that propaganda posters provide generally the authoritarian emission of messages and statements.

design. For him, the designer has the duty of commenting on the "sorry state of affairs," whenever a "job lends itself to it in any way." This approach helps to clarify the kind of criticality advocated here. Beeke says that he holds up "a mirror to the audience even if at times it may not be particularly clear. Every now and then I want to make a statement in which I tell other people what the world is like and what the world ought to be like." (Haase & Ten Duis, 1999, p. 163) In this statement by Beeke, there is a clear approximation to authoritarian, closed emission of messages[64], as previously described.

Based on the poster *Photographers for Vietnam* (1971) by Anthon Beeke, the authors argue that "at this time these were all well-tried devices in the tradition of the critical design that had its roots in Dada, Heartfield and the posters of the street." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 164) This statement underlines that graphic design that poses a critique is traditionally labelled as critical design. However, as noted in Chapter 2 in relation to developments in product and graphic design, the term gained a different and expanded connotation. Undoubtedly, the concept of idealism in graphic design has a more recent development within graphic design discourse. In 2003, the book *Citizen Designer*, edited by design writer and critic Steven Heller, collected a series of key writings on socially engaged design. These essays confirmed that when the word critical and social is used in relation to graphic design, it is often situated in between morality, ethics and politics. This does not help the clarification of terminology and the clarity of the discourse being produced in this context.

The Amsterdam design collective Wild Plakken (Lies Ros, Rob Schroder and Frank Beekers), which was founded in 1977, designed in the tradition of Jan van Toorn. Ten Duis and Haase argue that it "represented the younger generation and worked for groups of campaigners and lobbyists of which it itself was one. Whereas in Van Toorn, intellectual distance to the subject remained intact,[65] Wild Plakken operated at the base, demonstrating and agitating." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 220) This highlights another relevant division in criticality in graphic design: that of maintaining intellectual distance from the subject and supporting and participating in existing political movements. For Wild Plakken, society, politics, friends and living were all interrelated.

64   Van Toorn reiterates this idea in *View to the Future* (1997).
65   The issue of distance is as much intellectual as it is formal. The Dutch Communist Party (Communistische Partij Nederland) used the visual language of Zwart and Schuitema in their printed matter for many decades. Despite forming a coherent and recognizable visual identity that could keep the party's ideals into visual form, it can also potentially lead to easily reproducible propagandistic branding and out-of-context design work.

The fact that they produced design work for the Dutch Communist Party, brings to the fore the difference between intellectual independence and associating one's ideology and practice to an existing movement. The design studio Metahaven alerted to this in *Can Jokes Bring Down Governments?* (2013) by arguing that the designer only maximises the ideology and criticality of the client.

The designer Gerard Hadders, who was a member of Hard Werken, a group of designers and editors of the magazine with the same name argues that "graphic design and idealism really have bugger all to do with each other." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 220) He notes that idealism coincided with the birth of graphic design, namely with the progressive ideas being promoted at that time. Even more importantly, he suggests that idealism in graphic design—which can touch both sides of the political spectrum as previously stated—saw the Nazi's producing even more effective work than the Russian Constructivists'. After 1945, Hadders argues, "you'd be better off not being politically involved." Hadders agues that professionalism in communication is more important for the development and evolution of the discipline than idealism. He says that "graphic design is something that concerns itself with creating effects. I think that is what you should judge it by." (Hadders cited in Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 221) While Hadders points to the potential danger of aligning ideology with politics, raising the idea of professionalism and communication is relevant. It draws attention to the debate about ethics in graphic design on the one hand, and the impossibility of communication to be neutral.

Hadders also notes his reluctance about whether idealism can produce an output that matches its ambitions, despite saying he believes "strongly in ambiguity, in a form of polyinterpretability, rather than telling the story from a particular angle as though it were propaganda." (Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 222) He argues:

> It's really impossible to create design you could call idealistic. There is such a thing as idealistic designer; there's such a thing as Wild Plakken, which proved it in the seventies. For a while they were the people who shaped the face of the Dutch Communist Party, just as Grapus did for the PCF in France. Very effective, using torn paper, Gill and a particular kind of photocollage. It worked for them because in Holland the communist party was more marginalized. It's a good example of how you can shape he face of the communist party for years on end. But that's not idealism. It's just corporate design. That means that you arrive at a

particular form, whether or not you get there organically, whether or not you plan it, and you then keep on with it consistently. Well, then you're communicating, but we've know that ever since 1895. It may well be that I'm more strongly motivated when I work for the Labour party than I would be if I worked for a conservative party, but whether that produces a better result in terms of design, that's a debatable point." (Gerard Hadders, 1996 cited in Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 220)

In 1993 Dutch designers Felix Janssens and Mark Schalken published a manifesto titled *De zin van design* [The point of design] at the time they set up their studio, named Sober Denken Genootschap. Aligned with the Jan van Eyck Academy's ethos, the studio sought to develop graphic projects and interventions, such as posters and brochures that questioned current issues and aimed at confusing (informing) the audience. For them, postmodernism brought the "everything is possible" mentality. They say that "we live in a culture in which everything (including politics, education, the arts and communication) is seen as a tradable commodity. When mass communication is made subservient to market thinking, the consequence is that words and images lose their meaning and precisely because of that they can mean anything, provided that they are used in the right context and given the right commentary." The effect of this, the authors say, is that "attention-seeking has to assume ever more extreme forms, so that the genuinely new goes down in a spiral of visual violence and indifference." In turn Janssen and Schalken argue that "the pragmatic, and hence unprincipled, urge to convince others means that the power of argument is replaced by the argument of power". (Janssens & Schalken cited in Ten Duis and Haase, 1999, p. 246) This search for an open argument has close proximity to Van Toorn's concept of the dialogic image. This is investigated, for example in the project for *The Occupied Times*, as detailed in the next chapter.

Reflecting on an ever-expanding discipline, with its borders increasingly blurry, the book *The World Must Change* ends with suggestions for the future of design education. Speaking about the future of the Sandberg Institute, Rob Schröder says that "one's attitude to the future depends on one's attitude to an idealistic stand". However, he acknowledges that in comparison to the period in which Wild Plakken was more active, "it is now infinitely more difficult for young designers to become socially and politically engaged and to position themselves in the market on that basis." To intervene in such a complex and ultra-controlled media society, "demands of young designers an attitude, a mentality, deep reflection on the media and on the power

of media." His appeal is as valid to design students as it is to professionals, namely when he alerts to the importance of activating "a critical, humane and independent attitude' amongst students. Only then will they be capable of forcing the practice of design and those who commission it to accept innovation." (Schröder, 1996, cited in Ten Duis & Haase, 1999, p. 267)

Idealism, a philosophical definition

In *Idealism: Idea, Ideal, Ideology, Logistics of Ideas* (1999), the philosopher Henk Oosterling attemps to shape a definition of idealism in specific relation to graphic design. He does so by having in consideration the historical evolution of the term and by asking how it can survive or be relevant at the turn of the 20th century. He asks: "if the cohesion between individual existence, micropolitical ideas and collective action no longer depends on the Great Narrative which used to legitimize collective behavior, what still does move postmodern individuals and groups?" (Oosterling, 1999, p. 45) The author evokes the most known design movements associated with the notion of idealism in graphic design: Russian Constructivism, Bauhaus and De Stijl are the three examples put forward. He argues that these are "canonized through the combined action of philosophical, political and artistic theories and practices." (Oosterling, 1999, p. 12) It is important to mention, however, that even though the author is analysing idealism in direct relation to graphic design from a philosophical perspective, art, not design, is frequently used as a term to illustrate his arguments. Yet, the examples remain valid for the subject under discussion here.

The relation between the Russian Constructivism and its social ambitions was analysed in Chapter 2. What is important to mention here is that while the Bauhaus focuses more on functionalism as a solution to materialise its social commitment towards the improvement of people's lives, Constructivism pursues a more intellectual—although also pragmatic—radical liberation and information of its audience, rather than a fundamentally practical function. It is building upon the tradition of the latter, and finding a more balanced and methodologically informed approach, that will shape the concept of criticism developed here. It is possible to argue that one of the main goals of Constructivism was also to improve people's lives. By investigating ideology and dealing with its mechanics, Oosterling tries to debate the relation between consciousness and

action. To him, the ideal only exists in thought. He notes that German philosopher Immanuel Kant "regards the ideal no more than the Idea as a reality, but as an attempt by selfconsciousness to regulate its ever inadequate knowledge through Ideas in order to construct an 'ideal' unity. In this sense idealism is unavoidable." (Oosterling, 1999, p. 20)

Following the technological developments that started in the mid-1980s—dramatically impacting the design discipline—Oosterling asks the following questions: "Can one still speak of idealism in our post-modern times? Can graphic designers still be engaged in large-scale emancipatory political or artistic activities? It seems to me that the concept of 'idealism' is ready for revaluation." (Oosterling, 1999, p. 11) For a discipline with fast-changing tools and increasingly of inter-disciplinary nature such as graphic design, the author suggests three perspectives for shaping a genealogy of modern idealism. Before he presents them, he argues that "perhaps the metamorphosis of the contemporary design culture implies that idealistic inspiration has become something other than the inventive exploration of the space between pictures and text." (Oosterling, 1999, p. 12) Pointing to a deeper level of interference and involvement of the designer with idealism, the author introduces three concepts: epistemological idealism, politico-philosophical and politico-aesthetic.

Epistemological idealism

In the attempt to unpack different perspectives of idealism, Oosterling focuses on Kant. His acknowledgement that "even before Kant, idea, ideal and politics are structurally connected with each other" is particularly relevant to this thesis. It highlights the interdependence between ideology, consciousness, politics and action. He says:

> From the time of Kant, politics becomes a diligent collective effort of individuals rationally weighing the pros and cons of their collective actions. They allow themselves to be led by rationally based ideals motivated by the wish to involve a steadily growing number of the population in political decisions and management issues. Equality, liberty and brotherhood are the core notions of this political emancipation. (Oosterling, 1999, p. 13)

In fact, states Oosterling, "already in Plato, the Idea as a mixture of concepts and perceptions influences practical behavior: 'knowledge is virtue', Socrates, his

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spokesman, concludes. 'Eidos', as 'that which is seen', is the source of all knowledge and actions. Insight into truth demands the contemplation (literally: 'theoria') of Ideas. Although Plato exiles artists from his kingdom of truth after all they reduplicate the illusionary appearances and falsify reality the Idea is nevertheless an *imagi*nation connecting theoretical knowledge and moral actions. Collective action politics: the activities of the Greek citystate or 'polis' also are guided by Ideas. In *Politeia (The Republic)* Plato describes how society embodies the qualities of the Ideas: it becomes literally ' idea-l'." (Oosterling, 1999, p. 14) It is then pertinent to note that an ideal is formed by what an individual considers to be a set of ideas with quality. While this may seem an abstract concept, it becomes more concrete when one argues that a designer always shapes a set of ideas—indeed an ideal—whenever a work is produced, thereby generating an argument towards a preferred future. To this level, Oosterling argues that most images one sees are for the "most part meaningless or self-evident." (Oosterling, 1999, p. 14) However, he continues, "some images give pause for thought, while others give viewers ideas by suggesting coherence where it is not expected. Occasionally these images even incite to action. How individuals and groups allow themselves to be led by this combination of sensory images and conceptual rationality is the secret which has always been sought by advertising agencies and graphic designers, as well as politicians and philosophers. This secret is the heart of idealism." (Oosterling, 1999, p. 14)

The author explains how notions of totality can be built according to Kant. This is relevant to understand the mechanics of such a task, as these will impact the methods that can help understanding such all-encompassing concepts as *the ideal society*. Oosterling notes:

> Kant makes a distinction between concepts, sensory impressions and Ideas. According to him, knowing, technically speaking, means the structuring of sensory impressions through conceptual understanding. This knowledge can only be gained within the sciences because that is the only domain where one can speak of conceptually regulated sensory empirical input. If limited knowledge belonging to separate areas gets absolutized, thinking becomes entangled in contradictory claims to knowledge. This occurs once one attempts to understand comprehensive totalities of which there are no sensory impressions: the Soul, the World as the totality of the things, God or The Ideal Society. Regarding these as knowable 'things' leads irrevocably to contradictory judgements or antinomies. (Oosterling, 1999, p. 19)

Oosterling highlights how Kant proposes an analysis of the concept of 'idea'. This is relevant for two reasons. First, it points to the specific conditions in which knowledge is or is not generated. Second, it illustrates the experiments done in the workshops in Amsterdam and London, as it will be detailed in Chapter 4. He argues:

> Kant explains what role ideas play within this problematical process of knowing. Ideas, namely, only appear in the selfconsciousness or thought when concepts and impressions don't measure up. Ideas surpass knowledge. They provide direction – i.e. make sense and a goal by embracing, as it were, separated domains of knowledge. And that is exactly what happens in notions such as Soul, World, God or The Ideal Society. These cannot be contained in a concrete image, nor can they be known from a more general understanding. In short, Ideas derive their power precisely from the tension that exists between visual image and conceptual understanding. In order to distinguish between science and art, Kant makes a systematic distinction between Ideas of Reason as concepts without an image and aesthetic Ideas as images without a concept." (Oosterling, 1999, p. 19)

The ideal, argues Oosterling, "exists thanks to the tension between what is reasonable and what is real. It functions as a critical criterion of what in moral and political terms is an incomplete reality. In this way idealism, since the time of Kant, has gained a critical potential that reflects the degree to which individuals 'dare to think on their own': idealism is inextricably bound up with critical self-awareness, autonomy and self-realization." (Oosterling, 1999, p. 20) The author reinforces here the idea that the ideal is placed between what it is and what it could be.

Politico-philosophical

Oosterling points to the perils of using a totalising theory in order to be critical. While doing this, he explains the basic principle of the philosopher Theodor Adorno's *negative dialectics*:

> During the rise of National Socialism and Stalinism two political Gesamtkunstwerken [Total Work of Art], Critical Theory acknowledges that it is no longer possible to practice political criticism from totalistic theory without inaugurating itself a reign of terror. In order to avoid totalitarianism, ideology

critical philosophy, as a radical analysis of the existing situation, has to renounce an all-encompassing political counterpart. Therefor, by synthesizing Kant and Marx, Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969) transforms Hegel's method into a *negative* dialectic: criticism is driven only by negation and opposition. Philosophy can no longer offer affirmative positions such as utopia. Adorno regards the ability to endure the resulting indecision as a sign of emancipation. (Oosterling, 1999, p. 28)

Acting at both micro and macro-levels, Adorno's negative dialectics "unfold the difference between the particular and the universal, dictated by the universal." (Adorno, 1973, p. 6) Adorno proposes liberation from Hegel's future-oriented teleology. In other words, from seeking to explain something in function of its end to move to a questioning of history, between what happened and what might have happened without considering it an inevitability. This method can find a parallel in alternative history, namely on speculating on fictional alternatives to what happened in history, as detailed in Chapter 5. The pursue of emancipation cannot therefore be done through a totalising theory, but through continuous research and analysis, between negation, opposition and utopia—by an open dialectics.

Politicoaesthetic

For Oosterling, "the *politicoaesthetic* expressiveness does not lie in the explicit alliance of artists with ideologically motivated politics. [...] However, in order to remain idealistic in a critical sense and avoid totalitarianism, the Kantian 'Anspruch' (claim) has to be stressed and not the 'absolute Totalität." (Oosterling, 1999, p. 30) This ideal can find a parallel in Jan van Toorn's approach to design, namely in trying to maintain critical distance to his object of research. Oosterling alerts to the fact that the politicoaesthetic still has to be materialized within social interactions. The author also points out the exhaustion of the ideological nation state, arguing that it is in this context—after the 1960s—that micro-politics gain more importance. In this sense, a kind of individual, provisional utopianism becomes a way to resist and handle reality: the personal becomes political. (Oosterling, 1999, p. 43) The work created by designers under the banner of critical design, namely under the interchangeable terms design fiction and speculative design, serves then as opportunities to share ideals through provisional scenarios.

The essay ends by asking if our postmodern reality is both materialistic and idealistic. As a consequence of an ultra-accelerated technological and information society, he adds yet another question: "Can one say that idealism has become virtual and global, materialism actual and local?" To this, he answers that "the inevitability of this 'inter' requires an other idealism: reality is no longer taking place here or there, but shifts from the local to the global, whereas identity implies first and foremost the processing of differences and differends. Only an idealism that cultivates openness and the provisional by means of Ideas makes this continuous transformation practicable. In short, idealism has become smaller and more modest, faster and more provisional. Nevertheless, it does not call into question the *inclination* (Anspruch, Hang) to universalize. It situates this inclination however between the local and the global." (Oosterling, 1999, p. 45)

When society is governed by material and politics, Oosterling suggests that the "in between" has become the most appropriate field to navigate and deal with reality, as a kind of "sensibility." He says that "the radiant core of this shared sensibility could be a neverending creativeexperimental, physically based, existentially situated, reflective interactivity. Idealism has become a logistics of *sens(a)ble thinking."* (Oosterling, 1999, p. 45) Ideology is something that inevitably regulates the designer's actions. In other words, critical and analytical distance is pivotal for the kind of design practice advocated in this thesis; particularly in a methodological way, as articulated in Chapter 5. It is in this context that criticism can play a vital role by submitting idealism, ideology and politics to permanent scrutiny and evaluation: criticism through and as design.

State of design criticism

The conference *Critique 2013* took place between the 26–29 November of 2013 at the University of South Australia, in Adelaide. *Critique 2013* focused specifically on design criticism.[66] It did so from different perspectives. These were not only disciplinary (graphic design and architecture, for example), but also contextual: the design studio, classroom and public sphere. It is relevant to this thesis because of providing an overview of the state of design criticism. During the many papers presented and discussions that followed all of the sessions that run simultaneously during two days, it was possible to acknowledge a recurrent interchangeability of the words critical and criticism. In turn, this led to further discussions and attempts to create distinctions between the words critical, criticism and critique. These were not conclusive. In between these debates, the role of the critic emerged as an important issue that should be addressed. The recurrent use and misuse of these terms is particularly relevant to this thesis. Not only does it highlight the confusion surrounding them and their meaning, but also because it provides an opportunity to demonstrate how a distinction can be beneficial and productive for design practice. Indeed, this was a central concern of the conference organisers – the Australian architect Chris Brisbin and Canadian graphic designer Myra Thiessen – who set the tone of the conference with an introductory presentation on the state of criticism.

Brisbin and Thiessen's welcoming presentation reflected on the demise of criticism and questioned the possibility of its *de facto* death. Even though it was left unmentioned during their introduction, many ideas present in the book *The Crisis of Criticism* (1998) by Maurice Berger were invoked. The latter introduces the context for the essays published in the book by describing the decline of the role of the critic and its impact in society and public discourse. Berger argues that the decentralisation of the arts, including the rise of niche markets and community-based projects, promoted an increasingly blurry line between high and low culture, generating a decentralisation of the critic and dominant critical voices. In line with this account, Berger also comments

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66   It is important to mention that this conference was particularly different from previous conferences on criticism because it approached the subject from a multi-disciplinary perspective. It followed AIGA's *Blunt* (US, 2012), and was succeeded by *Criticall* (Spain, 2014) and *What Criticism?* (US, 2014). This seems to indicate an increased focus on the study and examination of design criticism. The PhD thesis *Purposes, poetics, and publics: the shifting dynamics of design criticism in the US and UK, 1955-2007 (2013)*, by Alice Twemlow, and Julia Moszkowicz's PhD thesis *Lost in Translation: The Emergence and Erasure of 'New Thinking' within Graphic Design Criticism in the 1990s (2011)* are also important indications of an increased interest and scholarly study of this emerging discipline.

on the rise of social media, noting that opinion gained more popularity than rigorously researched argument, provoking a decreased importance of the critic. In turn, he argues that this had an impact on the perceived relevance of criticism produced in an academic setting and indeed how the perceived notion of audience has changed (Berger, 1998, p. 6).

To Brisbin and Thiessen, "the pressures of commercial creative practice, and the perceived lack of relevance of written critique, have led to the near extinction of critique-focused creative practice." (Brisbin & Thiessen, 2013, p. 5) This statement indicates a strong dependence on writing when trying to engage in critique. Trying to offer different definitions of criticism, they quote architecture critic Andrea Oppenheimer Dean, who argues that criticism "enables a clearer understanding of designs whose strengths and shortcomings architects and those interested in their work may otherwise only intuit or comprehend incompletely."[67] The argument is that in doing so, "the critic ultimately holds the creative work's designer/s accountable whilst simultaneously advocating for the design principles that were applied to affect the critique." (Brisbin & Thiessen; 2013, p. 6) To add to this view, the authors mention a perspective defended by writer Nancy Levinson in *Critical Beats* (2010),[68] by saying that "critics must critique not solely about socially popular topics, but from a perspective of intimate expertise that understands the profound medium-long term affects of the designers' decisions on people's lives." (Brisbin & Thiessen; 2013, p. 7) In order to defend this view that the role of criticism is not only about the assessment of crafted objects but also about "unknown and unrealized" ones, Brisbin and Thiessen quote the architectural critic Thomas Fisher. He says that critics should "strive to be intelligent and political leaders, envisioning different futures, making new connections and providing insightful and unexpected explanations for seemingly mundane things."[69] (Fisher, 2011, p.) This examined role of the critic finds a parallel in critical design's aspirations.

What the authors put forward is a dark account of the future of criticism, in which the lay-critic and the Facebook-style instantaneous stream of opinion trumps the critic. It is a scenario that, according to them, asks the critic to rise to the challenge and respond to the new "means and methods of critique". (Brisbin & Thiessen, 2013, p. 8)

67   Oppenheimer Dean, A. (1999) *Listening to: Critics,* Architectural Record 187, no. 1.
68   Levinson, N. (2010) *Critical Beats*, in *Design Observer* [Internet blog] Available from: ‹http://places. designobserver.com/feature/critical-beats/12948/› [Accessed 5 May 2014]
69   Fisher, T. (2011) *The Death and Life of Great Architecture Criticism.* in Design Observer [Internet blog] Available from: ‹http://places. designobserver.com/feature/ death-and-life-of-great- architecture-criticism/30448/› [Accessed 8 April 2014]

Criticism and criticality

In *The Function of Criticism* (2005) literary theorist Terry Eagleton, who is a key figure in literary criticism, asks: "What functions are ascribed to such a critical act by society as a whole?" (Eagleton, 2005, p. 7) This question is made in the attempt to address the self-doubting institution of criticism in England since the early eighteenth century. While Eagleton focuses on literature, his insight is useful to this thesis because of identifying the original concerns of criticism as a discipline. Eagleton introduces the birth of Modern European criticism as that of a bourgeoisie struggle against the absolutist state. He then elucidates the platform in which such struggle would take place:

> Poised between state and civil society, this bourgeois 'public sphere', as Jürgen Habermas has termed it, comprises a realm of social institutions – clubs, journals, coffee houses, periodicals – in which private individuals assemble for the free equal interchange of reasonable discourse, thus welding themselves into a relatively cohesive body whose deliberations may assume the form of a powerful political force." (Eagleton, 2005, p. 9)

The intersection between discourse and power is particularly relevant to this thesis, as the methods detailed in Chapter 4 will address. Eagleton notes that "the sphere of cultural discourse and the realm of social power are closely related but not homologous: the former cuts across and suspends the distinctions of the latter, deconstructing and reconstituting it in a new form, temporarily transposing its 'vertical' gradations onto a 'horizontal' plane." (Eagleton, 2005, p. 13) This discourse sees a shared agenda with the kind of critical practice being debated here.

From a different perspective, the art critic and philosopher Noël Carroll aims to develop a philosophy of criticism in the book *On Criticism* (2009), with the main goal of evaluating artworks. He defends the focus of the book on a philosophy of criticism by asking if one cannot define art, how can one hope to develop a philosophy of art? This is particularly relevant to this thesis because in order to mount a critique, one must develop a critical understanding—of what is criticism. Carroll's book proposes a taxonomy of criticism, with its many stages being subservient to the task of evaluation. It is from this perspective that his work is relevant to the definition of criticality being examined here.

The author makes an important clarification of his aims, explaining the difference between his book and other potentially similar publications on criticism. He notes that it is neither on schools of criticism, such Frankfurt-style critical theory, Lacanian psychoanalysis and Deleuzian rhizome theory, nor a book that develops theories of how to conduct criticism. Instead, he sets himself to investigate the "foundations of any critical practice, whether theory driven or otherwise". (Carroll, 2009, p. 4) To further reinforce this differentiation, he presents a clear example:

> "… a critical theory – like Althusserian Marxism – tells you how to interpret any artwork, whereas my concern is with, among other things, the nature of and constraints upon anything that we should be persuaded is an authentic specimen of interpretation, including ones that take their marching orders from theories. As maybe already insinuated, the majority of critical theories on offer today are primarily theories of *interpretation*. They are about getting the meaning, including the symptomatic meaning, out of artworks. They take interpretation to be the leading task of criticism. In contrast, I argue that evaluation is of essence of criticism, especially in terms of the kind of artistic category or genre that the artwork at hand instantiates." (Carroll, 2009, p. 5)

Carroll says that he regards the "discovery of value as the primary task of criticism in contrast to the championing of criticism as the almost clinical dissection and interpretation of various codes or signifying systems or regimes of power." (Carroll, 2009, p. 7) The author presents the several dimensions of criticism, all of which he considers subservient to the purpose of evaluation. They are description, contextualisation, classification, elucidation, interpretation and analysis. Even though Carroll focuses on criticism from a linguistic point of view, either spoken or written, this is also applicable to graphic design criticism in practice. Yet, there is an important distinction to make, that of between the role of the critic and the potential of criticism. Carroll mixes the two at times and here the aim is to understand his perspective on criticism, not the role of the critic[70].

Carroll argues that evaluation is the unavoidable goal of criticism. Even the act of selecting what to critique, he argues, is a form of evaluation. After admitting that

70   Carroll has a particularly traditional view of the role of the critic, namely that of providing assistance (and education) to the audience and identifying value in an artwork or being a "skilled discriminator of quality". (Carroll, 2008, p. 14) In this sense, Carroll is not in a position of solidarity but of authority, which offers a different definition of criticism from the one proposed by this thesis.

evaluation may not be considered to be a necessary condition for criticism, he points out that the evaluative moment does not need to be explicit. However, by conducting some or all of the six elements he considers paramount to criticism, there will be a basis for or a contribution to support a reasoned evaluation. In this thesis, criticism aims to be seen as a research and emancipatory method, and not as the traditionally paternalistic, top-down and educational contribution to knowledge. The latter is evidenced by Carroll as he argues that "illumination of what is valuable in artworks" and to guide and assist an audience to discover the value of an artwork. (Carroll, 2009, p. 46)

In the seminal essay *Criticism and the Politics of Absence* (1995), the designer and educator Anne Bush provides an important account of the history of criticism in direct relation to graphic design. She alerts to the importance of the designer challenging her or his own convictions to remain critical, while putting forward an history of criticism through five headings of criticism as: conversation, mediation, explanation, investigation and contestation.

The first introduces criticism as dialogue, tracing its roots to the "intersection of the critic and the public sphere during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries." (Bush, 1995, p. 10) Bush references Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991) to explain that criticism begun as an intention by the bourgeoisie to challenge the aristocracy. However, because the goal of the emergence of such criticism was part of an enlightened concept of society, suspending class divisions and aiming at a discourse that was open to all, it became a utopia. This was, in fact, a struggle for power by the bourgeoisie, cementing its position and aiming for hegemony.

Under criticism as mediation, Bush notes that critical dialogue had become a commodity at the end of the 18th century with the bourgeois critic providing guidance on the relationship between technological advances and the human condition. Criticism as explanation sees the object-centred criticism that would be predominant in the first half of the 20th century. With its use of objectivity associated with science, says the author, "it created the illusion that social and cultural changes could be rationally articulated and impartially evaluated." (Bush, 1995, p. 8) The social upheaval of the 1960s was key in forming what Bush classifies as criticism as investigation: an emancipatory form of criticism. This positioning questioned the way that institutions disseminated knowledge, with scepticism towards the proliferation of mass communications in which

capitalist societies "had become a simulation." This was sought, according to Bush, by focusing "less on defining commonalities and more on articulating contradictions." Indeed, by demonstrating problems in what would be a "theatre of interpretation" instead of Habermas' "theatre of exchange". (Bush, 1995, p. 10)

Finally, the author suggests another manifestation for graphic design, that of criticism as contestation. Anne Bush points that graphic design has "avoided the contextual strategies employed by other disciplines in favor of a criticism that is professionally internal and unique to its product." (Bush, 1995, p. 10) By dismissing the limitations of the view that design criticism must be homogenised and consensual, thereby appealing to a broad audience, she argues that "criticism in its most rigorous form is analytic contestation." (Bush, 1995, p. 10) She further reinforces this idea by suggesting that a separation of "reflection and action, a single professional criticism depoliticizes graphic design." Therefore, there is a need to put the focus on internal disciplinary questions that may distance criticism from the social, political and cultural conditions in which graphic design is produced. In other words, Bush notes the need to "juxtapose internal conventions with external factors." (Bush, 1995, p. 10) This is important to note, as it reinforces the critical distance previously advocated by Van Toorn. What is also relevant to extract here for the kind of critical design practice being developed in this thesis is the view of design as analytic contestation. This will be further explored in the next sections.

Critical theory: a theory of criticism

In the seminal article *What's Critical About Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender* (1985), American critical theorist Nancy Fraser investigates what the word 'critical' means in relation to critical theory. Even though there have been dramatic changes in mass media, namely the emergence of digital media and participatory action, the relation between the designer and society highlighted by Habermas' structure of society remains pertinent. She analyses critical theory by using female subordination as a case study through which she seeks to highlight weaknesses, namely that of the inconsideration of the specificities of the female gender in *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), written by Jürgen Habermas, who is a key figure in critical theory. Fraser's article will be used here not to reflect upon the gender issue, but to gain privileged insight on Habermas' theory of society and specifically the role of critical theory.

Fraser starts the article by saying that to her, "no one has yet improved on Marx's 1843 definition of Critical Theory as the 'self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age.'" (Fraser, 1985, p. 97) She then puts forward an example that intends to illustrate what a critical social theory does in relation to a specific societal phenomenon. For example, "if struggles contesting the subordination of women figured among the most significant of a given age, then a critical social theory for that time would aim, among other things, to shed light on the character and bases of such subordination. It would employ categories and explanatory models which revealed rather than occluded relations of male dominance and female subordination." (Fraser, 1985, p. 97)

What is important to note here, is the adaptability and permanent change of critical theory, in order to address and reflect upon the most important issues of a given time. As Fraser explains, Habermas makes a differentiation between "action contexts onto the distinction between reproduction functions in order to arrive at a definition of societal modernization and at a picture of the institutional structure of modern societies." (Fraser, 1985, p. 105) She asserts that:

> Habermas holds that modern societies differ from premodern societies in that they split off some material reproduction functions from symbolic ones and hand over the former to two specialized institutions – the (official) economy and state – which are system-integrated. At the same time, modern societies situate these institutions in the larger social environment by developing two other ones which specialize in symbolic reproduction and are socially-integrated. These are the modern, restricted, nuclear family or 'private sphere' and the space of political participation, debate and opinion formation or "public sphere"; and together, they constitute what Habermas calls the two "institutional orders of the modern lifeworld". (Fraser, 1985, p. 106)

The institutional divide put forward by Habermas is not only relevant to understand the interrelations between them, but especially pertinent to this thesis. This is due to the thesis' aim to see the graphic designer as a particularly critical agent in the symbolic and material reproduction of the lifeworld.[71] Fraser continues, describing the

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71   It is important to note that following this argument, Fraser acknowledges that Habermas presents a "contrast between system and lifeworld in two distinct senses. On the one hand, he contrasts them as two different methodological perspectives on the study of societies. They system perspective is objectivating and "externalist," while the lifeworld perspective is hermeneutical and "internalist." In principle, either can be applied to the study of any given set of societal phenomena. Habermas argues

two spheres that provide complementary environments for the systems mentioned above. The following description is relevant to note the potential interference of the designer in the public sphere, and the inevitable necessity of his/ her realisation of the importance of citizenship.

> The 'private sphere' or modern, restricted, nuclear family is linked to the (official) economic system. The "public sphere" or space of political participation, debate and opinion formation is linked to the state-administrative system. The family is linked to the (official) economy by means of a series of exchanges conducted in the medium of money; it supplies the (official) economy with appropriately socialized labor-power in exchange for wages; and it provides appropriate, monetarily measured demand for commodified goods and services. Exchanges between family and (official) economy, then, are channelled through the "roles" of worker and consumer. Parallel exchange processes link the "public sphere" and the state system. These, however, are conducted chiefly in the medium of power. Loyalty, obedience and tax revenues are exchanged for "organizational results" and "political decisions." Exchanges between public sphere and state, then, are channelled through the "role" of citizen and, in late-welfare-capitalism, that of client. (Fraser, 1985, p. 111)

What is also pertinent to mention here, is the close complicity between all the institutions feeding the two systems, whilst the dominance over public and private spheres appears to be inevitable. The transformation of citizen into client is a key concern for a critical design practice, as will be examined later in this section. A generally uncritical state of the graphic design discipline—as evidenced in chapters 1 and 2— cannot be dissociated from designers' political and civic detachment at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s. The maturation of capitalism in western societies, and the increasing complexity of their bureaucratised systems, forced citizens into an alienating seclusion. In turn – and inevitably – this had an effect on design, generating an inward looking and comfortably non-reflexive ethos. As Fraser explains:

> Clearly, welfare-capitalism does inflate the consumer role and deflate the citizen role, reducing the latter essentially to voting – and, we should add, also

that that neither alone is adequate." (Fraser, 1985, p. 106) This realisation is relevant for the theoretical-practical model being put forward in Chapter 5, as it builds upon the adaptability nature of critical theory stated in this chapter. The second contrast has to do with seeing the lifeworld and system as two different kinds of institutions.

to soldiering. Moreover, the welfare state does indeed increasingly position its subjects as clients. (Fraser, 1985, p. 122)

When Fraser analyses Habermas' dynamics of welfare-capitalism in his *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), she notes the closely linked relationship between family, economy, state and public sphere, of which the designer, as any other citizen, is a member. To highlight the relationships between these institutions through Habermas' perspective is relevant to this thesis for different reasons. First, it clarifies separations and also interrelations between all of them within a public and private tension in classical capitalism. Second, it acknowledges the fact that the creation of political will, and civic participation is dependent on all these institutions. More importantly, this acknowledgement will not only aim to evidence the importance of these institutions, but also serve to clarify the delimitation and focus of this thesis to the public sphere as a platform to deal with the self-clarification of the struggles of any given time.

Fraser concludes that "the roles of worker and consumer link the (official) private economy and the private family, while the roles of citizen and (later) client link the public state and the public opinion institutions". (Fraser, 1985, p. 113) However, Habermas' analysis of late capitalism, denotes a realignment of "(official) economy-state relations", accompanied by a "change in the relations of those systems to the private and public spheres of the lifeworld". (Fraser, 1985, p. 119) This realisation is crucial for the argument being developed thus far in relation to the designer.

> First, with respect to the private sphere, there is a major increase in the importance of the consumer roles as dissatisfactions related to paid work are compensated by enhanced commodity consumption. Second, with respect to the public sphere, there is a major decline in the importance of the citizen role as journalism becomes mass media, political parties are bureaucratized, and participation is reduced to occasional voting. (Fraser, 1985, p. 119)

While Fraser highlights here Habermas' account of late capitalism, it also presents the inevitable new role of the citizen, that of the "social-welfare client". This reification process, is promoted – as Fraser reveals Habermas' insights – by "welfare bureaucracies and therapeutocracies", disempowering "clients by pre-empting their capacities to interpret their own needs, experiences and life-problems." (Fraser, 1985, p. 124)

Critical theory, as seen by Fraser through the *The Theory of Communicative Action*, focuses therefore on a response to "crisis tendencies in symbolic as opposed to material reproduction; and they contest reification and "the grammar of forms of life" as opposed to distribution or status inequality" (Fraser, 1985, p. 121) This is not a designer's role, but a citizen's role. It is therefore in the investment of the citizenship dimension of a designer's practice that criticism and critical theory become important tools to deal not only with an impoverished citizen role, but also the struggles Fraser mentioned at the beginning of the article.

Habermas argues that the colonisation of the lifeworld sees new forms of social conflict as a direct response to welfare-capitalism. Critical theory surely has an emancipatory role. The conflicts he refers to are contestations of the "instrumentalization of professional labour and the performatization of education transmitted via the worker role: the monetarization of relations and lifestyles transmitted via the inflated consumer role: the bureaucratization of services and life-problems transmitted via the client role; and the rules and routines of interest politics transmitted via the impoverished citizen role." (Fraser, 1985, p. 121) These contestations are extremely valid and timely at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, at a time of severe economic recession with a plutocratic dominance imposing severe cuts in all areas of public life (with an emphasis in Europe) via the economic-state system.

Fraser classifies these movements as responses "to crisis tendencies in symbolic as opposed to material reproduction; and they contest reification and 'the grammar of forms of life' as opposed to distribution or status inequality." (Fraser, 1985, p. 121) Therefore, what Habermas has called the "decolonization of the lifeworld", encompasses three things, as Fraser notes "first, the removal of system-integration mechanisms from symbolic reproduction spheres; second, the replacement of (some) normatively-secured contexts by communicatively-achieved ones; and third, the development of new, democratic institutions capable of asserting lifeworld control over state and (official) economic systems." (Fraser, 1985, p. 121)

The designer's instrumental influence in the symbolic reproduction of societies is evident. Whilst the three elements of the decolonisation of the *lifeworld* are the citizen's responsibility, what it is particularly relevant is the importance of allowing an understanding, and challenge the infrastructures on which they work. In other words,

the use of critical theory in order to create awareness and develop tools which can help citizens to navigate and interpret their own experiences. The identification of such tool will help to not only better understand the levels on which the work of a graphic designer impacts the *lifeworld* and its different institutions, but also to recognise which platforms and principles should a critical practice address.

Design as criticism

In *An ideal design is not yet* (1999), Dutch design writer and editor Max Bruinsma investigates the concept of idealism in graphic design, in order to propose and reinforce its need. He places his argument within the contemporary information society, saying that "the relationships between content, form and medium can no longer be established as unambiguously as it may once have seemed, when the avant-garde nodded with enthusiastic agreement at Marshall McLuahn's slogan The *Medium is The Message."* (Bruinsma, 1999, p. 301) In the quest to argue for a more responsible approach to design, he recalls Jan van Toorn's principles, noting the need to "'visualize the origin and manipulative character of the message in its form': that is, cast a message in such a form that it enters into a meaningful – and critical – relationship with its cultural, social and informative context: a necessity which becomes all the more urgent now that the information society is beginning to show signs of becoming an information deluge." (Bruinsma, 1999, p. 300)

For Bruinsma, in a world that is saturated with images, it is vital that instead of giving form to a message, designers should "embed the message in meaningful associations with other messages." (Bruinsma, 1999, p. 301) This highlights the role of the designer as editor[72], which he acknowledges soon after the aforementioned statement. The call for the designer to help identifying and providing a more meaningful context is then emphasised by introducing an idea put forward by German designer and teacher Gui Bonsiepe. The latter proposes that designers are called interface designers, "on the basis that in times of information overload it is more important to design the means of access to information and navigation *through* it than the form of individual messages." (Bruinsma, 1999, p. 301)

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72   This is explored, for example, in the publication *Modes of Criticism*, both in written and visual form, as detailed in Chapter 4.

Bonsiepe stresses that the form of the message plays a pivotal role in the contribution to the clarity of contexts. However, Bruinsma puts emphasis on the editorial dimension of the designer by saying that "it is the *editorial* quality of the designer that determines whether the design enables the recipient of the message to make meaningful connections with the information culture of which the message is, whether we like it or not, part." (Bruinsma, 1999, p. 302) In this context, he continues, "the most important contribution that today's designers make to the effectiveness of a communicationproduct is a matter of 'conceptual functionalism' rather than visual virtuosity."[73] (Bruinsma, 1999, p. 302)

In this sense, the quality of design is increasingly dependent of the way the designer addresses the context; one in which the audience effectively becomes a co-designer, according to Bruinsma. In order to develop such attitude, the author finishes the essay with a section titled *Design As Criticism.* This section serves as a call to arms, a small manifesto and a series of possible paths the designer can or should pursue in order to achieve the kind of meaningfulness he advocates.

He suggests that the designer must realise that "their ultimate task is neither to order information nor simply to decorate it". This serves as a prompt for a series of proposals and suggestions through which design can be more pertinent. The first is that reinforcing the message "can sometimes mean that you make the message less accessible, rather than handing it to people on a plate." (Bruinsma, 1999, p. 308) Considering contexts, references and interpretations more important than raw data, Bruinsma suggests that it may be the path leading through that data that contains the most valuable information. This is aligned with Van Toorn's definition of the *dialogic image.*

The will to increase awareness of the complex interconnections in our media culture, says Bruinsma, and to "increase insight into their nature and content", is "one of the most 'idealistic' attitudes a designer working in a contemporary environment can have." In order to achieve this, he proposes that designers must be able to realise that, more than aesthetic and technical knowledge, as "the core of their profession is analysis: a critical eye." With this attitude being put to work, Bruinsma says that every design "in essence, is a criticism of the context to which it has been produced. A good

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73   Such an assertion is also useful as a critique of visual articulations often observed in critical and speculative design. There is a danger of not allowing entry points for the audience and using imagery in a way that it simply becomes illustrative, literal and not opening up opportunities for dialogue.

design 'activates' those contexts by offering an understanding of, a comment on, or an alternative to them." (Bruinsma, 1999, p. 309)

Following this series of suggestions he introduces four points towards an 'idealistic' design; one which, in order to be truthful to its goals, it is never finished.

> "A design
>
> which – even if only temporarily – imposes meaningful structure on the chaos of possible meanings and references in the information culture's hall of mirrors;
>
> which questions the one-dimensionality of things that are taken for granted – however politically correct they may be;
>
> which derives its originality, regardless of the medium or the ultimate form, from the independent, well-informed and well-argued vision of the designer;
>
> which – in true 'metadisciplinarity' – achieves a real integration of form, content, technology and media.
>
> Such a design may, because it is never finished, always *not yet*, be termed idealistic." (Bruinsma, 1999, p. 309)

In 2010, designer Randy Nakamura approaches, too, the idea of design as criticism, although from a different perspective. Commenting on the scarcity of design criticism in mainstream publishing, Nakamura quotes design educator Meredith Davis. In an article in the *International Journal of Design* (2008), she asserted that it is not clear whether the graphic design profession uses established criticism research models, being instead more present in its disciplinary or academic sphere.

To reflect on the hypothetical veracity of such claim, Nakamura uses the Dutch design studio Experimental Jetset to construct an argument that offers a nuanced reading of Bruinsma's definition, that design is inherently a criticism of the context, and of what it is not. Experimental Jetset argue that they are "much more interested in graphic design AS criticism: the idea that a piece of graphic design is a manifestation of a certain way of thinking, a certain way of ordering the world, and that, by functioning in that way,

that piece of graphic design is effectively critiquing the dominant way of thinking, the existing way of ordering the world." (Experimental Jetset, 2010)[74]

In relation to this statement by Experimental Jetset, Nakamura argues that "designers in and of themselves are not sufficient for a design culture to exist. As diminished as criticism already is, it can still serve as a counterpoint and reflection on practice." (Nakamura, 2010, p. 168) Therefore, a work of graphic design is not inherently a critique of what it is not. Instead, Nakamura's argument seems to point not only that written criticism provides an important reflective counterpoint to practice, but also to Bruinsma's idea that an intentional, well-crafted discursive and visual critique must be articulated in order for design to function as criticism.

Bruinsma reasserts this view in *Adbusters* (2001), in which he introduces the concept of 'The Long March'. This is based on an idea by the German student leader Rudi Dutschke, who argued for a more effective way through which change could happen in society. He defends that one should occupy the institutions, behave, and then climb one's way up in order to make changes from within.

Bruinsma develops then an argument in which he proposes that any designer has the possibility of dissidence, as long as it does not happen in regular working hours whilst being employed by someone who does not allow it. The quest for finding spaces for dissidence is further outlined by the belief that in a contemporary culture in which neither "singular messages" nor "unambiguous messages" (Bruinsma, 2001[75]) exist anymore, design could promote critical awareness of this reality.

Here Bruinsma does not talk necessarily of design as criticism, but instead of design ethics, which are different issues. He highlights that designers are well positioned to mediate an image culture and share a "responsibility for the quality of the public debate." (Bruinsma, 2001) To reinforce this tendency by Bruinsma, he argues that in NGOs, activist and other not-for-profit institutions can provide plenty of valid commission opportunities for designers to explore dissidence. He says that if, "after the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of political polarization as we knew it during the cold war, radical and total opposition isn't an effective option anymore, that doesn't mean that the only options left

74   Experimental Jetset (2010) *Experimental Jetset Interview.* [Internet]. Available from: ‹http://blog. iso50.com/13625/experimental-jetset-interview/› [Accessed 10 August 2014]
75   Bruinsma, M. (2001) *The Long March.* [Internet]. Available from: ‹https://www.typotheque.com/articles/the_long_march› [Accessed 30 January 2015]

are consensus or resignation. There still is plenty of room for valid and effective dissent. The fundamental design aspect of this is that, since design has become not only a problem-solving tool, but a visual language, designers are in a perfect position to channel critical notions and alternative views into even the most prosaic commissions." (Bruinsma, 2001)

What is being debated here are not design ethics, but what motivates action in criticism. However, the line between ethics, morality, idealism and ideology blurs at the level of behavior change and action. The author clarifies this by saying that "this design mentality is a modus operandi which judges form in terms of content, and which sees content in terms of (implicit) action. Since the core of design, for any medium, is to interface information with actions by readers or users (practical or conceptual actions) in a social and cultural context, it follows that designers should be aware of their ethical and social responsibilities. (Bruinsma, 2001) Here Bruinsma reveals not only a basic goal of graphic design, but also proposes a disciplinary ethos. In this context, and because he repeats an excerpt of *An Ideal Design is Not Yet*, his argument that every design becomes in essence a criticism, is then an acceptable claim.

Strategies for criticality

In *On Neon Signs and Head Shapes: A Case for a Mapping-Based Design Critique* (2013), the design writer Peter Hall proposes a new model for design criticism. One that can establish important connections with the kind of methodological possibilities critical design can develop, even though the examples provided by the author focus on design writing. Hall's main influence in building such model is the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and French sociologist Bruno Latour's assertion that a critic should be one who assembles rather than the one who debunks. This position, according to Hall, is relevant to design criticism because it distances it from being a "spin-off of art history and theory." (Hall, 2013, p. 408)

The media sociologist Nick Couldry defines ANT as "a highly influential account within the sociology of science that seeks to explain social order not through an essentialised notion of 'the social' but through the networks of connections between human agents, technologies and objects. Entities (whether human or non-human) within those networks acquire power through the number, extensiveness and stability of the

connections routed through them, and through nothing else." (Couldry, 2008, p. 93) Even though the networks-method proposed by ANT can help position – indeed map – the many agents involved in a specific subject or phenomena, it does not provide information about their interpretation, according to Couldry. He argues that "those positions limit the possibilities of action in certain ways, but they do not tell us about the dynamics of action. Specifically, the existence of networks does not explain, or even address, agents' interpretations of those networks and their resulting possibilities of action." (Couldry, 2008, p. 96) ANT is interested in the establishment of networks, and can be an important theory for designers, in particular for the process of mapping all the agents—or actants, as ANT calls humans and non-humans—and power relations involved in a specific situation.

In order to present a model for design criticism influenced by ANT, Peter Hall reflects on a perceived crisis of criticism, by making a reference to the article *The Closed Shop of Design Academia* (2012) by Rick Poynor, in which he notes a lack of interaction between academic criticism and professional practice. In *Design and Culture* (2013), which contained a series of rebuttals to Poynor's essay, design educator Meredith Davis proposed a distinction between professional criticism and scholarly research in order to justify the relevance and independence of each of these activities. Professional criticism, she argues, is "to critique the work of designers, discuss the behaviors of the profession at large, and analyze trends shaping design practice". (Davis, 2013, p. 7) On the other hand, scholarly research focuses on the "transfer of knowledge in the discipline and upon which the future work of other scholars will be based" resulting from research standards which are "subject to a vetting process that confirms its relevance and rigour." (Davis, 2013, p. 7)

While this distinction may be useful to point different methods and goals, it also reveals how the blurriness of the writing that often appears in the public domain, which can be recurrently positioned between the two. In other words, the application of rigorous research, referencing, and even language, is often observable in contemporary design discourse. At the same time, it appears that Poynor was not deeming scholarly research irrelevant, only that it could – and should – interact more with a wider public. Yet, Hall makes another mention of the *Design and Culture* issue focusing on the subject Poynor raised, by drawing attention to Anne-Marie Willis' alert to the direction design writing should take. She says:

The obverse of self-enclosed writing on design process, designers, and the like is the kind of thinking and writing that engages design outside of professional enclaves, and considers it as encountered in the world – which is where it is to be found, as the designed. To do this with insight requires knowledge beyond design. It requires an understanding of the contexts of design: culture, economy, sociality, power, and the political; that which has over-determined design and to whose formation design has significantly contributed – and which constitutes no less than the modern world. Writing on design that has such an ambition draws on thinking from, for example, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and cultural theory. (Willis, 2013, p. 41)

The emphasis put on the importance of 'knowledge beyond design' and the tools needed to research and understand all the contexts Willis mentions find in ANT an important addition to the designer's research toolkit. Therefore, Hall argues for a non-dualist and more sociological methodological approach to design criticism. To frame the problems arising from typical lenses used to examine the world, Hall uses Latour's argument from *We have never been modern* (1991) in which he identifies three different approaches to criticism: naturalization, socialization and deconstruction. These, he argues, are "loosely aligned with three fields and scholars: biology (E.O. Wilson), sociology (Pierre Bourdieu) and deconstruction (Jacques Derrida)." (Hall, 2013, p. 412)

Building upon ANT, Hall notes that Latour "has suggested that we reimagine criticism not as something that looks for sweeping explanations but one that looks closely at things, and asks how they got there." Latour call this a "multifarious inquiry launched with the tools of anthropology, philosophy, metaphysics, history, sociology to detect how many participants are gathered in a thing to make it exist and to maintain its existence." (Latour 2004 cited in Hall, 2013, p. 413) Finally, Hall cites a quote by philosopher Michel Foucault in which he makes a clear account of what criticism should be. He says that:

"a critique does not consist in saying things aren't good the way they are. It consists in seeing on what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based…, that reforms do not come about in empty space and that criticism consists in uncovering that thought and trying to change it: showing that things are not as obvious as people believe, making it so that what is taken for granted is no longer taken for granted.

To do criticism is to make harder those acts which are now too easy." (Foucault 2000 cited in Hall, 2013 p. 456)[76]

A mapping-based critique would therefore be, according to Hall, a more valid approach to criticism than a 'two-world' or dualist, art history-inspired model, which often tries to associate grand narratives and *isms* to complex situations and objects of critique, leaving important information unaccounted and unchallenged. This idea of a multifarious investigation and mapping-based critique will be used in the workshops developed in Chapter 4, as they seek to embed criticism, ideology and politics as design method.

An important precedent of such a positioning in design discourse, can be found in the essay *Culture is the Limit: Pushing the Boundaries of Graphic Design Criticism and Practice* (1994) by the educator Marilyn Crafton Smith. The author tries to redirect the analytical emphasis put on design objects and communication, by prosing instead a cultural studies approach to design practice and criticism, as it is detailed below.

Crafton Smith says that according to the designer Frances C. Butler, graphic designers mostly base their decisions on the Gestalt Theory of form and meaning and therefore ground the assurance of the transmission of their messages to the perception of the audience based on those premises. She also highlights the fact that central to the mission of transmitting messages is the purpose of control. (Crafton Smith, 1994, p. 301) This awareness of control and power is aligned with the intentions of ANT. The author also argues that the compositional formulas put forward in the Gestalt Theory tend to "replicate the transmission model of communication: their application assumes a clean transmittal of visually organized content to a genetically predisposed (and welcoming) viewer", thereby criticising its refraining from other forces at work in a specific context. (Crafton Smith, 1994, p. 302)

The author alerts to the fact that historically, too much focus has been put on simplifying graphic design as transmission, with structuralist and semiotic approaches absorbed in an attempt to build a more solid theorisation and understanding of its practice. Reducing graphic design to an encoding/ decoding mode, says Crafton Smith, wrongly assumes that the sender and the intended receiver are autonomous subjects. She reinforces

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76   Foucault, M. (2000) *So is it important to think?,* in Power, ed. J. Faubion. New York: New York Press. p. 456.

this perspective by saying that "in contrast to the idea of meaning is derived from an engagement with the design object, or 'text,' by the audience, it is assumed that the authority of the message and 'source' of meaning are located primarily in the designer/client relationship." (Crafton Smith, 1994, p. 301)

In her account of the traditions of theorising graphic design, Crafton Smith suggests two notorious examples. While the design educator Richard Buchanan says in *Wicked Problems in Design Thinking* (1992) that designers are expected to engage in persuasive argumentation, Jorge Frascara intends with his theorisation to shift the attention from the visual components of the designed object to the moment of contact between the design object and the audience. Potentially, this could be a valid methodological approach if this moment of contact is seen as the starting point that sparks a zoom out, or retrospective research process that seeks to understand all the implications and actors involved in that moment. However, it still has a temporal limitation, which can hinder a thorough understanding and consideration of the implications of the designed object and its context, processes and effect. Furthermore, Crafton Smith is critical of Frascara's potentially over-ambiguous and subjective conception of "communication efficiency," namely as this is only determined at the level of individual behaviour. In other words, the reductionist concept of the "active participant" insofar as Frascara restricts its participation to "behavior modification stipulated on someone else's terms." (Crafton Smith, 1994, p. 303)

It is in this context that the author introduces cultural studies as a more appropriate lens through which to examine and practice graphic design. She says that "implicit in this cultural approach is the conception of society as unequally structured and comprised of diverse groups that are positioned in asymmetric relations to structures of dominance." (Crafton Smith, 1994, p. 315) Cultural studies sees the object and the text as just another component in a larger discursive field, in what can reveal important affinities with Peter Hall's description of a mapping-based critique following the principles and ambitions of ANT. This way, meaning and cultural practices are a primary consideration in opposition to a theorisation focused on aesthetics and communication process. To reinforce this, Crafton Smith says that "when graphic design is theorized as communication, design criticism, like mainstream communication research, tends to separate the communication process that it attempts to study from the social order as a whole." (Crafton Smith, 1994, p. 315)

Finally, the author argues that "graphic design's close alignment with business suggests marketing strategies as a model for understanding audiences." Therefore, "a crucial first step to understanding how meaning derives from graphic design" resides in "the way we conceptualize the audience." (Crafton Smith, 1994, 304-05) In this sense, she suggests that more emphasis has to be put in understanding the relationship between graphic design practice, cultural meaning and how audiences produce it.

Conclusions

In *The Critical in Design (Part One)* (2008), the design historian Clive Dilnot clarifies that the critical perception comes first in the design process, not realization. He says that "critical perception seizes, shows, exposes, and announces the truths of a situation and its potentiality *as it sees it.*" (Dilnot, 2008, p. 179) The theoretical framework debated in this chapter defined an articulation between ideology, critical theory, cultural studies, ANT in order to use criticism as a method for design. In other words, following Dilnot's suggestion, to form conditions for the *realisation* to also be at the service of perception. This chapter investigated the theoretical foundations of the expanded role of the designer, as detailed in Chapter 2. This is fundamental to understand the 'critical' in critical design (method and developing field) and critical practice (an approach and mode of practicing design).

This chapter traced key manifestations of ideology and idealism within graphic design practice, highlighting recurrent problems in dealing with the often-blurry line between ethics, morality, idealism and ideology. It revealed, too, the strong relation that form has with ideology and that importance that criticism can have in challenging them through a permanent critical awareness of context. When totalising theories are not aligned with the aspirations of criticism, Nancy Fraser reinforced that at the basis of critical theory is the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age. This is when previous examples in design discourse that attempt a definition of design as criticism become important to this thesis, and particularly in addressing the research questions. The designer's instrumental influence in the symbolic reproduction of societies means that they are in a crucial position to develop tools that can help citizens to navigate and interpret their own experiences. In a difficult state of design criticism, as Brisbin and Thiessen argue, design needs new means and methods of critique.

Cultural studies and theories such as ANT proposed by Latour, can be key in helping the designer to understand and communicate multiple points of view and question societal phenomena. Criticism is then a tool that can help unifying these different strategies. This idea of a multifarious investigation and mapping-based critique will be used in the workshops developed in Chapter 4, as they seek to embed criticism, ideology and politics in the design method.

This chapter examined the theoretical foundations of a critical practice, and methodological possibilities for the development of a critical graphic design practice. Chapter 3 provided an understanding of what is meant by *critical*, by debating the pillars of criticism in direct relation to graphic design. By clarifying what is meant by critical, this chapter proposed that tools such as ANT or cultural studies can be important in the development of the kind of critical practice being defined here. While Chapter 2 examined the expanded role of the designer and its heritage, the present chapter defined the theoretical framework for such a critical practice in relation to graphic design, highlighting the relation between ideology, politics and criticism. The contribution to knowledge of this chapter is not only the critical analysis of key contributions within design discourse, but also to be able to use it in a way that can be translated into methods in the next chapter, by approaching design as criticism. My experience as a practitioner will be key to link the historical and theoretical research developed in Chapter 2 and 3, and directly influence the methods that will be explored in the next chapter and proposed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 — *Research Methods*

Building upon and developing the propositions of design as criticism put forward in the Chapter 3, the present chapter details the research methods applied in the context of this thesis. Under the framework of action research, these include: 1) workshops; 2) professional practice; 3) self-initiated research, labelled as 'parallel lab'; and 4) critical writing and public debate. Action research, and in particular reflection-in-action, is used in this thesis because it is centred on the examination of how practitioners reflect on and affect their actions during and following their work. (Swann, 2002).

While criticism is traditionally seen as an activity that is considered reflection on action, Schön's reflection-in-action constitutes a pertinent framework to investigate criticism as an approach to design. The object of research of this thesis is aligned with important principles of action research, namely being situated in a social practice that needs to be changed, involving emancipatory, participatory activity and progression through a spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. (Swann, 2002) The action research scholar Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt notes that "Action Research is a cyclical iterative process of action and reflection on and in action." This is appropriate to this thesis as a research method because of the many dimensions and approaches through which new knowledge is generated via criticism. Action research is also scrutinisable, verifiable and always made public, which is a central aspect of criticism and of this thesis. (Zuber-Skerritt, p. 2) Furthermore, as the author argues, only emancipatory, critical modes of inquiry are capable of achieving "far-reaching transformational change, rather than functional or transactional change." (Zuber-Skerritt, p. 11) Such methodological aspirations overlap with those of the criticism that inform this research.

This thesis has practice as integral part of its method, drawing on Donald Schön's *action research*. Particularly because action research "has the potential to make inquiry to make inquiry become part of the culture of a workplace as the process of questioning one's practices becomes 'part of the work', (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010 cited in Crouch & Pierce, 2012), it becomes relevant to the critical ambitions of the methods developed

in this chapter and proposed in Chapter 5. This approach can provide insight to inform a "critical transformation of practice"[77] (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2003, p. 378). Action research is therefore research in, for and as action." (Tripp, 2005; Crouch & Pierce, 2012) It is important to mention that there are different modes of action research, such as participatory action research, technical action research, political action research, emancipatory action research, among others (Tripp, 2005). Action research has, historically, intrinsic emancipatory aims (Boog, 2003), namely allowing the practitioner to better observe, reflect, plan and act in the context in which they act. This thesis acknowledges their existence—particularly in an educational setting—but adapts iteratively to the findings produced by the methods in this chapter and the specific context of this research.

Furthermore, action research is aligned with his proposition of 'problem setting' instead of the established 'problem solving' approach to design. This approach critically informs the attitude shaped through methods in this chapter. While the latter sees problems as a given, the former tries to construct the reality in which designers function. Schön argues that when starting an investigation with problems as a given, "choice or decision are solved through the selection, from available means, of the one best suited to established ends. But with this emphasis on problem solving, we ignore problem setting, the process by which we define the decision to be made, the ends to be achieved, and the means that may be chosen. In 'real-world' [that is, in a commercial setting] practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioner as givens. They must be constructed from the materials of problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain. Problem setting is a process in which, interactively, we *name* the things to which we will attend and *frame* the context in which we will attend to them." (Schön, 1983, p. 40).

Action research and reflexivity (Giddens, 1991) are used to connect the definitions of criticism and strategies for criticality investigated in Chapter 3 to methods that can foster a critical practice and finally propose design as criticism in the form of a critical method in Chapter 5. The critical awareness of the construction of the self and developing an awareness that when individuals act they are also acted upon was mentioned in Chapter 1 via Anne-Marie Willis, finding a parallel in the sociologist

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77   Kemmis and Carr have notably developed the concept of 'critical action research' in *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research* (1986), which is pertinent to this thesis, despite focusing specifically on education.

Anthony Giddens. The methods detailed below share the common interest of connecting this awareness with the foundations of criticism noted in Chapter 3. The main goal of the present chapter is to investigate a variety of intersecting methods that will shape the proposal of a critical method in Chapter 5, comprised of three dimensions: visual criticality, critical reflexivity and design fiction. The aim is not to design a strict formula for criticality but an approach to design as criticism.

The workshops take advantage of my position as a visiting lecturer (University of Westminster), guest tutor and researcher to have access to the idyllic, marginal space for experimentation and challenging the limits of the discipline that is education and that Van Toorn identifies in Chapter 2, working as labs for professional practice. However, this thesis does not focus on and examine design education nor pedagogy, as this workshops are conducted from a practitioner's perspective. This will be evident in the detailing of the workshops, the self-initiated research and professional practice. The workshops held at the University of Westminster, London College of Communication, Sandberg Institute and the Royal College of Art are detailed below, both at undergraduate (BA) and post-graduate level (MA). The workshops were designed with the intention of putting criticism at the centre of design practice, namely by placing ideology and politics as an integral dimension for consideration, as well as creating opportunities for debate. The workshops aim to challenge a perception of our surrounding as naturalness. The design curator Andrew Blauvelt notes in *Disciplinary Bodies: The Resistance to Theory and The Cut of The Critic* (1994b) that "it is the operation of criticism that allows us to see the condition of naturalness." (Blauvelt, 1994b, p. 197) The iterative, exploratory workshops are described in detail below, with an accompanying conclusion noting the findings, as well as the benchmarking criteria and reflective analysis.

Supporting workshops get a brief mention. The workshops are one of the four methods working towards the development of a critical design practice. By this I mean methods of collecting, assembling, editing and visualising a designer's activity that are actively critical and self-aware of their shortfalls and potential, but as importantly, of their ideological, political, social and cultural dimensions at work. These methods aim at working towards an approach to design as criticism. They promote debate and self-reflection, while producing a politicisation of graphic design's methods. Together with the work developed under professional practice, self-

initiated research and critical writing, they will form a range of hypothesis that will inform the theoretical-practical model put forward in Chapter 5.

Included under professional practice are: the book project *New World Parkville* (2011) for the EDP Foundation, the newspaper cover for the *Occupied Times* (2014) and the visual identity for the conference *Designing for Exhibitions* (2014). These highlight a variety of different constraints, when comparing, for example, with self-initiated research. It is also important to note how the self-initiated research and the two other research approaches influence professional practice. This is followed by two self-initiated research projects, operating as a personal, parallel lab: *The Architecture of Gambling* and *Golden Times*. They serve as visual and theoretical labs. The experiments developed in these projects were also used in works presented under professional practice (the cover for the *Occupied Times*, for example). These projects highlight the intricate connection between the four modes of research and how they influence each other. They reveal, too, that the case-studies do not follow a strict chronology nor sequence, but overlap regularly.

Finally, the chapter ends with critical writing as practice, with essays published on *Design Observer*, *Eye*, *Grafik*, *Pli* (see in Appendices), and as public debate, namely through the conference *Connect the Dots*, held at the London College of Communication on the 16 January 2014. However, the central element of this fourth research dimension is the publication *Modes of Criticism*. This name was created in late 2011 and used for a website to archive work-in-progress as the literature and practice review was literally assembling a wide variety of modes of criticism within graphic design. It is then used as a platform to invite writers and researchers to contribute with essays that intersect the present research and build an ever-growing network of peers with shared research interests. The first issue of the publication allowed a public exposure to the research being conducted before its conclusion at the same time that it started to shape the kind of studio practice I am pursuing as a practitioner. *Modes of Criticism* 1, titled *Critical, Uncritical, Post-critical* (see Appendix G) and *Modes of Criticism 2 – Critique of Method* (see Appendix I) will be debated, as well as the publication's future issues and the implications and benefits of becoming a researcher-editor during the present research. The interviews conducted in the context of this research are either cited in the thesis, transcribed (see, for example, James Langdon's in *Modes of Criticism* 1) or transformed into essays (see, for example, Jan van Toorn and Noel Waite's in *Modes of Criticism* 2). The essays were subject to several, heavily commented and debated drafts and conversations by e-mail or in person, but there would be important ethical implication if these dense documents were to be published as an appendix.

Workshops

Diagram 2. Structure and planned structure of the workshops.

Note: The workshops became increasingly complex building up to the project *Exercises in Democracy*, in which all the research methods of this thesis are explored, concluding with the critical autonomy that allows the workshop participants to design their own critical methods as a way to use criticism in practice in response to a variety of shifting contexts.

The workshops seek to adhere to the action research model of observing, reflecting, planning and acting, using criticism as overarching framework.

Ideology and politics
Mapping, design fiction

Political Compass 1 & 2
Mapping, design fiction

Defamiliarisation
Design fiction

Politicisation of argument
Mapping

Exercises in Democracy
Mapping, design fiction,
and critical writing
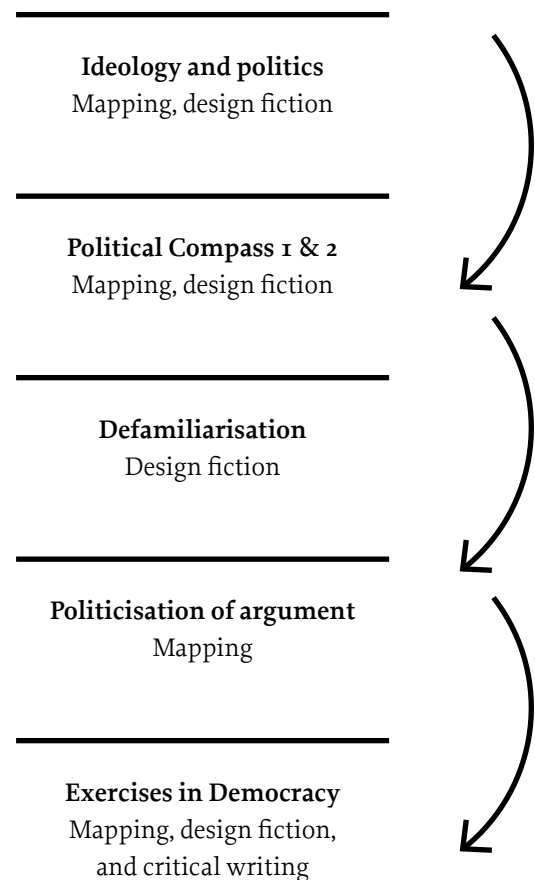
Workshop 1 – Ideology and politics
Aims and Context

This workshop focused on content analysis for ideological consciousness. The goal was to create awareness of the value of information provided by practical research, and realisation that the data gathered through categorisation and tagging identifies fundamental ideological elements and positions which inform the design process, and indeed, the approach to design. The workshop here described was conducted on 1 February 2012, with the second year students of the BA Graphic Communication Design of the University of Westminster, London. This workshop was designed following the 2011 interview with Jan van Toorn, namely addressing the importance of designers constructing a meaningful argument in design works. Using newspapers, this workshop aimed to deconstruct and examine ideological and political agendas, and was divided into two phases: 1) tagging and categorising and 2) generation of new knowledge based on 1.

Description

A group of 26 students was asked to collect two different newspapers over a period of a week. The two newspapers brought to class were *The Evening Standard* and *Metro*, which are free and distributed on a mass-scale throughout London. The workshop started by introducing students to its goals and aims, without extensively revealing its outcome. In the first task, the participants had to cover all the text of the five issues they collected. After finishing this, black and white photocopies were taken and the students were asked to do the same to the images of the newspaper covers, followed by the subsequent photocopying process.

With two rows of five covers ordered chronologically on a wall, this was the first moment of analysis and reflection. On the top row, where the covers had no text, the images were generally less powerful, with its meaning being much more ambiguous. This was an opportunity to identify what those images could be communicating[78], and most importantly, if a pattern over a week time was noticeable. This was also an occasion to notice the presence of ads with much more clarity [Figure 13]. Thus, the first realisation is that only by doing this kind of visual exercise are the students able to have more direct and easy access to information that is more opaque and diluted if an analysis was solely based on observation. Following the same principle, what the imageless covers revealed were the compositional patterns, the gravity of the words used and a clearer canvas for typographic analysis and content scrutiny.

Placing the five covers side by side, students were able to make a comparative analysis of the content, generating discussion due to the ambiguity in the image use and the capacity to isolate content while considering context and meaning [see Figure 14]. The students were then asked to start categorising the content they had in front of them. Sports, gossip or general news were five of the first categories they could identify. Their task was to tag the areas of the newspaper that would fall under those categories. [Figure 16] In this particular workshop, this was made using coloured post-it notes because of the ease/ rapidness of use, although some students used colour markers. At this point, pertinent conversations emerged, with students discussing the 'general news' category, noticing sensationalistic statements and sports as politics, thereby identifying political affiliations and making wider ideological connections by means of this exercise.

78   It is relevant to mention that at this stage, the analysis of all the content – here exemplified by the images – is seen at a macro-level, in order to introduce students to design as politics. Therefore, deeper consideration of the images would have to take place during another workshop, adapting future iterations to the stage of the student's education.

Figure 13. Students from the BA Graphic Communication Design sorting the covers chronologically.
Figure 14. Detail of two daily newspapers displayed side by side.

Figure 15. One week of the *London Evening Standard* covers overlaid with text only versus image only.

Design as criticism. Francisco Laranjo, LCC, 2017

When the tagging was complete, the students could conclude that the majority of space occupied in the covers of one of the newspapers over a week-period of time was gossip, as the quantity of a particular colour clearly stood out in comparison with the others. They could also note that the same was not valid for the other newspaper, allowing them to speculate about content, its quantity and political positioning. It is important to note that while this visual exercise can be useful for graphic designers in gathering important data when undertaking a design project, a greater amount of data and depth of the analysis will produce stronger and more solid information. It can feed a consistent induction process and subsequent conclusion. As an example, it was suggested that applying this method over a period of a month or a year, would yield more detailed information, ripe for less questionable conclusions and statements. The students were alerted that the more the categories are refined, the more specific the data will be.

Figure 16. Students tagging the different areas of the newspapers' covers.
Figure 17. Experiment done by students in which a colour is assigned to each day of the week.

The final stage of the workshop focused on exploring other possible directions this exercise could take, by noticing the different information gathered from the participants. All students were encouraged to photocopy the five issues of the newspapers on top of each other. What resulted from this experiment, were quantities of dense images that provided distinct information when comparing with the previous tasks. Both the imageless and wordless versions of the photocopies, were crowded condensations of headlines or photos and ads, permitting to rapidly see the most occupied areas and compositional choices over the selected period of time. The nature of the photocopy and the consequent visual result provided a different kind of information from the exercises that preceded this one. At this stage, it was relevant to observe students already adopting an inquisitive approach to the use of such techniques. As the class of 30 was divided into groups of five, one group overlaid five issues but attributed a colour to each day of the week. [see Figure 17] Their goal, they said, was to be able to know where and how the newspaper positioned the different kinds of information, whilst still being able to identify the individual covers in a single image.

Conclusions

The workshop came to an end with a discussion about how this method can be relevant for different graphic design projects, by specifically drawing attention to how ideology plays a major role in the design surrounding them everyday. It was emphasised that only by openly considering and analysing ideology and politics, are they able to be consistently informed about the context in which they will be operating. While great enthusiasm was noticed in the practical aspect of the workshop—and especially towards the colourful result of the tagging activity—it was clear that this workshop is only a first attempt, or possible step, towards dealing with ideology through graphic design.

This workshop engaged with ideology, but only to the extent that it creates awareness, as it does not aim at shaping a particular one. However, awareness is an important element that can greatly contribute to its development. To impose an ideological grounding was not the goal, but in order to be a contextual analyser—encompassing cultural, social and political issues—a designer can benefit from an ideological grounding as long as it maintains the critical distance to question and scrutinise it. Promoting and revealing ideological conflicts by means of visual exercises can be a way to feed an awareness that will give designers insight about the construction of politics and the devices it uses to construct an argument, fallacy or system of ideas one can call ideology.

Workshop 2 – Political Compass

Introduction

This workshop was held at the University of Westminster on 11 March 2014 with 24 second year students from the BA Graphic Communication Design. This workshop asked its participants to identify the relation between their ideology and their design work based on the proposition that all design is political. Any graphic design project affirms or rejects ideological agendas, whether consciously or unconsciously. The workshop detailed below attempted to promote awareness of the impact that the students' political intentions can have in their work, and by consequence, in the public. It aimed to alert not only to the politics they would necessarily be dealing with but also to the possibility of politicising their way of working. By this it is meant the process, tools and physical space. For design to become politicised, says Tony Fry, "it has to directly confront politics." (Fry, 2011, p. 7)

This workshop, as well as the next one held at the RCA and the Sandberg Institute, build upon the proposition of a sub-field of speculative design by researchers Tanyoung Kim and Card DiSalvo, to which they call speculative visualisation in *Speculative Visualization: A New Rhetoric for Communicating Public Concerns* (2010). The construction of visual rhetoric is also detailed in the complementary exercises in Workshops 4, 5 and 6. This workshop was designed to have three phases: 1) mapping of each of the participants' ideology; 2) identifying the participant's ideological position in relation to their ongoing work; 3) generate a body of work that identified positions that were distinct from the ones they aimed at.

The Political Compass

The session started by asking students to fill the online questionnaire titled *The Political Compass*.[79] This is comprised of a series of questions that range from ethics, economics, politics, religion, race, gender to power structures. The questions address the space defined by the two axis of the compass: economic (Left/Right) and social (Authoritarian/Libertarian). As a result of the questions answered, which are of multiple-choice, the person filling the questionnaire is presented with a multiple-axis political system that identifies his or her political position.

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79   *The Political Compass* (2001) [Internet] Available from: ‹http://www.politicalcompass.org/› [Accessed 21 January 2015]
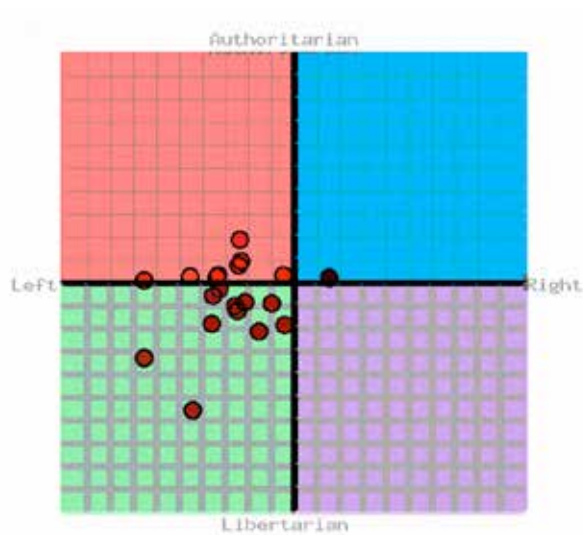
Figure 18. Political mapping of a class of students who participated in the workshop.

The scoring system used by *The Political Compass* is not revealed online, nor has the project's creator been made public since it was made available online in 2001. Therefore, this system cannot be used as a rigorous analysis, but instead provides an informal way to identify political affiliations and debate ideological positions. It is particularly relevant to observe that while the students were choosing their answers, numerous discussions emerged. They started questioning their peers' choices, challenging them, arguing against or for them. Due to the fact that it was announced beforehand that their political affiliations would be revealed and that this would provide an overview of the class' political orientation, the exercise was taken particularly seriously. At the end of the questionnaire the image generated revealed the positions of famous world leaders, as well as important historical figures. This was relevant because it created unexpected shared ideological beliefs between some students and polemic—and widely contested—politicians. Each participant had an individual image and after all of them were collected, they were overlapped, providing an overview of the political ideology of the class. The generated images were displayed in the studio and used as a working reference, indeed a method, throughout the semester.

Design as criticism. Francisco Laranjo, LCC, 2017

Speculative Compass

The next session built upon Jan van Toorn's 'intellectual gearbox,' by implementing visual exercises that challenged the participants' preconceived ideas towards their ongoing projects. In the conference *Curating Reality – New Tools for Investigative Journalism* (Amsterdam, 2012), Van Toorn introduces a diagram that he calls 'gearbox'. This gearbox, which he described as a working method, allowed him to remain "aware of the political and to understand the way designers negotiate and position themselves as cultural producers in the public arena." (Van Toorn, 2012) On the left of the diagram, it was possible to see an 'R' (Radical), on the centre an 'M' (Moderate) and on the right a 'C' (Conventional). After introducing Van Toorn's spectrum, from radical, to moderate and conventional, students were asked to indicate where did they aim their project to be positioned. This spectrum was constructed with a long string on the wall of the second year students' studio. It allowed their motivations to remain present throughout the project, and as importantly, stayed open to debate and exposed to their colleagues.

R – – – – – – – – – – – – – – M – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – C

Figure 19. Intellectual gearbox, Jan van Toorn, 2012

Students were asked to position their work in the spectrum, by informally putting a piece of masking tape on the wall with their names. Most of the students ambitiously placed their projects next to the left extremity, where the word 'radical' was written. This allowed an initial discussion between the inevitable negotiation of the client's interests, the public interest and their own agenda. Instantaneously, a few students revised their position. The next step was for students to search online and in the library in groups of two ,and print three examples of what they considered to be radical, moderate and conventional approaches to design.

After the wall was covered with A4 prints, students had to select three more examples of visual identity works that fit within those three possibilities. The workshop had one last section. This last task asked students to produce design work in groups of two that would fall under the three categories in direct connection to their brief. In reality, this encouraged students to generate hypothetical work that often sat in direct opposition to what they wanted—and often was possible—to do.

Conclusions

The political compass was instrumental in raising awareness about the importance
that politics play in graphic design. It provoked numerous discussions during the
questionnaire and raised questions about the relation between ideology and design.
It allowed the generation of an ideological map that remained visible in the studio for the
duration of the semester. This was particularly useful. Students could consult and confront
their chosen tactics accordingly as the research, design process and production progressed.

Figure 20. Wall on which the students first
positioned their ideological intentions, then
confronted them with the material they were
gathering to inform such a position.

This workshop built upon Van Toorn's method by adding several new layers, and perhaps
most importantly, a performative and practical dimension. It allowed students to realise the
relevance of creating platforms of discussion with their peers, but also practical exercises
that critically challenge their temporary decisions and developing research. The initial
position on the spectrum was important, but most participants still found it vague, even
after finishing doing the political compass exercise. It was only once examples of work start
being manipulated that the issues at stake became more evident: ideology, politics, method,
context, agency, the client, institutions and personal, private and public interest.

By manipulating the same spectrum at different levels, from generic to specific (in relation to their own project), students realise the possibility of multiple ways of continuously challenging their approach to design and its process. However, while these performative, mapping exercises were used and appropriated as the students' individual projects developed, it was the speculative work produced that generated more interest. Making work that students knew beforehand that was either inappropriate and/or difficult to be accepted by the client allowed an increased awareness of tactics and design approaches that could be explored. In turn, the group work offered the opportunity for different variations and propositions to be explored and mapped. This exercise was useful throughout the project, one which some students returned to.

However, the majority of the students saw this workshop as initial research and did not continue developing the methods. This tendency is not applicable to all undergraduate education, but is specific to the University of Westminster and this particular class. Nevertheless, it was possible to observe that the students who adopted the methods and were able to use them as tools of self-critique, developed a more articulate visual, verbal and written result. An example of this is the case-study *Oh Mai-dan!* detailed below. This workshop challenged a disconnection between theory and practice, politics and design and between history and contemporary practice. This was pivotal in encouraging students to work towards a more seemless integration between theory and practice. The performative and collaborative dimensions—and especially the speculative production of work—were key in bridging this gap. In an online questionary undertaken via the platform *Survey Monkey*, 19 out of the 24 students who participated in this workshop said that it was highly likely that they would use these methods in future design projects.

Case-study: *Oh Mai-dan!*

The University of Westminster undergraduate research project *Oh Mai-dan!* (2014) by the student Paula Minelgaité, takes the form of a book. It uses graphic design to investigate the Ukraine and Russia geopolitical situation and armed conflict in Crimea, which started in early 2014. The book provides evidence of the impact of the workshops mentioned above at the University of Westminster, by detailing and expanding several practical exercises examined in the workshops.

Oh Mai-dan! is a multi-layered reading experience, highlighting an awareness of the many manifestations and influences in the conflict: from political interests to the use of mainstream media and social media as propaganda. In turn, it reflects this visually by mixing rigorously researched information with informal web images from social media—a central platform to follow the conflict from a distance. Discussions about the critical intentions of Jan van Toorn are also present, by offering different, even contradictory, perspectives on the same subject. These are visually displayed upside down to further reinforce the argument. The book also includes infographics, namely visual representations of the deteriorating relationship between the German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the Russian President Vladimir Putin by collecting several public photos of both with different facial expressions and distinct cartographic interpretations of the conflict.

Screenshots of conversations on Facebook, as well as a set of speculative Ukrainian bank notes suggesting what they could become if Russia takes over the country complete an extensive visual investigation resulting in an open work for the reader to challenge and discuss all the information provided. In the interview conducted with Anthony Dunne at the Royal College of Art (2014), he noted that the interaction design MA students were challenged by individual tutorials, not methods. In other words, the students relied on feedback from and discussion with the tutors to develop their critical approach to design. In the research project *Oh Mai-dan!*, the result has a strong methodological influence, of which perhaps the central benefits—especially building upon personalised feedback—is that it encourages methodological autonomy, through manipulation and adaptation.

Figure 21. Evolving visual representation of the
relation between Merkel and Putin.

Figure 22. Several geopolitical perceptions of Russia
and Ukraine.
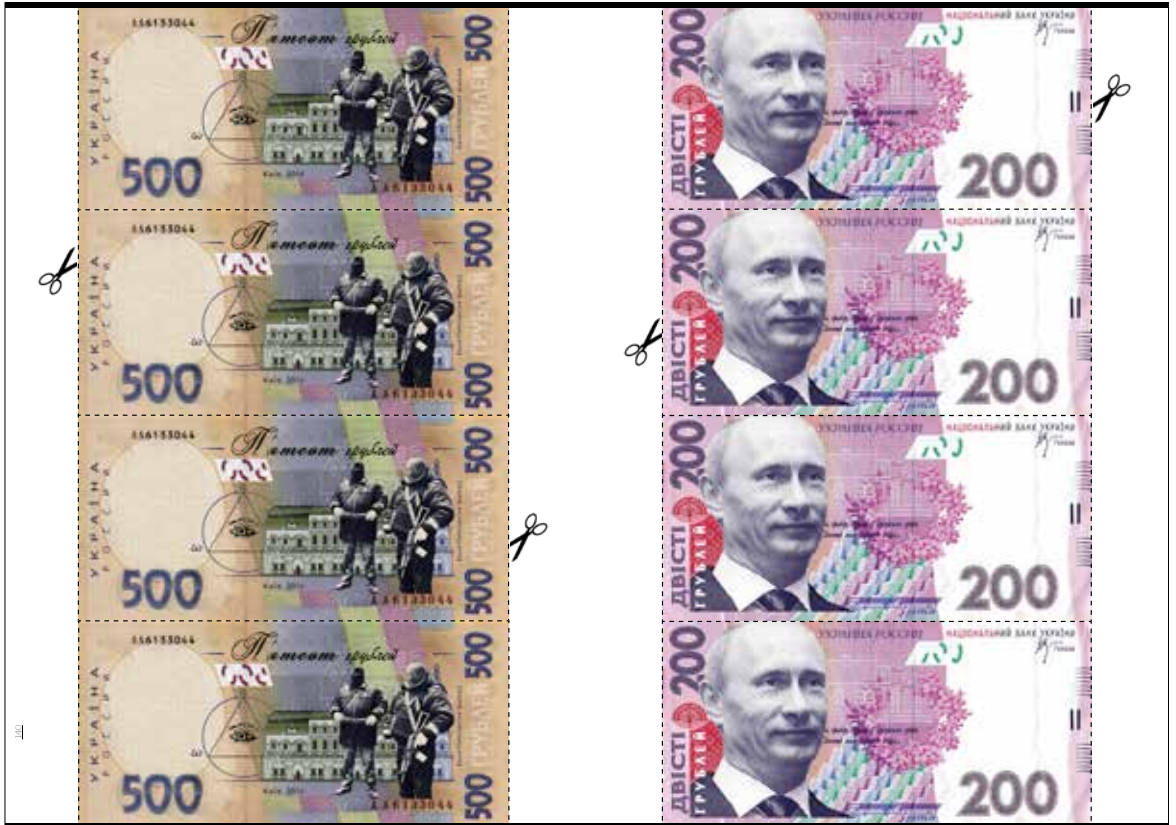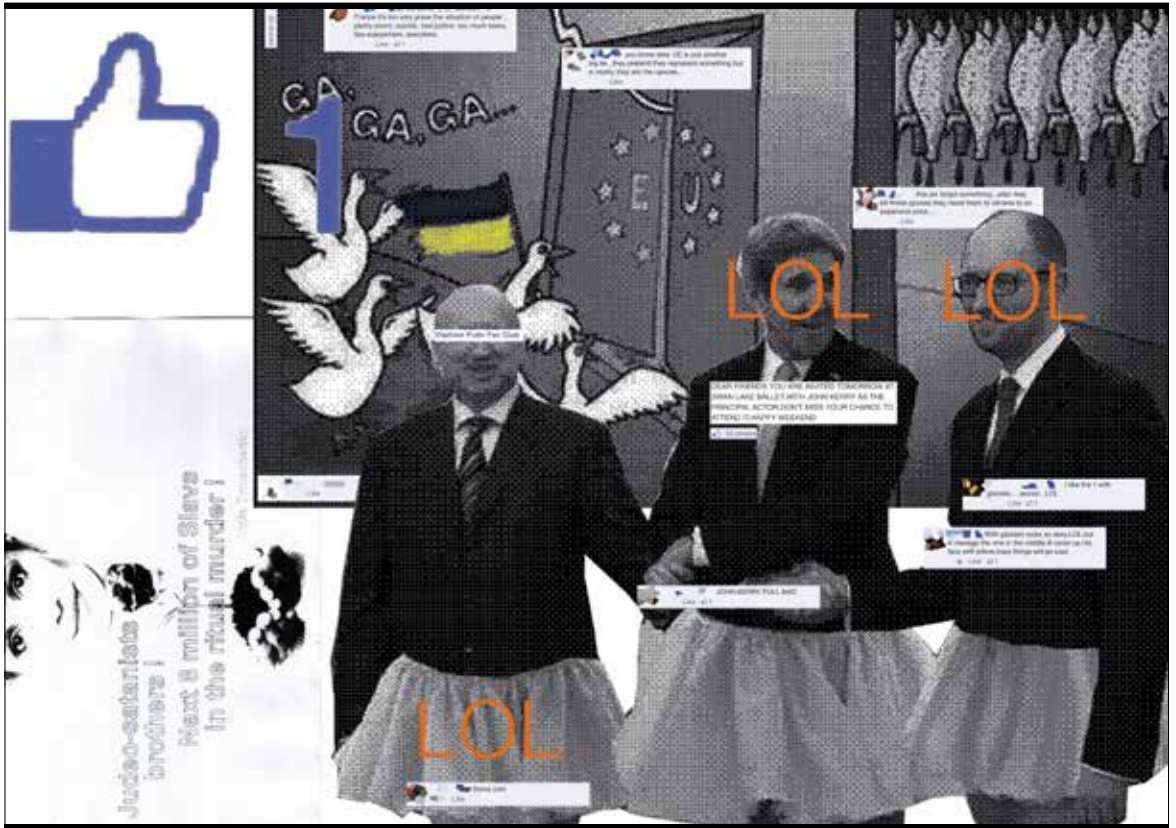
Figure 23. Overlap of collected online discussions
with illustration and iconography.
Figure 24. Speculative Ukranian banknotes after
Russia's invasion.

Workshop 3 – Exercises in democracy

The collaborative project titled *Exercises in Democracy* was initiated with two main aims: 1) bring together students from the Royal College of Art (RCA) and the Sandberg Institute (SI) who have a specific interest in using graphic design as tool for political, social and cultural criticism; and 2) provide a platform to investigate and test critical research methods that could feed that shared interest. As an initial starting point, a draft of the article *Avoiding the Post-critical* (2015), which functions as the editorial of the first issue of *Modes of Criticism,* was used to introduce the students to the relation between the current economic and political crisis and recent developments in graphic design discourse. In line with the arguments defended in the article, I suggested that in a broad sense, all social, political and cultural graphic design projects that aim to contribute not only to self-emancipation but also to shed light on the struggles of the time in the public domain, are exercises in democracy. This suggestion paved the way for the title of the collaboration: *Exercises in Democracy.* The title was going to prove itself vital, as it constantly influenced the intentions of the students and the way they developed the methods during the project.

The collaboration explored some nuances of democracy. For example, the researcher Matthew Kiem, PHD candidate at the University of Western Sidney, argues that there is an important difference "between Carl Schmitt's conception of democracy as the flip-side to dictatorship (equality of substance within a homogenous political body personified in a charismatic leader), the Marxist ideal of a (historically unfulfilled) stateless condition of economic equality, and the liberal idea of procedural equality amidst economic freedom (inequality and perpetual growth). There is still further difference between a system of representational democracy (with its political alienation, corruptibility, and dependency upon the design(ing) of mass media) and the direct, horizontal, and consensus based practices used by Quakers and the Global Justice and Occupy movements (involving the design of radically different customs, procedures, spaces, symbols etc.)." (Kiem, 2013, p. 35)

Both the students from the RCA (MA Visual Communication) and the SI (Masters Design) already had a strong commitment to the study of graphic design as a critical tool, and also a good overall knowledge of the societal issues they want to investigate. The SI Design department presents itself as a "Think Tank for Visual Strategies"[80], positioning

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80   See *The Master Generator* (Sandberg Institute, 2013).

itself at the margins of graphic design practice and attracting students with a particular interest in investigating the relations between graphic design and society. The RCA, and more specifically the MA Visual Communication has a tradition of fostering critical reflection[81] and pushing the boundaries of the design discipline. If with the SI, all first year students took part in the project, the RCA saw a smaller participation due to the size of the department, variety of disciplines taught (e.g. design, illustration, film) and broader range of research interests. Therefore, these postgraduate students formed a specifically interested and literate focus group for the research methods being developed in this thesis.

This workshop had four main aims: 1) To generate a forum for dialogue between students with shared political, social and cultural agendas and who are using graphic design as a reflective and critical tool; 2) To question the limitations of past and current visual strategies within an established post-political reality; 3) To generate a forum for design discussion, in order to obtain a visual-textual body of work; 4) To co-edit and design a publication with the experiments and discussions held during the collaborative project. The workshop was designed to be open-ended, aiming at promoting critical autonomy. In this sense, the initial workshops served to offer a range of possibilities that were to be interpreted by the participants in a variety of ways following the political context presented at the beginning, as well as challenges to graphic design operating under the banner of critical design faces (as detailed in Chapter 2). Therefore, the workshop constituts an important case-study, allowing privileged observation. The design of the workshop aimed at observing the development of methods using criticism in practice, thereby generating data directly addressing this thesis' research questions.

Exercise 1 – The Reader

Both students agreed that they could share one piece of writing that was central to their ongoing research as a way to allow everyone to have access to their research interests. A student from the Sandberg Institute created a docuWiki, which is an online platform that allows all the contributors to submit and edit their content in an open-source way,

81   See for example, *George Hanson Critical Forum* (RCA, 2004), *The Buryport Critical Forum* (RCA, 2006) and *Woodhill Park Critical Forum* (RCA, 2007), as well as the RED Tape conference/ discussion series initiated in 2011. More recently, it is relevant to note the Eady Forum and *GraphicsRCA: Fifty Years and Beyond* (2014).

while allowing to link all the entries. This was potentially useful, in order to highlight the connections between the different research projects.

Exercise 2 – Radical vs Conventional

Building upon Van Toorn's 'intellectual gearbox', what was initially asked to the participants of the workshop was to gather visual material related to their ongoing research which they thought would fall under these two polar opposites. On the one hand, this aimed at allowing the students to be in control of past examples of work with an interest similar to theirs, while surveying possibilities to break away from predictable visual approaches. It is important to note that all the participants were developing their research in an academic environment, and therefore, they could position themselves and their work in any position of the diagram. This would possibility would be unlikely in professional circumstances. However, it was the exercise in awareness that was relevant.

Some students used the library and design history books, whilst others mainly used the Internet. When the collection of works was finished, all printed sheets were laid on the floor, with a description made by each of the participants. This allowed an initial discussion, as some disagreed with some categorisations. It was also relevant to note that some of the radical and conventional works presented would also be useful to research projects being undertaken by other participants in the workshop. Afterwards, the students compiled all the images in a publication for future reference. This document was then posted to Amsterdam, in order to inform their peers of their interests and research.

Workshop session 1 (Amsterdam, The Netherlands)

These workshops were held in Amsterdam on the 4th and 5th February 2013 at the Sandberg Institute. Two Sandberg students presented a proposal for the two groups of students with the goal of promoting a platform for everyone to be (physically) introduced to each other. After showing a series of political images to illustrate and announce the idea that every revolution starts with a movement, they explained the format of the performative exercise.

The room had as many tables as the number of RCA students, who were the guests at the Institute. The SI students would rotate tables after each timed session by its organisers. Each student carried a number on a sheet and had exactly two minutes to talk about their approach to design, by highlighting their on-going research. From each talk, the participants at the table would collect information that would then be translated into a performative physical movement that would be performed later by each group.

Figure 25. 'Design a movement exercise', at the Sandberg Institute, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

To have only two minutes to explain your approach to design and on-going research without any previous preparation, obliged a careful – but quick – selection of words, terminology, as well as increasing the levels of attention by both the speaker and the listeners. Using a megaphone to inform the remaining time and to encourage the participants, with aerobics music playing on the background promoted, even more, an environment of tension and fun. The keywords written during each speech, allowed the speaker to realise what was more relevant to their audience about their design practice, and the other participants to have quick access to the current interests and ethos of the colleagues they had just met.

After all the possible table rotations, each group had four minutes to discuss the produced notes and design (and to give a title to) a movement that would communicate the group's practice. This particular exercise allowed the students to be introduced to each other quickly, while promoting a greater and faster complicity between them, due to the inevitable physical contact the different performances required. It was an useful playfulness that accelerated the eagerness to talk, ahead of the second day of

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workshops. Once all 'movements' were designed, they were then performed, filmed and archived, in order to be enacted by the whole group on the next day.

Aligned with the intentions of the collaboration, I proposed that on the next day, the whole group would donate a portion of their time to their colleague's research. This way, each student would have another designer providing insight about their ongoing research, thereby having an external perspective on their object of study. Everyone then provided three keywords of issues they were currently researching. After a division of the project's participants into five groups, the students decided that they would design their own exercises, so that everyone could discuss and try them. Most of the exercises, in the form of methods, stemmed either from a student's personal interest or question that could be useful to everyone, and a result of an attempt to challenge everyone's own assumptions of their research.

Exercise 1 — Pyramid

The students presented an A3 sheet of paper with a triangle and 3 questions directly connected with their own research. They asked the participants to present the answers to the questions in whatever media they found appropriate: How does democracy smell?, What part of our life will also become artificial?, and who are the most powerful people? Most students presented images, while others described ideas verbally and used different objects to build a three-dimensional piece that could work as a prompt for a metaphorical speech.

This exercise was a consequence of the issues the students in this group were researching. However, suggesting beforehand a link between the three questions allowed them to reveal the connections between their projects and how these could be relevant for everyone in the group. The idea of organising and displaying content in a triangle as a research process can potentially yield pertinent results, resulting in the surfacing of hidden narratives and ideological agendas.
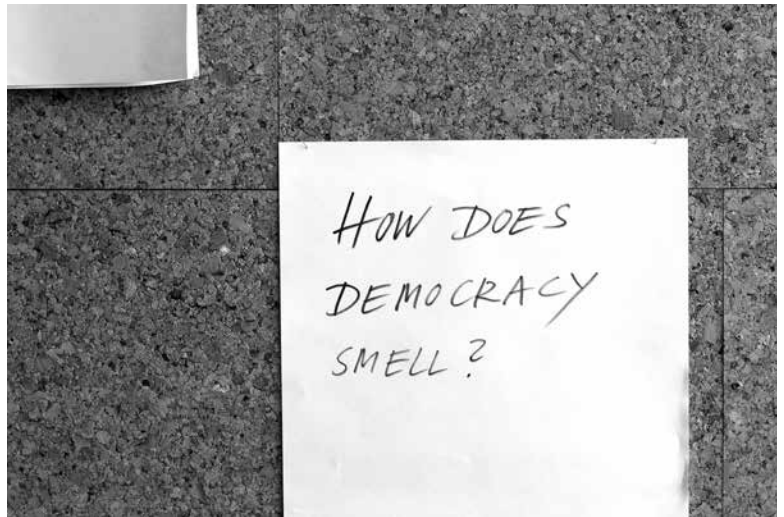
Figure 26. Question on the wall at the Sandberg Institute, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Exercise 2 — Anti/Pro

This exercise's main goal was to test the polar opposites of what each student was researching, as well as to provide a platform for discussion about what does it mean to be 'anti' and to be 'pro'. After setting up an axis on the wall with masking tape, each extremity defined the structure of the exercise. On the left, the word 'anti', on the right 'pro', on the top, 'existing' and at the bottom 'non-existing'. The idea for the brief came from one student's ongoing research on the imagery associated with the word 'anti'. However, and following an earlier workshop held at the Royal College of Art[82], this exercise was designed to both inform his project and challenge his colleagues'.

Each group had to select 3 images, print them and carefully place them on the wall. This exercise generated very pertinent results, with ambiguous and unorthodox use of imagery. In some cases, the same image could survive in the four extremities; and others could sit in either the anti or pro positions depending on the ideological perspective or what could be said about them. This exercise was a platform that provided an opportunity for substantial discussions, both during the selection, placement and explanation of the position chosen to pin the image to the wall.

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82   This workshop run by myself focused on using Jan van Toorn's 'intellectual gearbox', namely on what can be considered radical and what can reaffirm the status quo (conventional). Accordingly, during one day, the students compiled several images that were then assembled in a publication investigating the typical imagery used by graphic designers when working on critical design projects.

Exercise 3 — What?

In this exercise, three images were asked from the participants, which would have to be sent to a shared online folder. As it happened in previous cases, the questions/ challenges the students decided to make to the whole group came from their ongoing research: "What is the contemporary ideal?," "Smartphones: negatives and positives", and "Name behavioural patterns created by ads". There was a concern about the way the challenges were constructed, namely on how they could impact everyone's projects. A predictable intersection of interests was likely to happen because all the participants' projects were often linked due to these students' view and use of graphic design as an investigative tool for visual culture and its manifestations in politics, media. The organisers of this exercise, collected then an image bank with visual replies to their ongoing research

Exercise 4 — Post-Book

This book exercise was the most elaborate, requiring several tasks before it could be considered concluded. This group's organisers designed an exercise that speculates on the ideal bibliographic reference for each person's research. First, it asked each participant to write a short review of the ideal, non-existing book that would challenge, solve or be the perfect influence for their project. To this review, a title, author and publisher had to be added. With a quick draw, each review was assigned to a different person, who then had to design the book cover for that imaginary book, print it and upload the digital file to a shared folder. This exercise produced fascinating results, with students making up authors by merging the names of existing ones and challenging their colleagues' assumptions by deconstructing what they originally meant with their reviews. The design of the covers, however, revealed the limited time available to produce it, with the participants recurring to house styles of publishers, or choosing to adopt quick typographic illustrations.

Figure 27. Details of four covers designs for imaginary books.

Exercise 5 — Rebel

This unrealised exercise asked one question, with obvious problems arising from such a difficult task. After all the exercises and discussions held during the day, this group asked: "What would you do, if you were not a graphic designer?" The goal was to try to create awareness of the media and thinking process normally used by designers to address the complex issues everyone was studying, thereby forcing even more open proposals. It was decided that the consequent proposals would be uploaded to a shared online folder. This exercise remained as a proposition.

Conclusions

Even though the students had been introduced to each other beforehand via video conference, the exercises undertaken on the first day revealed that the physical encounter and the way this was designed were key to produce the work and the observed results. It was evident at the end of the first day that trust and complicity are necessary elements for designers to reflect, collaborate and share critical agendas.

The exercises demanded substantial attention and effort from the participants. In turn, this asked a readjustment of ways of thinking every 40 minutes, which notoriously affected the quality of the work as the day progressed and the participants became tired. If each exercise would have had more time available, the results would probably have been more meaningful. However, it was exactly the short time frame provided to both design and perform the exercises that promoted rapid interactivity between the participants and the quick use of research/ knowledge they were developing. Importantly, these exercises created awareness to the benefits of changing and developing methods in order to respond to different or changing contexts. In this sense, these exercises can be relevant to commercial practice, and in situations of limited time to develop a design project.

In a feedback session at the end of the day, all students evidenced the importance of the absorption of different methods and their collaborative aspect. They highlighted the relevance of the interchange of points of view and privilege that is to have a fresh input on their research and working methods, thereby effectively functioning as co-researchers.

The presence of the word democracy in the title of the collaboration, frequently asked during the two days a closer attention to the benefits of what the participants were working on to the whole group. This detail undoubtedly played a pivotal role in shaping the resulting methods. In this sense, it is also pertinent to note the willingness to discover what a non-designer would do when facing the issues they were investigating. Clearly, as it was possible to observe and listen in the final discussion and feedback session, graphic design does not produce structural change in society on its own, and the methods allowed them to both engage in debate, but also to realise the limitations of their discipline. Values such as solidarity and emancipation through criticism and debate were adopted in direct relation to the intentions of critical design detailed in Chapter 2 and addressing key struggles of criticism noted in Chapter 3.

Workshop session 2 (London, ᴜᴋ)

The workshops below were held in London on the 21 and 22 March 2013, at the Royal College of Art. Following the Amsterdam workshops, the ʀᴄᴀ students had the responsibility to prepare the visit of the Sandberg students and to organise the events for the two days. In a meeting that preceded the students' visit, I presented to them potential strategies and questions that could be addressed. What was discussed was the pertinence of giving continuity to the debates they started in Amsterdam, and even more importantly, to allow other students and designers access to them, in order to be able to build upon the work they had been and would be developing. This allowed the students to identify the specificities of the work produced in Amsterdam instead of following suggestions literally. In other words, to focus on the collaboration's object of study—design methods and democracy—and importance of making the discoveries and discussions public. Student A informed by e-mail the students intentions, by saying:

> (...) we have divided the two publication related activities on the first day to: i) content and ii) form. Following strict rules and methodology (set by us), both of these occasions will serve as forums to discuss and choose a direction to follow. (Student A, e-mail 14 March 2013)

It is therefore relevant to mention that as in Amsterdam, the discussions held with the students had the goal of enabling them to independently analyse the issues at stake in the project and their own research, and to plan how to address them methodologically.

Exercise 1 – Cut-up Manifesto

The first (surrealist) exercise was produced using material requested by e-mail two weeks in advance. All students were asked to bring two books that were either an on-going or long-lasting influence in their research. The result was a diverse and eclectic library, which was on display on an improvised shelf during the two days. This request enabled the students to have instant access to a selected bibliography that allowed them to have an expanded understanding of the scope of everyone's research interests.

Each student was asked to produce a manifesto by using content from at least two different books. What the exercise achieved was that each student was introduced to different books, which would end up intersecting their own research directly or indirectly, as the whole group of students shared a common interest: to use graphic design as a tool for political, social criticism and method unified their interests. The output of the workshop manifested itself in different forms: collages, photocopied and reassembled parts of text, or even small publications. Each presentation of the outcome transformed itself into a performative act in which the participants reacted to the produced content after introducing the books that were used in their project.

Figure 28. Selection of manifestos, Royal College of Art, London, 2013.

Figure 29. Detail of a manifesto, Royal College of Art, London, 2013.

Figure 30. Colelctive bibliography on display, Royal College of Art, London, 2013.

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Exercise 2 – The Myth of Democracy (Part 1)

This exercised focused on the play *The Eumenides* (458 BC) by Greek Playwright Aeschylus. It started by each of the play's characters being randomly assigned to the participants, thereby involving every student in the exercise. With candles providing a dramatic visual effect in the room in which the workshop was taking place, white masks that were given to all of the 'normal' citizens and golden masks given to the gods maximised the aforementioned effect. *The Eumenides* tells a story about the shift of a lawless Greek justice system to a democratic one, which would include the introduction of courts, trials and the participation of elected representatives elected by the citizens of Athens. This play was used as a pretext to engage in a discussion around the birth of democracy and to allow the different groups, defined by the assigned 'gods', to devise a variety reflections and visual strategies that would be presented in the following day. **Dinner**

Figure 31. Authoritarian display. Royal College of Art, London, 2013.

During dinner, which was cooked together by both groups of students,, another surrealist method was attempted (Exquisite Corpse). The first participant would choose an image from the Internet and write a word that would classify it. After writing it on a piece of paper, the word would be passed to the next person who would read what he or she wrote but would not have access to the image. The following participant would only have access to the word written by the person immediately before him or her. Once a full round would be complete, the final person would select an image that reacted to the word he or she chose. This playful exercise allowed the group to build

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an image bank of contradictory meanings, which produced unexpected material related to the title and focus of the project. The display and decoration of the food was also an opportunity to illustrate different approaches to democracy (e.g. from parliamentary to presidential).

Exercise 2 – The Myth of Democracy (Part 2)

During the morning, all the participants presented their reflections to the group. Each of the four groups introduced their ideas in a different way. The first opted to argue that their present generation would be the first one with worst financial prospects than their predecessors. This realisation opened up perspectives and how could this reality affect not only the way they saw and make politics, but also their way of defining and approaching design. The second group dedicated time to visually investigate the masks they were given, especially connecting them to the act of dissecting layers of political speeches and their visual apparatus. By first projecting a moving face on a mask worn by another person, and then slicing the mask in two, this group was able to show the film of the performance while debating the issues they were particularly interested in debating, such as politicians leading double lives.

Interpreting and illustrating the concept of guilt explored in Aeschylus' play, the third group created a collective performance in a separate room. With everyone wearing masks, they would select the few who would not be allowed to wear one and be in a demeaning position (seating instead of standing) in relation to the observers (wearing white masks) and the ones who would get closer and confront them, wearing golden masks. The exercise was always performed in silence, generating an introspective environment and revealing once again the power of the mask as a visual device of false neutrality.

Finally, the fourth group used the masks to create a hybrid of human and unicorn. They pursued the construction of their argument through the use of costumes, by telling a surreal story about illusion, fantasy, power and totalitarianism with North Korea functioning as a backdrop for their narrative

Exercise 3 – Visual Power

Conducted by student B, this exercise provided an opportunity for visual and political criticism. He opted to use this platform to impose an authoritarian environment, by loudly demanding that everyone would remain quiet and only perform an action when instructed to do so. By imposing a climate that immediately balanced between fun and seriousness, the performative qualities of the workshop leader revealed an important impact on the attention and commitment of the participants. They were willing to see what this attitude would produce and rapidly assumed the intended persona.

Figure 32. Student placing an image during the Visual Power exercise. Royal College of Art, London, 2013.
Figure 33. Authoritarian display. Royal College of Art, London, 2013.

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In advance of the workshop, every participant had been asked to bring three printed images on the notion of power, with all the subjectivity that the word entails. On a large blank wall, the workshop leader indicated that on the left would be placed the images that the participants considered to be 'low-power' and on the right 'high-power'. One by one, all participants placed their images on the wall. However, there were two more elements to be considered. On the top, 'soft-power' and on the bottom 'hard-power'. With the axis fully formed, the decision was justified by the workshop leader, arguing that soft-power was more persuasive and long-lasting than one which would exist in physical form.

Every participant, upon being called by the workshop leader, was then requested to look at the wall in silence for two minutes, in what became an introspective and solemn exercise. With everyone watching, each of the participants would be nominated to go to the wall and move any of the images they did not considered correctly placed. This would have to be followed by an explanation of why this move was necessary. The act of altering the placement of the images continued for a long period of time until everyone would agree, with the same images being moved many times and even returning to their original position on the wall. The result was a carefully considered and thoroughly discussed visual exercise, with many political, cultural, social and religious layers being debated and revealed.

The second session finished with a discussion about potential outputs of the collaboration, with emphasis on a publication. Four groups were randomly assembled and had to present to the whole group their proposals, having in mind four main elements to be considered: content, form, media and responsibility.

Even before their individual reflections took place, a heated discussion occupied significant time. This was due to the fact that some of the participants did not want to produce an outcome or even something that could be considered finished. The responsibility of the designer-researcher was then put forward as a topic for discussion, as someone who should allow his/her peers to build upon his/her work, and open up platforms for that to happen.

Each group presented different proposals and an assembly was formed in order to vote for the most appropriate proposal. It was then agreed to do a template that would rotate through each of the participants, and which everyone could add, and edit the content of

the book whenever the file gets to them. Each person would be given a short time frame while the file would be with them, with the next person already waiting for it, thereby increasing a sense of responsibility.

Conclusions

Both the workshops held in Amsterdam and in London, allowed the participants to develop their own design methods, thereby promoting their critical autonomy. This was a key goal of the project, namely promoting critical distance to their object of research and cultivating the capacity to create and adapt to different methods and shifting contexts and actors. The title of the collaboration kept the integrity and orientation of the methods aligned with the goals proposed from the outset, with an important dimension of solidarity. The speculative and fictional approach that many of the exercises developed, revealed how design fiction can generate a particularly critical forum and approach to design, whilst being able to productively balance fun and seriousness.

The workshops made visible the tendency of the participants to seek refuge in dialogue and avoid forms of visual materialisation about the issues they were discussing and investigating. This reinforced the idea of a recurrent gap between theoretically-grounded critique and forms of visual knowledge production in design approaches operating undet the banner of the terms investigated in this thesis. In this sense, the visual/ practical exercises added an important element to reflect upon, while also providing a prompt to discuss the importance of having the responsibility to allow other people to build upon their work. This was evidenced by the unwillingness to compile the students' findings in a book form. However, a small publication was produced by a group of the Sandberg Institute students. It contains an essay that runs throughout the book and that is the result of the themes and issues mentioned in the presentations in Amsterdam and London. Appearing in pages cutting the rhythm of the essay, it is possible to see spreads displaying key sentences that suggest the students' approach to the project and graphic design as an investigative tool such as: "contradiction as a strategy," "we don't distinguish between reality and fiction" and "personal is political." The book archives many of the exercises in pictures, as well as a selection of output, such as the book covers designed in the context of the exercise *Post-book*.

The conclusions drawn after the first session in Amsterdam were confirmed after the session in London. This was particularly notorious in the use of design fiction as a design method, employing a variety of performative, fictional exercises to both speculate about alternative pasts, dystopian futures and tactics for preferable futures. Other exercises, such as the one on visual power for example, were aligned with criticism's need to continuously question established power structures, as suggested in Chapter 3. Finally, *Exercises in Democracy* also saw another development: the Sandberg Institute students organised a series of performances at the conference *What Design Can Do* (2013). They built upon the opening performative exercises held in Amsterdam, but asked the participants to embrace a non-division between reality and fiction to arrive at a series of utopias in the form of crowd-sourced ideas[83], making a pertinent connection with design fiction. It is also relevant to note the emergence of the architecture and urban space temporary Masters programme at the Sandberg Institute, *Designing Democracy*, announced at the end of 2013.[84]

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83   The manifesto can be read on the *What Design Can Do* (2013) programme, p.85.
84   Designing Democracy (2014) [Internet] Available from: ‹http://sandberg.nl/designing-democracy› [Accessed 16 March 2015]

Figure 34–38. Spreads from the book produced at the end of the project, with an essay, reflections and several proposed design tactics.

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Supporting Workshops

The workshops detailed below support the central workshops described above. These constitute smaller experiments that informed the workshops above, while in other cases support the theorisation process.

Workshop 4 – Politicisation of the Argument

Introduction

This workshop was held at the London College of Communication on the 11th November 2013 with 22 students from the BA Design Cultures. All the participants were working on a project focusing on the East-London neighbourhood of Brick Lane, with the goal of developing visual essays. The aims of the workshop were to introduce the students and raise awareness to the multiple possibilities of visualising ongoing research, and continuously critically challenging the material being gathered. This workshop was specifically designed in order to allow the participants to critically construct their argument, building upon workshop 2. It investigated the development of the argument as a tridimensional construction, building upon Van Toorn's 'gearbox' and the multifarious investigation suggested by ANT in Chapter 3. Aligned with criticism's central goal of debate, and with previous knowledge about the students' object of research, the workshop put emphasis on bringing to the centre of the design process its political, cultural, historical and religious dimensions.

Description

Each participant was asked beforehand to bring between 5 and 15 images printed on an A4 sheet of paper. When asked to display the material they brought, students instinctively scattered the different images on tables—some more arranged, others simply in piles. This was the intended starting point because when asked to describe the images they brought and what they said about Brick Lane, the discourse was generally vague, simplistic and generic. Shopping, markets, food, graffiti, crowds and religion were some examples of the themes that were loosely presented.

On a large white wall, an axis was designed with masking tape, labelled in each of the extremities: cultural on the left, religious on the right, historic at the bottom and contemporary at the top. Students were then asked to place their images accordingly. This prompted a series of immediate responses as some participants started to either disagree with the choices made by their colleagues or doubtful regarding their own. When all the images assumed a final location, each student was asked to justify their positions in relation to the axis. As one presented after the other, it became evident the existence of contradictory choices. After each student presented, they were asked to move any of the images on the wall that they thought need to be more appropriately positioned, having to argue their choices.

Figure 39. Students organising the images/ research on the wall.
Figure 40. Students organising the images from superficial to central.

The four initial labels intentionally and provokingly positioned politics at the centre of the discussion, knowing that any images of religious nature would create an awareness of its presence in Brick Lane. This did not pass unnoticed, as questions begun to emerge in regards to this choice of axis. It was important that these questions appeared because they started to point to an awareness of categorisation and labels as a mandatory element to engage in debate and to develop an argument, whether verbal, written or visual. These questions allowed the students to see that different labels would yield different results that would reconfigure and challenge the position of the images, but as importantly, how their meaning would be affected when standing next to other images. Other possible axes were debated and how these could range from formal, to historic or even very context-specific in order to achieve greater levels of precision as their research progressed. Likewise, differently shaped grids could generate other debates, and axis could even be overlaid to generate knowledge that would not be apparent at first sight.

The next section of the workshop proposed a completely different look at the same material they had been gathering. All sheets were brought down from the wall and had to be organised on a long, narrow table at the centre of the room. On one end of the table, the students had to place what they considered to be more superficial in relation to the subject being researched and on the other, what they saw as being central and fundamental. As the images started to be spread on the table, spontaneous discussions started again, particularly when students were placing images next to the extremity that signalled what was central to Brick Lane.

As many students were working on visual essays, this mode of organising the material being gathered generated the possibility of having a tridimensional perspective of their argument. Not only did it allow to walk through the material and discuss its appropriateness in relation to Brick Lane, but could also allow that other categories could be placed at the end of the table. It would, too, function as a visual compass, making sure that the superficial and the central and carefully and consciously placed and manipulated.

Conclusions

Students reported that it was useful to know how to organise and structure the often chaotic and intuitive manner in which they conduct research and gather the material

to inform their projects. They also said that the first exercise heavily influenced the choices and how they performed on the second—more informed, aware and critical. While the first exercise is something that they argued would be more useful at the beginning or middle point of a project, the second could be used throughout the whole project as an orientation mechanism.

Workshop 5 – Political Compass (2)

Aims and Context

This workshop took place at the London College of Communication and existed in the context of the final major projects that the 3rd year students of BA Graphic Media Design were working on at the time. It built upon an earlier workshop at the University of Westminster and served to provide a second test with the same methods being applied in order to observe possible patterns in the process and outcome.

Description

The session started by asking students to write their name on a tag and place it on an axis with their political affiliations. The use of the *Political Compass* built upon its use at the University of Westminster. The questionnaire was completed in full in the previous workshop at the University of Westminster mentioned above and therefore, it was possible to generate a global political map of the whole class by overlaying all the results. More than serving as an overview of the students' ideological affiliations, the resulting work was used as both a prompt for discussion and a guiding tool for the duration of a design project. The session that was run at the London College of Communication adopted a quicker approach by drawing the axis and asking students to position themselves. There was a general reluctance to publicly reveal political affiliations, with very few exceptions (2 in a group of 12). Therefore, students tended to position themselves at or very near the centre to not polarise or spark any reaction. While this was applicable to most of the group, it was particularly noticeable with Asian students, bringing to the fore cultural traditions, impact and perception of the subject, more specifically, politics.

The next step was to ask students to place one example of their work that they considered representative of the position they chose, on the wall. The axis remained in place. On another wall, a new line was drawn. On one extremity, the word radical, on the other, the word conventional. Moderate was at the centre. This allowed a confrontation of choices and prompted a series of questions: how is a left wing position aligned with a radical position? Is conventional aligned with right wing? What kind of overlaps can happen?

Conclusions

This workshop enabled a critical confrontation of ideological approaches to design, an exposure to preconceived ideas about what graphic design work is actually achieving and if the students' approach to design is informing and challenging these positions. It also promoted criticism of the students' working methods: what was radical about the design process used by the student who positioned himself as radical? How does it sit in relation to both what he considers to be radical design work and how radical work has been documented in design history? These became not only theoretical, but practical concerns.

Workshop 6 – Defamiliarisation and design fiction

This workshop was held at the University of Westminster in November 2013, and constituted a short exercise in defamiliarisation and design fiction. This exercise, which derived from a personal interest, consisted in understanding the construction of reality by mainstream media, namely through magazine covers. Two trips were organised: one to the local supermarket Tesco and another to the newspaper shop WHSmith. Their goal was to observe, reorganise and propose different readings of the news via magazine covers. This exercise invited students to see what meanings of the covers would and could be altered by placing different magazine next to them or partially covering them in different positions. By reshuffling the location of the magazines, it was possible to construct new interpretations of specific covers, in what was an editorial exercise in defamiliarisation. What was and is a personal habit and recurrent exercise of self-initiated research— became an investigative method that became useful in the exercises that followed.

At a time when the mass surveillance revelations, namely the program *PRISM*, by the whistle-blower Edward Snowden were being reported by the journalist Glenn Greenwald and numerous media outlets, the pop artist Katy Perry released an album with the same name. This allowed showing students potential connections between popular culture and pivotal societal phenomena. A parallel design of Perry's album *PRISM* was then proposed to the students, one that revealed political intentions behind its title and album track list, which includes titles such as *Ghost* and *International Smile*. Such quick exercises allowed the students to engage in political discussions, but most importantly, it showed them to cultivate their awareness for opportunities to be critical, and the implications of manipulating, appropriating and using design fiction as an investigative design method

Figure 41. CD cover produced to exemplify a possible approach to design fiction.

Practice for professional contexts

The present research aims to generate methods for the development of a critical graphic design practice, with specific attention to investigating such methods from a practitioner's perspective. In this sense, the projects detailed in this section exist in such context. However, there are limitations in the scope of the clients represented here. The commissioners/ clients in the projects outlined in this section are in cultural, educational and political/news sector. Even though with different degrees of openness to debate and autonomy given to the designer, these commissioners provided privileged situations in which they saw the designer as researcher and editor, and open to debate and arguments. They all knew beforehand the kind of approach Modes of Criticism adopts and were actively looking to explore—and challenge—an expanded role of the graphic designer. The data collection methods in this section are feedback from the commissioners, as well as interpretative, self-reflexive analysis. The projects detailed here are both informed by and informing the workshops conducted in an academic environment.

New World Parkville

Context

Margarida Correia is a Portuguese artist whose photographic work recurrently focuses on objects of affection, issues of belonging and the exploration of the relationship between the people who originally owned the objects and those who inherited them. The project *New World Parkville* followed the artist's interest in this kind of documentation and representation.

In 2009, Correia was commissioned by *Real Art Ways*, an arts institution from Hartford, Connecticut (US) to develop a project with the local community. Her work consisted of a laborious investigation and documentation of the traditions and legacy of Hartford's Portuguese emigrant community. From retired Fado singers to radio presenters, Correia's work aimed to gather information about their (now mystic) ideas of the country they left many decades ago. The project — now at an extended stage — was going to be exhibited at the Museum of Electricity, Lisbon (Portugal), presenting those found objects and lost stories in the Hartford area, in order to reveal and recover symbols, rituals and history. *New World Parkville* undoubtedly deals with

issues and material that can be maximised by the designer, such as historical references, sociological research, iconography and a myriad of cultural manifestations in various forms. Furthermore, Correia's work permanently navigates between subtlety, mysticism and subversiveness, which encourages a critical discourse between the artist, the context of the exhibition and the designer during the research and production of the publication. The kind of reflective explorations this art publication set out to pursue has an important heritage.

Description

In *The Portable Art Space* (1996), designer and educator Anne Burdick notes the limitations, but also the possibilities and potential of the art catalogue. She highlights that the catalogue "exists in the service of art and artist" and that "it is primarily an institutional document that is equal parts commemoration, evidence and archive," (Burdick, 1996, p. 28) while evidencing the dense network of agents involved in the production of the art catalogue. Burdick, however, reveals the many situations in which it was possible to counter the traditional (delusional) white cube catalogue, by making it a "site-specific interpretation." (Burdick, 1996, p. 28) The essay also serves as an important reminder of the rich history of institutional and contextual critique through book design that preceded the art and design self-publishing boom of the 2000s and the renewed interest in the book form, publication practice and the book as an exhibition space.

Following this tradition, criticism could play a vital role whilst designing the book: identifying and mapping the factual, creating room for historical connections and generating (maximising) space for adding critical layers to the reading experience. The specificities of both the constructed photos and the ones collected by Correia, collapsed almost any distinction between what was considered to be fine art and what was a reproduction of an original document, now too, elevated to the status of the former. In this thin line that separates both, there was space to allow the documents to return to their original state.

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Figure 42. Cover of *New World Parkville.*
Figure 43. Endpage and first page of the book.
Figure 44. Spread with the section with essays.

Figure 45. Detail, hand-written captions by the artist.
Figure 46. Detail, selection of Portuguese vinyl records, confronting pop music with politically-engaged music.
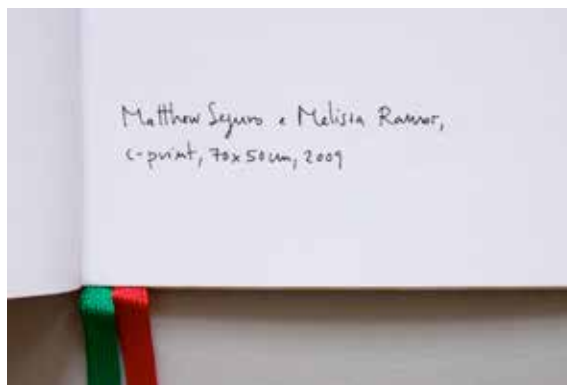
After writing a short text about my preconceived ideas on the subject the artist was exploring, practical issues had to addressed, such as the quote for the production of the book. While the text was written with the goal of confronting my assumptions with informed research at a later stage of the design of the book – thereby promoting a slower production speed – the necessity to request a quote accelerates the design process, thereby creating an unavoidable friction. Writing slows down the often amnesiac, fast journey that professional practice imposes on the design process, forcing critical decisions to be more carefully considered and accountable due to the importance and weight of the written word.

The book aims then to transcend the mere documentation of the exhibited work, by being more than an extended caption and instead working as an independent object capable of highlighting hidden narratives and opening doors for discussion and tension

to emerge beyond its original context, the exhibition. A continuous negotiation recurrently present in this kind of design work was also part of the design decisions: the book validates the quality of the work it carries, the artist and the institution paying for its production. This is also noted by Burdick. (Burdick, 1996, p. 28).

The collection of vinyl records, which assumes a central role in the context of the book, provided an opportunity to promote the kind of layered meanings Bruinsma associated to design as criticism in Chapter 3. Politically engaged records (namely historically associated with the Carnation Revolution) were always placed opposite to populist and pop ones. This allowed a constant confrontation of content and form, making the distinction more visible. The dimensions of the book have in mind the possibility of reproducing the majority of the documented objects in real scale, but most importantly, they seek to provide a relevant platform for the diverse works to establish connections with each other. A reference to an approximate size of the many scrapbooks documented by Correia was also considered. It is then important to say that emphasis was put on the context of the work and not as much on its formal and physical qualities.

By editing all the work, including an article by Sociologist Glória de Sá and the artist, the knowledge about several entry points for critical statements through design decisions, increased. This informed the awareness that the book should expand – and indeed question – the experience that the audience would have in the exhibition space, thus obliging the publication to part away from that particular setting. Sequence, binding and the hand-drawn captions were determined by the artist's research process, as a critical archive that could be read starting in different sections, with surprises attempting to interrupt the possibility of a continuous linear narrative.

Conclusions

Upon reflection, other approaches could have possibly yielded more relevant results. For example, the reproduction of a 1960s pattern used in the interior of the book contrasts with the contemporaneity and ambiguity of the cover. It references the interior of one of the many scrapbooks Margarida Correia photographed – which are present in the book itself – forcing an historical time travel for the reader. However, a bolder decision such as the introduction of us imagery (e.g. the stars of the flag versus

the Portuguese visual heritage signalled by its flag) would provoke and suggest a bigger absorption of cultures, amplifying a nostalgic displacement provoked by many photographs.

Although this project allowed a critical approach, it also revealed that the levels of 'criticality' are dependent of a series of factors, highlighted here and by Burdick in *The portable art space* (1996). The extent to which an art catalogue allows to embed critique in its process and outcome, varies from client to client, from artist to artist and the quantity and quality of the network of agents involved in its production. It is therefore a more constrained platform for reflection due to the compromises that have to be done, if compared with self-initiated, research-oriented work. However, with the mindset advocated by Burdick, it is always possible—and necessary—to find those critical opportunities.

The book was part of several exhibitions, such as *A Book Show* (Brighton, 2011), *B Book Show* (London, 2012), *5th International Artists' Book Exhibition* (King St. Stephen Museum, Hungary, 2013), *Photobookshow Malmö* (Vasli Souza Gallery, Sweden, 2014) and included in collections such as the Smithsonian Library (Washington D.C., US), MUDAM (Luxembourg) and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (Lisbon, Portugal).
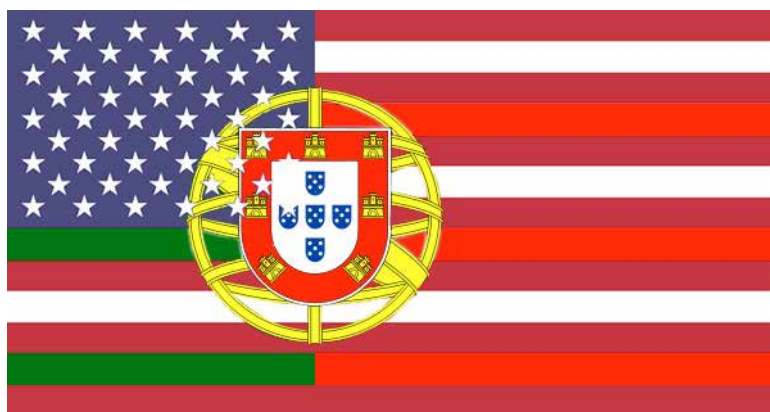
Figure 47. One of a series of 10 versions of fictional representatios, merging the US and Portuguese flags.

Context

This project existed first as self-initiated research, with the title *Invisible Markets.* It sought to investigate the ghost identity of 'the markets,' a term recurrently used in mainstream media in the wake of the global financial crisis. This series of 12 posters seeks to provide a platform for critical reflection instead of emitting a closed message. Aligned with the critical intentions investigated in the thesis, this visual research did not to look for imagery normally associated with the financial crisis—such as photos of stock-exchanges, banks or money—but sought to use instead financial data and news. The main intention was to promote an interest in information, and not to create an immediately clear and closed message, but seek an approximation to the dialogic effect, as put forward by Van Toorn. For this reason, the stock and news ticker of US-based mass media economics corporation Thomson Reuters was chosen as a valid option. Over the period of 10 months, thousands of photos were taken at all times of the day in Canary Wharf, London.

Figure 48. Photo of the news ticker of Thomson Reuters, Canary Wharf, London, UK.

Over that period of time it was possible to recognise the focus on US, Middle East and Asia news, with an obviously always-present financial backdrop. The 'curated multimedia feeds', as Thomson Reuters calls them,[85] provide the audience a sense of emergency and authority, dominating a landscape dressed in glass. In between the indices of Nasdaq, Dow, FTSE 100, the 'commodities' gold, oil, corn and several currencies, three short sentences repeatedly headline what the company identifies as being most important. This same information, when provided in a varied and substantial quantity creates an opportunity that allows an understanding of what the dominant mass media gives attention to, and how it crafts, or curates, the (politico-financial) news. Here, it is possible to acknowledge the relation with the workshop at the University of Westminster, which focused on creating opportunities for the politicisation of image research and editing

While it would be neither possible nor desirable to randomly select snippets of information appearing on the ticker, the ones included in the poster produce conscious clashes and invite the audience to question them. There is a clear intention of being transparent about the manipulation of information, both by the media and the designer. The shift from day to night suggests that the information displayed on the posters was captured over a longer period of time, instead of being the crystallisation of a single moment.

In the context of this research project, ten posters were produced. They include, for example, an inversion of the traditional colours assigned on the screens and financial websites to the up (green) and down (red) stock arrows, which gain a problematic meaning, particularly in the context of a widely-spread economic crisis. Other posters include a visualisation of the phantasmagorical identity of 'the markets', so commonly invoked by those imposing austerity measures[86]. These include a typographic composition that seeks to illustrate the veiled identity of traders[87] and management of banks, insurance companies, mortgage corporations and subprime lenders. In addition,

85   This is described on their website. [Internet] Available from: ‹http://thomsonreuters.com/en/products-services/reuters-news-agency/online-news-services/digital-signage.html?subsector=political-news-services› [Accessed 11 October 2014]

86   Cambridge University economics lecturer Ha-Joon Chang argues in 2013 that "markets are in the end man-made devices for utilitarian purposes, not a force of nature that we should not try to resist." [Internet] Available from: ‹http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/10/royal-mail-bean-counting-market-forces› [Accessed 21 April 2014]. This quote was used in one the posters.

87   A series of posters for the data analysis company Palantir (2013) had an important impact on the design of these posters, as a consequence of their visual representation of hackers by pixelating their identity.

a visualisation of the logos of all the major institutions involved in the economic crisis was also created, with the goal of mapping them while making readibility difficult. Finally, a visual suggestion of the rising and descending values of the stocks was explored in order to expose some of the faces of 'the markets'. These posters use portrait shots of people who were either convicted of fraud or senior management of corporations involved in fraudulent activities associated with the present economic crisis. The density of the poster becomes more problematic than the typographic one, as it triggers curiosity by the reader, generating questions about the identity of those people and what have they done to be displayed in such manner. An integration of symbolic representations (such as logos) and the people responsible for opaque and criminal acts could perhaps have produced more nuanced results, thereby generating a richer reading experience.

Posters include collages using blown-up photocopies of the aforementioned people. These build upon the original intention of reflecting the upwards and downwards movement of stocks, but create instead a ghost, surreal identity that only gives hints of their origin by showing half-hidden typography in which it is possible to read 'world economic forum'. The posters produced in the context of the *Ghost Markets* series can be separated into three categories: 1) discursive/ open; 2) subversive; 3) mapping. While this categorisation is useful to understand the posters' goals and design approach, it also reveals that some can be positioned in between categories and the existence of overlaps. These experiments, which investigated different forms of approaching the same subject, using ANT to gather data that could be incorporated in them, allowed also an integration of methods explored in the workshops, such as visualising the argument. However, after having the possibility of producing work for the *Occupied Times*, the limitations of each of these individual approaches gave way to a multi-layered cover aligned with Bruinsma's call for the activation of meanings as well as Van Toorn's dialogic image.

Figure 49. *Down and up*, A1, digital print, 2013
Figure 50. *Finantial (political) news*, A1, digital print, 2013
Figure 51. Collage with people involved in the 2008 finantial crisis, used for the poster announcing the conference and exhibition *Connect the Dots* organised in the context of this research.
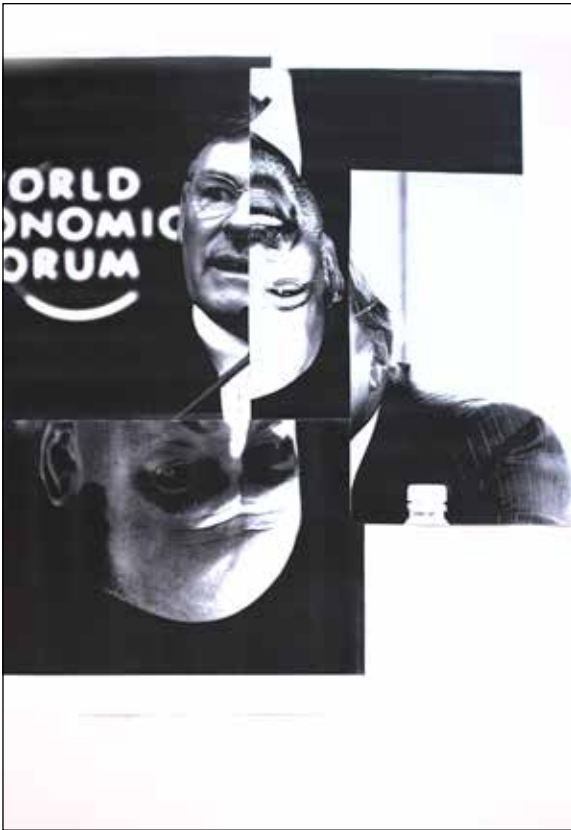
Figure 52. *Ghost markets.* 70 x 100 cm, digital print, 2014.

Figure 53. *The Markets*, digital print, 70 x 100 cm, 2014.

Figure 54. *The right information*, digital print, 70 x 100 cm, 2013.

When the *Occupied Times* approached me to contribute to their latest issue focusing on the politics of madness, it was possible to adapt one poster to function as the cover of the newspaper. The image bank of photos taken in London's Canary Wharf allowed to incorporate new information while amplifying its discursive ambitions. In the cover, it is visible the stock value of the pharmaceutical giants GlaxoSmithKline, as well as healthcare corporation UnitedHealth GP and UnitedTech which are followed by Visa. When one is trying to condense extremely broad and complex issues into just a single image, the resulting effect is most probably weaker than when addressing a particular event or situation. It was exactly in this context that other research projects (such as *The Architecture of Gambling* and *Golden Times*) were initiated in order to function as more containable case studies. Yet, reducing the issue to the relation between politics and mental health allowed an exploration of the definition of design as criticism being developed here.

Conclusions

The cover for the *Occupied Times (OT)* allows multiple readings, while framing the political and financial news between Thomson Reuters' trademarked and dangerously ambiguous slogan: "The right information in the right hands leads to amazing things." The cover attempted therefore to produce an open message with the audience—based on solidarity and liberation—not authority. The exercises detailed above contributed decisively to identify an opportunity to pursue such design proposals, to seize an opportunity for criticality.

Providing feedback in an interview, the designer Tzortzis Rallis of the *Occupied Times*, notes that "some read this image as a visual metaphor to the collapsing of the markets or a person", while others interpreted it "as a critique of mental issues related to the way the economic system works." Issue 24 is considered a success by the OT collective because of the high number of visits to online articles and the popularity of the printed version of the newspaper in many distribution points across London. They note, however, that this is not necessarily and solely connected to the design of the cover, as the interest in the theme and the authors of the articles play a crucial role in increasing the popularity of a specific issue.

Rallis highlights that this issue of the *OT* is distinct from many of its previous coversand that the design deliberately avoids "literal pictorial solutions and instead proposes an open message that reflects a conversation with the reader of this specific theme." He also acknowledges that the design takes "into consideration production aspects that were often ignored in earlier designs. For instance, it builds upon the physical form of the publication. Therefore the components of the cover communicate equally when the tabloid paper is folded in half. In comparison, a visual drawback can be that the complex composition is more delicate when the publication is disseminated digitally, for example in small size thumbnails on *OT*'s online media." (Rallis to Laranjo, 2015).
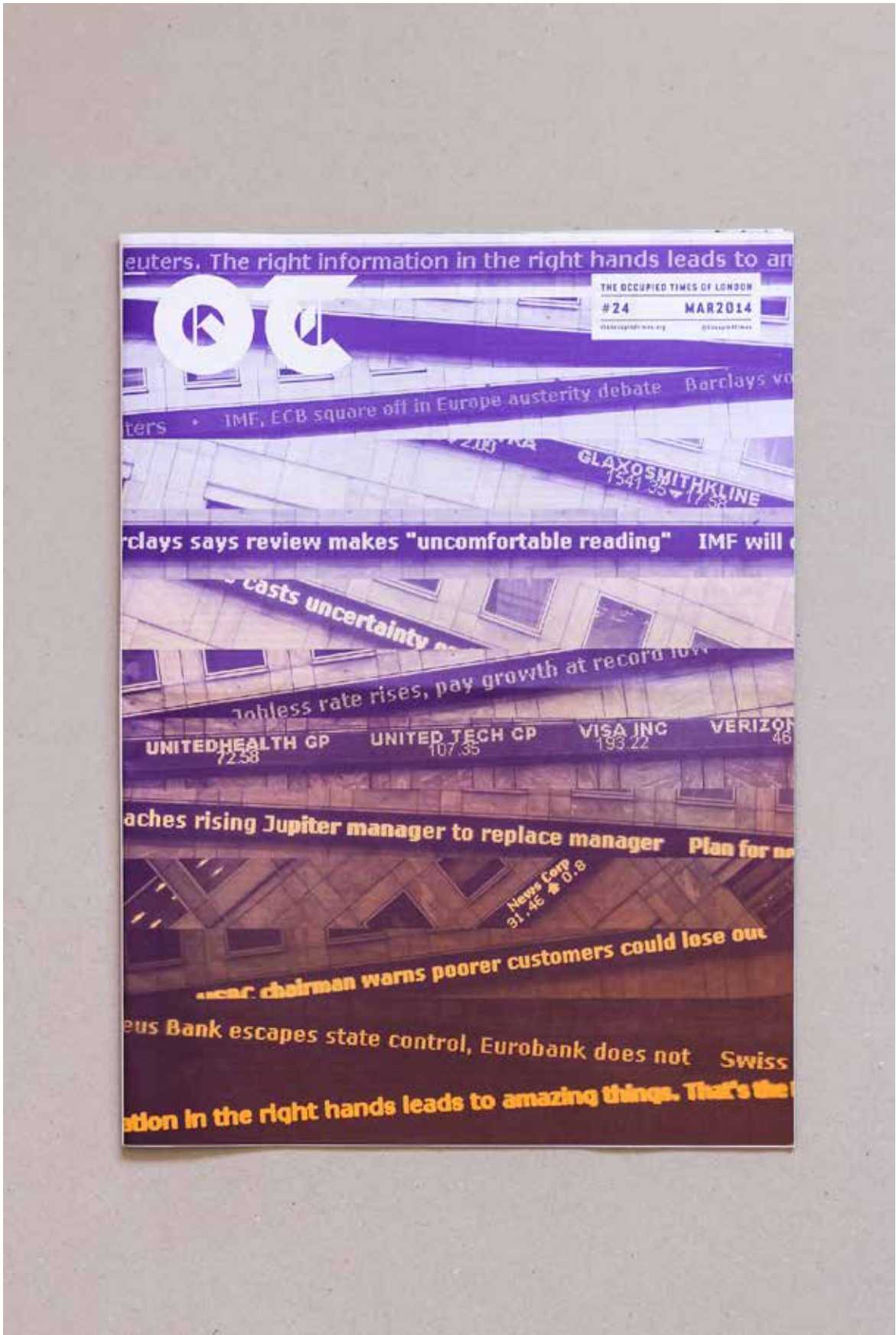
Figure 55. Cover of the *Occupied Times 24 – The Politics of Madness*, 2014.

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Designing for Exhibitions

Aims and Context

Designing for Exhibitions was the title of a one-day PhD symposium held at Central Saint Martins, London, 2014. It existed in the context of the conference *Chaos at the Museum*, which focused on the evolving role of exhibition design. The symposium aimed to bring together ongoing and recent research addressing the following key questions: "What is the relationship between the designer and the curator, the institution, the visitor?", "Who are the designers, producers, makers, authors of an exhibition?", and "How does exhibition design impact on the stories that are told and on the visitors' experiences of these stories?" One of the organisers of the colloquium, PhD candidate Jona Piehl, argues that exhibition design "is neither a process nor a product that can be examined in isolation; it always engages with and operates within a larger context." (Piehl, 2014, p. 3) This was the central concern of the visual identity for the event.

Description

During the design process, I was given access to the papers being submitted and accompanied the debate about the structure of the colloquium with its organisers, Jona Piehl and Claire Holdsworth. The project had a very specific and restricted audience: the participants who were presenting papers and invited delegates. Guiding visitors from the entrance of the college to the conference room, different posters attempted to challenge the expected content of an event focusing on exhibition design. Two different posters were on the walls, while an A5 booklet with the paper abstracts and contextualisation provided access to extended readings and the biographies of the speakers, as well as the programme.

This project adopted a series of methodological approaches. Following a request by the symposium's organisers, the speakers provided the images that they either cited in the papers or provided an illustration of their talks. The starting point were all the images submitted by the speakers, which illustrated their arguments or were referenced in their papers. They ranged from installation shots to professionally photographed objects being displayed in varied forms. Laying all the images on a table was a way to

see potential relation between them, but more importantly, to have the possibility of mixing them with other images that were illustrative of the wider context that Piehl was referring to, as well as issues that were object of research in the submitted papers. These included, for example, the large quantity of revelations by whistle-blower Edward Snowden profoundly affecting Western societies' awareness of surveillance, privacy and freedom and a culture of the self and the dependency on social media as signalled by the celebrity socialite Kim Kardashian.

Figure 56. Tumblr as exhibition, digital print, A1, 2014.

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Influences from workshops

The method of organising images expanded on a pragmatic categorisation developed in a workshop held at the University of Westminster in January 2014 with second year students from the BA Graphic Communication Design. Five to ten images had to be chosen to illustrate an identified topic. They were then sorted by importance (e.g. political, economic, cultural). This choice was then challenged once an image was placed with other images and their meaning changes, forcing the initial sorting to be reconsidered through group discussion. The importance and meaningfulness of the images was inevitably subjective. This subjectivity was used to reveal that meaning exist in context and can be altered by multiple elements, thereby encouraging the students to be aware of the importance of image editing and the implications of its manipulation.

A second exercise was also developed in the context of the workshop mentioned above. As students were working on the annual brief set up by the International Society of Typographic Designers, they were asked to bring five to ten images that identified key discussions and phenomena in contemporary society—from politics to pop culture. This had two goals: 1) to expose the different priorities each student has, promoting awareness and debate; 2) to create conditions for the relations between political, social and cultural events and their ongoing work to become visible and identifiable. Furthermore, this encouraged, too, that the initial set of images gets challenged and re-examined. It attempted to create conditions for criticality to be activated.

The first poster for *Designing for Exhibitions* produces a dense visual result with a great number of images being confronted by others that seem misplaced. Attempting to construct and open-ended argument, it invites connections between the objects, installation shots and their role in wider cultural and political phenomena such as the financial crisis, the popularity of the social media blogging website *Tumblr* and the rise of the '#selfie'—a self-portrait taken by stretching one's arm with a camera and sharing online by labelling it with an hashtag to describe what is already visible. Such behaviours have been increasingly present in the museum environment, as it is common for visitors to post pictures of themselves next to objects displayed in such contexts. This is not only an act of individual expression and exhibitionism, but also a marketing strategy encouraged by cultural institutions generating attention by suggesting an apparent engagement with the work on display.

Figure 57. The politics of exhibition design, A1,
digital print, 2014.
Figure 58. Cover and back-cover of the booklet for
Designing for Exhibitions, A5, 2014.

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The second poster proposes a reflection about the politics of the museum. In other words, the relations and hierarchies playing a fundamental role in exhibition design. Here it is possible to read typical museum roles such as marketing director, brand manager, head of curating, intern, museum director and education officer, amongst others. To illustrate these roles, many political figures were used with the aforementioned roles serving effectively as captions. This allowed to bring not only political figures to an event about exhibition design, but as importantly, brought to the attention of the participants pressing political issues that were being discussed at the time when the symposium was taking place. It is then possible to see the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Barrack Obama. Corruption scandals and the Ukraine/Russia conflict were then used to reflect on the politics of the museum. What the selection of these political figures and issues also allowed is to take advantage of the general, but varied, perception of both the politicians and opinion about the different conflicts. Therefore, labelling Obama or Putin as 'intern' will produce very different—and surely provocative—meanings in relation to who is chosen to be the museum director and curator. In this sense, this poster was complementary to the first, but adopted a different strategy, although with shared goals.

Finally, the A5 booklet accompanying the posters continues to share the visual identity's aims. The visual coherence and unity is sought not only by the visual discourse developed in all printed and digital media, but also by the typographic qualities of the block of text with the title of the symposium. This allows the cover and back-cover to be significantly different from the posters while addressing issues that are evoked in them. With the widely used Google pins over a recurrently used photo of a galaxy, it is possible to suggest not only the politics of the museum, but more importantly, the intersecting political and cultural issues that it cannot escape. It is for this reason that, as the reader drives attention away from an unlabelled pin at the centre of the cover, it can read words such as "#museumselfie", "surveillance" or "normcore". Inside of the end pages, it was possible to insert two sentences that build upon the visual discourse. At the beginning of the booklet, it is written "Audience? Visitor? Public? Society" with the goal of proposing a consideration of the important difference between them when doing exhibition design. At the end, and after discussion with the conference organisers, the last, provocative sentence attempts to make clear the need for a politicisation of the discipline, by stating: "Exhibition design is curating."

Figure 59. Poster installed in Central Saint Martins, London, 2014.
Figure 60. Section of the illustration adapted to screen, Central Saint Martins, London, 2014.

Conclusions

This project provides evidence of how the methods impacted professional practice and vice-versa. With limited financial resources, this project allowed to explore ways in which the design of the event could contribute to the content of the conference in a critical manner. The conference organiser, Piehl, states this importance in an interview conducted in January 2015. She says that "from the outset, the graphic elements for the colloquium were understood in terms of a double function. On one hand, they were considered as constituting the event's visual identity; as such, they needed to create a sense of visual presence and recognisability in the intellectual context of the main conference and the physical context of Central Saint Martins. On the other hand, and for me more importantly, the graphic elements were considered to act as a visual response to the colloquium's theme. In this role, the graphics appeared on the same level as the papers presented during the event, they were a visual contribution in addition to aspects such as marketing or wayfinding, acting as a visual frame to the event, almost a visual keynote." (Piehl, 2015)

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There were limitations to this approach. The A0 posters, although provocative, were still seen as just announcing the event or signalling the venue of the presentations. In this sense, there should have been more attention to how the narrative was displayed and activated in the space and aligned with the expected behavior in a symposium like this. On the other hand, the screensaver of the conference which gets substantial attention between presentations, proved to be influential, as unexpected elements such as a cut European Union flag, the conflict in Crimea and the rise of the selfie directly interacted with presentations that came to a conclusion and promoted connection between the objects shown by the presenters. This is also mirrored in Piehl's assessment that was visible between the presentations, an item that was not perhaps not initially thought of as particularly key, turned out to carry a larger role than expected not only in terms of its presence during the colloquium but also its legacy via the photographic documentation of the day. Conversely, says Piehl, "the emphasis on the visual content of the graphics, impacted on their role as wayfinding elements; especially the posters lost some of their functionality as navigational aids." (Piehl, 2015) It is also important to note that I chaired a session in the colloquium on exhibiting critical design in which it was possible to reconfirm the tendency by its practitioners to avoid accountability, and considering the generation of debate an automatic sign of success of a design project operating under this banner.

Self-initiated Research

The Architecture of Gambling

This project is the result of an ongoing interest in the aesthetics of gambling. In other words, the branding and visual tactics deployed by powerful businesses operating in the UK and with online activities registered in tax havens such as Gibraltar or the Isle of Man. This project took different forms and was used as a lab to test a series of approaches in using graphic design as an investigative tool.

The first exercise was perhaps the most obvious one: to subvert the name/logo of some of the betting companies. For example, in a photo where it was possible to read the name of the betting giant Ladbrokes, it reads instead 'Brokelads.' Three of these photos were exhibited in *Research in Progress – Pushing Boundaries and Practices* (2012), at the London College of Communication. By subverting the name of the logo, the posters displayed on the façade gain a different, perverse meaning in contrast with a decaying architecture and passer-by. This technique, commonly known as subvertising, has been overwhelmingly used in the last 20 years, most notably by the magazine *Adbusters.* Even though it may still work in specific contexts, it is now predictable, anticipated and largely ineffective.

After this collection of large-scale, manipulated photos, the focus was put on more quantifiable analysis. By gathering hundreds of photographs of façades of many different betting shops, it was possible to realise patterns and have access to more information about the visual tactics at work. This not only included typefaces, colour and composition used in branding and poster design, but also the way the windows are covered and how much is one allowed to see through the front doors. Screenshots of each betting company's website were also taken and archived. This information was made public in the exhibition mentioned above in the form of an A0 poster. The latter was made of A4 sheets with peelable labels. To be able to remove and hide some information was as much a need of stating that it was unfinished work, as it was of data and content that is recurrently eliminated or hidden from the public domain. However, while this interactive aspect of the poster draws an initial attention to it, it also banalises its content and effect by becoming over-playful, and allowing little access to further information.

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Figure 61. *Brokelads*, digital print, 30 x 20 cm, 2011

The next series of posters were more revealing. At the entrance of many betting shops it is possible to often observe trails of used betting slips. Inside, slip holders contain many dozens of slips with different branding, distinct rules and varied sports and events. In the digital age, these still form a central element in the betting process by making a conveniently dense, confusing bridge between the customer and the many flashing screens with constantly updating information, live transmissions and data. The first posters present the back and front of a big quantity of slips, respectively on the front and back of the poster. Even though the intention is to provide awareness of the wide range of tactics used against the clients, this approach ends up producing a visual result that could be used by the betting shop itself. Instead, other prints adopt a more informal composition, with slips overlapping one another in an apparently random way. If a big quantity of the backs of the slips constituted a dense, impenetrable array of information, the front is colourfully rich and allows glimpses of the diverse aggressiveness of the branding that betting shops use to allure their customers. The last poster explored this, by photocopying the front of many betting slips and just placing the back of one, diverging attention from the hypnotic allurement and to the reverse side of betting.

Figure 62. Installation shot, London College of Communication, 2012.
Figure 63. *The Architecture of Gambling* (detail), London College of Communication, 2012.

The project evolved then to the form of a 38-page visual essay that used important aspects of the visual research conducted to date. It uses a series of visual metaphors and makes visible the connections between, for example, gambling, banking and media. In between, hints of its geopolitical implications are inserted, either through flags (Isle of Wight, Gibraltar) and apparently disconnected captions taken from annual reports of some of the most notorious betting companies that are thriving in times of financial crisis such as Ladbrokes, William Hill and Paddy Power. A short version of this visual essay was published in *Modes of Criticism 1* (2015) [see Appendix G].

Figure 64 & 65. *Lucky no. 7.* (front and back),
50 x 70 cm, 2013.

Conclusions

This project allowed a study of different approaches to the production of a critical design; from subversive to provocative and informative. These constitute exercises that evidence what is argued in Chapter 2, namely via the use of subvertising as visual technique and its often uncritical effect. Many of the findings were further explored in there workshops— such as how to triangulate information in Workshop 1—or in professional projects (*Occupied Times 24*) and self-initiated research (*Golden Times*). *The Architecture of Gambling* functioned as a platform for awareness of the multiple approaches to a specific subject, functioning as a lab of experiments for other projects throughout this research. Exploring a variety of exercises, this project drew on hypotheses debated in Chapter 3 (such as mapping-based critique), also building upon Van Toorn's visual essay *Panorama of Habits* (2003) with the essay published in *Modes of Criticism 1*. In turn, this explored visual tactics investigated in Workshop 6, namely in introducing elements for defamiliarisation such as hints of closed shops and protest on the edges of the page. *The Architecture of Gambling* is an ongoing study that expanded from the UK to continental Europe and then to other parts of the world, as tax havens and tax avoidance make of this a global phenomenon. In this sense, the project can benefit from exploring the exercises of speculative visualisation suggested in Workshop 1, namely taking advantage of web media.
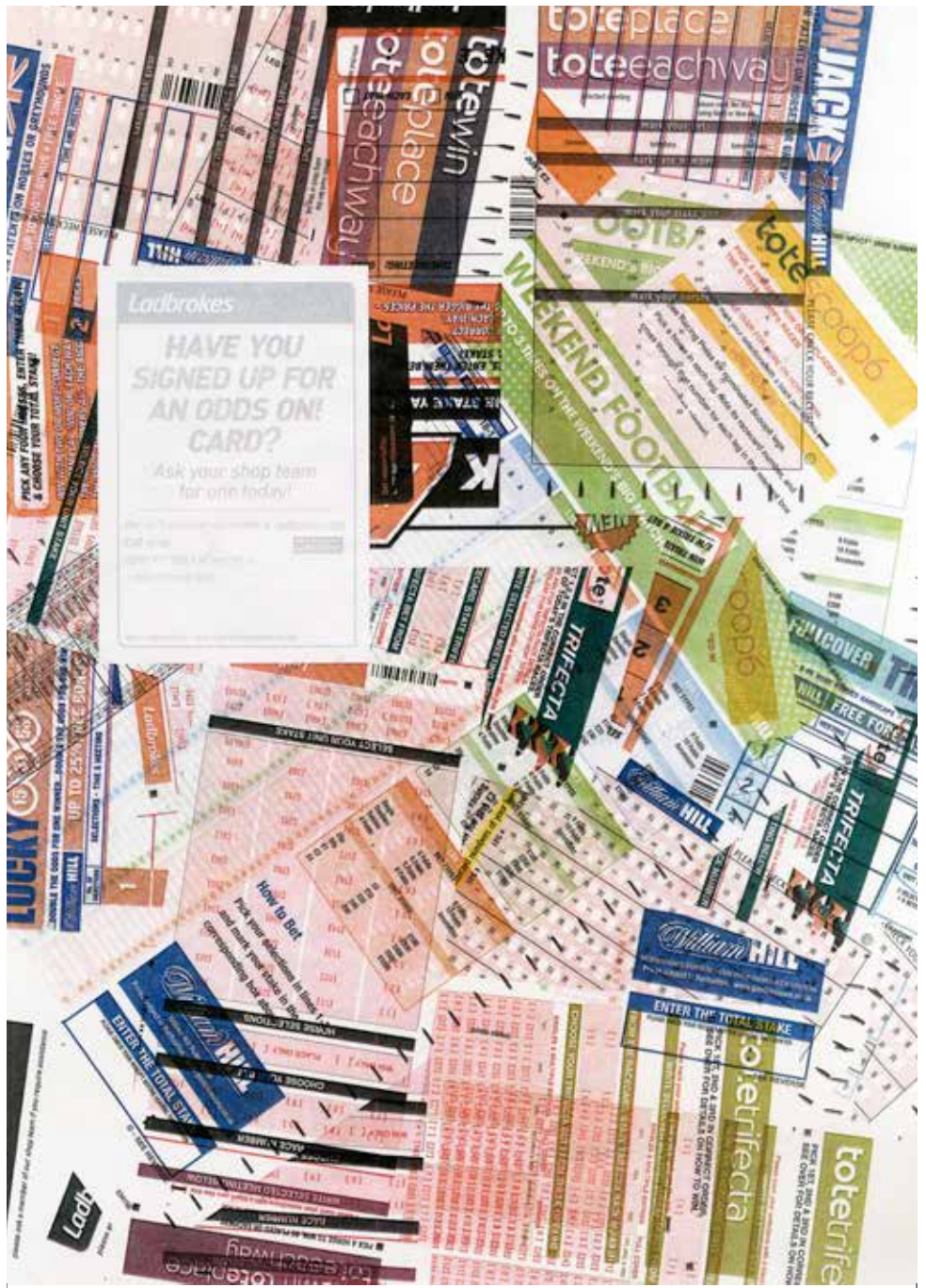
Figure 66. *Sign up*, digital print, 50 x 70 cm, 2013.

Figure 67. Spread, *Modes of Criticism* 1, 2015.
Figure 68. Spread 2, *Modes of Criticism* 1, 2015.

Golden Times

Following the 2008 financial crisis it was possible to observe an acute surge of pawnshops during frequent trips to Portugal. In cities such as Porto, Lisbon, Matosinhos, Braga and Faro it was not unusual to see three or four shops in the same street announcing that they were buying gold. Sometimes situated immediately next to banks, these shops capitalise on the anxiety and desperation created by the collapse of banks and mortgage companies, using dense and aggressive visual strategies. In contrast, their interior is often the opposite: minimal, with a red carpet welcoming the client to a transaction made at a table where the broker is awaiting. At the same time as these shops proliferated in the country, the Portuguese government created a polemic program to draw investment to the country titled *Golden Visas* or *Golden Residence Permit Programme.* By investing 500 thousand euros or more in the country—either in a company or through real-estate—a permanent visa is awarded.[88] This project ran parallel to *The Architecture of Gambling* and the research that originated the cover of the *Occupied Times.* This exercise served to create another platform to question and develop strategies to turn opinion into operational critique, to build upon Van Toorn's argument.

88   This scheme was also adopted by Spain (minimum investment also 500,000 euros), Cyprus (300,000 euros) and Greece (250,000 euros).

Description

An ongoing photographic documentation started in 2012, collecting façades of many pawnshops across Portugal. With over 500 photos, it was possible to start identifying two major patterns in ways of addressing the shops' target audience: bold, exuberant and dense façades with distorted typefaces, while the other attempts an approximation to corporate banking branding. But it is the most informal, quick and dense visual experiences that are predominant, with sandwich boards being a recurrent device to attract attention. In a report by the Portuguese National Parliament, two pawn shops buying gold were opening per day by the end of 2012.[89] At the same time police discovered a large network of tax avoidance and undeclared sales of gold, and the golden visas scheme lead to detentions at the Portuguese border agency for alleged corruption on granting this kind of visas and the exoneration of the minister of internal affairs.[90]

Figure 69. Digital photo building a collection of pawnshops. Matosinhos, Portugal, 2013.

89   See *Report from the Portuguese National Parliament* (2012). *Público.* [Internet] Available from: ‹http://www.publico.pt/economia/noticia/abriram-duas-novas-ourivesarias-por-dia-entre-janeiro-e-marco-1544938› [Accessed: 21 January 2015]

90   See *High rank members of the state in preventive custody because of the gold visas* (2014). *Público.* [Internet] Available from: ‹http://www.publico.pt/politica/noticia/altos-dirigentes-do-estado-ficam-em-prisao-preventiva-no-caso-dos-vistos-gold-1676734› [Accessed: 22 January 2015]

The nomadism of these shops is suggested in three prints, which reveal two photos in different colours, suggesting that it is the same, but out of focus. What initially may seem the same photo, reveals that actually it is the façade of a shop (in gold) and the empty, to rent, façade of the same space (in red). This is a different approach at suggesting different readings of a phenomenon when comparing to the prints in *The Architecture of Gambling* that featured the back and front of betting slips. Another set of two prints deconstructed the visual strategies employed by these shops by depicting them in a spiral form. This allows the inclusion of elements related to the golden visas in the middle of the composition, being therefore an exercise that builds upon the visual essay on gambling published in *Modes of Criticism 1*. It allows the suggestions of connections to related phenomena such as real estate, Chinese investment and visual tactics used by banks to soften consumers at a period of contestation such as the increased inclusion of children and the offer of bank cards to 10 year old kids depicting the famous brand Hello Kitty or by simply calling the bank card 'LOL'.

Figure 70. Ouro, digital print, A1, 2014.
Figure 71. Golden LOL, digital image, 2014.

Conclusions

While this project is unfinished, it is useful to note the important differences of producing critical design as an exercise of self-emancipation and to specifically generate such research for the public. The former can remain cryptic and inaccessible for someone new to the research, while the second one needs recognisable entry points for a wide audience, not recurring to stylistic signature but context-specific elements that develop solidarity with the audience instead of an indulgent authorial positioning. This project, clearly situated in the parallel lab mode described above, is self-emancipatory even though there is the intention of articulating all the findings in the form of a visual essay and large prints in the public domain. *Golden Times* highlights the proximity that critical design can have in cases such as this with the emergent field of design activism, as a project within this field would be explicitly directed at the public domain, but could borrow the critical methods and critical visual strategies being developed here.

Critical Writing

Modes of Criticism

In the context of the literature and practice review of this thesis, a series of informal conversations as well as in-depth interviews were conducted with key figures in critical design and practice such as Jan van Toorn and Anthony Dunne. These had as goal to survey other design disciplines and areas of research that intersected the specific interest of this thesis and the terminology it proposes to map in relation to graphic design: critical design and critical practice. Parallel to this—and to disciplines such as architecture, product design and interaction design—this study sought to identify predominant attitudes in contemporary graphic design practice as well as mapping active research with close proximity to the present one, namely on the politicisation of the designer and method. With these goals in mind, the magazine *Modes of Criticism* was initiated after identifying a gap in design discourse. It was created with three central aims: 1) to generate a platform that allowed to invite contributions from researchers, writers and practitioners with research interests intersecting that of this research; 2) expose academic research to a wider audience; 3) promote a diversity of approaches to writing and criticism as well as a platform for visual research. *Modes of Criticism* is also an invaluable platform to investigate and develop the role of the editor as critic. While there is a defined editorial position and approach, complementary and even confrontational arguments are offered in the publication. In this sense, the role of editor while conducting research allows access to a vast quantity of detailed debates and access to expert insight that reinforce, challenge and expand the research being undertaken and conclusions being drawn. All the essays are the result of direct invitations to contribute to the publication, and consequence of several conversations via e-mail and revised drafts with detailed comments and confrontation with the research undertaken in this thesis.

Description

The first issue has eight essays with a diverse range of approaches to writing and criticism. It seeks to highlight a crisis of the word 'critical' in relation to graphic design by providing an overview of recurrent problems with its use: from the emergence of the post-critical to the traditional Western view of the discipline, and its manifestations in curating and product design. *Modes of Criticism 1* is titled *Critical, Uncritical, Post-critical*, highlighting exactly a difficult terrain in which definitions overlap and are not free of nuances, paradox and contradiction. It is for this reason that the essay *Avoiding the Post-critical* (see Appendix G1) opens up the magazine, functioning as editorial. It is preceded by a shorter version of the visual essay *The Architecture of Gambling,* which welcomes the reader after the cover. It is placed here for two reasons: the first is to create a contrast with the typographic cover and back-cover. It uses a substantially different visual language and makes the act of the manipulation by the designer more apparent. The second reason is to add a wide variety of meanings, not only to the opening essay/ editorial, but also to all the other contributions. The first essay focuses on introducing a series of 'post' terms that indicate a depoliticisation of design: post-political, post-critical and finally post-graphic design. It traces the heritage of the term post-critical within architectural discourse by proposing what it can mean to graphic design and how it has been addressed in recent years. In this sense, the post-critical cannot be avoided but can instead be used for a different purpose: to critique the critical. This is the challenge put forward at the end of the essay and the central aim of this issue.

The designer Ian Lynam contributes with an essay titled *Weddings* (see Appendix G2). He uses an anecdote to grab the reader's attention and suggest that Western design thrives on instant nostalgia by listing several examples. *Curation, Cataloging and Negative Capability,* by Randy Nakamura provides a critique of the recent, recurrent trend in graphic design exhibitions of listing and archiving, arguing that it is too easy to blame technology as the culprit of such manifestation. The idea of cataloguing has become synonym of curation, shifting away from a tradition of genealogy. Exhibitions such as *Forms of Inquiry: the architecture of critical graphic design* (2007) and *Graphic Design: Now in Production* (2011) are used as case-studies, with the first one's subtitle considered to be inappropriate, thereby reinforcing and reinstating what is argued in Chapter 2.

Brave New Alps, a studio based in Italy and the UK introduce their research project *Precarity Pilot* (see Appendix G4), with a direct connection to one of its member's PhD thesis.[91] It examines the difficulty of financially maintaining a politically and socially-engaged practice after exiting academia, proposing tactics for deprecarisation. The critical attitude towards the awareness and social, political and cultural context of each designer's practice—and the infrastructure that sustains it—is aligned with the present research.

Futuristic Gizmos, Conservative Ideals: On ~~Speculative~~ Anachronistic Design (see Appendix G5) is the title of the essay by the Brazilian doctoral researchers Luiza Prado and Pedro Oliveira. In this essay, the authors underline the importance of considering gender and class when developing a critical design project. They also note the problem of the continued adoption of a consumerist attitude as part of the production of critical objects (by Dunne and Raby, for example), which uses the neoliberal infrastructure it aims to criticise while being mostly confined to academia, art galleries and museums. In short, this essay asks that speculative critical design become self-critical while alerting to the need for close scrutiny and political accountability.

This essay provides an introduction of critical design to a broader audience and prepares the reader for the following contribution by Cameron Tonkinwise, a sustainable design studies researcher. His contribution (see Appendix G6) uses eight short pieces of fiction to problematise recurrent issues with the practice and theory of critical design. Tonkinwise puts a strong emphasis on critical design's lack of self-awareness and overlook of present realities and the implication of amplified, dystopian futures.
In direct confrontation with this is an interview with the British designer James Langdon (see Appendix G7) about his project *A School for Design Fiction* (2013), which existed in a Fine Art context. Langdon shows affinities with design historian Noel Waite's work and research (see Appendix I4), namely in seeing design fiction as a method for design archaeology and investigating the past instead of using the more common approach of science fiction and possible futures. It reveals a distinct interpretation of the dominating view of design fiction, while highlighting and reinforcing the frequent reliance on Fine Art and the art gallery context for critical design practice, exactly after contestation from the two previous essays.

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91   *Designing Economic Cultures – Cultivating socially and politically engaged design practices against procedures of precarisation* (Goldsmiths University, 2014) by Bianca Elzenbaumer. Available from: ‹http://www.brave-new-alps.com/designingeconomiccultures/› [Accessed 12 March 2015]

Figure 72. Cover of *Modes of Criticism 1*, 2015.
Figure 73. Spread of *Modes of Criticism 1*, 2015.

Finally, the magazine ends with a provocative contribution by the design writer Kenneth Fitzgerald (see Appendix G8), which is a response to the seminal essay *Fuck Content* (2005) by Michael Rock. It challenges the argument that the history of graphic design is a history of form, not content. It does so by scrutinising the relation and desire for power and cachet by designers who defend idealistic approaches to design—and

Design as criticism. Francisco Laranjo, LCC, 2017

their appetite for graphic treatment based on flawed design theories. FitzGerald makes an important, bold case for ethics in design, asking for greater debate about the often unspoken dichotomy between what star designers argue, what the work achieves and
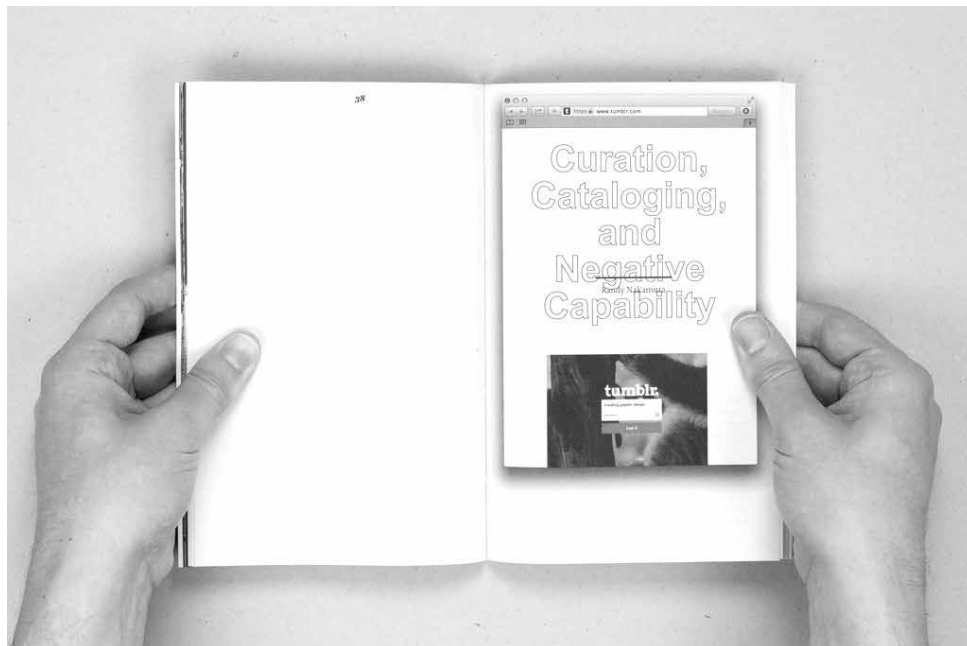
Figure 74. Spread 2 of *Modes of Criticism 1*, 2015.

the ulterior motives that underpin such interactions.

The second issue of *Modes of Criticism* (2016), titled *Critique of Method* aims to build upon the first volume by problematising the rise a renewed interest in method in relation to graphic design. And, to put forward a series of strategies that inform the theorisation presented in Chapter 2. The first contribution is by educator and historian Anne Bush, providing an essay (see Appendix I1) that builds upon her seminal article *Criticism and the Politics of Absence* (1995). This essay constitutes an overview of the state of design criticism and a survey of the uneasy relationship the graphic design discipline has with it. The resistance to authority, accountability and evaluation reaffirm a tendency argued in Chapter 2, putting forward the example of *Forms of Inquiry* as a poorly considered approach to critical practice in an attempt to be used as replacement to design criticism.

Design researcher Peter Buwert offers insight into the translation of Brecht to graphic design, building upon Jan van Toorn's work, with the essay *Defamiliarisation, Brecht and Criticality in Graphic Design.* (see Appendix I2) Workshops that investigated defamiliarisation were practical exercises into this relation that is in this issue presented to a broader audience, while offering an intersecting definition of criticality

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with that introduced in this thesis. Designers have a responsibility in shaping the processes of habitualisation, and therefore, in using design to project alternatives to current societal issues. This essay functions as an introduction to Jan van Toorn's contribution, titled *Operationalising the Means: Communication Design as Critical Practice* (see Appendix I3). The contribution by Jan van Toorn is the result of the three interviews conducted with him during this research, offering it to a broader audience and allowing further research. He argues that the "choice of a political subject or a critical position does not in itself make the message political" (Van Toorn, 2016, p. 42). This is preceded by a critique of current approaches to criticality, to then alert to the importance of politicising the means towards the development of a critical practice.
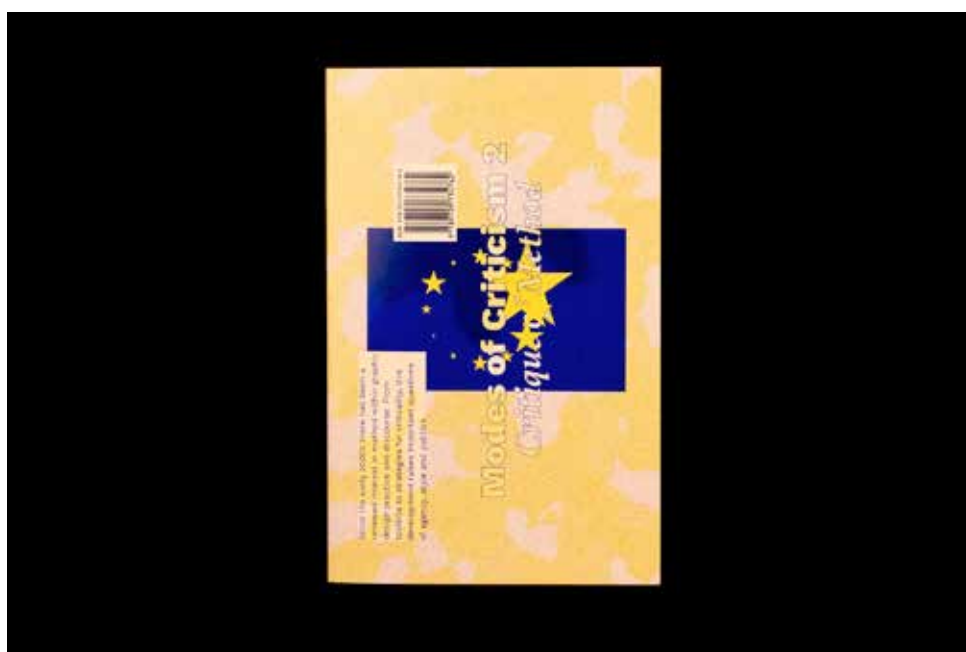
Figure 75. Cover of *Modes of Criticism 2*, 2016.

The essay by design historian Noel Waite, titled *Learning Design Histories for Design Futures: Speculative Histories and Reflective Practice* (see Appendix I4) introduces allohistory as design method. Waite has been exploring the generation of alternative pasts in order to question the inevitability of the present and better project the future. Importantly, he has been promoting the production of practical exercises in the context of design history studies, with positive results in student engagement and participation. This essay has been edited to offer this understudied perspective of design fiction in order to integrate it in the critical model proposed in the next Chapter.

Figure 76. Detail of the title page of *Modes of Criticism 2* (2016), where it is possible to see a dialogue with the cover and end pages.

Design researcher Ahmed Ansari offers a decolonial overview (see Appendix I5) of the rising trend in universal toolkits and design methods for social design and humanitarian design. Ansari notes that terms such as design methods and design thinking (dangerously) require "an almost absolute faith in its own universality and authority." (Ansari, 2016, p. 63) By running a case study from Pakistan parallel to the critical survey, the aythor reveals the myopic and authoritarian position of the Global North, continuously exporting colonialism to the Global South in the form of methods. Finally, with the essay *The Imperial Code, Or, What If I Told You It's the Colonial Matrix of Power?* (see Appendix I6), the researcher Matthew Kiem questions the recurrent rhetoric in technology and design that insists in imposing computer coding as a fundamental skill but especially as a mandatory, imperial, universal literacy. "Now that enough white men have made their billions and established hegemony", notes Kiem, "the push for expansion is on." (Kiem, 2016, p. 84) The second issue ends with a citation by Dutch designer Jan Bons (from *The World Must Change* [1999]) in which he debates the differences between leftits and "rightist" typography, functioning as a prelude to a conversation about the persistence of style in visual research to be published in the third volume of the publication.

Figures 77 & 78. Sales map of *Modes of Criticism 1* and 2. The magazine had a print run of 300, shipped to 24 countries and sold out in six and nine months respectively, thereby funding the next issue.

Conclusions

The magazine exposes and builds upon the literature and practice review, by introducing recent terminology, pointing shortfalls of contemporary design criticism and identifying a dominant, influential trend in graphic design curating. It continues by suggesting ways to maintain a socially and politically-engaged practice through the research project *Precarity Pilot*, moving to a succinct overview with the rise of the term critical design and its recurrent problems. This opens up space for fictional, polemic stories that expand the issues at stake introduced in the essay that precedes it. Finally, an interview on an overlapping term, design fiction, proposes a different interpretation from the norm, ending with the demystification of a seminal essay within design discourse. The second issue builds upon the first by specifically focusing on the renewed interest in method within graphic design. After surveying the state of graphic

design criticism, supporting and complementing arguments exposed in Chapters 2 and 3, offers a translation of Brecht to graphic design. This introduces an account of tactics for a critical practice, condensing interviews and recent work of Jan van Toorn, which is central to this research. After introducing an expanded understanding of design fiction, two decolonial critiques are put forward, reflecting on the shorfalls and myopic use of terminology and the claims of universality often made by the design discipline. The exploration of critical writing, editing, fiction and criticism as design method evidenced an increased interest in infrastructure, namely the disciplinary crisis, its connection to the current political and social conditions and willingness to explore emerging tactics and strategies to deal with the current reality-

Modes of Criticism also allows the collection of invaluable data constituting quantitative research. By being able to track with precision the destinations of the sales, it is possible to map an interest in this particular discourse[92] and provide evidence of the Anglo-American predominance suggested in Chapter 1. The top destination is the United States, followed closely by the United Kingdom and Australia.

Modes of Criticism is a platform for visual investigation as mentioned above. This is evidenced in the design of the publication, providing multiple opportunities to challenge the content of the articles and explore exercises attempted in workshops (e.g. defamiliarisation present on the edges of the pages in the opening visual essay), for example. It provides further evidence of an integration of all the research dimensions investigated in this chapter: workshops, self-initiated research, writing as practice, effectively becoming professional practice. The second issue continued to investigate ways in which criticism in practice works in tandem with writing. Adding a variety of layers to the cover, back-cover and title pages are important examples that evidence the application of workshops as well as self-initiated research. The second issue is wrapped by the political context in which the publication exists at the time it was published (March 2016). Tensions and the institutional undermining of sovereignty by EU power structures, revealing key issues to be addressed are visually argued with images that provoke a series of confrontations. A speculative EU flag was designed for the cover, establishing a dialog with a desintegrating EU unity in the title pages, with the cover filled with visual noise in a climate of growing populism and nationalism, camouflaged both visually and verbally (via terms such as 'alt-right', for example).

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92   It also identifies the geographic location of the circles of practice focusing on these subjects. The fact that the magazine is in English also affects the predominance of the countries mentioned above.

The production of this publication cannot be dissociated from the exercises done at the University of Westminster with the BA Graphic Communication Design students. It is common practice to ask design students to produce a research document in studio modules, as it teaches them to compile and edit the information they collected during the research and production stage of their project. In classes that preceded two workshops on the political compass, students were asked to divide their research into three categories: contextual, historical and technical. This was a prompt to reveal overlaps between categories exemplified by the nature of the material they were collecting and the reasons that lead them to consider a specific piece of information worthy of being included in the aforementioned document. But to produce a publication for a broader public, especially in a group, proved to demonstrate a different concern by the students. It revealed a greater self-consciousness about the importance of their choices and how thorough their investigation was or was not. It made the unavoidable role of the designer as editor, visible. My role as editor helped promote a critical distance and inform the design process, by adding several stages that asked dialogue, external input and criticism. This layering of dimensions of the designer, provided key opportunities to develop criticality in both the way discourse was shaped, edited, designed and in turn the theorisation of this thesis examined and permanently questioned. Finally, the magazine helps to make the transition from academic research to professional practice, while being a platform to expand the research undertaken in this thesis. The magazine is a platform that provides space to investigate this thesis' research questions directly, expanding its literature review by addressing identified gaps and activating its central focus on a theoretical and practical level: critical practice. *Modes of Criticism* was a finalist in the 2015 National Design Award (Student Category) in Portugal, and exhibited at the National Coach Museum in Lisbon between the 11th September and 29th November of 2015.

Future Issues

The third issue will focus on the relation between design and democracy, and have contributions by Els Kuijpers, Laura Gordon, Maria Portugal, Ramia Mazé, Angela Mitropoulos, XML Studio, Silvio Lorusso, among others. The first (2012–13) and second (2016–17) iterations of the collaborative project *Design and Democracy* between the RCA and Sandberg Institute will be presented in a reflective essay, consolidating the

research presented in this thesis via action research in a systematic manner. This will be followed by presenting a series of intersecting subjects with democracy. A mapping of a variety of design approaches dealing with the British EU referendum in 2016 by the designer Laura Gordon will confron Els Kuijpers' essay on style and visual research. XML Studio will reflect on the temporary MA programme at the Sandberg Institute *Designing Democracy*, while an interview with Mitropoulos will investigate the implications of the rebranding of language under the current political conditions. Silvio Lorusso will debate precarity, entrepreneurship and social media as valuable tools to reflect on current working conditions. Ramia Mazé will debate the politics of design agency in times of post-truth Finally, the design researcher Maria Portugal will reflect on her practice-based research at Goldsmiths University, exploring strategies towards a repoliticisation of the designer, while examining the phenomenon of political apathy.

Modes of Criticism and critical writing as design method promote an interest in systemic issues and disciplinary challenges, as evidenced by both issues and an increased politicisation of discourse and practice. In this sense, issues 4 and 5 will continue this, with the fourth issue focusing on automation and the fifth on radical pedagogy, opening up possibilities of further research. While the 4th issue will question the difficulty in continuing to explore criticality in graphic design as algorithmic accountability becomes key in design practice, the 5th issue will gather a variety of radical approaches to education that seek to challenge the impact of such an important shift in the discipline.

Conclusions

This chapter investigated methods that not only aimed at examining the many dimensions of an object of research, but also promote a designer's critical distance to what she/he is researching, as well as fostering a critical attitude towards practice. They built upon the expanded field of graphic design surveyed in Chapter 2, the definition of criticism investigated and the possible strategies for design as criticism outlined in Chapter 3. That is, strategies for criticality. Iteratively, the workshops followed a systematic exploration of those possibilities through a variety of lenses—e.g. building upon Hall's mapping-based critique or Van Toorn's gearbox. The workshops introduced ideology, followed by politics and finally adding design fiction as well as writing (during *Exercises in Democracy*), forming iteratively, more complex and overlapping modes of approaching design.

This progressive complexity was useful to the workshop participants because of constructing an awareness and revealing entry points to adopt a critical position towards the context in which they were working and its relation with society at large. This constitutes new knowledge—namely building upon Van Toorn's methods—because of providing practical exercises to promote criticality and not relying solely on debate, analysis and reflexivity. Due to the process of engaging in these issues through criticism in practice, namely by producing design work to gain access to and generate knowledge, the production of objects became fundamental to the design process and the maintenance of a critical attitude. As these exercises formed political maps of practice and situated actions, they were incorporated in subsequent workshops, while exploring other forms of dealing with the research material. This is evidenced in the impact that the speculative compass workshop had on the politicisation of the argument workshop—they formed, through practice, devices for critical scrutiny of the ways in which a designer is informed about the context in which he or she is working. These methods demonstrated that criticism creates an increased ability to develop their own methods in relation to constantly changing contexts, thereby promoting critical autonomy. The constant categorisation and identification of criteria that could connect the rationale of the workshops to the theorisation and criticism presented in Chapter 2 and 3, allowed to form divisions in approaches to criticality despite recurrent and necessary overlaps. This paved the way to the critical method introduced in the next chapter.

The workshops, as well as the self-initiated exercises revealed a close integration with professional practice and critical writing, namely in establishing and maintaining a critical mindset. Professional projects such as the *Occupied Times 24* noted influences from the theorisation in Chapters 2 and 3, such Van Toorn's dialogic image and specifically the importance of the parallel lab and speculative work that affected professional practice. In turn, this was then applied, for example, in the essay and visual essay *Ghosts of Designbots Yet to Come* (2016) (see Appendix J). The project *Designing for Exhibitions* further investigated the expanded role of the designer detailed in Chapter 2 and was used to test methods that were theoretically noted in Chapter 3 in relation to the definition of design as criticism being proposed in this thesis, such as mapping-based critique via ANT. The multi-layered offering of arguments explored theoretically in Chapters 2 and 3 can be observable in many projects, from *Designing for Exhibitions* to the *Occupied Times* and *Modes of Criticism*, using distinct methods. This project also highlighted links between methods, as exercises conducted in workshops at the University of Westminster on the visualisation of research material were applied and had a direct effect not only in the way content was edited, but also on the final form of its output as seen on the posters for the symposium *Designing for Exhibitions*. Exercises in defamiliarisation and speculation reinforced the overlap between professional practice, self-initiated research and the workshops.

Finally, the essays published on *Design Observer*, *Eye*, *Grafik* and *Pli* allowed public debate—e.g. on the comments section of the essay about the Whitney Museum identity but also via the many public talks and discussions—and aimed at applying action research's goal of publicly disclosing ongoing research. The publication *Modes of Criticism* functioned as an unifying critical method, intersecting the four methods detailed in this chapter. *MoC* addressed a gap in design discourse and expanded this thesis' research questions by using design as criticism, that is, criticism as design method. *Modes of Criticism* informed and was informed by all the other research approaches detailed in this chapter. This is evidenced not only on the design of the publications, with connections to the projects *Occupied Times* and *Designing for Exhibitions*, for example. The research for these two projects had the foundation in the project The Architecture of Gambling, in which a series of strategies were tested in a 'parallel lab' mode. Importantly, the essay *Ghosts of Designbots Yet to Come* (2016), evidenced the application of design fiction in design writing, by proposing possible scenarios of the graphic design profession in 2025. This essay was presented at the

conference *Design, Identity and Complexity* in November 2016 at the University of Lisbon, Portugal. Making use of both design fiction in writing and in a performative way in the form of a lecture, and visually through the creation of a speculative visual narrative to challenge the written discourse, this essay revealed an application of all the research modes detailed in this chapter, while demonstrating an interest in infrastructure, promoted by them.

The mixed methods procedure allowed access to multiple forms of data collection, gathering data simultaneously and also sequentially in order to investigate the research problems. Examples of this are the use of *Modes of Criticism* throughout the thesis, providing both qualitative and quantitative data, and crossing this information with the conclusions drawn from the workshops, self-iniaited research and professional practice. Mixed methods were important to be applied in this chapter, as they adapted to permanently changing situations, while simultaneous collection of data provided a mutually challenging critical distance that was key to foster the critical dimensions of the methods detailed in the present chapter. This thesis begun with broader considerations and progressed to focus on a more detailed examination informed by the continuous collection of data from multiple sources. The next chapter will translate the findings detailed in this chapter and the historical and theoretical research outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 into a critical method.

Chapter 5 — Conclusions: critical method

This chapter presents the conclusions of this thesis, in the form of a critical method for the development of a critical graphic design practice. It is divided into two sections. First, a description of the method, and second, a summary of the aims of this research, its methods and findings. The implications for the discipline following this thesis are also presented, as well as further research.

As a consequence of the theorisation developed in Chapters 2 and 3 and the methods detailed in Chapter 4, this chapter proposes three categories that constitute a critical method for graphic design. It is important to note, however, that this is a method and not a methodology. The author and researcher Nigel Cross defines with clarity the difference between design method and design methodology. Whereas methods concern the act(s) of designing itself, methodology deals with the study of methods of designing, being a field in itself. (Cross, 1980) The three categories aim to provide a critical attitude and mindset—indeed criticism *in* action—towards the act of designing by making the designer question and define its role as an agent of transformation working towards preferred futures. It is a method that aims to work at an ontological and epistemological level. In other words, to both examine reality and the relationship between reality and the designer. This method is not linear. It suggests a continuous overlap in order to adapt to—and challenge—its specific context, with the development of new methods being an important element of its proposition. The present theoretical-practical model being put forward here aims to use criticism as a fundamental tool for graphic designers during the design process, instead of an exercise developed a posteriori and exclusively in written form—criticism *in* action and not solely *on* action. This method is divided into three categories: visual criticality, critical reflexivity and design fiction. The first is a result of the exercises conducted in the workshops detailed in the previous chapter, as well as the self-initiated research. The second is a consequence of the editorial, critical writing and publishing work. Finally, design fiction is predominantly derived from a theoretical study (noted in Chapter 2 and *Modes of Criticism 2*) but also of experiments explained in workshops, the case-study of the project *Oh Mai-dan!*, and the essay and visual narrative *Ghosts of Designbots Yet to Come (2016).*

Visual criticality consists of a series of exercises that seek to identify the ideological affiliations, politics and power structures at work in the context in which the designer is operating. They form a fundamental platform for debate between designers, clients and those involved and affected by a design project. These exercises confront the designer's political affiliations and expose them in relation to other interests at stake on a given project and social/political/cultural issue being addressed (e.g. private or public interest). Design fiction proposes speculation and prototyping as tools to investigate both the future and the past in order to gain insight into understanding the specific circumstances of the present. Critical reflexivity uses design writing, editing and publishing to gain access to other researchers with intersecting research interests, while activating the public domain. These three categories reveal frequent reciprocal influences, further emphasizing the non-linearity noted above and highlighting the importance of the parallel lab introduced in Chapter 4. Therefore, a central aspect of this critical method is the constant overlap of its three categories, as they benefit from sharing their specific characteristics in order to challenge each other and develop new ways of designing and approaching different and constantly shifting contexts.

Visual criticality

This series of exercises seek to provide an awareness of the ideology and politics at work on a given design project. Visual criticality uses graphic design as a tool to dissect, visualise and gain insight into the various dimensions affecting a specific project with particular attention to ideology and politics, key pillars of criticism.

In a first instance, visual criticality allows access to the multiplicity of dimensions affecting and influencing a specific context, and identifying its many actors. The political compass functions as an instrumental starting point, exposing the different interests between the parts involved, affecting and being affected by a given design project. Visual criticality also encourages confrontation and an increased interest and willingness to have access to as much information as possible, while politicising it through the creation of a platform for debate and accountability. The axis of the political compass is a tool that evolves as a design project progresses. Examples of this are when new actors are brought to the project, new aims emerge and the

research produced can question the original—and ongoing—mapping. This was particularly evidenced in the workshops held at the University of Westminster, as the political compass of the whole class gave way to individual compasses, which in turn served to identify the ideological and political affiliations of the research material each student was collecting, including articles, images, books, interviews, surveys, thereby promoting shifts in ways of working and the formal aspects of the work. The exploration of speculative, fictional mappings that imagined alternative approaches to counter the ones chosen, evidenced how the other dimensions of the critical method—in this particular case design fiction—overlap with visual criticality.

Visual criticality also serves to build upon Jan van Toorn's *gearbox*, producing work that sits on the extremities of what designers propose to do, allowing them to generate a body of work that actively challenges and criticises what is being designed and projected. As observed and evidenced in the workshops at the University of Westminster, this was pivotal to generate discussion between peers, opening up multiple entry points for debate, as well as diverse research aspects—quantitative and qualitative—in order to construct and sustain arguments, and expose their weaknesses. In short, to reveal opportunities for criticality. Such an attitude can be possible in a commercial studio environment, as noted in the project *New World Parkville*, for example.

Figure 79. Example of an exercise in defamiliarisation, conducted at supermarkets and newspaper stores such as WHSmith.

This method aims, too, at providing multiple perspectives of the same object of research and entry points to its several dimensions. Examples of this are evidenced in the workshop investigating ideology and the media, collecting quantitative data and generating visual forms of knowledge production. The exercises in defamiliarisation at the supermarket and transforming research documents—in the form of images—into a tridimensional experience that would be converted into an argument, as developed with the BA Design Culture students at the London College of Communication is an important example. The workshops held at the Royal College of Art and Sandberg Institute further emphasize this attitude by adding a variety of approaches to visualisation and design fiction: from acting and performance to fictional bibliographies and cooking, while generating a mindset that proactively engages in the creation of new methods. These workshops, that brought together students from two institutions, noted the progression of complexity and articulation of all the dimensions of the critical method, evidencing the benefits of their constant overlap.

Critical reflexivity

This method aims at opening up ongoing research and processes applied to a broad public, while expanding its reach and promoting self-reflexivity, namely through the use of design writing and the exploration of the role of editing as design method. During this research, the paper *Critical Design and Critical Practice: A Methodological Approach?* (2013) was presented at the peer-reviewed conference *Critique 2013*, at the University of South Australia, Adelaide (Australia). However, the essays published on *Design Observer* provided a different insight into the object of research of this thesis— namely in gaining access to a broader understanding of what is considered as 'critical' in graphic design. This is particularly evident in the comments to the review *Whitney Identity: Responding to W(hat)?* (2013) in which it is possible to read vague criteria for the attribution of such quality. This process informed the theorisation and criticism presented in Chapter 2. The reviews published on the *Eye Magazine* website and in *Eye* 89 (2014), allowed to continue an exposure of ongoing research and explore different writing tones and strategies, while creating critical distance—a recurrent key element of criticism and a fundamental aspect of critical reflection as argued by Van Toorn.[93] The essay *Ghosts of Designbots Yet to Come* (2016) published on *Eye Magazine* and presented

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93   Van Toorn evokes his teachers Charles Jongejans and Lex Metz, by saying that "critical reflection on the social conditions creates the distance necessary for cultural renewal." (Van Toorn, 1997, p. 41)

in the form of a performative lecture at the academic conference *Design, Identity and Complexity* (2016) at the University of Lisbon with a fictional visual essay is also evidence of the overlap and mutual influence of the three dimensions of the critical method presented here. This fictional essay looks back at the graphic design discipline from 2025 with a critical perspective on infrastructure, political strategies and working conditions, evidencing the influence of design fiction, as well as a mapping different power structures.

The magazine *Modes of Criticism*, however, was specifically used as a critical method to have access to ongoing research by other researchers, designers and writers intersecting the object of study of this thesis, while exposing the important role of the editor. Discussions addressing the designer as editor are not new. As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, the designation functioned as a synonym for the 'designer as author' in The Netherlands in the late 1990s. The design critic Rick Poynor, revealed his scepticism towards an increased tendency for designers to be their own editors in *We Are All Editors Now. Or Are We?* (2005). While this article was written following what he considered to be a failed self-edited monograph by the Dutch duo Mevis and Van Deursen, it drew attention to the importance of the editor in three identified tasks: content, copy-editing and proof-reading. If this critique is closely aligned with the discussions of the designer as author noted in Chapter 2, what Critical Reflexivity is proposing is a greater awareness of the unavoidable editorial act by the designer when researching and designing, and a use of writing as a reflexive activity, as a fundamental aspect of design practice. In short, research *in* action. With it, and as a consequence of the use of the two other methods in tandem, there is a generation of a greater awareness of the ideology and politics at play, forcing a constant critical distance and revaluation of the employed strategies, their impact, implications and consequences.

Design fiction

This method indicates the importance of speculating about the future as much as about the past. The term design fiction is specifically used in order to avoid the more ambiguous 'speculative design.' Anthony Dunne noted in the interview conducted on the 30th January of 2014 at the Royal College of Art that the term design fiction is more used in the United States because of its tradition of fiction and key authors such as Bruce Sterling. Speculative

design is traditionally more used in Europe. However, the term is too broad and can be reduced to the generic process of prototyping and in this sense, any project can be a speculation of what it *may* be. While design fiction establishes a more defined field within design, speculation is open to myriad interpretations. The designer Peter Bil'ak reinforced this idea in the magazine *Task Newsletter* 2 (2009) by arguing that "most creative work is by its very definition speculative," as it is "formed on a basis of incomplete information, involves intuition, and explores new areas, which means it also runs the risk of not always delivering what it promises." (Bil'ak, 2009, p. 99) The typical framework used by designers to speculate about the future—Foresight scholar Joseph Voros' *Futures Cone* (2003)—has important shortfalls, as noted by the Sustainable Design Studies researcher Cameron Tonkinwise. The cone's division between probable, plausible and preferable futures is constraining, as there is "no reason to imagine why the preferable does not in fact lie outside the plausible, and even outside the possible." (Tonkinwise, 2014, p. 173) Furthermore, it is important to ask who is making such projections and from which vantage point, as it can run the risk of producing a generic projection deprived of a critical dimension. The method being put forward here, however, aims at a process of time-travelling between the past and the future.
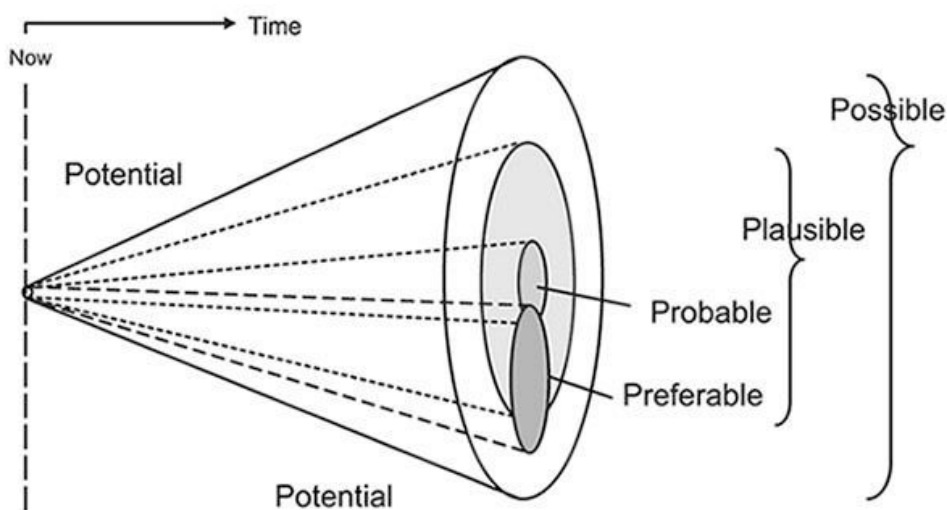
Figure 80. Futures' Cone by Joseph Voros.
(Adapted from Hancock and Bezold, 1994), 2000.
©Joseph Voros.

A critical approach to design fiction has to engage with issues of race, gender, class and avoid a culture of consumption as noted Tonkinwise in the review of Dunne and Raby's book *Speculative Everything* (2013), while not simply using dystopia as final outcome. Instead, dystopia should be used at the service of utopia. In other words, the goal should

not be the plausible, but political engagement towards preferable futures. The lack of attention to well established power structures by design fiction is also noted by Luiza Prado and Pedro Oliveira in *Modes of Criticism 1*. The design researcher Ahmed Ansari, too, pointed in the conference *Knotty Objects* (2015) that the dystopian futures often proposed by design fiction are already a reality in the global south and that most projects produced under this banner are driven by aesthetic rather than political concerns and questions. The critical method proposed here also aims at challenging this.

Another proposed use of design fiction is aimed at generating an understanding of the present and projecting the future, but by using design history and constructing alternative histories or even counterfactual histories (also known as allohistory). The design theorist Tony Fry is a central figure in the emerging field of Design Futures, working against the accelerated pace that contemporary societies are 'defuturing' themselves. He argues that "looking back teaches ways to think about how to project forward. It can be a way to formulate key questions and to create 'critical fictions', enabling the contemplation of what would otherwise not be considered." (Fry, 2009, p. 39) The design historian Noel Waite conducted a series of exercises at the University of Otago (New Zealand) that aim at generating agency in the students towards the design of their futures (cf. Appendix I4). By investigating alternative histories and the impact it might have had on contemporary society, this kind of fiction can generate very different results from solely speculating about the future. This way of using design to investigate history and current phenomena can be used not only as a process to address a present situation, but also aid foresight exercises.[94]

The ideological and political dimensions of visual criticality, its self-criticism, as well as the public platforms for discussion generated with critical reflexivity will prevent design fiction from becoming a series of insular, over-playful and inconsequential exercises. An example of the latter is the project *Future Fabulators* (2007–13), which was an EU-funded project bringing together artists, economists, scientists, writers and a vast quantity of participants from various disciplines. Proposing Voros' *Futures Cone* without a thorough analysis of context, generates a carefree production of hypothesis—often

94   Noel Waite was a keynote speaker at the Design History Society conference (London, 2010). He presented the method used in the module *Design Futures*—in a clear reference to Tony Fry's work. Waite structures the research undertaken in the module in four sections: Insight, Hindsight, Foresight and Allosight, encouraging students to investigate specific historical phenomena from a variety of perspectives, using both design history and graphic design as an investigative tool. This is explained in detail in the essay *Learning Design Histories for Design Futures: Speculative Histories and Reflective Practice*, published *Modes of Criticism 2 – Critique of Method* (2016).

carried out in a single day. This creates an entertaining, playful, even visually rich experience, but ultimately produces superficial reflections on political, cultural and social phenomena. The design fiction exercises conducted in the workshops at the University of Westminster revealed only initial insight into their potential. The case-study of the book project *Oh Mai-dan!*, however, was more substantial, making use of a diversity of visual exercises that challenged the material being researched and displayed. Design fiction must be a highly scrutinised activity as it can easily become superficial and be predictably dystopian, ignoring that futures that it proposes may already exist in underprivileged contexts, and unaware of its ethical implications and responsibility.

Working model

The idea of having a space for self-initiated research, indeed a parallel lab, can be common to all these categories. Jan van Toorn pointed its importance in the interview conducted in 2014. What is proposed here with visual criticality, design fiction and critical reflexivity, is that these methods become prompts to change, adapt and create new methods, while promoting graphic design as an investigative tool in its own right. Therefore, trips to supermarkets such as Tesco and newspaper stores such as the UK-based newsagent chain WHSmith's in order to observe, reorganise and propose different readings of the news—which are a personal habit and exercise—became a method. This exercise, which existed in the realm of self-initiated research, labelled here as parallel lab, influenced the generation of workshop 1 (Media and Ideology) and to establish connections with previous exercises of defamiliarisation, evoking the work of Bertolt Brecht and Ernst Bloch, often cited by Jan van Toorn and previous attempts[95] to activate such goals (cf. Appendix I2). The direct influence of such method can be observed in the self-initiated research on the rise of pawn shops in Portugal following the 2008 financial crisis.

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95   In the workshop at the University of Westminster focusing on the Political Compass, students were encouraged to explore ways to make the designer visible. Some created printed errors on the margins of the printed pages of a book, while others purposefully left Adobe Photoshop tools visible on printed posters. Van Toorn points in *View to the Future* (1997) other examples in which this was happening, such as Italian and French nouvelle vague (the cameras were occasionally visible) and even in Cervantes' writings, the court jester would wink at the audience to suggest that "it is a 'made thing' which is not natural." (Van Toorn, 1997, p. 42)
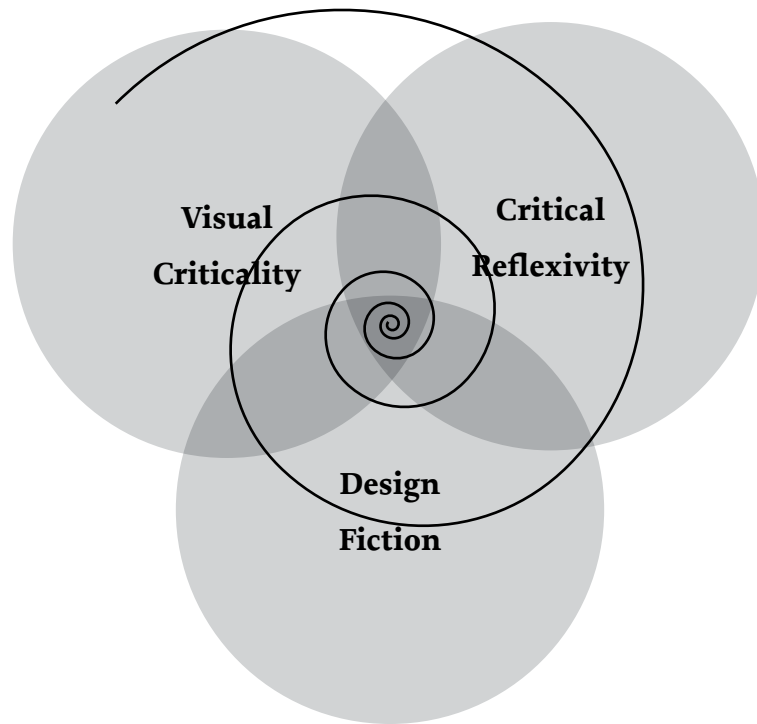
Diagram 3. The critical method works in a spiral until developing a permanent overlap of its three dimensions.

The three categories detailed above, forming the proposed method, have in common a constant overlap and sharing media with the same investigative, critical goals. While it is useful to create a distinction between the three categories for the purpose of tracing heritages, specific media and traditional outputs, they form a method that aims at creating a mindset. One that promotes a critical, independent agency and therefore, uses and borrows tools from each of the categories to address the specificities of a given design project and issue being researched, or engage in a partnership with another discipline, in which the designer can make a meaningful contribution to new knowledge. It is therefore the continuous juxtaposition of—and exchange between—these three categories, with visual criticality, critical reflexivity and design fiction working in tandem that prevent them from becoming insular, inward-looking and trapped in the discipline itself.

By approaching design as criticism, this method challenges well-established, hierarchical methods such as the Design Council's *4D* (2005).[96] The latter is divided into four distinct phases—discover, define, develop, deliver—with a clear separation

96   Design Council (2005) *4D – Design Process.* [Internet] ‹http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/design-methods-step-1-discover› [Accessed: 12 July 2015]

between them, an over-focus on the market, and detachment from politics, ideology and therefore, from a critical understanding of context. The critical method proposed here, makes the research, reflection and processes applied more visible, coherent and therefore more accountable, contributing to new knowledge about the design process and graphic design practice.

Conclusions, summary of key findings and further research

This thesis investigated the role and potential of criticism in practice in the graphic design process, particularly in the context of emerging terminology such as critical design, speculative design and critical practice. Criticism and its manifestations in graphic design practice were surveyed, as well as its theoretical heritage and presence in design discourse. The current research sought to bridge a recurrent gap between theory and practice, identifying criticism as a key element, in the form of a critical method that can keep the social, cultural and political dimensions of a design project— and the designer—under close scrutiny, while maximising the critical awareness of opportunities for criticality. The new contribution to knowledge of this thesis is centred in two key elements: 1) the theorisation of critical design in relation to graphic design and 2) the development of critical methods as a direct consequence of this theorisation, in the form a theoretical-practical model presented in this last chapter. The model detailed above constitutes the conclusions of this thesis.

Surveying in a critical manner the discourse about criticality in graphic design, while connecting it to a constellation of influential thinking from other disciplines in relation to this subject—such as critical theory or sociology via Actor-network Theory—was a central aim of this thesis. After an identification of the history and theory present in design discourse in academic journals, independent magazines and interviews with key figures actively undertaking research in this specific field, this thesis proposed an approach to design as criticism through a critical method, connecting a diverse network of influences. It did so using four interconnected approaches, with particular emphasis on a practitioner's perspective: workshops, self-initiated research, professional practice and design writing. These revealed a constant reciprocity. Examples of this are methods explored in workshops that were applied in self-initiated research and design writing for public debate, that subsequently

influenced professional practice. Writing was used both as research *on* action (thesis), but particularly *in* action (*Modes of Criticism*) as the method critical reflexivity notes, informing the development of the workshops, professional practice and the theorisation of terminology developed in this thesis. This interconnectivity allowed identifying the relations, dependencies and gaps between necessarily complementary activities in the development of a critical graphic design practice.

The workshops investigated and identified ideology and politics as pillars of criticism, through exercises of visualisation, self-awareness, debate, self-criticism, speculation and fiction. These added a key practical dimension to Van Toorn's conception of self-reflexivity. Self-initiated research projects explored specific subjects, revealing the importance of a parallel lab to inform professional practice, as the *Occupied Times 24* project evidenced, namely through the generation of methods and the advantages of constructing a different investigative framework than a client brief. Writings published on *Design Observer*, *Eye Magazine*, *Grafik*, *Pli* and IDEA permitted to expose ongoing research and engage in discussion with the design community, informing and reinforcing arguments defended here, as outlined in Chapter 4. The publication *Modes of Criticism*, through its first issue *Critical*, *Uncritical*, *Post-critical*, built upon these intentions, not only creating a more ambitious platform for critical discussion but also as a tool to continue investigating, debating and developing opportunities for criticality and a critical design practice. The second issue, *Critique of Method*, continued to pursue the goal of politicising design discourse and practice, by exposing ongoing research by key researchers on critical practice, while offering interviews and conversations in the form of essays. This issue focused specifically on method, proposing approaches to design that have been explored in the workshops, self-initiated research and professional practice, as noted in Chapter 4. The three methods of the critical model put forward in this chapter—visual criticality, critical reflexivity and design fiction—are the result of a dissection of the terminology under debate in this thesis: critical design and critical practice. As argued, these are neither prescriptive nor linear but complementary, with overlaps evidenced in the previous chapter.

This thesis critically examined the emergence of the terms critical design and critical practice in relation to graphic design through a practice-led study of their history, theory, criticism and practice. And, importantly, how these can generate new methods to further develop the discipline. The present research investigated the application

of criticism as design method. Its research methodology aimed to be diverse, drawing on various disciplines (such as critical theory, sociology, literary theory), forming a constellation around graphic design that provides new knowledge into the potential of criticism for the graphic design practitioner. Therefore, this thesis provides insight into the frequent overlaps and potential that exist at their intersection, proposing translations while offering tangible evidence of the benefits of such new approaches to design. The research methods used were not only a direct consequence of the terms this thesis investigated, but also the present political and disciplinary conditions in which it took place. For these reasons, the methods should be in constant reevaluation and scrutiny.

The methods used in this thesis are detailed in Chapter 1 and 4. These were divided into four: 1) Workshops; 2) Professional practice; 3) Self-initiated research; 2) Critical writing. Below is an overview of these methods and summary of key findings, which formed the basis of the theoretical-practical model presented in this chapter.

HISTORICAL SURVEY, CRITICISM AND THEORISATION

— The terms critical design and critical practice are wrongly used interchangeably in design discourse. Critical design is an emerging field, while critical practice is a mode of approaching design that can be informed by the new methods that critical design is contributing to the discipline. This was further confirmed in interviews with Jan van Toorn, Els Kuijpers, Anthony Dunne and Michèlle Champagne.

— Critical practice has a more profound commitment to the public, emancipation and open discourse than the often indulgent, stylised and self-centred critical design. They are, however, inseparable, as the first can greatly benefit from the methods and criticism emerging in the context of the second.

— It is possible to identify key historical precedents for this terminology, from the Russian Constructivism to the designer as author and editor, but ambiguous criteria for the attribution of such a banner as 'critical' to design work, via the exhibition *Forms of Inquiry,* produced an inappropriate canon of critical graphic design. The visual mannerisms of key practitioners operating under these terms rapidly revealed a small elite of designers and limited visual vocabulary. In turn, this produced an often satirical, pejorative connotation of the term 'critical graphic design'. The goal should be the continuous development of a critical design practice, not the practice of 'critical graphic design'.

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— The rejection of the terms is aligned with an expanded view of the discipline, but not with that of the majority of the discipline and its practitioners.

— Until the present research, and while the field develops within product and interaction design, there was no criticism and reflection of work and discourse produced under this banner.

— Focus group at the London College of Communication demonstrated confusion as to what constitutes 'criticality' in design, identifying recurrent figures used as reference without established criteria for evaluation.

— Designers operating under the banner of 'critical design' and 'design and research' should be publicly self-critical of their work and methods.

— Critical perception is at the basis of criticality. Practice through criticism can aid this process.

— Overlap between ethics, morality, idealism and ideology is recurrent when investigating these terms. Form reveals itself as central in the materialisation of any debate about these.

— The base of critical theory is the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age. The designer is central to the construction of society's symbolic lifeworld.

— Cultural studies and sociology theories (such as ANT) can positively contribute to an understanding of the multiple points of view regarding a given issue, phenomenon and context.

— Criticism is an unifying tool and discipline that can articulate and mediate a dense network of contributions to new knowledge.

WORKSHOPS

Ideology and politics

— Ideology and politics are often absent in the design studio, despite playing a fundamental role in design production, and are only occasionally debated in history and theory models.

— Graphic design can be a productive tool to bring these aspects of criticism into the design studio and process.

— Exposing the political affiliations of the work environment produces a scenario in which awareness is permanently present and decisions are made accountable and open to constant scrutiny.

Political Compass

— Demonstrating alternative forms of identifying and mapping a designer's political affiliations.

— Built upon and added multiple layers to Jan van Toorn's 'gearbox'.

— The exercise introduced the use of criticism during the design process for, the generation of debate and both individual and collective examination.

— Production of work that is known beforehand that is inappropriate, thereby designing options that can physically criticise what the designers are creating.

— The students who adopted and applied speculation as design method demonstrated that such approach became an effective tool for self-critique, developing more articulate and challenging visual output.

Exercises in Democracy

— Articulation of exercises of mapping, visualisation and speculation involving politics, ideology through graphic design generate critical tools and an interest in infrastructure, namely the way designers work, while testing a variety of methods. This produces critical autonomy.

— The use of fiction evidenced an increased capacity to keep a critical distance to the object of study, both by proposing alternative past scenarios, dystopian futures and imaginary tools to address present phenomena.

— The tendency for focusing solely in verbal and written discourse was often observed when engaging with criticism, ideology and politics. Practical exercises were key in countering this tendency, promoting a balance and overlap of tasks instead of separating them.

— The short set of exercises designed by the students as consequence of the mindset being proposed, highlighted the transferable aspects of visual criticality, design fiction and critical reflexivity.

Politicisation of the argument

— Revealed the importance of being able to see the material being collected towards the understanding of a specific context from multiple perspectives, as stated by the vast majority of its participants.

— Visual exercises facilitate the task of transforming theoretical into practical concerns.

— Design fiction is an useful tool to connect, have access and be introduced to other disciplines and subjects that intersect and affect design. The workshop at the

University of Westminster, RCA and Sandberg Institute evidenced this, as students would accelerate the easiness of establishing associations between apparently disconnected objects and phenomena.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

New World Parkville

— Speculation is useful in producing a series of alternative visions and challenging the content that is being edited by the designer. This generates a body of work that is useful in negotiating decisions and arguing with both client and commissioner.

— Producing work that criticises the shortfalls of a finished projects creates a commitment in the designer's working method, which is visible in subsequent work.

The Occupied Times

— Application of the idea of a critical, open work, building upon Van Toorn's dialogic image. Development of the idea of criticism not as a top-down, authoritarian approach but a liberating one, open to multiple readings.

— Feedback from the collective evidenced the difference in approach and effect of this work, functioning beyond a literal illustration of its object of study.

Designing for Exhibitions

— Evidence of how methods explored in workshops and self-initiated research have direct transferability and impact in professional practice.

— Integration of political issues in disciplinary discussion.

— Method of gathering documentation about the object of study is transferred visually to the project's output. The politicisation of method produces the politicisation of form.

SELF-INITIATED RESEARCH

The Architecture of Gambling

— Platform to develop practical exercises in tandem with the theorisation and criticism developed in Chapter 2 and 3, namely by investigating traditional approaches in design that is considered critical, such as subversiveness, provocation, humour or information.

— This parallel lab exercise drew on the theorisation detailed in Chapter 2 and the connections with multiple disciplines and theoretical discourse surveyed in Chapter 3.

— Interchange between this parallel lab, professional practice and critical writing is evidenced in the design produced for *Designing for Exhibitions*, *Modes of Criticism* 1 and 2.

Golden Times

— Evidenced the gap between the production of critical design as a self-emancipatory

exercise and an object to be exposed to the public and a broader audience. This functioned as a lab to test the theorisation and critique put forward in Chapter 2.

DESIGN WRITING

— This research identified an absence of a theorisation of the terms critical design, speculative design and critical practice in relation to graphic design. And, inexistent criticism of projects produced under this emergent terminology. Public debate and comments to published essays (e.g. *Design Observer*) evidenced this.

— *Modes of Criticism* 1 contributed to the theorisation of Chapter 2, and reinforced its arguments, for example, via Randy Nakamura's analysis of *Forms of Inquiry* (2007).

— *Modes of Criticism* 2 informed the theorisation of Chapter 3 (for example, via Anne Bush's survey of the state of graphic design criticism), while presenting the interviews with Jan van Toorn in the form of an essay, as well as feeding the design of workshops on design fiction via Noel Waite's essay.

— Both issues of *Modes of Criticism* evidenced, in a distinct manner from the project *Exercises in Democracy*, the use of action research's collaborative and participatory dimensions.

— The extensive use and referencing of the writings and research produced in the context of this thesis by practitioners, students, researchers and academics is evidence of its impact in the discipline. The mapping of power structures shaped under 'visual criticality' can also be observed in the essay by Matthew Kiem, which offers a different perspective from the one of Brave New Alps, published in the first volume.

— The essay *Ghosts of Designbots Yet to Come* (2016) evidenced the application of the critical method in its many forms, both by mapping and visualising power structures, using critical reflexivity and writing, and design fiction as approach to design.

CRITICAL METHOD

— Visual criticality provides an awareness of the ideology and politics at work on a given project, while producing work that functions as a critical compass throughout a design project.

— Critical reflexivity encourages the designer to be self-aware of its editorial position, questioning and exposing to a broader public its methods and depth of research.

— Design fiction demonstrates the importance of speculating about preferred futures as well as alternative pasts.

— The application of the critical method, with its three dimensions in tandem, evidenced a greater awareness of the power structures at work on a given project,

consideration of multiple approaches in a self-critical manner, commitment to the public and a developed interest in systemic issues that affect the way the designer works, thinks and lives.

— Criticism is a fundamental tool to keep these dimensions under constant monitoring, scrutiny and accountability.

— In order to develop a critical practice, a designer has to approach design as criticism.

As detailed in Chapter 4, the workshops with over 100 students, 10 articles published, 13 essays edited and published in 2 volumes of *Modes of Criticism*, 12 public lectures with public debate, 7 interviews, 2 self-initiated projects, and 3 professional practice projects provided the insight for the conclusions presented here, drawing primarily on qualitative data. However, this research would benefit from an even greater quantity of data, and especially an analysis and reflection about long-term impact. Even though workshops were repeated two times for more detailed data, the conclusions can only be considered at a pilot scale. The methods applied, however, aimed at creating a platform that would allow a continuous collection of information in order to test and demonstrate with more accuracy the validity of the propositions presented in this thesis. While the scope of this research could produce more accurate results with greater quantity of data, it is still able to present evidence about the transferability of the proposed methods. Chapters 2 and 3 provide a foundation for further graphic design research, while pursuing different hypothesis and approaches to design. This can happen, or not, in tandem with the methods explored in Chapter 4. The methods investigated in Chapter 4 can be adapted to different audiences, as well as disciplinary and political contexts[97], allowing adjustments to be considered, introduced and analysed. Finally, this research provides a theoretical-practical foundation for an in-depth study of design pedagogy and education, which the present thesis does not pursue.

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97   Building upon the set of exercises proposed under Visual Criticality, a workshop about EU power structures in post-Brexit Europe was held at the University of the Arts Bern (Switzerland) in November 2016 with a group of 20 MA Communication Design students, adapting the design of axis to also allow a reflection of Swiss politics and its system of direct democracy.

Until the beginning of this research, a theorisation and criticism of the terms critical design and speculative design in relation to graphic design was inexistent. This thesis' contribution to new knowledge is clearly evidenced with the use of its research output as central in this field by design students, professionals, researchers and academics with reading lists[98], papers[99], articles[100], interviews[101] and theses[102].

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This thesis identifies possibilities for further research. The role of critical writing in graphic design education has been explored for at least two decades, with a series of Masters programmes being formed in the first decade of the 21st century as noted in Chapter 2. Furthermore, at undergraduate level, the gap between writing and studio practice is a recurrent concern.[103] There is a need to compile and survey the findings of all these degrees and map strategies, shortfalls and potential methods applied and integration being undertaken in order to design new approaches and pedagogy. Further research could specifically examine the role of written criticism in a designer's education, as well as in studio practice.

Another proposition for further research has to do with quantitative data in relation to the effectiveness of the methods presented in this thesis over a long period of time. The evaluation undertaken in this thesis used primarily qualitative measurement tools in order to draw conclusions and anticipate the potential of the proposed methods. To complement these, quantitative measurement was also used, namely via the evaluation undertaken by the workshop participants and data retrieved by the distribution of the publication *Modes of Criticism* 1 and 2. The methods proposed here are the result of a progressive, speculative exploration of criticism and research. To be able to document and analyse the application and manipulation of such methods by design students after they leave an academic environment would provide important information about their effectiveness. This would build upon the smaller case-studies evidence here as well as the professional practice projects. However, these methods will never exist in exclusivity, but assist the designer in its practice. The same would be valid for a range of design studios, as observing the application of such methods in a studio environment would bring additional, invaluable information to challenge the claims put forward in this thesis. Finally, the critical method proposed here would be also challenged by large-scale projects in different sectors such as finance, commerce and advertising. This would allow to gain insight into distinct specificities of each sector, as well as expose the fragilities but also the potential of a critical practice, generating new approaches to deal with varied realities and contexts, ultimately keeping it under permanent expansion.

The journal *Modes of Criticism* will continue to be a central research platform beyond this thesis. Its third volume, focusing on the relation between design and democracy,

103   See for example Colin Davies and Monika Parrinder in the book *Limited Language: Rewriting Design: Responding to a Feedback Culture* (2009), as well as Julia Lockheart's research project Writing-PAD.

will be published in 2017. Building upon the second volume, which proposed multiple strategies towards criticality in design, this next issue will put further emphasis on the transferable aspects of this thesis through an account of the *Design & Democracy* workshops and collaboration between the Royal College of Art and Sandberg Institute students. In this sense, and especially because in 2017, its second iteration will be concluded, it will allow to continuing building upon the data collected during the first year that it ran. *Modes of Criticism* will therefore continue being an open platform to expose and debate with researchers, professionals and educators the potential transferability of the new knowledge generated by this thesis. The journal is read by both design students, professionals, researchers and academics in 25 countries[104] and available in several libraries and public collections[105], contributing to the development of the discipline by politicising design discourse, promoting increasingly rarer design criticism by opening up multiple approaches to it via new researchers and voices in design writing, and sharing design methods in a reflective manner, as well as with public talks and debates[106] that the publication facilitates.

The future issues of *Modes of Criticism* will continue to build upon the ones produced in the context of this thesis. The fourth volume will focus on automation, establishing connections with the precarious state of the profession debated in this thesis and the first issue of the journal (see Appendix G5), while the fifth will provide a series of propositions to the challenges the discipline is facing in the form of radical pedagogy. The new knowledge produced by this thesis will construct the foundations of a research institute (Shared Institute) in Porto (Portugal) that will receive many of the contributors of *Modes of Criticism* in order to continuing to make the relation between design, politics and criticism an important issue for public debate. Such project will be achieved through public funding and especially via temporary post-graduate

104   The online shop where the journal is sold, reveals the list of countries where it has been shipped: UK, US, Australia, Canada, Austria, Singapore, Croatia, Germany, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, Norway, Brazil, The Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Italy, New Zealand, Czech Republic, Japan, Ireland, France, Finland, Belgium and Greece.

105   Some examples include Central Saint Martins, London College of Communication, Leeds College of Art, University of Creative Arts, Edinburgh Napier University, Royal College of Art (UK), University of the Arst Bern (Switzerland), RMIT (Australia), Umeå University (Sweden), Rhode Island School of Design (US), Aalto University (Finland), University of Fine Arts of the University of Porto and ESAD (Portugal), the Contemporary Art Museum of Serralves (Portugal) among others.

106   The focus and object of study of this thesis and *Modes of Criticism* originated lectures and public debates at Kingston University, Central Saint Martins, Royal College of Art (UK), University of Coimbra, University of Lisbon, ESAD (Portugal), University of the Arts Bern (Switzerland), a talk at the *Research Methods Festival* (Switzerland, 2016), and a participation as speaker in the conference *Undesign* (2016) at the University of Applied Arts Vienna (Austria).

courses addressing pressing issues in society through design. Beyond this thesis, there is a commitment to continuing to make this research's object of study accessible to a broad audience, contributing to the politicisation of the discipline. Publishing design criticism in the mainstream Portuguese newspaper Público about the connections between design and politics, as well as the politics of the discipline itself is one example of this. The methods investigated in this thesis continue to be exposed to a varied range of students and practitioners. Some examples of this are lectures and workshops held at the University of Applied Arts Vienna (Austria, 2016), University of the Arts Bern (Switzerland, 2016), University of Coimbra and University of Lisbon (Portugal, 2016) and Sandberg Institute (The Netherlands, 2016).

These conclusions do not claim to cover all the benefits and shortfalls of the present thesis. However, the methods and theorisation of influential terminology are a substantial contribution to graphic design practice and discourse, offering both the expansion of existing methods and the creation of new methods that can continue to foster the discipline's critical potential. This thesis' impact for practitioners lays not only on the new theorisation put forward, but the transferability of the critical method. The designer intervenes at different stages of a design project (Swann, 2002), often when research has already been conducted. The new knowledge proposed here allows the designer to implement the methods at any stage of a design project and critically adapt to different political, social and cultural contexts with a variety of time constraints.

This thesis has had a profound impact on my own practice. It was not only a tremendously enriching learning experience in relation to design research and design writing and criticism, but also an opportunity to study disciplinary discourse and practice from a variety of disciplines—such as architecture, sociology, literary and critical theory—which intersected the object of study of this research. This was fundamental in allowing to think and propose methods of working that can function at an infrastructural level, while maintaining a constant need to learn from, and collaborate with, other professionals, researchers and academics.

From a point of view of my own practice, the exposure to a wide variety of work in particularly difficult and problematic social, economic and political conditions following the 2008 financial crisis, generated a greater politicisation of both my discourse and practice. This has become clearly evident in both my self-initiated

research, design writing and professional practice, with a constant interest in using graphic design as a tool to investigate the conditions in which I work at both personal and disciplinary levels, a permanent presence of politics in my writing and a dense, multi-layered approach to my professional practice, affecting the tools and processes used to research and produce work. These were all exponentiated by this research, with dramatic differences noticeable before and after the research started and is now concluded. The personal, disciplinary and public dimensions of the designer—which are activated by the critical method—were key in learning the overlaps between being a researcher, professional and educator. Informed by discourse, practice and tools that have taught me to be open, reflective, while maintaining a critical distance, these three dimensions will be key in order to continue to contribute to the development of the discipline and society through the collaboration with cultural, educational and governmental institutions, as well as with local communities.

Terry Eagleton concludes his seminal book *The Function of Criticism* (1984) by arguing that without a profound understanding of the symbolic processes "through which political power is deployed, reinforced, resisted, at times subverted, we shall be incapable of unlocking the most lethal power-struggles now confronting us." (Eagleton, 1984, p. 124) Criticism is a fundamental method that can enable and promote such an understanding. Graphic design will continue to be a discipline in crisis and unavoidable transition. The politicisation of its methods and criticism offer a key opportunity to develop a reflective and critical approach to both its disciplinary challenges, and more importantly, society. Criticality should be a project as much as a process. The terms critical design, speculative design and design fiction were useful to signal an uncritical state of the discipline but especially to expose its own shortfalls and habits, which in turn help shaping new strategies and methods to deal with reality and inform the discipline in its capacity, and especially necessity, to be critical. These methods should be used—as proposed in this thesis—as an opportunity to develop a critical practice; one that shapes a continuous agency and interest in wicked, systemic and infrastructural problems with a constant ability to critically adapt and research their multi-layered nature in an open manner. This will on the one hand help the designer to become a substantial agent of change and on the other, in recurrent, particularly difficult circumstances of conflicted personal, private, disciplinary and public interests such as commercial practice, to find opportunities and strategies for criticality. Criticism in practice is fundamental in this process.

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Any time the word anti is used in a title of an event, it is bound to prompt ferocious criticism. The word is instantaneously wrapped as anarchistic, counter-culture and looked with suspicion as disorderly by mainstream media. However, anti is presently a rare word as much as it's a trendy cliché: an indication that tactics that once worked in the past seem to be effortlessly digested and ignored today. In here lies perhaps the most evident mistake of the first iteration of the *Anti-Design Festival* (*ADF*), which took place in London between 18-26 September 2010.

Visual culture and graphic design are fields that have been given little attention at the *London Design Festival* since it began in 2003. And it was here where *ADF* pertinently claimed space for alternative practices and different points of view. Naturally, this should be at least as important as the glossy corporate design that has been showcased during London's biggest celebration of design. Even though the trendy alternative feel surrounding the event's main location in Redchurch Street was almost suffocating, it would be unfair to look at *ADF*'s main site as representative of the whole range of events, which spread throughout East London. Still, it deserves some reflection.

The exhibition was divided into three main sections. Inside the first space, an installation with old computers, messy desks and archives of old and now recycled projects were displayed in a chaotic way, suggesting that an ongoing work was taking place. Printers, fax machines, old phones, rusty cabinets and folders were piled into a simulation of intense activity. Its visual presentations was very familiar, and could be described as a rushed, poor version of an installation by the Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn.

Underneath flyers of the interesting 'subvertisement' *Reverse the Wave* (2010), it was possible to find some unidentified prints. As loose pages flooded desks, it was more than

often unclear what they were doing there or if one should look at it as just a simulacrum. Consequently, one had the disappointingly confusing experience of looking at some sheets made by someone who was responding to something. This anonymity was almost consistent throughout, and while it was under the umbrella of a non-elitist approach, it did make it hard(er) to understand what were the intentions of the work and to consider and evaluate its pertinence.

It may have been a mistake to try to judge the work through normal canons, because the event's main curator, the designer Neville Brody, was extremely interested in failure. By inverting and antagonizing basic established methods of defining quality, Brody attempted to disinform, rebelling against the status quo. Yet, wandering through the exhibition spaces, it seemed to be more of an easy refuge than a planned risk. To emphasize this idea, doing things fast appeared to be the dominant way through which disinformation was sought. From fast generation of objects to superficial, under-developed "quick" manifestos, there was in this room a call for "action instead of blah blah blah," as one poster boldly displayed.

The second room hosted the workshop space, manifesto wall, bar and some exhibited work. To fail, or to make mistakes and experiment was the ultimate goal of the festival. On this quest, much of the hope was put on the act of chance. The problem is that quick exercises and ill-informed manifestos will most probably generate revivalism and inconsequential chance. Reliance and hope on chance alone is not enough. Planned chance and accident however, can be surprisingly and positively disruptive.

Unlike *LDF*'s guest blogger Puff & Flock, I was not "intoxicated by the plethora of refreshing work". In fact, I found myself in an environment that it is possible to be seen in many student work in progress or even final

shows in London. Moreover, anyone who has been to a few of this kind of events, knows that the process of finding something relevant and informed is as hard on these installation/unfinished "exhibitions" as it is on the swanky framed ones. The third and last room, with its walls completely covered from top to bottom with prints, collages and paintings was the one that best demonstrated this idea.

Looking back, it is fundamental that space for failure exists, for unfinished and non-commercially viable ideas. What is even more fundamental is that this is sought through the continuity of this festival and by promoting discussions with people outside the troops that normally rally behind this kind of events regardless of its quality. Even though the necessity and urgency of an alternative platform for design events is unquestionable, the biggest challenge and danger *ADF* will face is its potential forgetfulness, with its mistakes falling into oblivion and being undocumented.

As a result of carrying the word anti as prefix, events like the *ADF* will always suffer from the pressure of quickly delivering a cure to the plague they are trying to fight – especially when they announced they are a response to "25 years of cultural deep freeze". While revolutions have proved in the past to be the ultimate social leap, it's obvious that this 'cure' cannot be achieved in two weeks – at least, not like this. However, through the creation of conditions of sustained criticality, different modes of production and thinking, and a continued existence with strong curatorial leadership, unlike in this first attempt, this may happen or at least contribute substantially towards a more global realisation that "designers are not on the artifact business, but in the consequence business."

The *ADF* seemed an important—yet frustratingly predictable—start of what anti-events (or alternative events) such as this could be in the future: a critical space for alternative practices, to foster informed making and especially to see experimentation as a means, and not just an end.

Immediately after the release of the new visual identity for the Whitney Museum of American Art, social media rapidly reacted. "Great," "bold," "sweet," "I'm really excited," "I'm jealous" or simply "Love it!" were some of the initial glowing endorsements of the work designed by the Dutch design studio Experimental Jetset (EJ). However, what has been largely overlooked is EJ's description and rationale for the project, which is a masterclass of ambiguity and ambivalence, one that builds upon gratuitous justifications, inconsequential buzzwords and the studio's recurrently sought refuges.

In the essay *On the Uselessness of Design Criticism* in *Idea magazine* (2010), American designer Randy Nakamura alerts readers to the naiveté and misuse of out-of-context quotes by EJ. The Whitney project description was no exception, with Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936) and Raymond Williams' *Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory* (1973) being vaguely invoked and loosely synthesized into just a few words — "to put it very briefly" — that serve as a quick prop to their argument.

Nakamura also points out the need for careful historical mapping when using quotations from other disciplines' discourses and especially from very particular historical circumstances. He notes: "Experimental Jetset has at least the ambition to situate their work in a theoretical framework that reinstates some form of criticality to their practice. But they stumble when they choose to do so using frameworks that are solipsistic, obsolete and of questionable relevance."

The most troubling aspect of the Whitney's visual identity is its conceptual foundation, or the lack of it. This is reflected in its form. The so-called "responsive W," a visual system based on the idea of a wavering zigzag that can assume different shapes, defines the Whitney's logo and identity.

The W, the designers explain, represents both the non-linearity of art history and the museum's treatment of it. The logo apparently encapsulates the "heartbeat of New York, of the USA"; it is both "open and closed," "in and out," "Old World" and "New World," "industrial" and "sublime." With this degree of latitude, we might go on to suggest other equally valid (though so far unused) comparisons: Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker, up and down, yin and yang, yes and no. According to EJ, the shape "could also represent the 'dérive'-like journey of the Whitney through Manhattan, moving from one location to the other. It could also symbolize the signature of the artist; or the waves of the nearby Hudson; or the waves produced by sound and vision."

In short, it could mean anything. By trying to describe their work as simultaneously being something and its opposite, they place it in a particularly comfortable position: almost beyond criticism. This way, the Whitney can just as easily claim to be "Britney." Or anything else … and its "anti."

The ambiguity of the project's description — and of the project itself — can likewise be seen in EJ's citation of a diagrammatic *Typology of Lines* published in 1946 by the painter Ad Reinhardt. "It is exactly in this context," they say, "that we would like to place the idea of the 'responsive W': the line as a graphic agent of systems (and of anti-systems)…" Deprived of substantial context, Reinhardt's work becomes a prompt to build yet another dubious justification. Their use of sugarcoated, marketing-friendly buzzwords such as "industrial directness," "low-fi/low-tech casualness," and "openness," along with an ultra-fast explanation of the etymology of the word "fresco" to justify the use of the word "freshness," completes a bouquet of strange arguments.

In *Mad Dutch Disease (*2003), designer Michael Rock of 2x4 recalls the seminal discussion between Dutch designers Wim Crouwel and Jan van Toorn in the 1970s, while also labelling EJ's output as an "ideology-free regurgitation of Crouwel's work." This debate serves as a reminder of two distinct ideological approaches to design and the public role of the museum. Where Crouwel argued that designers should not impose their own views on the content given to them, Van Toorn actively questioned the art museum's authority as cultural producer, both theoretically and formally. The Dutch designers Metahaven have more recently noted in *Can Jokes Bring Down Governments?* (2013) that Crouwel and Van Toorn were both "tied to institutions that already advocated what the designer then amplified." But this insight doesn't diminish the importance of the designers' individual ideologies; nor does it change Van Toorn's commitment to the liberation of the audience and to independent research as a practitioner and academic. It does serve here, however, to highlight the shared responsibility of EJ and the Whitney, as commissioner, in this hugely visible public project.

Instead of critically addressing and confronting the context, EJ designed an identity that isthe context. Yet despite serving a set of strict formal rules to the "excellent designers of the Whitney's in-house design team" — who will have to apply them, like all rules, with little possibility for deviation — they still argue that a graphic identity "could (and should) never be a machine, in which one simply 'inputs' an image and a title, and out rolls an invitation."

Undoubtedly, Experimental Jetset's identity for the Whitney will continue to be retweeted, reblogged, re-liked, and eventually rebranded. When that happens, let's hope that instead of a "responsive W" we get a reflective and critical institution with an identity that will also do just that: reflect and criticize. Until then, the Whitney Museum of American Art has the identity it sought, not the one it deserves.

Graphic design exhibitions are rare events in Portugal. If one takes into consideration its disastrous economic situation in the context of the global financial crisis and unimaginable austerity measures imposed by its government, their existence alone should be a case for celebration. *Almanac – An History of Portuguese Graphic Design in Magazines* took place under these conditions between October and December 2013 in the northern city of Matosinhos.

The exhibition was spread over two floors in the municipal gallery Espaço Quadra, which is solely dedicated to design and run by ESAD – Escola Superior de Artes e Design. Upon entering through glass doors, a big quantity of vitrines filled with magazines occupied the majority of the ground floor, with a wall-size timeline dominating the room. On a window that allowed looking at the floor below, a short text in bold black type set the tone for the exhibition.

In the preface of the 4th edition of Philip B. *Meggs' History of Graphic Design*, the designer Alston Purvis mentions that "the visual feast that is graphic design becomes more abundant as time passes." If we use this image, we can affirm that one of the most eloquent ways of serving that feast is to lay magazines on a table allowing that they communicate styles, values, techniques, content and form through the diversity produced by the history of graphic design.

This was a risky statement by the exhibition's curator José Bártolo, head of ESAD's Scientific Board. It may imply that graphic design served and displayed like food, will speak for itself. Contrasting with this there was a concern in framing the displayed work in a wider historical context. The timeline signalled the emergence of some magazines in parallel with important national and international design events, as well as political and social

ones. Even though this effort was undoubtedly a crucial contribution to the discourse being developed in the exhibition, it still left the magazines lacking a clearer and more objective contextualisation. The dimension of the timeline and the spread historical events made it hard to understand the potential impact they had on the design and editorial process of the publications being exhibited.

If in the first room was possible to see a colourful feast of a vast quantity of magazines from the first half of the 20th century, the second appeared to be even more abundant, with too many publications inside some vitrines – particularly from the last decade – making the task of navigating so much information more difficult. There was a notorious effort to highlight magazines of political, social and cultural influence such as *A Paródia* (1900), *Ilustração Portuguesa* (1903) and *Contemporânea* (1922). Bordalo Pinheiro's A Paródia was pivotal for introducing political humour to a wide audience and as importantly, a model of production and distribution in what could be considered the birth of self-publishing in Portugal. It was a pro-Republican magazine critiquing D. Carlos monarchic regime. Such relevant information was not available to the audience. In the second room, *Almanaque* (1959), *Cadernos Politika* (1989), and *K* (1991) were other notorious examples amongst more contemporary publications from the 1960s to present. They showed political involvement, critical reflection, and the attempt to produce a magazine as a coherent argument with a consideration of its many stages and activities involved. They revealed, too, Portugal's rich legacy of political and satirical caricature and illustration, the diversified use of typography, a constant reference to the country's historical visual elements and also the influence of Modernism, with the magazine Binário, for

example. Due to the ambition of trying to provide an overview of over 100 years of history in such a small space, to develop a consistent and thorough discourse would always be a very difficult task.

Portuguese graphic design history remains largely unknown outside of the country, and in particular the UK and US which continue to dominate most of the discipline's historical production. The work of Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro, Sena da Silva, Victor Palla and many more less known designers deserve a closer attention and study. The last decade has seen a rise of self-initiated publications and academic research addressing this need. The *Colecção D*, edited and published by designer Jorge Silva, and Robin Fior's thesis about Sebastião Rodrigues' work are some examples of this.

Organised chronologically but with thematic detours, the exhibition demonstrated an effort to highlight the relation between political, cultural, social events and design production, while putting forward a careful selection of magazines in the form of a proposed – and much needed – archive. Yet it was inevitable to not leave *Almanac* without the feeling that it was not an exhibition of magazines, but of magazine covers. At a time when there is a contagious culture of tumblring, with many designers archiving, compiling and sometimes just simply dumping images and unreferenced content with a self-indulgent absence of criteria and purpose, to use feast as metaphor for a graphic design exhibition is undoubtedly dangerous. *Almanaque* was able to avoid it.

Appendix D – *Critical Graphic Design: Critical of What?* (*Design Observer*, 2014) Available from: http://designobserver.com/feature/critical-graphic-design-critical-of-what/38416/

Critical graphic design is a vague and subjective term. The meaning of the word 'critical' in relation to graphic design remains unclear, resulting in an overuse and misuse in design magazines, books and websites. The term was popularized by the much-cited traveling exhibition *Forms of Inquiry: The Architecture of Critical Graphic Design* first shown in 2007, and by the Dutch design studio Metahaven, among others. Yet, the ambiguous criteria used by the Forms of Inquiry curators to support the term, and designers' struggle to match the ambitions of their political, social and cultural research with its visual output, indicate a continuing need for critical discussion of critical graphic design.

In recent years, however, there has been disenchantment and even skepticism toward graphic design work that is labeled as critical. If we look for critical graphic design online, the first search result is an open-submission *Critical Graphic Design* tumblr predominantly filled with humorous responses to design work, designers, publications and institutions generally associated with the term. Here, we can listen to the designer Michael Oswell's satirical electro track, *The Critical Graphic Design Song*, absurdly repeating the names of designer Zak Kyes (co-curator of *Forms of Inquiry*) and Radim Peško, whose typefaces Kyes often uses in his work. Also mentioned is the popular blog Manystuff, which disseminates many works commonly described as critical, though its press-release style of presentation is inherently celebratory and uncritical. The tendency to gather and repeat familiar names shapes an echoing, self-referential canon that is automatically self-validated.

An updated post-financial crisis cover created for Adrian Shaughnessy's book *How To Be a Graphic Designer Without Losing Your Soul* suggests that criticality is a luxury in the current conditions under which graphic design is produced. Other works include parody photos of Metahaven's three-dimensional representation of Sealand, and images that imitate the visual styles of some of the most celebrated critical designers and academic institutions — Yale is often mentioned. These references seem to have three different goals: (1) to provoke the "critical graphic design" clique exemplified by the participants in Forms of Inquiry and the recent exhibition All Possible Futures; (2) to express disappointment toward traditional forums for public debate and legitimation: essays, lecture series, publications and academia; and (3) to challenge the shallow and predictable stylistic approaches used by designers to address critical issues. As the nonsensical critiques, literal illustrations and animated GIFs appear on the screen, they raise some pertinent questions about critical graphic design: What does this poster or image add to the issues at stake? Where is the critique? How does it contribute to written modes of research? What are the criteria and who makes these decisions?

This is not revealed on the *Critical Graphic Design* tumblr, nor does there seem to be any intention with most of these responses to construct a coherent argument. Despite their popularity online, these critiques of criticality also remain largely unquestioned. Are these hacks really contributing to a better understanding and questioning of these undebated trends? Or are they merely tickling the clique they intend to provoke? Are LOLz enough? Can jokes bring down (supposedly) critical design projects? Most of the submissions online reveal an ironic suspicion toward critical design and this attitude will presumably be reflected in the critics' own practice, as they try to avoid doing what they criticize. A clarification of what is meant by "critical" may provide some answers.

In the book *The Reader* (2009), the design researcher Ramia Mazé suggests three possible forms of criticality in design. The first has to do with a critical attitude toward a designer's own practice. The designer makes an effort to be self-aware or reflexive about what he or she does and why. Mazé argues that this can be understood as a kind of internal questioning and a way of designers positioning themselves within their practice. The second form is the "building of a meta-level or disciplinary discourse." This involves what Mazé calls, "criticality within a community of practice or discipline," and trying to challenge or change traditions and paradigms. Designers are critical of their discipline while actively and consciously working toward its expansion and evolution. In the third kind of criticality, designers address pressing issues in society. The critique is not targeted at a designer's own discipline, practice or even at design in general, but at social and political phenomena. In practice, the three modes of criticality often overlap, intersect and influence each other.

Mazé's categorization is not new. A direct connection can be made with the Dutch designer Jan van Toorn's view on design pedagogy. As a design educator, Van Toorn tried to raise awareness of the tension between private and public interests. In *User-centred Graphic Design* (1997), he argues that the "student must learn to make choices and to act without attempting to avoid the tensions between individual freedom, disciplinary discourse and public interest." This assertion of the personal, disciplinary and public levels that a designer should always consider anticipates Mazé's three forms of criticality.

Two influential European design schools focus on the development of critical design practice. The Werkplaats Typographie (WT), founded in 1998 by the Dutch designers Karel Martens and Wigger Bierma, bases its educational model on a modernist form of reflexive practice, following the idea of the "workshop" developed by the English typographer Anthony Froshaug and designer Norman Potter. The WT normally concentrates on typography as a point of departure in assignments set either by the school, external clients, or the students; these usually take the form of publications. The WT's type of criticality falls between the first and second definitions put forward by Mazé.

The other Dutch design school with a strong critical orientation is the Sandberg Institute, which emphasizes the third type of criticality. Its design department presents itself as a "Think Tank for Visual Strategies," with students seeking critical reflection and engagement through work that explores design's role and potential in relation to public and political issues and public discourse. Some examples of this are Femke Herregraven's *Taxodus*, Ruben Pater's *Drone Survival Guide*, Noortje van Eekelen's *The Spectacle of the Tragedy*, Belle Phromchanya's THE RISE OF THE MOON and Simone C. Niquille's *Realface Glamouflage*.

Despite the rejection of the label "critical graphic design," most notably by the designers Stuart Bailey (*Dot Dot Dot* 20, 2010) and James Goggin (*Most Beautiful Swiss Books*, 2008), the term is still relevant. It emerged at a time when the discipline was in a generally uncritical state, providing a necessary distinction from routine practice and awarding a kind of merit badge to designers or studios who deviated from the norm. For designers who scorn the label, criticality in its many forms is intrinsic to graphic design and therefore a special term is unnecessary and redundant.

The term also highlights an important transition in graphic design practice and education: from the designer as author to the designer as researcher. This is not only a consequence of the maturation of the discipline, seeking legitimacy to be used as an investigative tool, but also the result of an increased importance of the social sciences, humanities and their multiple research methods being applied, changed and appropriated by design education and designers. On the one hand, graphic design aims to use its own processes and production methods to contribute new knowledge to the areas it works in. On the other, the absorption of ethnography and data collection methods shows an increasing reliance on other

disciplines' methodologies. The widespread presence of 'design research' in design's lexicon is a sign of these developments, despite recurrent confusion as to what constitutes research in graphic design.

In the age of Behance, of earning badges and appreciations, when one of the most used words in the site's feedback circle is "awesome" and likes and followers are easily bought, graphic design has another opportunity to reexamine its apparently incurable allergy to criticism. Within interaction design, speculative and critical design is now being openly questioned and the critical design projects' political accountability and relevance to society debated.

As a term, critical graphic design will probably be replaced in the permanent rush to coin the next soundbite. Criticality in graphic design will surely continue to be a topic for discussion, but a design work is not instantly critical just because of the intentions of the designer, or the pressing issue being researched. A talk, song, scarf, flag, web meme, website, installation or publication may all be valid ways to pose a critique. However, it's time to publicly discuss the means, effects and especially the quality of the critical design projects, not just to celebrate and retweet them. If that doesn't happen, critical graphic design runs the risk of not being as substantial and meaningful as it could be. Or worse, it will become irrelevant to society. For a discipline that aims to contribute to public debate — let alone social and political change — that would be a disastrously wasted opportunity.

Homage exhibitions are inherently celebratory. However *Staging the Message: The Open Work of Jan van Toorn*, now at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands until 18 Jan 2015, offers a critical challenge to that tradition.

With a seemingly informal but bold approach, work by the Dutch designer is framed within a wider historical and contemporary graphic design practice, allowing 'Staging the Message' to become an exercise in self-reflexivity while proposing a succinct yet provocative case for design theory.

One corridor of the museum is lined with wooden tables designed by Van Toorn, filled with a vast quantity of books and other printed matter. Tablets and a TV screen provide extended access to publications and references used in his work, ranging from film to literature and theatre. The exhibits have been carefully selected, giving attention to Van Toorn's strong relationship with the Van Abbemuseum and its former director, Jean Leering, who shared and encouraged Van Toorn's intentions in openly challenging the role of the museum and art in the public sphere.

Though the show includes recent work ('10 Still Lifes with Borrowed Furniture', 2011), it presents an opportunity to see lesser-known works, such as his proposal for bank notes for De Nederlandsche Bank (1986). Here Van Toorn made visible the politics of money, and his proposal was rejected. Catalogues, books and posters show a shift away from grid-based functional works from the early 1960s, to a journalistic and dialogic approach in the early 1970s and later. The exhibition provides an understanding of that progression, and Van Toorn's struggle to free himself from his Modernist education.

Black-and-white prints – Staging, Design Strategies, Editing, Image + Research, De-Schooling – are taped to the museum's windows, structuring and commenting on the exhibition, each with a quote from a thinker (Umberto Eco, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Ivan Illich) that emphasises the relationship between media, manipulation, politics, method and design.

Under the heading 'Editing' come other sub-headings that summarise Van Toorn's practice and the contributions he has made to graphic design through books such as And Justice for All … (1996), Design Beyond Design (1998), Design's Delight (2003) and Critical Practice (2005). Themes include Data-Journalism, Pictorial Statistics + Isotype, Typography and Image, Image Editing and The Commission.

But it is the five 'Design Strategies', co-authored with historian and curator Els Kuijpers, that provide the exhibition's most provocative theorisation. The first strategy is Functionalism: designers in this category (including Jan Tschichold, Wim Crouwel, Bruce Mau, Mevis and Van Deursen and Experimental Jetset) think 'technology and form can be deployed in a value-free way'. The 'socio-political dimension of the design process is reduced by the conceptual orientation of this model of communication and the abstract, uniform visual language in which it addresses us.'

Formalism groups Herbert Bayer, Alexander Rodchenko, Irma Boom, Gert Dumbar, Stefan Sagmeister, Wolfgang Weingart and Anthon Beeke. This strategy 'celebrates the aesthetic form as liberation from the Modernist dogma forms follows function and the uniform functionalist style it paradoxically leads to.' Instead, form becomes 'detached from content [...] at the expense of meaning'. Informalism, by contrast, employs socially driven, radically open language, opposing 'the aestheticisation of everyday life by art and design', breaking with professional

design that 'deploys communication to control and discipline'. Examples include Hannah Höch, Kurt Schwitters, John Heartfield and Fluxus.

Next, Productivism, which puts communication design 'at the service of a social programme aimed at bringing about change in society.' While it breaks from the 'politically naïve idea of design as a non-ideological form of communication', it 'often fails to relate its own practice to the theoretically grounded critique': messages become depoliticised, and it fails to offer 'realistic alternatives to the status quo it is criticising'. See Metahaven, Bureau d'Études, Hito Steyerl and 2x4.

Finally, Dialogism 'adopts a view of communication based on democratic reciprocity and solidarity'. By seeing communication design as an 'aesthetic system and moral practice in one', this reflexive and social strategy 'aims to involve spectators in the communication in a recognisable and critical manner and thus to offer them counter-images dealing with reality'. Gérard Paris-Clavel, Les Graphistes Associés, Chéri Samba and Hard Werken come under this head.

This proposed taxonomy of design strategies is a careful exercise in history, process, method and effect. It can give an account of a designer or studio's approach based on one project, but also serves to reveal the overlaps and nuances of the works used as examples, being naturally open for debate. So it is possible to see different works by Rodchenko under Formalism and Informalism and El Lissitzky under Functionalism and Dialogism.

At the heart of the exhibition the audience is invited to sit at a table and read some of Van Toorn's books and essays. Another reading room is at one end of the corridor, with shelves of books by authors quoted along the walls, and access to a wider selection of titles. A computer screen shows a variety of films, from Jean-Luc Godard to the documentarist Adam Curtis. On the walls are models used in exhibition design – including one for the current exhibition,

installed in a public corridor so that visitors don't have to pay to see it.

Critical practice does not begin or end with Van Toorn: the exhibition makes clear that there are other ways ways of taking a critical stance, and draws attention to the importance of framing work in the context of society and design practice. But Jan van Toorn's work is a tenacious example of commitment to public debate, criticism, reflexivity, disciplinary discourse and research. 'Staging the Message', appropriately, doesn't indulge in homage, but makes an important contribution to graphic design.

The exhibition *Freedom of Image*, which was spread throughout Porto between May and September 2014, was a vast collection of work from a vital period of political change. It gave witness to ephemeral and functional graphic design production in the period between 25 April 1974 – when the so-called 'Carnation Revolution' brought almost half a century of dictatorship to an end – and 1986, when Portugal entered the European Union. This period saw the birth of many political parties, movements, rallies and associations that allowed democracy to flourish. Graphic design was instrumental in this process.

Approximately 500 pieces of graphic design were displayed in Porto institutions such as the Museu Romântico, Palacete dos Viscondes de Balsemão, Casa do Infante, Casa-Museu Guerra Junqueiro, the music hall Casa da Música, Biblioteca Almeida Garreth and the Contemporary Art Museum of Serralves.

Famous posters, like the exhibits, were loosely organised thematically: MFA (1974) by designer João Abel Manta, *Povo / MFA Revolução em Marcha* [Revolution under way] (1975) by Artur Rosa and *Não faças o jogo da reacção, vota pela revolução* [Don't play the reaction game, vote for revolution] (1975) by Marcelino Vespeira. These posters used simple visual language, making use of Portugal's rich tradition of political illustration and caricature, while revealing traces of Modernism.

Ana Hatherly's decollages *The Streets of Lisbon* (1977) provided a visual overview of the city's walls by ripping and collaging political posters. Examples of crucial works to be found in the many spaces of the exhibition included the satirical newspaper *O Coiso, A Capital* (1974) and the masterfully designed 1959 book by Victor Palla and Costa Martins, *Lisboa, Cidade Triste e Alegre* [Lisbon, Sad and Happy City] – the book's pioneering importance justifies the chronological detour.

While the majority of the work in the exhibition revealed a political connection and affiliation with the revolution of April 1974, some exhibits had different aims. The easily recognisable output of the designer João Machado, one of the best known Portuguese graphic designers, had a strong presence, and revealed the influence of Modernism in social and cultural production. The exhibit allowed an exposure to paintings (by Vieira da Silva), illustrations and performance that shaped Portuguese graphic design. Some performance and co-designed work (labelled 'intercreativity') from the 1970s by multi-disciplinary artist Ernesto de Sousa highlighted the influence of the Fluxus Group and allowed the visitor to see the impact of other disciplines in graphic design.

The scattering of exhibits made it difficult to see the whole exhibition in a single day, obliging visitors to explore the city and take breaks between venues. To make it more challenging, the historic venues had their own architecture and idiosyncratic interiors; in many cases, the work had to co-exist with permanent collections. Bringing temporary exhibitions to museums with collections that remain untouched by time can cause problems for visitors. At the entrance to each venue the work was announced by a text by the exhibition's curator, José Bártolo of ESAD, Matosinhos' Escola Superior de Artes e Design, and another from the Porto council of culture. The work itself was displayed inside red cabinets protected by glass and laid on the floor, or sometimes on top of furniture. Captions were largely absent, so that the audience had to rely on an overly academic introductory text to navigate myriad graphic design media – posters, newspapers, publications, stickers, pins, record sleeves, installations, collages and paintings.

The neutral visual identity was designed by the Porto-based design studio Drop, and the coherence between exhibits was achieved and signalled by red cabinets illuminated from inside, with a matching red power cable. With a playful black and red typographic composition, the visual identity seemed distant from the issues at stake. The exhibition posters had an important presence in the city but hardly engaged the viewer, provoked or raised awareness of its political and ideological dimensions. Nor, despite its openly celebratory aims, did *Freedom of Image* seem to be open to non-Portuguese speakers. There was little to contextualise the work for visitors from other countries, who struggled to understand the presence of slick boxes in the middle of furniture from the Romantic period and the relevance and context of such work.

This celebration took place inside these stylish, glamorous cabinets which blended subtly with the lavish interiors of the venues, giving the work a nostalgic look. At a time when the achievements of 25 April 1974 are being challenged both by a monopolising mainstream media and by severe government cuts, the work deserved a bolder, more critical presence.

Appendix G –
Modes of Criticism 1 – Critical, Uncritical, Post-critical (Modes of Criticism, 2015)

Spreads of the visual essay *The Architecture of Gambling.*

Design as criticism. Francisco Laranjo, LCC, 2017

Design as criticism. Francisco Laranjo, LCC, 2017

Avoiding the Post-critical, Francisco Laranjo

Soon after the financial services firm Lehman Brothers collapsed in 2008, economics occupied a central position in the media. For decades, the financial sector had been driving a process of de-politicisation of society. However, the exposing domino effect caused by the auto-destructive nature of capitalism allowed it to continue suppressing an already fragile public, political discourse. Terminology such as 'subprimes', 'derivatives' and 'collateralised debt obligations' headlined public statements and TV reports, as infographics attempted to explain what had *really* happened.

As European countries started to implement severe policy measures and cuts in all areas of public life, civil unrest was imminent. This took form as an outburst on behalf of the people, in response to the pressure exerted by banks, the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission, to which society felt both powerless and not responsible. Government arrangements with the financial sector under neoliberalism became the norm, attempting to establish a consensual, inevitable state of affairs managed by technocrats. To the condition of eliminating the "proper political,"[1] philosophers such as Jacques Rancière and Slavoj Žižek call the 'post-political.' Throughout the media, a shift in the discourse emerged. There was one reality before the global financial crisis started and another one after it begun. A 'pre' and a 'post'-global financial crisis. These prefixes are recurrently used to mark the before and after of a social, political and cultural event in time.

When the main focus of Western governments is a desperately obsessive yearning for economic growth at any cost, the state of crisis naturally spreads not only to all layers of society, but also to all disciplines. Graphic design is no exception. Trapped between disciplinary discourse and personal, private and public interest, graphic design has another opportunity to re-examine its complicity with the current state of affairs. In other words, the present economic, political and social crisis highlights the fragilities, limitations, but also the potential of the discipline. Yet, at a time when it is fundamental to be critical, the very term has become ubiquitous, cool and vague. While it is possible to identify overlapping levels of criticality, as suggested by the personal (reflecting on own work), disciplinary (expanding disciplinary issues) and public (addressing societal phenomena), what is meant by *critical* is open for debate.

In a conversation between the designers Zak Kyes and Mark Owens published in *The Reader* (2009), the latter makes an important observation concerning the (mis)use of terminology adapted in graphic design discourse. Owens argues that graphic design tends to be delayed in engaging with terminology that is under discussion in other disciplines, more often than not using terms that are "frequently founded on some unacknowledged misreading or misunderstanding." (Owens, 2009, p. 327) He notes that 'postmodernism' was an exhausted term within fine art and architectural discourse by the time it started to take hold in graphic design in the late 1980s. Adding to the list of examples, he says that the same applied to the discussions of 'graphic authorship' in the 1990s and, more recently, the exploration of the term 'relational design' by retrofitting Nicolas Bourriaud's 'relational aesthetics.'

[1] "Proper politics exists whenever the count of parts and parties of society is disturbed by the inscription of a part of those who have no part." (Rancière, 1998, p. 123)

The term 'post-critical' seems to follow this legacy. As the above examples, compared with other disciplines, it is still a recent term within graphic design discourse. As Owens points out in relation to other terms, its reading and interpretation are likely to generate misunderstandings in disciplinary discourse, but also overlaps with the applications developed in other disciplines. In *Critical of What: Toward a Utopian Realism* (2005), architect and critic Reinhold Martin provides a succinct account of the

manifestations of the post-critical within architecture. Martin constructs his argument by referencing and extending the article *'Criticality' and Its Discontents* (2004) by the architect George Baird. Martin characterises practices operating under the banner of the post-critical as "sharing a commitment to an affect-driven, non-oppositional, nonresistance, nondissenting, and therefore nonutopian, forms of architectural production." (Martin, 2005, p. 104) According to Martin, the kind of practice he described citing Baird, failed to deliver "an actual, affirmative project," hiding instead behind adjectives such as "easy," "relaxed," and "cool."

Martin suggests that the post-critical may be seen as the shift from 'political critique' to 'aesthetic critique'. He argues that the former can be defined as "Frankfurt School-style negative dialectics" in reference to critical theorist Theodor Adorno, and associated with theorists like Manfredo Tafuri or Michael Hays. In other words, it follows a tradition of what the word critical is traditionally associated with: negation, resistance, emancipation. Hays has notably described critical architecture as "one which is resistant to the self-confirming, conciliatory operations of a dominant culture and yet irreducible to a purely formal structure disengaged from the contingencies of place and time." (Hays, 1984, p. 14) Martin notes, too, the disbelief and dismissal of architecture's potential by the post-critical, as it "usually winds up testifying not to the existence of a critical architecture, but to its impossibility, or at most, its irreducible negativity in the face of the insurmountable violence perpetrated by what the economist Ernest Mandel called, some time ago, 'late capitalism.'" (Martin, 2005, p. 105) This is particularly important, as graphic design has to deal with (proportionally) similar political and economical constraints as architecture in its search for space for critical autonomy. Yet, the architect Peter Eisenman explicitly diverted his criticality, as Martin argues, towards the questioning of the discipline's internal assumptions and processes, thus resulting in what he calls

aesthetic critique, and architects Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting call projective architecture. By demonstrating both disinterest and resistance towards the political, social and economic struggles architecture has to deal with at professional and academic levels, Martin says that Eisenman semantically changed what was understood as 'critical.' Using the rationalist architect Giuseppi Terragni who worked under the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini as example, Martin alerts to Eisenman's illusion that a "formal syntax could be separated definitely from its political semantics."

In issue 64 of *Emigre* magazine (2003), a concern with a generalised uncritical state of the graphic design discipline was openly expressed, namely by design curator Andrew Blauvelt. Commenting on a reality observable within graphic design discourse after the vivid contributions generated during the 1980s and 1990s, such as the discussions revolving around 'design authorship', Blauvelt presented a dark account of the state of the discipline. In the article *Towards Critical Autonomy or Can Graphic Design Save Itself?*, pluralism seemed to be the word that best described graphic design at the beginning of the 21st century. The discipline's constituent elements were so "scattered and destabilized", that for Blauvelt, "any attempt at definitions becomes meaningless." He goes even further, by introducing the 'post-critical' term to graphic design discourse by arguing that "any critical edge to design—either real or imagined—has largely disappeared, dulled by neglect in the go-go nineties or deemed expendable in the subsequent downswing. However, the reason seems not a factor of cyclical economies, but rather the transfiguration of a critical avant-garde into a post-critical arrière-garde." (Blauvelt, 2003, p. 38)

Five years later, Blauvelt reaffirmed this post-critical condition. In the article *The Work of Task* (2008), he reviewed the birth of the magazine *Task Newsletter*. This magazine, edited by designers Emmet Byrne, Alex DeArmond and Jon Sueda collected a series of conversations with influential design

figures and writings on a diverse range of themes. Blauvelt argues that *Task Newsletter* was being symptomatic of an installed, non-confrontational attitude in graphic design practice. He questions: "The presence of *Task* asks, How do you make a magazine for the post-critical, post-movement moment of contemporary graphic design?" After the application of the 'post-critical' term was contested in the blog post's comment section, Blauvelt provides a clearer reasoning for its use, shedding light on its meaning: "In my opinion the critical establishes a position. The post-critical does not. I'm not evoking a specifically architectural reference for the term, only alluding to the idea that there is nothing to define, uphold, be against, or resist, etc. The issuance of an object into the world does not necessarily establish a critical position. It is possible that we can have more objects and fewer critical positions." (Blauvelt, 2008)

Reinhold Martin's analysis points to a de-politicised manifestation of a new uncritical form of criticality. The lack of ideology is the ideology. It is one which, perhaps unwittingly, blurs, confuses and ignores what critical has been known to mean in the past. The 'aesthetic critique' reconfigures what the word 'critical' can mean in relation to graphic design, thereby liberating the word and allowing it to be attached to virtually any kind of practice that deviates from an uncritical approach to design. This opens up two additional possibilities: 1) the critical as criticool—visual formulas can be developed in order to rapidly make a project look critical; and 2) the critical as simply a synonym of thinking. As a result, there is no need to bridge—or justify—any gap between theoretically-grounded research/critique, visual output and effect. The post-critical places itself beyond criticism, delusionally rendering the tradition that preceded its existence neglectable. Martin suggests that the post-critical avoids becoming obsessed with the past, looking instead optimistically to the future. The designer Stuart Bailey seems to partially reinforce this idea in his open letter in *Dot Dot Dot* 20 (2010). Responding to design critic Rick Poynor's criticism of overlooking graphic design history and tradition associated with the term 'critical design', Bailey said that they (referring to a group of participants of the exhibition *Forms of Inquiry: The Architecture of Critical Graphic Design* (2007) have their own tradition, make their own and will continue to do so, sustaining his arguments with a series of eclectic references. For them, *Emigre* is as much as an influence as an independent record label or a band.

The impact the financial crisis had on graphic design, such as precarity, student debt and budget cuts, has been briefly noted by design writer Adrian Shaughnessy in *When Less Really Does Mean Less* (2012). Here, it is possible to see the introduction of another 'post': post-graphic design. This over-dramatic term does not suggest that graphic design will cease to exist. Instead, it points to imminent changes. The fierce competition from businesses of ready-to-use, categorised templates and logos, to crowd-sourced services such Fiverr or 99 Designs, will drastically reduce the need for typical graphic design work. People producing generic work via these services at reduced prices will, too, be out of work, replaced by automated, data-driven tasks. In this sense, the term also draws attention to the extremely dangerous rise of surveillance, big data and pre-emptive personalisation, which are important to design. It alerts to an increased acceleration of algorithmical automatisation, which anticipates personalised graphic design across media based on collected data across devices. This can render the traditional role of the graphic designer redundant and close even more opportunities for criticality. This 'post' serves to introduce, as all the posts, the "notion of posteriority, the transition from a known classifier to an unknown but suggestive future" as architectural theorist Charles Jencks suggests in *What is Post-Modernism?* (1986).

The post-political and the post-critical have two goals. The first draws attention to the elimination of politics and the bankruptcy of the dominant political systems. At the same time, it opens up new possibilities:

direct action, impromptu public forums, new governance models, movements and parties, for example. The second has a similar orientation. On the one hand it alerts to the crisis of the word it is claiming to be moving away from. On the other, it indicates other approaches operating or diverging from its original meaning, suggesting a new definition of what is meant by critical. While these and other 'post' terms surface within graphic design discourse, it is unlikely that designers will want to wear their corresponding badges, avoiding pigeonholing in an increasingly volatile and fast changing discipline. That is also arguably the least relevant contribution of their emergence and existence. They are useful to signal paradigm shifts, to indicate upcoming demises, challenges and especially to open up discussions and platforms, which in turn can foster new approaches to deal with current social, political and cultural conditions—ultimately keeping the discipline under much needed scrutiny. The post-political and the post-critical will keep highlighting shortfalls and promoting possibilities. In this sense, it may well be the political and disciplinary conditions that lead to the emergence of such prefixes—creating a state of indefinite crisis—that will force the 'critical' to really become critical once again. The post-critical is a term that graphic design does not need to borrow or adapt to. It signals, however, a crucial opportunity to clarify, debate and define what the *critical* in graphic design can and should be—to generate a critique of the critical.

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Appendix G3
Weddings, Ian Lynam

Takeshi is a Japanese male who works as an administrator at a medium-sized corporation. Ayumi is a Japanese female who works as an administrator at a medium-sized corporation. They were married in December of 2013 in Hokkaido at a nice hotel. I was invited to their wedding, but was unable to attend. However, I did see a video of their wedding a week afterward.

The marriage was conducted in the fashion of a Western-Christian wedding with a white man playing the role of priest and coordinating the exchanging of vows, while the couple was clad in a Western-style tuxedo and wedding dress. This was followed by dinner service, while the couple made the rounds greeting their guests individually.

The event's symbolic meaning was amplified by the bride and groom donning Santa and elf costumes to serve dessert at one point—the hybridity of marriage and Christmas feeling very Postmodern. Next was a digital slideshow of the bride and groom, showing them from childhood through adult maturation, followed by images of them together. Afterward, they did another costume change and prepared to bid their guests goodbye. Meanwhile, another video was projected—a slow-motion replay of highlights of the entire wedding that had just occurred with the guest list as the credit roll. Next, everyone left.

This was perhaps the most interesting wedding I have ever witnessed (even if witnessed second-hand from a removed geographical position) due to the collision of symbolism and conflation of cultural ideas that it contained, most notably via the instant nostalgia that the couple and the wedding planner/production team attempted to infuse the event with by projecting the near-instant replay of the event, with time itself being slowed down in the video. As a global culture, we expect some time to pass before a notable moment

in life can become crystallized as being worthy of nostalgia. Instead, the producers behind the event attempted to skip the required period of metaphysical 'fermentation' and present the event as being instantly memorable, fraught with meaning and, ultimately, to emerge fully-formed as being both worthy of nostalgia and instantly nostalgic.

This case of 'instant nostalgia' is not isolated to this wedding, but in fact represents much of what is problematic with graphic design in the West at the present moment. Graphic design, a practice named in 1922 has had more than enough time to "ferment" and become an area of cultural production, research and exploration that is filled with meaning. The difficult thing is that if one peruses his or her local bookseller's graphic design section, the pickings are slim.

The bulk of design, and more specifically, graphic design books and publications are those steered toward very specific reading audiences. These books can be broken down by subgenre, as most notably:

• a selection self-help-manuals for the budding graphic designer
• a smattering of graphic design history books (either focused on a single practitioner or functioning as general surveys)
• a ton of practical how-to guides
• too many books about typographic grids
• an overwhelming amount of monographs
• a dizzying array of books showing contemporary or near
• contemporary books depicting slices of graphic styles
• collections of logo designs
• packaging prototype books

In Western graphic design literature at present, books-as-tools, style guides, and hero worship dominate — there is nearly nothing suggesting anything outside of the problem-solving/commercial/early Modernist methodological paradigm. Because of the dearth of graphic design books that substantially explore the potential of graphic design, it is normal that veteran graphic

designers seek the art and architecture sections of bookstores. And by "potential," I am referring to expanded forms of discourse (conscientiously abstaining from either the term "theory" or the term "practice in this lone instance—graphic design publishing is, and has always been overburdened with practice-oriented writing and not enough theory). There is nearly nothing being produced in the current moment in terms of graphic design *theory*. In short, there is a void. It is not problematic that graphic design draws on the discourses of art and architecture, though it is troubling that homegrown discourse within graphic design is so slow to develop. Due to this, Western graphic design literature just offers far less than contemporary art and architecture theory and literature in terms of breadth and depth in approaches to practice itself, as well as criticism and theory. Graphic design culture at large is still caught up with satisfying clients and being goal-oriented to a fault. This is evidenced as much by the dearth of theory and criticism as it is by the apparent lack of interest in these pursuits by practitioners.

The printed legacy of graphic design has rarely transcended its origins in commercial art and advertising art. The bulk of our literature today is too much akin to the manuals offered by commercial art schools' correspondence courses from the turn-of-the-century. Most graphic design publications today offer preset methods and methodologies, mechanical coursework in various flavors, and are predominantly hydra-like in their combination of over-simplification, banal generalization, atavistic/retrograde approaches to form and practice, and conservative in the applied thinking and writing.

In the West, it is as if we are stuck in a temporal/causal loop—the expanded approaches to graphic design fomented by Postmodernists in the 1990s have (in-effect) ended and there have been few further attempts at an expansion of discourse and practice. Graphic design in North America and Europe relies and insists upon a nostalgia for slices of the early/mid-Modern era. The continued popularity of the writing and design of pioneer practitioners such as Paul Rand (as nostalgiac symbol of Modernism and good, old, long-lasting corporate identity) and Bruno Munari (as carefree symbol of those interested in operating at the intersection of design and art) reifies this, as the West's continued interest in Helvetica, the Swiss/International Style, et al. This fascination with the then-nascent Modern is symbolic of both a form of cultural constipation (at best) and of what constitutes a stoppage in the development of graphic design as a form of cultural production (at worst). However, approaching graphic design from a different geographic location allows for a renewed perspective of history, and allows one to sidestep being stuck in the time loop of Western graphic design.

Paul Rand is important in Japan for his contributions to the development of nascent graphic design in Japan via his alliances with Kamekura Yusaku and the designers in *Graphic '55* (Nihonbashi, 1955), the first exhibition of graphic design in Japan that catapulted the activities of graphic design into general public consciousness. However, he is more of a footnote/interloper/influence than the de-facto timelord that he is in the West. It is this difference in perception that is important in understanding graphic design culture from a global perspective. What/who is important in one culture is not necessarily so in another culture, or in the case of Rand in particular, brings about a difference in perspective heretofore unknown in viewing graphic design from a Western viewpoint.

Another example is the late Swiss graphic designer Emil Ruder—his published work saw popularity in the West in the 1960s and 1970s due to the clarity and availability of his books in English. In Japan, Ruder is emerging as a more seminal figure only at the present moment due to translations of his work (*Emil Ruder: Fundamentals*, Seibundo Shinkosha, 2013) initiated by his former student Helmut Schmid. Consideration of individuals' and concepts' relative importance to a culture adds an additional dimension to commonly accepted notions of graphic design history in the West, as well.

Japanese graphic designers and educators have always utilized a greater reliance upon abstraction and intuition with their approach to design thinking and practice—semiotics has not come into play in the discussion of graphic design that it did in the West. It is the same for many of the popular topics of the 1990s, such as the influence of the vernacular and the questioning the role of graphic authorship. The majority of essays on these topics have not yet been translated into Japanese, and are therefore not part of a greater discourse.

However, the recent published work of designer and writer Shirai Yoshihisa, notably his essay "On Printers' Flowers" (*Idea Magazine* 325, 2007) and reprinted in the book *A Natural History of Printers Flowers* (Seibundo Shinkosha, 2010), has helped form a critical historical understanding of the decorative/baroque in typography in a conscious manner in contemporary Japanese graphic design. His analysis of decorative ornament has helped provide Japanese graphic designers with an in-depth historical understanding of the use of Western typographic ornament, cultural context, and a detailed understanding of implementation. This exploration of historical Western design is helping to expand design discourse in Japan—providing a deeper understanding of design history and culture.

Simultaneously, *Idea* editor Muroga Kiyonori has steered the publication to increase its coverage of Japanese graphic design history, expanding literature beyond merely lionizing the earliest practitioners from the 1950s and filling in the historical gaps of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s through exploring less-known but equally important graphic designers. Other writers at *Idea* (most notably Barbora) have written extensively on the development of both Japanese and Western independent and DIY small press initiatives over the past half-century, expanding the history of designers as literal authors on a global scale.

Designer Goto Tetsuya has been writing a serialized feature called "Yellow Pages" for *Idea* since 2014, which is an expansive bilingual survey of graphic designers in other parts of Asia (to date in Beijing, Taipei and Hong Kong). This series is of immense importance, as it explodes preconceived notions of Japanese design myopia and symbolizes Japanese graphic designers' extreme interest in design culture in the East.

Graphic design literature in Japan is moving forward and looking outward. There is an increased awareness of time and space that is pervasive throughout Japanese culture at the present moment, though most of it is nostalgic in nature. Of note in terms of popular culture is the Japanese movie *Always Sanchōme no Yuhi* (2005)—the film epitomizes retrograde tendencies via a gauzy-lensed look back at post-World War 2 reconstruction-era in Japan and a yearning for "the good old days".

However, the recent writing in *Idea*—the lone bastion of sustained deep discourse on indigenous Japanese graphic design—is redolent of a quite different attitude and desire for expanded global discourse and and an exploration of domestic culture beyond mere nostalgia. The editorial staff and collaborators involved with the magazine are looking at other means and methods of design practice, thought and understanding.

By evaluating graphic design culture through the twin lenses of time and space, Western graphic design literature and discourse can be kickstarted again. As graphic design theory is sorely lagging behind other disciplines, then perhaps by looking to other cultures' investigative methodologies and divergent histories, we can find other approaches and perspectives. Without renewing these, graphic design is doomed to an even-further prolonged 'instant nostalgia-zation' due to its emphasis on the importance of Dribbble Likes, reTweets, Facebook mentions, Pinterest pins and Behance badges.

Known and accepted histories of graphic design have divergent viewpoints, back stories, and potential approaches that are as-yet unexplored. For example, there is a virtually unknown connection between post-War Japanese Modernism and Swiss Modernism that is as much interpersonal as it is developmental. That Swiss typographers

Josef Müller-Brockmann and Max Huber were married to Japanese women is known and acknowledged, but that Huber's wife Aoi Huber (née Kono) is the daughter of the incredibly important early Japanese Modernist Takashi Kōno is not. The familial relationship between two men who helped contribute to the formation of aesthetics of graphic design for whole countries on opposite sides of the world is something that *should* be both studied and analyzed.

Perhaps our understanding of the culture of graphic design—its theory, history and practice—is akin to a wedding slideshow. We just see the snapshots—the edited version of history from very particular perspectives. We don't see things from the perspectives of ex-lovers, second cousins, or father-in-laws. Time must pass for cultural production to be deemed worthy of sustained merit, but most of all, we must be cognizant of time itself and its influence—notably, our place in history, and what we can do in order to 'un-stick' ourselves in time in the West. We have the ability to move past this collective cultural moment of instant gratification, not by reengaging with graphic design with nostalgia, but with a renewed sense of inquiry.

Curation, Cataloging, and Negative Capability, Randy Nakamura

If words had patina then a word like 'curation' would be have a surface so shopworn as to be unrecognizable from its original form. The concept of curation in its unreconstructed sense is intimately connected to institutional authority. If 'curate' as a noun in an archaic sense, refers to the ecclesiastic duties of a church pastor, and 'curator' in a more modern sense, is one who acts as an institutional overseer that preserves the contents of a museum or collection, then the entire concept of curation cannot escape its roots as part of a process of cultural conservation. Fundamentally, the act of curation is conservative, hewing to tradition or institutional continuity. But when we reduce the idea of curation to an act of list making, the cataloging of objects and ephemera, the conservative impulse is upended. Curation then becomes an act of proliferation, a reduction to the most basic element of any creative process. Any list can be potentially interesting, even arbitrary or random lists of things will eventually generate interesting associations purely by the act of serendipitous permutation. It is too easy to point to any number of social networking or web-based tools as the source of this shift in emphasis from genealogy to catalog. Technology is merely symptomatic and obscures larger institutional and discursive shifts in thinking about curation. What is in need of closer examination is how curators and designers understand curation and in particular how they define it as a means of framing exhibitions about graphic design.

The recent Cooper-Hewitt/Walker Art Center show *Graphic Design: Now in Production* (2011) is most emblematic of the institutionalization of curation as catalog. If this show can be seen as a lively and thoughtful engagement with the form and sheer mass of contemporary design (contemporary being defined in a tidy and arbitrary manner as "since 2000"), then it is also a weird form of capitulation to the curatorial means of last resort: the catalog. The very idea of a catalog implies that it is part of the process of curation, not an end in itself. Yet it is the catalog or the process of cataloging that has become synonymous with the idea of curation in graphic design.

In alignment and in some ways, in opposition to the catalog is the idea of the inquiry. Perhaps the most influential articulation of inquiry as a form of curation is found in the introduction to the catalog of the *Forms of Inquiry* exhibition that ran from 2007–2009 at the AA School of Architecture, London, and various locations in Europe. Curators Zak Kyes and Mark Owens define their approach to the show as being framed by the idea of inquiry. For Kyes and Owens an inquiry is distinct from any rigorous empirical or analytical investigation, they define it as an "anti-methodological methodology" that is intentionally intuitive.[1] *Forms of Inquiry* is a collection of works by graphic designers that fall under the rubric of what Kyes and Owens call "intuitive modes of investigation."[2] Absent any clear statement of curatorial intent, it is difficult not to confound the thematics of *Forms of Inquiry* with its curatorial process. Inquiry is both the operative process and the object of *Forms of Inquiry.*

Beyond the interdisciplinary focus of the show on the combination of architecture and graphic design, it is the thematic and curatorial framework of the inquiry that is the most provocative.[3] The first order of business is to separate the idea of inquiry from the idea of 'critical graphic design' that acts as a confusing sub-title for the show. There is no necessary or obvious relationship between criticality and inquiry. It would be easy to assume that the terms could be understood as opposites: criticality

1 See the introduction by Kyes and Owens in *Forms of Inquiry: The Architecture of Critical Graphic Design*. London: Architectural Association, 2007.
2 Ibid.

3 See Rick Poynor's review and unpacking of the term "critical design" in the June 2008 issue of Print magazine. Available on the web: http://www.printmag.com/article/observer_critical_omissions/. The web version is notable for the inclusion of Kyes and Owens' response to Poynor and Poynor's reply.

implies a rational analysis or some sort of overtly oppositional stance, while inquiry could be the basis of any number of practices that verge on the poetic or even deliberately irrational. A *derive* or an assemblage could constitute an inquiry, but neither is critical in a way that is obvious or unambiguous. Kyes and Owens managed to confuse the issue, perhaps because the show is related to architecture, by an inept use of architect Manfredo Tafuri as a generic placeholder for the critical project in architecture. Tafuri in his *Sphere and the Labyrinth* (1987) insisted that the critical project had moved from architectural practice to history, practice being compromised by its investment in capital and its reliance on existing means of production in an unjust economic system. Only the historian or critic could have sufficient distance in order to enact any sort of uncompromising critical project. Contra Kyes and Owens' own framing, *Forms of Inquiry* is anti-Tafurian in its focus on the design practitioner.

The most singular and obvious influence on Kyes and Owens' concept of inquiry is the poet John Keats' notion of *negative capability*. In Keats' 1817 letter to his brothers he offers this classic broadside to enlightenment rationality: "I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason—" It is the deliberate use of non-rational means of knowing, of literally being content with "half-knowledge," and denying any kind of coherent or useful epistemology that seems most congruent with something like an intuitive mode of investigation. Negative capability is the locus of Keats' Romantic poetics, embodying an early nineteenth century "counter-enlightenment" where reason is put to the sword. The fact that negative capability survived to influence numerous early twentieth-century avant-gardes gives it a particular resonance (F.T. Marinetti and the Futurists perhaps being the most telling example involving both a messianic irrationalism and the fetishizing of technology). Keats' invocation of contradiction and uncertainty is almost a proto-modernist statement of difficulty where aesthetics emerges not from transcendence, or reaching after idealized forms, but from the incommensurate nature of a given work.

In the sense that Kyes and Owens use the concept of an intuitive inquiry, curation becomes a type of poetics. Works are collected under the aegis of an exhibition not because of some rationalized intellectual project, but because there is something valuable in juxtaposing works that are multifarious and contradictory. There may be thematic coherence, but the crux of the exhibition remains beyond reason, in the realm of what they call the "subjective world."

Forms of Inquiry could be classified as an attempt at synthesizing a catalog and an inquiry. The structure of the exhibition is reliant on the slight tweaking of three received categories, any of which could be applied to any of the works in the exhibition. The need to call out a category like 'typographics' in a show specifically focusing on graphic design is pure tautology, even as it reflects a widespread and somewhat flatfooted confusion as to what constitutes graphic design as a practice. To a lesser extent categories like 'modes of production' and 'methodologies' suffer from the same sense of typology as being generically descriptive rather than synthetic or even poetic. The result of this tepid cataloging of works is to deflate the premise of *Forms of Inquiry;* that which is intuitive must be disciplined and rationalized even if the rationalizations only obscure the primacy of intuition as a means for investigation. If fundamentally an inquiry is attempting to re-enchant the world, grappling with contingency head on, the list only serves to deaden and deceive, giving false order to a world that has never been amenable to woolly-headed reduction.

Graphic Design: Now in Production suffers from similar faults. As a catalog it is ecumenical to the point of brain death. Exhibition curators Ellen Lupton and Andrew Blauvelt's ambitions are clearer in the sense that they see the exhibition as part of a defined lineage of sprawling catalogs such

as the writer Stewart Brand's *Whole Earth Catalog* (1968) and architects Alison and Peter Smithson's *Parallel of Life and Art* exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (London) in 1953. One does not have to go much further into the depths of what would qualify as pre-history for graphic design, to find architect John Soane's museum established in 1833: a massive collection of art and architectural objects from antiquity and the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, where the contemporary (neo-classical enlightenment) and the ancient found concord as part of the genealogical project of early modernity.

In contrast, *Graphic Design: Now in Production* is completely about the contemporary. It is literally a "history of the immediate present" to follow historian Anthony Vidler's rephrasing of Reyner Banham's famous title. Lupton and Blauvelt's exhibition has one overwhelming virtue: in a purely formal way they succeed in conveying the boundlessness of contemporary graphic design. One gets the sense that they have considered any and everything that might fall under the rubric of graphic design, even if in truth their curatorial strategy is ruthless in its parochialism, implying that the only graphic design that matters is of Anglo-American origin and almost monolithically in English.[4] Perhaps this points to the main advantage of the list or catalog as a curatorial strategy: it provides a semblance of completeness without ever having to be complete. A list is potentially boundless, it has no implied endpoint. It is the format of almost every web page and application by default, where "below the line" becomes an infinity of javascript constantly reloading content into the white void below. If Lupton and Blauvelt indeed had "sought out innovative practices that are pushing the discourse of design in new direction, expanding the language of the field by creating new tools, strategies, vocabularies and content", as they argue in the exhibition catalog, one wonders if this just a shrewd way of justifying the list as curatorial strategy. A search for new "strategies, vocabularies and content" in graphic design is a search

for a haystack in a pile of other haystacks. It is a statement of non-discrimination, not curatorial intent. Never mind the fact that the concept of "innovation" is so imbued with the mendacity of the entrepreneurial huckster that it is now best left to the MBAs and Richard Florida's of the world.

Between the slipperiness of the inquiry and the conceptually stunted catalog, graphic design curation is at a rather bizarre crossroads. What is at stake here is nothing less than the idea of how the discipline of graphic design constitutes its own contemporary canon. At the heart of any curatorial impulse is a critical opinion. One must decide what is valuable and why it is valuable if it is to be preserved and exhibited. Yet these criteria for curatorial value seem either to be cloaked in obscurantism or so vaporous as to be unintelligible. In one of the many captions in the *Graphic Design: Now in Production* catalog, Blauvelt admits to a deliberate strategy of incoherence. Commenting on the design of the catalog, Blauvelt notes that the design is based on a "pre-modern style of arrangement" derived from paintings exhibited in salon-style hangings, where the goal is to "... impose an order and sensibility on an often incoherent assemblage of objects...". One suspects that this is less a case of a gloss accidentally contradicting a specific curatorial vision than an admission that the entire concept of the exhibition was based solely on a process of collection, collation, and display that had no clear direction. This is a blind heuristics run amok, unleashed with the desperate hope that there might be meaning hiding somewhere in the infinite proliferation of objects.

The catalog and inquiry can be read as symptoms of a more ominous issue. This is not a simple issue of decline or unoriginality, but one of belatedness. Both *Graphic Design: Now in Production* and *Forms of Inquiry* share an obsession with the contemporary that is

4 See Ian Lynam's review of the exhibition *Japanese Graphic Design: Not In Production* in *Slanted* 19 (2012). Lynam notes the exclusion of large tracts of non-Western design production in particular the absence of any representative design from East Asia.

expressed in a manner that is now retrograde. At the root of what is considered modern (or "modernist" if one wants to be explicitly ideological) is the idea of newness and nowness. More important for modernity than any explicit rejection of tradition or the past is a strident need to be 'innovative' and of the moment. Whether it was Marinetti in his phenomenology of speed and car crashes as the foundation for aesthetics of a nihilistic 'now' to later movements like Fluxus, who moved the nexus of the "now" to the use of everyday materials and multiples, a need to find the locus of the contemporary became an *idée fixe.* The fact that at this late date there is still an obsession with the contemporary implies that this is an era of a belated modernity, skipping like a locked groove on the remnants of the now.

If there is a critical function to be found in graphic design curation beyond the descriptive then there must be a move beyond the discomfiting continuum between inquiry and catalog. These options give us a palette of extraordinarily limited means where we are faced with the black box of intuition on one end and the endlessly scrolling catalog on the other. Both of these strategies are symptomatic of what the music critic Simon Reynolds defines as basic conundrum of our era, a "hyper-stasis" where there is "a paradoxical combination of speed and standstill."[5] We should no longer be beholden to the modern, and on the quicksand we stand and sink, assuming that it is the only ground available for a solid foundation.

5 See Reynolds' *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to its Own Past* (2011), p. 427. The last chapter "The Shock of the Old" is perhaps the best diagnosis of the contemporary condition, easily applicable to design culture and all its permutations.

Design as criticism. Francisco Laranjo, LCC, 2017

Appendix G5
Precarity Pilot: Making Space for Socially- and Politically-engaged Design Practice,
Brave New Alps

How can one walk the line between some sort of financial sustainability and the production of design work that critically challenges accepted power structures and discourse? How can one organise a design practice that creates space for work that is socially- and politically-engaged and aims for social transformation? These are questions we have been asking for several years within our practice. Since the last year of our MA at the Royal College of Art in London (2009–2010) we have been asking them in a more structured way. At the time, the only answers we could get were centred around a) living in a country where the government supports critical cultural work, namely through state funding; b) setting up a successful commercial practice and taking 10% of your time to do pro-bono or other kinds of socially-engaged work; c) getting into teaching to monetarily stabilise and feed your practice; d) being able to count on the wealth of your family.

The limitations of these options left us unsatisfied and frustrated. In fact, we observed how the conditions to which these answers were the response to had contributed to the dropping out or de-politicisation of the work of many of our peers, who, during our BA studies in Italy (2002–2006), had produced incredibly engaged work but who had "disappeared" just a few years later. This dynamic bothered us because it raised questions of the viability of our own practice and the transformative potential we see in design. We came to the conclusion that if design work was to be supportive of naturocultural justice, i.e. a justice that does not only consider humans but also nonhumans (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2014), there was a need to put in place strategies that would allow socially- and politically-engaged designers from diverse geographical and social backgrounds to develop viable practices.

There seems to be an open assumption within design education that designers should engage with pressing social and environmental issues. In fact, the number of courses that have social, environmental or similar objects of study in their title or course descriptions, and the number of thesis projects dealing with such issues are proof of this. However, design education is not trying to come to terms with how to make this critically engaged approach to design viable in the long-term. In face of the still unravelling financial crisis, the organisational strategies of running a design practice are still, more than ever, tied to the conventional mechanisms of the market. Students are encouraged to increase their enthusiasm for entrepreneurialism, competition and mainstream notions of success. This individualising approach is largely ignoring the accelerated politics of precarisation in Europe. These include, for example, the cut of hard-fought welfare provisions such as free or affordable health care and education, the undermining of labour-rights, the rising cost of housing but also the cuts of cultural funding — all of which are radically changing the socio-economic conditions for people living in Europe.

Advice to designers on how to make a living still tend to be "one size fits all" suggestions, with little to no differentiation regarding people's approach to the world, their socio-economic background, gender or geographic location. Thus effectively ignoring that in our times of socio-economic and environmental crises, there is a need and the possibility to experiment with other ways of organising our work and our lives. And while design activism, adversarial design or design as politics are encouraged and enthusiastically taken up by students, the prevalent discourse on how to make a living as designers is not yet substantially questioned by design education and people's desires for other ways of practicing are most of the time cast aside as naïve, marginalising or simply unviable.

Wanting to intervene in this situation, between 2011 and 2013, we received a PhD

fellowship from the Design Department at Goldsmiths, University of London, to thoroughly work through our questions both in practice and in theory. This fellowship provided us with the time to inquire how the creative industries function, how their economic, social, psychological and physical procedures affect the lives of designers, and how these procedures fit into the functioning of capitalist economies (Elzenbaumer, 2014). What became clear was that although designers and design education do not openly speak about it, within the creative industries most people are exposed to exhausting precarious working and living conditions, such as bulimic work patterns, long hours, poor pay, anxiety, psychological and physical stress, and lack of social protection (c.f. Elzenbaumer & Giuliani, 2014; Lorey, 2006;). Given this situation, we became interested in how design education — both inside and outside academia — can move from the production of docile creative subjects to the production of designers aware of labour politics so that they are prepared to create conditions that are less precarious. Which in turn would allow for more engaged and transformative wo rk to be produced while also allowing for more inclusivity in regards to who can work as designer.

This research gave us the opportunity to work through possibilities of intervention by drawing on feminist and autonomist Marxist theories of the political economy, which focus on the potential of workers to bring about social change through the production of common(s) and a radical restructuring of (reproductive) labour. Inspired by the engagement with such approaches, since 2014 — thanks to fellowships from Akademie Schloss Solitude and Leeds College of Art — we are gathering the research of the last years in what for now we describe as a "subversive career service": *Precarity Pilot (PP)*, developed together with illustrator and pedagogue Caterina Giuliani, is an experiment on how to co-create relays between theoretical knowledge about precarious work and practical strategies to secure livelihood in de-precarising ways. Unfolding through a series of Europe-wide nomadic workshops and an online platform, the project is dedicated to familiarise us and other designers with possibilities of performing enabling rather than precarising economies and interdependencies. We focus on the collective exploration of how design skills can be mobilised in order to spark a socio-economic "becoming-other", i.e. a transformation of how we perceive ourselves and how we relate to the world, or, more precisely, a "becoming-other-with". Because, as the philosopher Donna Haraway points out, there is no isolated becoming-other (2011). The workshops should contribute to the creation of economies— within and beyond design — that foster naturocultural justice and equality. Through *PP*, we invite designers to experiment with tackling the tensions between the production of engaged content and precariousness by embarking in the co-creation of economies (and ecologies) of support that allow long-term viability of design practices that aim for social transformation.

We see the current notion of success within the field of design — focused on individual visibility and market value — closely entangled with the precarising rat race typical of capitalist economies. It contributes to the rarefication of more radical social engagement, and as this engagement often hinders one's ability, but also willingness, to participate in the aforementioned race. In this individualising climate, we see the need to introduce ways of working and living that follow an "ethics of care" (Tronto, 1993) towards others and that are thus grounded in a more thorough understanding of the politics engendered by one's individual and collective ways of practicing design. Shifting from an ethics of competition to one of care is a strategy to challenge the precarising yet widely accepted notion that one's survival needs to be based on constant competition. One in which the best chances for success are stood by entrepreneurial, self-assured, smart, independent, popular designers. We propose that making space for cooperative,

reflexive, complex, entangled and critical designers also means to make space for relations that go beyond competition and that allow for the construction of mutually empowering interdependencies, solidarity and collective action.

Making space for other selves through a diversity of relational modalities is for us an opening towards linking content with politicised ways of working and organising. But although it is clear that all design work is political, whether it is overtly taking position or implicitly siding with what is taken as the norm (and thus falsely assumed to be apolitical), we strongly argue that the choice of inscribing one's design practice in transformative politics cannot solely be reduced to a matter of individual choice as it is often suggested. A key example of this de-politicised tone and argument of individual responsibility is used in *How To Be a Graphic Designer Without Losing Your Soul* (2005), by design writer Adrian Shaughnessy. But when designers comply with and perpetuate the normalised yet precarising procedures of the creative industries and the neoliberal agenda — such as systemically relying on un- or underpaid work of others, overworking and/or overspending as common practice, pitching without question, eagerly offering hyper-flexibility — they put pressure on others to do the same. This compliance with precarising procedures erodes the bases for resistance while also privileging the healthy, (apparently) independent and well-off designers. By structuring social relations and ways of practicing in mutually empowering rather than precarising ways, the conditions for making a living through design work can become more inclusive, allowing for a diversification of the field. Moreover, the effect of this re-structuring is connected with the transformation of socio-economic cultures at large. As designers change their ways of working and relating to each other, design work also starts to change: it becomes possible to engage with the world from a position that knows that competition, individualisation, marketization and (self-)

precarisation are not an unquestionable norm. It becomes possible to collectively redesign economies and interdependencies in ways that defy, resist and/or exit precarising ways of organising and designing.

Precarity Pilot has been exploring this in a number of different ways, ranging from small, individual interventions to substantial collective experiments. These vary depending not only on the location, but also the specific professional and personal situation of the participants. Propositions explored so far through PP encompass, amongst others, the creation of spaces to openly speak about the relation between design and money: how much to do you charge for your work, how is the money you earn distributed within your collective or company, and when is it acceptable to work for free? Other questions address the way designers relate to time: what happens if designers stop being constantly ready to work, stop working and sending e-mails on weekends, plan projects in a way that getting ill is not causing a major professional, psychological and physical melt-down? What happens if networked design collectives commit to work only part-time, while adopting a low-consumption lifestyle and contributing to transformative structures outside the field of design? These are only some proposals that have been put forward by PP. They are, however, representative of its approach: an attempt to make conventional, precarising ways of practicing, strange. By doing so, PP recalls that designers can work and organise themselves in different ways, and that these can be functional under current, difficult conditions while also being prefigurative of a different future.

We're aware that the proposals for intervention put forward through PP are not necessarily to be accomplished easily, without doubts, failures and contradictions. University-educated designers are already a privileged group in the global rat race and the present research project has so far relied on competitive fellowships and research positions. But this does not diminish the urgency of needing to find de-precarising

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strategies of working and organising as they are the long-term enablers of socially- and politically-engaged practice. In this setting, it is encouraging that this research does not stand as an isolated endeavour but is embedded in a larger ecology of people around the world experimenting with economies that work towards the prospect of better lives for everyone, despite multiple and increasing crises. Here we are thinking of experiments that are developing in many places in diverse and situated ways, such as community economies where relations and exchanges are negotiated ethically, practices of commoning where common goods are (re) produced collectively, subsistence perspectives where people produce mainly for the direct satisfaction of their communities' needs, economies of degrowth that defy the capitalist imperative of expansion and solidarity economies that build empowering links between economic alternatives. With *Precarity Pilot* we invite designers to collectively engage with this central entanglement in which design exists and to experiment with multiple approaches to restructuring ways of working and relating. There is a great need to create and share knowledge towards the development of inventive tactics and strategies to make socially- and politically-engaged design practices viable in the long-term.

www.precaritypilot.net

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Appendix G6
Futuristic Gizmos, Conservative Ideals: On Speculative Anachronistic Design,
Luiza Prado and Pedro Oliveira

Speculative design is going through a troubled adolescence. Roughly fifteen years after interaction design duo Dunne and Raby first started talking about "critical design," the field seems to have grown up a bit too spoiled and self-centered. Being a fairly young approach to product and interaction design, it seems to have reached a tipping point of confusion, rebellion, contrasting opinions and confrontations. Presently, from practitioners to theorists there seems to be little consensus about what the field is able to offer—and whether it is of any use at all. In this article we hope to pinpoint some reasons why this is so, while at the same time offering not possible, plausible or probable but *preferable* developments for the field.[1]

1 We are referencing physicist Joseph Voros' *Futures Cone* (2003), recurrently employed by speculative and critical designers to position their projects (as seen in Dunne and Raby's *Speculative Everything* (2013, p. 5), for example).

Before introducing what we consider to be *truly* critical about speculative and critical design (from here on referred to as simply SCD), context is paramount. SCD made its first appearance as "critical design" in the late 1990s in the corridors and studios of the Royal College of Art (RCA) in London. It envisioned design as a tool for critique, and aimed to explore the metaphysical possibilities of the designed object in order to "provide new experiences of everyday life, new poetic dimensions" (Dunne 2005, p. 20). Even though the idea in itself was not new—with other practitioners already undertaking similar endeavours without necessarily defining them as "critical design"—this was perhaps the first time that criticality was proposed as a deliberate attitude to product and interaction design, "a position more than a method" (Dunne and Raby 2008, p. 265; 2013, p. 34). In the following years speculative proposals became a strong driving force and a trademark of

the Design Interactions programme at the RCA—under the direction of Dunne — and a few other schools in northern Europe. Across the Atlantic, practitioners and authors such as Julian Bleecker and Bruce Sterling, as well as curators such as MOMA's Paola Antonelli, began taking interest in these new perspectives on design; in the US the discipline was rebranded as "design fiction"—though it maintained most of critical design's core goals.[2]

2 It is unclear who coined "design fiction" — although science fiction author Bruce Sterling is commonly credited. Dunne and Raby (2013, p. 100) remark that even though similar in nature, design fictions are "rarely critical of technological progress and border on celebration rather than questioning." For a comprehensive account of design fiction, refer to Bleecker (2009) and Sterling (2009).

Despite the growing number of practitioners and the interest that this approach has garnered in the design community since its inception, the discourse in the field has remained suspiciously static. In *Hertzian Tales* (2005), Dunne passionately argued for an exploration of the metaphysical possibilities of the designed object, focusing on its potential as embodied critique, political statement or activist provocation. His proposal rejected design as a discipline exclusively focused on servicing the industry, though it was equally careful not to align itself with Marxist ideals (ibid., p. 83). Distancing its speculative proposals from "market-led agendas" (Auger 2013, p. 32) emerged as the motto of Design Interactions' output, with a good number of the programme's alumni becoming mainstream references for what speculative design is able to achieve. Their projects follow a clear path of dreaming about the uncanny implications of tricky subjects such as birth,[3] death and social anxieties,[4] only to name a few. Yet, they are predominantly expressed through aesthetics of consumerism, still contained within a clear neoliberal framework. Fifteen years on, the field seems to have taken this fear of left-wing ideals at heart.

3 Ai Hasegawa's project *I Wanna Deliver a Dolphin* explores the possibility of humans birthing other animals: http://aihasegawa.info/?works=i-wanna-deliver-a-dolphin (Accessed October 14, 2014)

This reluctance in cutting its ties with the industry might be the effect of a narrow

4 Auger Loizeau explore "the harnessing of our chemical potential after biological death through the application of a microbial fuel cell, harvesting its electrical potential in a dry cell battery." in their *Afterlife* project: http://www.auger-loizeau.com/index.php?id=9 (Accessed October 14, 2014) Sputniko's project *Crowbot Jenny* dreams of trans-species communication as a solitary girl's way of connecting with other living things: http://sputniko.com/2011/08/crowbot-jenny-2011/ (Accessed October 14, 2014) Auger Loizeau also explore social anxieties in their project *Social Telepresence:* http://www.auger-loizeau.com/index.php?id=11 (Accessed October 14, 2014)

view of design's agency in everyday life. Whereas Dunne and Raby's famous *A/B Manifesto* (2013, p. vii) makes sure to differentiate their approach as directed towards "citizens" rather than "consumers", the authors reinforce in their most recent publication *Speculative Everything* (2013) that it is basically through *what people buy* that futures are brought into existence. In other words, a shopping window packed with near-futures, ready to be chosen and consumed (Dunne and Raby 2013, p. 37, 49, 161; Tonkinwise 2014; Kiem 2014). Furthermore, for Dunne and Raby, the political sphere of critical design ends where the design profession ceases its responsibility, that is, at the moment a consumer product (or a prototype thereof as "critical design") comes into being (2013, p. 161). Yet contrary to what they affirm, we argue that designers are as politically responsible and accountable for their practice as for their actions as citizens; there is no separation between one role and the other. When this simple assumption is taken into consideration, it becomes clear that the art gallery is not the most appropriate space for these "provocations" and discussions to take place — it needs to penetrate public discourse beyond the "art and design exhibition" setting in order to become an instrument of the political (Fry 2011; DiSalvo 2012; Keshavarz and Mazé 2013).

It is precisely because SCD's productions — and the debates they aim to incite — rarely leave these specific environments that they stall. The field's preoccupations are directed towards little more than an alleged "lack of poetic dimensions" in our relationship with designed objects (Dunne 2005, p.20). SCD is made *by, for* and *through* the eyes of the Western—and typically northern-European and/or US-American—, intellectual middle classes; the vast majority of work currently available in the field has concentrated its efforts on envisioning near futures that deal with issues that seem much more tangible to their own privileged audience. Projects that clearly reflect the fear of losing first-world privileges in a bleak dystopian future abound, while practitioners seem to be blissfully unaware (or perhaps unwilling to acknowledge) the existence of different realities.[5] This myopic vision of the world has led the field to limit itself to superficial concerns, and stunted the development of its once-ambitious political aspirations.

Clear examples of these problems can be found in the visual discourse of SCD: the near-futures envisioned by the great majority of projects seem devoid of people of colour, who rarely (if ever) make an appearance in clean, perfectly squared, aseptic worlds. Couples depicted in these scenarios seem to be consistently heterosexual and bound by traditional notions of marriage and monogamy. There are no power structures made visible that divide the wealthy and the poor, or the colonialist and the colonised. Poverty still happens *somewhere else*, while the bourgeois SCD subject copes with catastrophe through consuming sleek, elegant, futuristic, white-cubed and white-boxed gizmos.[6] Gender seems to be an immutable, black-and-white truth, clearly defined between men and women, with virtually no space for trans∗ and queer identities (let alone queer and trans∗ voices speaking for themselves).[7] Between these narrow depictions of reality and whitewashed formulations of near-future scenarios, SCD seems to be curiously

5 Michael Burton and Michiko Nitta's *Republic of Salivation* suggests a dystopian future in which citizens are fed rationed meals by the government. The designers seem to be unaware that this is already a reality for many countries in the developing world. Its inclusion in MOMA's *Design and Violence* online curating platform ignited a long debate on the validity of SCD and served as the starting point for this and other essays. The thread is available at http://designandviolence.moma.org/republic-of-salivation-michael-burton-and-michiko-nitta/ (accessed October 10, 2014).

6 As Tony Fry remarks, "[f]or the privileged, defuturing often happens under an aura of elegance." (2011, p. 27)

7 Whereas Sputniko's *Menstruation Machine* attempts to tackle the subject of transsexuality and queerness, it still employs questionable terminology and representation of queer identities (cf. Prado de O. Martins 2014).

apathetic and apolitical for a field that strives to be a critical response to mainstream perceptions of what design is, and what it should and could do. In truth, the only message that this apathy can convey is that society is fine as it is.

The question is then whether it is possible to expand from these superficial concerns and provide more thoughtful perceptions and analyses of the world. While the majority of criticism towards the field remains highly sceptical (and perhaps rightfully so), we still believe SCD can be transformed into a strong political agent. For this to happen, however, it needs to be tested, spread out, modified, re-appropriated, bastardized. SCD's hesitation in acknowledging its problematic stances on issues such as sexism, classism or colonialism, to name a few, need to be called out. Projects promoting and perpetuating oppression should not be tolerated, and those not willing to second-guess their own decisions need to be held accountable for their political decisions. Assuming that the (white, cisgendered, male, European, etc.) gaze is 'neutral' or 'universal' is not only narrow-minded, but also profoundly reactionary.

Many of the problems we have highlighted within SCD stem from the tenuous grasp that the field seems to have of the humanities and social sciences. In its ambition for envisioning how technology reflects social change, it assumes a very shallow perspective towards what these social shifts mean; it avoids going deeper into how even our core moral, cultural, even religious values might—or should—change. While SCD seems to spare no effort to investigate and fathom scientific research and futuristic technologies, only a small fraction of that effort seems to be directed towards questioning culture and society beyond well-established power structures and normativities. This is, perhaps, the most defining trait of a teenaged field: the ironically anachronistic nature of a practice that creates futuristic gizmos for profoundly conservative moral values. In order to overcome this, we believe designers have to look beyond given socio-economical and political structures and inquire *how* and *why* our societies got there in the first place. One way to do so is to get closer to research in the critique of science, feminist and queer theories, sound studies and other scholarship that dare to question the hierarchies of privilege that constitute the world as we know it today. More than that, SCD should offer a helping hand towards making these tricky questions visible and tangible to public discourse, well beyond exclusionary spaces such as academia, museums and art galleries. This needs to be done without fearing a dialogue with the so-called "mass culture" or "mainstream" so often neglected and avoided through the use of purposefully cryptic language.

While the issues highlighted in this article are not the only ones worthy of the field's attention, demanding meaningful engagement and thorough research from a community largely stemming from—or with connections to—academia is hardly asking too much. Such an attitude will not only prevent projects from incurring in the same basic mistakes pinpointed here and henceforth failing to address their aspirations, but will also offer some diversity beyond self-indulgent, narrow-minded perspectives. From the moment SCD researchers and practitioners start keeping these issues in mind and holding themselves accountable for their political decisions, the field might finally start fulfilling its promises of critique. Until then, it will remain confined to a vicious circle of navel-gazing and self-appraisal.

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Appendix G7
Design Fictions About Critical Design,
Cameron Tonkinwise

At the beginning of 2015, some researchers took the physical components of the design duo Dunne and Raby *Foragers* exhibition to Liberia. The imagery and texts that accompanied the original exhibition of the 'fictional' artefacts were not included because their art direction contained too many unquestioned class and ethnic assumptions. At the time, Liberia was recovering from being in a state of emergency as a result of Ebola. Food production was limited and the imaginary of Liberians was filled with the 'space age' suits and equipment of wealthy white people trying to contain viruses. As a result, the *Foragers* designs were an immediate scandal. Riots ensued. The Liberian government, believing it had evidence of an anti-African plot by Europeans and Americans, expelled all foreign companies and committed to becoming self-sufficient in organic produce and local economies.

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Report: Speculative Critical Design — Inbox

22 January 2015 10:35

Report: Speculative Critical Design

Dear Dean,

The joint studio we have been conducting with the Pakistani Design School this semester ran into some difficulties. As you may remember, this class was investigating 'Speculative Critical Design.' Students were challenged to be really radical in their responses to the brief, widening their sense of the possible by straying into the impossible. However, there seem to have been some 'lost in translation' issues. Halfway through the semester we realized that the Pakistani students were not describing imagined scenarios, but situations that various of them or their families had experienced. These were in many ways more disturbing than the futures our North American college students were generating. When we realized this, we reiterated that our intention was to do 'SCD.' When the Pakistani students finally understood that our designs were only intended to be thought-experiments that could not yet be realized, they became very angry. They were outraged that we were not interested in focusing on their current problems resulting from the use of existing technologies. Many of our students came to me to complain that they had signed up for a course in thinking about the future, not a course in West vs Islam politics.

Best regards,

Investigators have found that a spate of tragic drone-related accidents had a common source. The operators had been inspired to DIY their devices after seeing what they believed were real examples in a shopping catalogue. Instead the catalogue was the 'design fiction' project of the Near Future Laboratory. A court found the Laboratory culpable for the accidents. The presiding judge expressed disbelief that the Laboratory could have imagined such evil devices. The Laboratory argued the 'it was just art' defense but the judge refused to accept this because the ideas had been rendered at such a high level of fidelity. "It was criminally negligent of the Laboratory to have designed these provocations without making any preparations for the consequences of releasing these ideas into the world," the judge said in a statement. "The Laboratory could not explain to the court even their best case scenario for how productive reception of this 'artwork' was expected to take place."

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"Yes, Hello, thanks for taking my call. My design magazine is very interested in publishing stories about your Speculative Critical Design. To be frank, I was told about your work by some of our most dedicated and well-paying advertisers. I wasn't familiar with your projects, but our clients—from some of the most expensive furniture companies to some of the most exclusive fashion houses —knew all about it. They were saying that your work is radical and critical—really disruptive—but that it is still really great design, very clearly demonstrating the power and sophistication of Design. They love how it makes design look so cutting edge. One of my magazine's most prolific advertisers was saying that he has been waiting so long for this. For decades now leftist cultural critiques have been vilifying design as the source of all consumerism. But now you are using design to critique everything else. At last design looks like the savior rather than the villain. It reaffirms the world's faith in the value of design. All our advertisers want to position their products alongside articles about your work. Design schools too. They love that you are driving student interest in forms of designing that they are already teaching—no need to retool. So tell me—what have you been 'critically designing' recently?"

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*Design as criticism.* Francisco Laranjo, LCC, 2017

A new leak from Edward Snowden points to a complicated conspiracy. For some time, design research laboratories at universities, such as the one associated with the design researcher Bill Gaver at Goldsmiths University, have used funding from tech companies to produce what appeared to be provocative propositional products about the social implications of future technologies. Investigative journalism revealed 18 months ago that these projects were not the cultural critiques they claimed. They were instead versions of an old design strategy that the industrial designer, Raymond Loewy, once called MAYA – *Most Advanced Yet Acceptable*, in 1951. In this approach, designers produce extremist speculative designs on their own time in order to move the ones that more conservative designs clients might choose further along the innovation spectrum. *Vice News* showed that what appeared to be arm's-length funding for 'ambiguous' explorations of design possibilities, such as Gaver's, were in fact deliberate attempts by tech companies to work with design researchers to 'soften up' the public for new technologies or new uses of technologies. Snowden's leak reveals a further twist. The NSA in the USA channeled money to Speculative Design researchers through tech companies to generate projects that would make the public think that radically life-changing new technologies were just around the corner. The intention appears to have been to make the public believe that increased technological reach was an inevitability.

The product designer James Auger is facing disciplinary action by his university for his role in 'industrial sabotage' of genomics research. Auger began working with genomics scientists as part of an 'Art-Science' initiative at his university. The original aim was to explore how designers could help scientists better communicate the implications of their work. Initial collaborations involved Auger using what is known as a 'Speculative Design' to imagine ways in which the scientists' research might be commercially deployed. Scientists were apparently appalled by the resulting designs, discerning for the first time the great dangers of their work. Shocked by the realism of Auger's exploitative propositions, the scientists committed to ending their work. It is alleged that it was Auger, drawing on what he had discovered from his design research about the media ecology sustaining the credibility of this science, who proposed how the scientists could effectively 'suicide-bomb' this field of research. We now know that the experiments that the scientists claimed to be doing, which led to widespread public outcry and consequent outlawing of such work, were never in fact conducted—they were merely stories that the scientists put about to provoke the very reaction that ensued. Auger's defense invokes 'the precautionary principle.' On his way into the disciplinary meeting at his university, he refused to comment to reporters apart from saying repeatedly: "Google 'Post-normal Science'!"

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The New School in New York City, which includes the Design School, Parsons, announced a new degree program that combines Design and Journalism. Part of this unique, innovative and urgently needed degree program is the possibility of majoring in Discursive Design. The Director of the Discursive Design major spoke at a MOMA *Design and Violence* forum saying, "Speculative Design is pointless unless it is active in giving form to the speculations it stirs up. You can't just make provocative products and then throw them over the wall into the existing media landscape. For instance, tech journalism at the moment is an embarrassment. If you really believe in the importance of design as a shaper of the future, you must also construct the media that can be the forum for that shaping. We will teach Discursive Designers how to build up the audiences they need."

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Design researchers at a number of Art and Design Schools are concerned about possible terrorist threats against them. Many have received versions of messages saying things like:
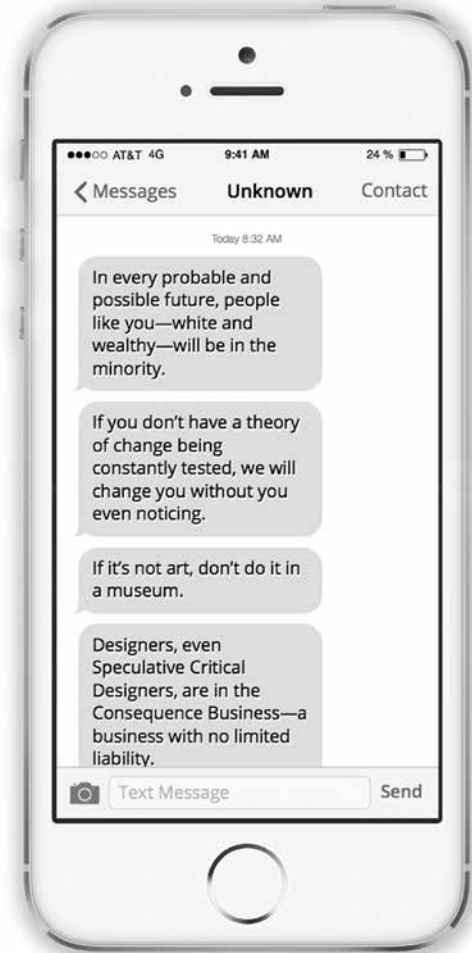
Some of these Design Researchers suspect that the messages have in fact been written by their colleagues more committed to Social Design and Participatory Design.

Appendix G8
A School for Design Fiction: Interview,
James Langdon

FRANCISCO LARANJO: Design Fiction is a term that has been increasingly popular within design discourse, especially in relation to product/interaction design, and more recently, graphic design. The short course/project *A School for Design Fiction* that you initiated in 2013 formed the content of a subsequent publication with the same name. Why did you choose to use this term in relation to the specific context in which the project was taking place?

JAMES LANGDON: My use of the term 'design fiction' began with a presentation at the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig in November 2013. The format was a single day of lectures and instructional performances. A small publication followed in January 2014, and the project has continued as a workshop, hosted in London (UK), Ravenna (Italy), Stockholm (Sweden) and Vancouver (Canada).

My motivation is to present an alternative understanding of design fiction. In my practice I have never been concerned with anticipating or implying particular futures through design. I am interested in how artefacts speak to us, sometimes in ways that can be shaped by design, but also in ways that a designer cannot control.

FL: To propose a 'school' for design fiction suggests that on the one hand that it can (should?) be a field in its own right and on the other that there may be specific methods and processes that are substantially different from the norm. How was this reflected in the workshops done in the context of the project?

JL: I should begin by describing the programme of the workshop briefly. The workshop takes a collection of ordinary objects and puts them through a series of related processes of description, interpretation, representation and transformation. The final exercise takes the premise of reverse-engineering as a form of portraiture, asking the participants to deconstruct an object and shape its remains into a representation of another object. The emphasis is on analogy and manipulating the narrative potential of objects.

Perhaps it would also be useful for me to be more precise about how I use the term design fiction. I see design essentially as a storytelling process, in the sense that I understand all human artefacts to be implicated in telling the story of the universe. I like the image of an archeologist examining an artefact from a lost civilisation. Many centuries after its designer lived, that artefact continues to suggest narratives about the culture that produced it. For me, the *fiction* in design fiction is not primarily about the impossible, or the futuristic, but about the multiplicity of possibilities in any ordinary decision making process. If one accepts artefacts as narrators of the universe, then it would seem that a most urgent task for any designer is to become familiar with manipulating object narratives in this basic and essential way. It is design for the attention of archeologists.

In the context of this workshop it has not been important for me to assert design fiction as a field in itself. In fact I have found it necessary to resist the preconceptions held by some participants that design fiction implies design without everyday constraints. The methods and perspectives used in the workshop are derived from various disciplines, I consider that essential for any design education.

FL: Design historians have perhaps most notably used design archeology as a method. Your concept of design fiction seems to draw more on this legacy than on the future-oriented science fiction literature that feeds most design practice associated to the term. In the book *A School for Design Fiction* it is only possible to see traces of objects and some initial insight into the discourse that framed the methods. What references, work or methods is this project building upon? And, what did it add to them?

JL: The book is structured by a ridiculous yet sincere proposition of a curriculum for designers. The elements of this are as follows: The first part of the book is a relatively conventional historical design fiction that expands on a small publication of mine titled *Pugin's Contrasts Rotated* and published by Bedford Press in 2011. It takes the example of English architect Augustus Pugin and his polemical manifesto on architectural style, *Contrasts* (1836). Pugin's book has a notoriously binary argument: essentially, that Gothic architecture was the true, form of divine Christian architecture, and that the neo-classicism of Pugin's age was a vile desecration of that ideal. The design fiction in this case is to imagine the original production of Pugin's book as if it were not subject to the technical constraints of its time. What appears in *A School for Design Fiction* is a representation — made by artist Simon Manfield — of the earlier work, in which an original first edition of *Contrasts* is disbound, modified and rebound so that its graphic design and binding better relate the binary form of its argument to the binary form of the open book's two facing pages. In terms of the curriculum I am describing, this is intended to establish the idea of an essential union between format and meaning.

The second chapter of the book is the most speculative in its relation to design. It presents the work of American neuroscientist Michael Gazzanniga, a pioneer of the study of split brain surgery in humans. The content in my book is only superficially a design fiction, in the sense that it is a revisualisation of existing material. Gazzaniga has lectured and published very widely and videos of him presenting similar material as illustrated lectures can be seen on YouTube and read in numerous textbooks. My work, with artist K.N.W., was to be faithful to the science as documented in these sources, but to make two shifts of emphasis. The first is the macabre aesthetic. Early split brain surgery involved extensive animal testing, and this is hardly covered in Gazzaniga's recent presentations. So there was a motivation to stress that aspect: the abuse of living beings in the pursuit of knowledge and insight into our own existence. The second emphasis was to assert Gazzaniga's discovery of the 'interpreter' — the part of our brains whose function is to make narrative relations between the disparate phenomena of our sensory experience — as profoundly significant to design. To me, Gazzaniga's discovery confirms the idea that humanity's role in the universe is to tell the story of the universe.

The following two chapters are closely related, and both try to exemplify this idea of telling the story of the universe practically. The first, made with artist Peter Nencini, is an exercise in very long duration storytelling. The models shown reflect on aspects of *Star Maker*, a 1937 novel by English philosopher and writer of science fiction, Olaf Stapledon. Through several major novels, Stapledon was engaged in a speculative attempt to imagine the story of the human race in its entirety. From our possible origins to our potential fate. His writing is naturally imaginative, but extraordinarily considered in the way that it extrapolates a believable narrative of such vast scope from the history and politics of Stapledon's time. This part of the book is the closest to expressing the ideas that I explained before, about design and archaeology.

Following that, is a short portrait of Gilbert Adair, a Scottish author who spent his entire career continuing the work of other writers. He would mimic the narrative constructions and prose style of his subjects with amazing fidelity. I have been writing more about Adair recently, and this is the part of *A School for Design Fiction* that I am presently most focused on exploring. What I see in Adair's example is an idea that I think is a great resource for designers: a kind of code for relating to the past. There is so much of design education that is concerned with the historical record, and studying the work of previous generations, but I know of relatively few concrete pedagogical examples of *how* exactly these influences can be assimilated into a practice. Gilbert Adair is wonderfully instructive in this way. In the project to tell the story of the universe, we need a method for continuing the work of our predecessors.

The final part of the book is a proposal

by Céline Condorelli for putting these ideas to use in a process to redesign the cafe of the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig, where the project was first presented.

FL: After *A School for Design Fiction*, you published *A School for Design Fiction Workbook* (Motto Books, 2014). The publication gathers a series of objects from different historic periods and locations with some formal similarities, framed by a text by the artist Francesco Pedraglio that proposes a way of thinking aligned with that argued in the previous book. Between this text and the objects printed in black and white, it is possible to see colourful objects photographed on colourful backgrounds. These subtly reference the objects, but they also highlight that this project exists in a fine art context. The proximity and the sometimes flirtatious relationship between design and art has been previously debated, for example, in *Design and Art* (MIT Press, 2007) and more recently in *It's Not a Garden Table: Art and Design in the Expanded Field* (JRP Ringier, 2011). Why is *design* fiction useful to art?

JL: I have to begin by expressing skepticism for the dialogues that I have read around transdisciplinary art and design. I would add another representative title to your list, *The Transdisciplinary Studio* (Sternberg Press, 2012) by Alex Coles. My reservation about these dialogues is that there is probably nothing at stake in them. In my outlook, an interesting context in which to practice always offers constraints and requires responses. I think very few artists work — or, importantly, desire to work — in a way that is free of a context or premise to respond to. In the past three years I have interviewed a number of former students of the English designer and educator Norman Potter. I have heard many similar anecdotes that reflect an attitude that Potter apparently instilled in his students. They all go something like this: if you were working on a project — as a builder, for example — and you had the ability and tools to help your commissioner — with some plumbing, for example — then you

would do so, naturally. Such improvisations probably constitute a vast majority of the everyday processes in any human activity. The fact that there is apparently no discourse on transdisciplinary practice in the building and plumbing trades tells me that certain art and design commentators are overlooking the ordinary realities of work in all but the most reductive practices.

 A School for Design Fiction Workbook was published to accompany the final presentation of the workshop that I mentioned at the beginning of our conversation. The book is concerned with *reading* objects as an essential exercise for designers, and draws on reference points in philosophy and archeology. I commissioned the contents of the book in relation to a historical narrative that loosely informs the workshop. It's a classic archeological hoax known as 'Piltdown Man'. In 1912, skeletal remains were found in a gravel pit in the English village of Piltdown. These were heralded as one of the most important discoveries in history, evidence of the 'missing link' between humans and apes. An extensive discourse was written around these fragments, until they were revealed, forty years later, to be a hoax. Apparently nothing more than orangutan bones stained with chromic acid to make them appear ancient. Prompted by this narrative, Francesco Pedraglio's text in the *Workbook* interweaves two situational readings of an object to suggest the decisive moments that determine its canonisation — be that in the history of archeology, of hoaxes, or a single personal history. As you noted, the text functions in the book by implying a connection between the two collections of images — found photographs of archeological sites and artefacts prepared by Batia Suter, and new sculptures by Samara Scott.

 To account for this work directly in response to your point about the usefulness of design fiction to art, I need to rearrange the terms. In the case of the *Workbook*, I am visualising aspects of a number of practitioners' work to communicate this sense of the mutability of objects that I have

described. That strategy is an expression of my own approach as a designer. I think of my work as display: a gesture of *showing something* to *someone*. The *Workbook* is a proposition: a way of understanding the work of its four contributors — Peter Nencini, Francesco Pedraglio, Samara Scott and Batia Suter — that emphasises a particular quality of incomplete narrative that they have in common. I am offering this as a suggestive reference point for designers. It is not intended to represent 'transdisciplinary' practice. I don't see the fields of art and design, however we constitute them, in that way. I intend the context to be *narrative* — in the biggest sense that we can imagine it — the narrative of all of the things made by humans, and their potential to be remade by our changing perceptions of them.

The solution most commonly offered for improving or expanding writing about graphic design is to recruit more practitioners to the task. Or, to lure formerly active ones back. Unsurprisingly, it's almost exclusively *other* designers that propose these remedies. Discussion quickly turns to methods to inject more money into writing, to offset the robust pay (at least in comparison) that comes from doing design. As a writer myself, I can't argue against that prospect. But as a reader, offering higher fees for the same unreliable product isn't an advance.

To varying degrees, the writings of practitioners—or those who rose up through the profession—are always compromised. Directly or indirectly, these writers bolster their professional status and prospects in their texts. Why shouldn't they? Arguing a strongly held opinion is the hallmark of all good critical writers. That opinion *should* align with a designer's business interests. However, a simple disclaimer must accompany practitioners' writing: *Warning: may contain ulterior or mixed motives.* This is a significant issue in design writing, where practice-related and practice-centric writers predominate.

Catalog essays for the currently touring *Graphic Design: Now in Production* (GDNiP) exhibition highlight the problems with practice-related writers. Immediately, there is their prevalence in the complement of essayists. Then there is the uncritical acceptance of propositions that speak more about the writers' professional aspirations than the ostensible subject.

For profession-based writers, professional practice and "graphic design," are synonymous. Client-based commercial work is asserted as the graphic designer's sole legitimate expression. "We speak through our assignment," writes designer/educator Michael Rock in "Fuck Content," a 2005 article revised for the GDNiP catalog (and included in the design studio 2x4's recent book *Multiple Signatures*). This short essay is intended to be the definitive statement on the essential nature of graphic design. To that end, Rock pronounced a resolution of the "content" vs. "form" dichotomy. Form-making—graphic treatment—is declared as design's true content. "Just as every film is about filmmaking," Rock says, "Our content is, perpetually, Design itself."

Rock's stated purpose for the article is to counter a widespread misreading of "The Designer as Author," his oft-cited 1996 *Eye Magazine* essay surveying the phenomenon of "graphic authorship." To his dismay, designers considered the article an affirmation of the idea Rock set out to debunk. "Fuck Content" is the rebuke. According to the GDNiP's co-curator Ellen Lupton, Rock "admonished designers to focus on how things look and how they communicate, not what the message is." All that matters is *how* you do design—formally.

Though cleverly argued, "Fuck Content" merely restates design's traditional, Modernist rationale. As he asks in the essay, so what else is new? In an ironic twist reinforcing its throwback nature, Rock invokes Paul Rand ("There is no such thing as bad content, only bad form") to strengthen his case.

Rock further channels Rand by remaking design history in his own image: "If you look at the span of graphic design, you discover, not a history of content but a history of form." Here, Rock's reading is accurate, in that the design profession and its chroniclers have emphasized and prized formal achievement. It also ranks as a truism: is there a formless design? A contentless one? Rock's perspective churns all design artifacts into conceptual slurry, roiling all distinguishing intentions into a blurry mass of form.

Rock's reductive view is absurd, particularly considering Modern design's genesis. Of the few practitioners he cites—Rand, Zwart, Cassandra (sic), Matter, Crouwel—none count amongst design's polemical progenitors of form. Rock proposes that the German designer Jan Tschichold's impassioned, political text in *Die Neue Typographie* (1928) had no more significance

than current copy for the Nike Sportswear Fall Retail Campaign. However, the bracing innovation of Tschichold's form is inseparable from the urgency and import of his words. For many other designers of Tschichold's time and others before and since him, design is a medium to ideals beyond itself—and especially beyond consumer culture.

The covert agenda in "Fuck Content" is to reinforce the status quo of design as service industry—and the established hierarchy of practitioners. At the apex are moneyed culture and its servants. Overall, the *Graphic Design: Now in Production* catalog gives no love for graphic authorship, with the design writers Steven Heller and Ellen Lupton heaping scorn upon the poor concept—Lupton slapping it down in her two essays ("The Designer as Producer, "Reading and Writing"). Why is graphic authorship so reviled and marked for elimination?

While problematic as a concept, graphic authorship implicitly (and dangerously) questions the purposes that design talent is put to, and the terms under which we appraise it. Eradicate content as an evaluative factor, whether self-generated or for non-commercial purposes, and we default to abstract graphic treatments possible only under the patronage of affluent clients.

Products of graphic authorship are also alarmingly compelling. In "Design Entrepreneur 3.0," (2011) Steven Heller back-handedly acknowledges the power of graphic authorship, attempting to siphon off its appeal to fuel his own synthetic movement. The number and variety of productions featured in "The Designer as Author" undermined Rock's contentions, speaking more persuasively than his recondite scolds.

The "insecurity" derided as motivating force behind graphic authors appears to afflict the most daring and accomplished designers of historic and contemporary times, and compels singularly inspiring and imaginative works. The standards of traditional, form-centric, client-based design are challenged and swept away. Might designers see this not as a bug but a feature?

Retrograde commentators regard graphic authorship as just another excess of the 1990s to be rolled back. To practice-centric critics, the nineties are what the sixties represent to conservative politicians. Both eras are regarded as times of indulgence, ugliness and chaos, where upstarts challenged their betters, and establishment verities were rejected. Reading critics rail against graphic authorship echoes right-wingers mocking the "permissive culture" fostered under liberalism.

Self-determined works are by definition more egalitarian than client-based design. Of course, commercial design work is possibly as open since it's available to anyone for purchase—if you can afford it. However, Michael Rock isn't professionally invested in such work. And "Fuck Content" points toward a restricted design practice, not a populist one.

Rock discloses his thinking in an e-mail exchange reprinted in the design critic Frida Jeppsson's *In Case of Design—Inject Critical Thinking* (2010), which published an earlier version of "Fuck Content." In it, Rock dismisses "99.99%" of design as simply "an index of the culture that produced it," while the remaining 0.01% "is the part that really bears up to close looking." A reasonable assumption is that Rock considers his work amongst that select one-hundredth of a percent. Once again, he harkens to design's past: an ability to stand apart from culture was another Modern conceit.

What is ultimately telling is that detractors of graphic authorship never claim that its works are incapable of the design paradigm Rock spells out in "Fuck Content": "... to speak through *treatment*, via a whole range of rhetorical devices—from the written to the visual to the operational—in order to make those proclamations as poignant as possible...." Arguably, a graphically authored work has *more* potential to attain the ideals Rock proposes for design. Except it was not produced to a client's order, making it of *de facto* lesser status. The objection is about *propriety*, not quality.

A further statement from Rock's article is inarguable: "The choice of projects in each

designer's oeuvre lays out a map of interests and proclivities. And the way those projects are parsed out, disassembled and organized, and rendered may reveal a philosophy, an aesthetic position, an argument and a critique." A survey of the Michael Rock/2x4 oeuvre maps an obsession with elite consumption, buttressed by abstruse theory. Graphic design is fetishized, in keeping with the fetishized goods it frames. As Rock sets no boundaries as to the methods or ends to which design may utilize its potential to make, in the words of "Fuck Content," "proclamations as poignant as possible," we must assume that there are none.

With articles like "Fuck Content," the author Rock provides valuable intellectual cover for the elite class of designers and their clientele. His sincerity is evident as he proselytizes for an expansive and empowering role for graphic design. That it can only be realized by substantial capital is, for him, happenstance—and irrelevant. It's about *form*—not personal aspiration.

While he goes further than any other designer in rationalizing an exclusive construction of design, Rock still refrains from declaring any individual motivation beyond exemplary formal achievement and communicative efficacy.

Historically, renowned designers are always presented, and present themselves, as acting out of abstract principles. Their creative idealism transcends mundane careering to operate on a rarified plane of practice. In the foreword to Steven Heller's 1999 *Paul Rand* monograph, Swiss designer Armin Hoffman states "Paul Rand worked tirelessly with his students on the renovation and invigoration of our sign-world." For famed designer George Lois, he was the "heroic Paul Rand," whose "major concern was to strive for cause and effect in the creation of his work, and with tireless and selfless effort, teach write and inspire younger generations to march to his beat."

To biographer Kerry William Purcell, International Style icon Josef Müller-Brockmann had "...a near-religious longing

to give one's self over to a greater truth." And never one to assume a low hyperbolic orbit, in the revised edition of *The End of Print*, commentator Tom Wyatt declared of David Carson, "The commitment was to original expression, ceaseless exploration, an unending quest to originate and assimilate, and to change what you were doing if you recognized it was looking rule-bound."

Amongst these aspirants, Stefan Sagmeister is decidedly self-effacing in his famed "Things to Do Before I Die," list. It starts straightforwardly enough —"Open and run a design studio in New York,"—but still manages to end on an ardent note, "Touch someone's heart with graphic design."

That designers might want to enjoy an exclusive lifestyle—to be like or rub elbows with their celebrity/thought leaders/industry titan clients—isn't acknowledged. Or, of course, that it might influence their value system.

Having attributed graphic authorship to envy and a striving for status, might we also credit Michael Rock with the same causation? Yes, designers aspire to power, social position, and cachet. But they also hope, by declaring themselves a kind of "graphic auteur" to garner respect—and stout fees. Rock isn't alone in having parlayed a reputation as a deep design thinker into an enviable career crafting (for instance) Kanye West-branded immersive theater experiences in Qatar. These are opportunities for power, position, and cachet that is risible to expect from graphic authorship.

For prominent designers, the reality of their relationship with elite consumption can be an uncomfortable state of affairs. Most espouse classless, left wing political attitudes. The conflict between championing an egalitarian access to exceptional design and the substantial capital required for realizing it has bedeviled idealistic designers going back to the British designer William Morris. The economics seem inflexible, pushing practitioners unremittingly into the arms of moneyed culture.

Resignedly, designers will sometimes tender explanations that they must 'rob Peter to pay Paul.' But the said theft isn't an

imperative, it's a choice. As attractive as Paul's wares may be, the necessity to rob Peter to acquire them should give pause. It's not inherently wrong to desire fine objects, live and work in New York, travel and lecture widely, hang with Kimye's people. The problem is transmuting the desire for a lifestyle into a design theory.

That designers have an appetite for graphic treatment is obvious. What the response to "The Designer as Author" revealed was a hunger for *meaning*—and self-determination. A choice of how to perform graphic design and have it judged on its merits.

"Fuck Content" is nihilism posing as revelation. Commercial work isn't at risk of being supplanted as graphic design's primary manifestation. If you find that practice, or its alternative, embarrassing and unfulfilling, then don't do it. But also refrain from tearing down everything in fear of having your position usurped. Like it or not, our design, and our perception of it, says something about us. Design isn't a glossy and empty abstraction of itself. It's by and for people. Our content is, perpetually, ourselves.

Trends normally control the use of terminology. Within product design, 'critical design' is developing as a field with projects, papers, articles, publications, conferences, exhibitions and debate. Within graphic design, there are predominantly press-releases, likes, FAVs, RTs and lulz. However, the interest and need for a critical graphic design practice is not aligned with the term's demise within design discourse. In order to understand and discuss emergent phenomena, categories and temporary terminology are useful, allowing to frame goals, trace precedents, scrutinise and evaluate achievements. The relevance of this apparently decadent term lays precisely here, in enabling to identify a generally uncritical state of the discipline and generate interest in developing and theorising a new field and with it, challenging the discipline itself. If everything is fine as it is, graphic design should just continue to distribute awards on a yearly basis, celebrating its most valued aspect: formal achievement. However, if critical and speculative design are presently and trendily closer to Art Basel and Frieze Art Fair than the streets and public forums other than art museums, then there is a need for further debate.

Rise to popularity

The term critical design was popularised by product/ interaction design team Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby. Its central idea is to use design to speculate about the social, political and cultural implications of everyday objects, producing design works that question and challenge the status quo rather than reinforcing it. Such an approach, which questions the well-established market-focused and problem-solving orientation of graphic design is not new. The theorist Donald Schön proposed instead 'problem-setting' in the seminal book *The Reflective Practitioner* (1984). While problem-solving sees problems as a

given, problem-setting tries to construct the reality in which designers operate. In fact, as the design historian Victor Margolin points in *The Struggle for Utopia* (1997), the use of utopia and future visions can be traced at least until the 1820s. The French theorist Henri de Saint-Simon proposed a triumvirate in which "the artist's role was to envision the future of society, while the scientist would analyze the feasibility of visionary ideas, and the industrialist would devise administrative techniques for putting them into practice."

Dunne and Raby's investment in the term happened primarily through the publication of Dunne's book *Hertzian Tales* (1999), and their continuous production of work operating under critical design until the exhibition *United Micro Kingdoms* (2013) and the release of *Speculative Everything* (2013). The latter signalled a tendency to use the term 'speculative design' and 'design fiction' as interchangeable of 'critical design.' This should be questioned. While critical design is unavoidably connected to criticism, speculative design is even more open to debate. The designer Peter Bil'ak reinforced this idea in the magazine *Task Newsletter 2* (2009) by arguing that "most creative work is by its very definition speculative," as it is "formed on a basis of incomplete information, involves intuition, and explores new areas, which means it also runs the risk of not always delivering what it promises." The first is bound to a centuries-old discipline with criteria to debate and build upon. The second can be a free ticket for unaccountable musings and visual indulgence. Speculation is more prevalent in Europe, while design fiction via authors such as Bruce Sterling is more connected to the US, namely the East-coast's tradition in science fiction.

However, there are important precedents and parallel terminology with shared agendas to these. The Polish artist and designer Krzysztof Wodiczko is a key example, working on a series of projects which he described as 'critical vehicles.' His work started as a reactive and survival attitude towards the social conditions of Poland in the 1970s,

which he called an oppressive psycho-social machine. The works he produced were then structures that sought to help the many times oblivious followers of a disguised autocratic regime under the illusion of freedom. This was amplified in a thriving capitalist North America in the 1980s, where he established the Interrogative Design Group at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at the MIT Media Lab. More recently, the interaction design researcher Tad Hirsch proposed contestational design (2008) as a way to analyse a "design activity whose aim is promote particular agendas in contested political arenas" and design educator Carl diSalvo tried to connect the philosopher Chantal Mouffe's political theory of agonism with design – namely exploring the positive impact of political conflict – in the book *Adversarial Design* (2012).

Speculation in the white cube

In the mid-2000s graphic design was openly flirtatious with fine art. The designer Daniel Eatock was working under his motto "Say YES to fun & function & NO to seductive imagery & colour!" while continuously designing logos for the reality show Big Brother in the UK. He became a figure that could comfortably move from commercial design to self-initiated, process-driven works exhibited in the art gallery. It also highlighted an increased interest by design in and as performance, with Åbäke being an important example. With a different approach, M/M Paris was also an emerging studio openly crossing from design to art, as documented in *Design and Art* (2008). But this blurriness did not really fade. With severe cuts to arts funding as a consequence of the austeriterian politics spread across Europe, museums and art galleries became the remaining (semi)public platforms that allowed designers to display their research. The artist James Bridle won the Design of the Year award by the Design Museum, while his anachronistic term 'New Aesthetic' tried to give a name to work that illustrates the presence of the internet and digital technology in the physical world. But if the presence of drones in the art gallery is not new – let alone

digital technology in the built environment – why call it "new"?

It is common to hear designers saying that they do not judge nor are in the business of criticising their colleagues' work. This is good PR. It allows the always-tight circuit of graphic designers, clients, conferences and exhibitions to remain filled with smiles and polite, respectful nods. As a consequence, there is no generation of public debate, and the design press predominantly excels at what it does best: celebratory press-releases and descriptive news, peppered with some sentences by the designers themselves describing and validating their own work. But while in great scale this reality is largely accepted with indifference and disbelief, can critical and speculative designers adopt the same mantra? This is possible when the clients are museum directors and curators, magazine editors, publishers and event organisers. It should not come as a surprise that the vicious cycle repeats itself: <3, press-releases, RTs and friendly-FAVs ensure that smiles and polite, respectful nods generate virtually no public discourse and criticism of graphic design work produced under the banner of these terms.

Criticool style

If a designer or studio is investigating a social, political and cultural issue, there is little time left to publicly debate and question the effectiveness, success or shortfalls of that research. After all, there is already plenty of deviation from mainstream design and investment in an expanded role of the designer as researcher, writer, critic, curator. But can the expanded role of the designer come at the cost of the visual? In such a scenario, that contribution to knowledge is secondary – it is a prop to engage in larger issues... the ones that really matter. The goal is to generate debate. Second – and even though the goal is to generate debate – it is not good to expose oneself and be publicly self-critical. This is bad PR. But if even critical and speculative designers are not self-critical, what hope is left for the other 99% of graphic design? And, if the visual articulation of the work

is seen as a collateral damage, a neglectable abstraction to invoke important ideas, how can graphic design mature if the visual means through which it investigates and reflects are not scrutinised?

In the age of surveillance and 'The Internet of Things,' it is unsurprising that there is a recurrent visual suggestion of camouflage, blurriness and a penchant to vaguely invoke the nefarious presence of technology in our lives with a cool, laid-back revivalism of anti-design with stretched typefaces, glitches, Photoshop brushes and abstract, morphed geometric shapes that leave little to no room for negotiation with the audience. The work of the Design Displacement Group – who claims it is designing twenty years in the future – is one example of this. The vagueness of the visual vocabulary in use does not allow entry points for the audience to deal with reality or the often-blurry line with virtuality. It literally illustrates a state of indefinability, but without providing insight into its mechanics. In this sense, the term critical design is not useful to do short, temporary briefs, retrofitted in curricula as buzzword and promote design summer schools. Instead, it can be an opportunity to study and question what is at its base: politics, ideology, criticism. This will, too, allow to trace lineages, potential connections, influences and strategies, from Paul Schuitema to Wild Plakken, Mieke Gerritzen to the work of Maureen Mooren and Daniel van der Velden and later Metahaven, to vaporwave, netart, and from Pinar & Viola and Slavs and Tatarsto the predictable visual style *Idea 366* (2014) labels as 'post-internet', to name just a few. This will make sure that the visual vocabulary in use is critical, not criticool.

Critical challenges

The typical framework used by designers to speculate about the future – Foresight scholar Joseph Voro's *Futures Cone* (2003) – has important shortfalls, as noted by the Sustainable Design Studies researcher Cameron Tonkinwise in *How We Intend to Future* (2014). The cone's division between probable, plausible and preferable futures

can be constraining, as there is "no reason to imagine why the preferable does not in fact lie outside the plausible, and even outside the possible." A critical approach to design fiction has to engage with issues of race, gender, class and avoid a culture of consumption as noted Tonkinwise, while not simply using dystopia as final outcome. In a post-Snowden era submerged in post-political neoliberalism, dystopia is too easy. It is just not enough. Instead, it can be used at the service of utopia. In other words, the goal should not be the lazy visual decoration of the plausible, but political engagement towards preferable futures. Despite difficult and rare funding opportunities, museums and art spaces are not the only places in which such work can be staged. There are no safe ideological havens. The researcher Gillian Russell suggests that novels, films, games, and theme parks are better platforms for critical and speculative design than galleries and museums will ever likely be.

James Bridle appropriately exposed his concern about the limited aspirations of a mantra frequently used in association with work operating under the terms debated here: making the invisible, visible. In the conference *Superscript* (2015), he said that the role of art is to disrupt and criticize networks, but "the idea that visibility is a way of solving problems is troubling." His project *Drone Shadows* (2012) which draws real-scale drones on the streets and Pedro Cruz's *An Ecosystem of Corporate Politicians* (2013), which visualises the dangerous, promiscuous relation between members of several Portuguese governments and corporations, are some examples of this. The intensified interest by artists in reflecting about technology and its unavoidable political implications is notorious, with artists such as Heather Dewey-Hagborg, Trevor Paglen, Zach Blas, Kei Kreutler, Hito Steyerl and Diann Bauer. While not a new strategy – and at a time when antidisciplinarity is gaining popularity – collectives such as Space Caviar also point to an increasingly collaborative approach to questioning what are systemic, infrastructural, and necessarily political problems through

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design. But regardless of this approach, graphic design must be capable of debating and openly scrutinising how form is addressing and informing the issues at stake. It should, too, be able to challenge and build upon what other disciplines are producing in relation to the same issues.

All these overlapping terms importantly highlight that politics is not optional for designers, but an integral part of their activity. Therefore, they can be fundamental in contributing to the repoliticisation of the designer. In this expanded field of graphic design and conquered autonomy – but with recurrently shared platforms with art – the question is not of intention but accountability and consequence. Here lays perhaps a relevant distinction between the two disciplines. This is crucial because if critical and speculative design are in the business of generating debate, how and who is evaluating that debate? Clearly, there is strong competition from political propaganda, satire, activism and even protest to interact with a broad audience, not just the legions of design beliebers that rally behind any speculative design project regardless of its quality. Critical, speculative design and design fiction are political actions rooted in the present towards preferred futures. If success is to be measured in levels of coolness and buzz, and automatically celebrated in the art world, then everything is perfectly fine as it is. But if it is to be accountable for its substance, quality and effect on society, then the bar for critical and speculative designers must be substantially raised.

Illustration for the cover of *Modes of Criticism 2*, 2015.

Appendix I1
Double Vision: Graphic Design Criticism and the Question of Authority, Anne Bush

If the strength of a discipline can be measured (at least in part) by the quality of the criticism that it attracts, then the field of graphic design is arguably in a weakened state. The reasons for this are varied. Working within the general public ambivalence toward criticism, some commenters have attributed the absence of critical dialogue in graphic design to insufficient remuneration, the disappearance of traditional publishing venues, and the paucity of educational programs dedicated to training critics (Bierut, 2013 & Triggs, 2011). Others have blamed changing political and cultural conditions for the waning climate of critique (Heller, 2002 & Poynor, 2005). Distanced from the political upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s as well as the culture wars of the late 1980s and 1990s, graphic design criticism appears to have lost its urgency as well as its subject.

What is curious about this post-critical condition is that it is concurrent with an expanding public awareness of design's impact on everyday life. Although predominantly invoked for the sake of commercial gain, it is still the case that design, as a value as well as an activity, is increasingly a part of civic consciousness. Given the gulf between such awareness and the silence that has enveloped the graphic design profession, it seems fair to ask whether designers have a thorough understanding of the reasons behind criticism's meagre beginnings and contemporary decline. After all, one could argue that criticism has never been a lucrative profession, that design publications, even when more numerous, were rarely champions of rigorous critical discourse, and that (until recently) specific academic qualifications in design criticism were non-existent. Moreover, the twenty-first century has offered provocative social and cultural catalysts for analysis and debate. Myriad questions concerning the sustainability of graphic design's output, its social relevance as well as its cultural particularity, and its role in technological development, use and access have yet to be asked. To what then can we attribute our collective reticence? And why, when so many writers and designers are calling for the revitalization of critical discourse, does the lull persist? Acknowledging that the factors above have contributed to a retreat from critical engagement, I would like to suggest that our flight from criticism may also be due to an ambivalent relationship to authority itself.

Critical Foundations
It would be difficult to deny that the field of graphic design has experienced an identity crisis over the past twenty years. Technology not only has changed (and in many ways complicated) the way designers work, but challenged the very definition of graphic design—most notably by raising questions about established conceptions of expertise (Heller, 1994; Miller, 2002; Elkins, 2003; Hall, 2013). In response, the field has become increasingly fractured and offers both a broader range of subjects for study as well as a profusion of new advanced degrees. Institutional motivations aside, these changes reflect the maturation of the graphic design discipline—underscoring, in particular, the development of design research. They also indicate the shifting ground on which designers stand.

It is therefore not entirely surprising that graphic design criticism has failed to establish sustained traction inside as well as outside the profession. Key suppositions about graphic design's process and object seem to be changing daily and the increasingly diverse social and cultural context within which designers work puts notions of the public intellectual in a precarious position. At the very least it begs one to consider the vocational expertise often affiliated with specialized aptitudes and the way in which this squares with an intellectual scepticism that has wider social, cultural, and political resonance. Is it possible, or desirable, to establish common critical

foundations or a shared critical vocabulary given the fissures in the discipline today? And, if not, how does critical debate proceed without dissolving into nebulous relativism? Acknowledging that a thorough examination of these questions would require more space than the scope of this essay allows, I would like to consider two questions that relate to these larger queries. Does a general ambivalence toward authority among graphic designers leave us predisposed to certain approaches to critical dialogue? And, if so, in what ways has critical discourse in graphic design progressed as a result?

Theories of Relativity
It is ironic, given what graphic designers do for a living, that the profession has an image problem. Graphic designers began to suffer from low professional self-esteem long before contemporary technology suggested that our collective knowledge might be expendable. Plagued by a chronic sense of belatedness relative to established professions like art and architecture, graphic designers have long felt the need to make our conceptual and pragmatic labor more visible and to justify our worth to allied professions and the greater public. The periodic call for graphic designers to be certified—however well-intentioned it may be—is only one testament to a desire for validation and authority. Increasingly it is criticism that is summoned to play this supporting role. In 1997, the writer Steven Heller referenced Massimo Vignelli's 1983 call for the development of historical and critical foundations in the graphic design field, to underscore the potential for "serious introspection" to have a "remedial effect on our professional self-esteem" as well as inspire the mainstream press "to be more respectful of our achievements" (Heller, 1997, p. 1). This claim followed his suggestion three years earlier that there was a developing "clamour for a body of criticism that [would] help legitimize the graphic design profession—in the way it did for architecture and industrial design" (Heller, 1994, p. xi). Although Heller acknowledged in 2006 that this initial promise had yet to be fulfilled, his comments anticipated those

of others who likewise saw in criticism a way to claim professional respect (Triggs & Gerber, 2007). Acknowledging that such professional insight would undoubtedly have an effect as well as the fact that Heller attributed wider benefits to the establishment of serious critical debate, these comments reveal a fundamental problem. With more rigorous criticism comes evaluation and it is precisely this judgment that many designers resist. How do we proceed with critical debate when it is both embraced and rejected—lauded for its potential to supply the legitimacy we crave and demonized for the ways in which it challenges this same authority?

An ambivalent relationship to authority is not unique to graphic design. Authority is intrinsic to a free society and the public embraces it when it serves a common good or curbs habits of self-interest. Yet, the same people may reject it when it operates as a distant power or a challenge to personal freedom (Hendel, 1981). Underscoring this latter point in 2012, the art historian and critic Hal Foster attributed the decline of art criticism to growing concerns about the position of the critic.

> First, there was a rejection of judgment, of the moral right presumed in critical evaluation. Then, there was a refusal of authority, of the political privilege that allows the critic to speak abstractly on behalf of others. Finally, there was scepticism about distance, about the cultural separation from the very conditions that the critic purports to examine (Foster, 2012, p. 3).

These concerns have echoed larger debates in cultural studies throughout the past twenty years and have reconfigured the general authority of the art critic in both positive and negative ways. A reconsideration of the position of the critic has clarified the perspectives of marginalized social and cultural groups. It also has refocused the attention of the critic on the specific histories and contexts of critical debate. Perhaps most significantly, it has reminded interested readers of the constructed nature of all

discourse. Yet, in some cases, challenges to the authoritative position of the critic have reinforced a relativity of perspective that too often is mistaken for pluralism (Foster, 2012). Conceived as a struggle between ideological perspectives, criticism is frequently dismissed as a myopic "will to power"—one that is not self-reflective about its own claims to truth (Foster, 2012, p. 3). Allowing that there are contexts that require this interpretive approach, the relativity that results from its general application has tended to stymie critical debate rather than encourage it. For all its value, the internet complicates this situation because it atomizes critical dialogue and diminishes the agency of its readers (McDonald, 2007). By bringing the interests of the loudest voices into the foreground, the internet exposes a general desire among readers to fall in line rather than stand out. Even in cases where a dialogue may begin as a reaction to a thoughtful essay, the ensuing din of commentary can divert or eclipse an argument. The result is often the confirmation of bias rather than the transformation of perspective.

Although the field of graphic design lacks an established tradition of criticism upon which to reflect, it wrestles with similar concerns about authority. Questions about who stands in the best position to analyse and evaluate design work (independent writers or practicing designers; journalists or scholars?) are routine in the design press as are discussions about distance: for example, whether critical practice can provide a direct and more meaningful method of critique. The commercial nature of graphic design complicates these questions. Concerns about client confidentiality, the negative economic impact that criticism can cause, and the objectivity of the practicing designers who often serve as critics—beg one to consider the potential conflict of interest between professional goals and a more disinterested analysis (Adamson, 2005). At the very least they help to explain the perpetuation of design competitions as the predominant form of assessment in the field. Winners are celebrated rather than scrutinized in a public forum. Losers retain their anonymity. When critical authority is asserted in the field, it typically takes the form of biting and snarky quips voiced by online agents hiding behind pseudonyms, personal acronyms, or the blank landscape of unsigned comments. Given this situation, it is not surprising that many view criticism as problematic or self-righteous. This predicament also explains why would-be critics might equivocate about jumping into the fray. It is one thing to have one's design work subjected to evaluation. The collaborative nature and commercial restraints of design make mediocrity easier to justify. It is another to willingly expose one's individual ideas to mass interrogation and debate. Balancing the need for critical foundations in the field against the possibility of offending one's professional colleagues and friends, it is easy to understand why some might demure at the very prospect of initiating or responding to critical discourse.

Critical Agency

The ways in which graphic design criticism has developed in recent years reflect these concerns. Vacillating between a desire for stable foundations as well as a need to address change—graphic design critics have tended to both embrace and resist authority through a range of manoeuvres which foreground personality, sidestep history, or prioritize description over analysis.

In written criticism, this tendency in many cases has thwarted debate. Originating for the most part from within the graphic design field, the majority of written criticism is editorial or reportorial in voice, breadth, and depth. Lauded for its immediacy and accessibility, as well as the ways in which it delivers pointed condemnation and praise, such popular criticism has been largely commended for its authoritative yet straightforward manner—an approach that is not problematic in itself. At its best, such writing not only entertains but teases out significant insights and shapes them into efficient prose. Yet, at its worst, it can be diffusive and emotional, palliative rather than probing.

The *belle lettristic* variant of journalistic writing common to design blogs can inhibit critique by showcasing personality and narrative style over argument. In 2001, the art historian James Meyer, actually dismissed this so-called "writerly" approach as "anti-writerly in ambition" because it avoided "sustained reflection" (Meyer, 2002, p. 216). As the art historian James Elkins has added, "extravagantly attracted to non-sequiturs, repetitions, asides, apostrophes, jokes, self-contradictions, and impressionistic collages," the approach runs the risk of baiting anti-intellectualism (Elkins, 2003, p. 52). Suggesting the prevalence of such writing in graphic design criticism in 2011, the editor of *Eye* magazine, John L. Walters, asserted that there was a misplaced desire among writers to express themselves as stylists rather than communicators (Walters, 2011). And, perhaps, therein lies the rub. Is it possible that style has trumped substance in such cases because it is not only familiar territory for designer-critics, but because it functions as an intellectual placebo—one that, while dressed as criticism, maintains the status quo by shirking authority and implicitly suggesting that we don't take ourselves seriously? Accepting that one should never take oneself *too* seriously, it seems fair to assume that one should approach their work in an earnest manner—one that is respectful of the reader's time and effort. This is not to say that all online criticism is written in purple prose or that serious criticism should be lifeless. Yet, inasmuch as academic writing has been censured for its opacity (sometimes deservedly so), shouldn't stylized journalism also be scrutinized for the ways in which it indulges its own esoteric machinations? And, if we avoid such investigations do we expose our desire to have it both ways—to allow a reader access but not allow a deeper entry into the substance and context of the claims we make? Certainly, as the writer Matt Soar (2002) has suggested, it is easy to imagine the ways in which a broader public understanding of design—aided by thoughtful and rigorous criticism—might jeopardize, or at least challenge, a level of expertise that graphic designers have always considered to be their own.

Of course, journalism is not the only medium where one can detect ambivalent manoeuvrings around critical debate. Although often presented as an antidote to the failings of graphic design criticism in written form, critical practice in design frequently reveals a similar desire to embrace and reject authority. Akin to more stylized approaches in written criticism, design projects that are ostensibly critical often represent a bifocal view by attempting to rationalize a process of open subjectivity that detaches criticism from history. This approach was evident in the exhibition *Forms of Inquiry* that London's Architectural Association mounted in 2007. Making the case for critical practice as an intuitive endeavour, curator and catalogue co-editor, Zak Kyes, explained that the term inquiry was chosen specifically to accommodate "obfuscation" as well as "clarity" and to distinguish an intuitive approach from the more analytical aspects of design "research" (Kyes, 2007, p. 11). In so doing, he suggests that inquiry is invested in a kind of presentness—distinct from what he deems to be the "interpretive baggage" that binds research to the past. As Kyes proposes, it is precisely this immediacy which allows for true critical investigation—which encourages "posing questions and pursuing paths without necessarily knowing where they will lead." Given that the broad goal of the exhibition was to "mobilize graphic design as a specifically *critical* activity," this approach presents problems. First, if confounding and explicating work go hand-in-hand as motivating factors in *Forms of Inquiry*, is it reasonable to expect that critical insight will be the result? After all, doesn't criticism ultimately seek to distinguish as well as explain? Second, in as much as intuition foregrounds the potential freshness of a first impression, is it wise to privilege this way of understanding over a more analytical approach—one that takes into account the insights as well as the

complications of past ideas? Given that all research incorporates intuition as well as logic, is intuition alone preferable in this case merely because it seems to require no larger explanation and suggests that critical awareness can be decontextualized from the messiness of history? Accepting the exhibition organizers' later claim that the curatorial intent was not to resurrect the "insular polemics" surrounding critical practices of the past (Kyes & Owens, 2008, n.p.), one is compelled to ask if such omissions inadvertently narrow the space for critical exchange rather than extend it. Certainly, acknowledging the ways in which the exhibition curators legitimize the authorial voice(s) behind such subjective investigations and therein risk reinforcing the modernist elevation of the brilliant designer, seem appropriate in this case (Rock, 1996). At the very least, doing so would help other designers understand that critical practice is not without its own history or ideological baggage. It also would encourage practicing designers to examine more closely what they mean by criticism and to what end critical practices aspire.

In discussing journalistic and practical approaches to criticism, I am not suggesting that academia does not have its own complicated relationship to authority. In particular, recent commentary, emanating from scholarly sources, reveals not only the range of practices that many consider to be under the rubric of criticism but also the varying ways in which they carry authoritative weight. A 2013 special issue of *Design and Culture*, the journal of the Design Studies Forum, brought the issue of criticism to the foreground. In her contribution, the educator Meredith Davis emphasizes the distinction between professional design criticism and scholarship. Professional design criticism focuses on design practice, including graphic design work, behaviours and trends, in an effort to mark both modulations in the field and the value that others assign to design. Davis explains that scholarship, in contrast, is an "evidence-based study" that facilitates the transfer of knowledge and builds the foundations for future research (Davis, 2013, p. 8). Going

on to explain reasons for the confusion surrounding definitions of design research and the subsequent slow growth in the field, Davis makes a convincing argument for more rigorous expectations from graduate study in design. Her analysis, nevertheless, raises its own questions. Noting that Davis' argument is premised on "the need for design to achieve maturity as an academic discipline," the writer and critic Peter Hall (2013a) suggests that seeking such maturation can also circumscribe disciplinary boundaries too tightly. As a result, scholars can make problematic distinctions between not only what counts as legitimate design research and its acceptable subject matter, but the ways in which this research influences the larger profession. Underscoring the position taken by Anne-Marie Willis, the editor of *Design Philosophy Papers*, that both journalism and scholarship are too narrowly defined, Hall substantiates the case for more open-ended critical inquiry. In particular he argues for switching focus from what the French sociologist, Bruno Latour has deemed "matters of fact" to "matters of concern."

> The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather. The critic is not the one who alternates haphazardly between antifetishism and positivism like the drunk iconoclast drawn by Goya, but the one for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in need of great care and caution (Latour, 2004, p. 246).

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is an approach with origins in the social sciences that can be used to reorient one's focus from the juxtaposition of the critic and his/her subject. This theory acknowledges the non-human as well as human agents behind a claim and therefore emphasizes the complexities and contradictions intrinsic to what critics might naively assume to be factual. Hall explains that this approach is particularly

appealing to designers because it brings the materiality of the designed object back into view. Underscoring the range of agents involved in a given design, this approach also foregrounds a kind of intellectual humility on the part of the critic—a diffidence that will offer many readers a welcome respite from the seemingly definitive and sometimes censorial voice of the critic as grand pundit. It becomes the opposite of a more traditional authoritative view, though not without difficulties. As Hall has acknowledged, this approach, for all its openness, runs the risk of being politically conservative. Citing a critique of ANT by the sociologist Nick Couldry, Hall explains the ways in which allocating agency to both humans and non-humans, potentially fails to register the very real issue of "human power differentials" and also "the possibility of resistance to wider power structures" (Hall, 2013a, p. 416). Although he concedes this possibility, Hall believes this approach remains useful. Others are not so sure. Not only does the focus on a more collective and, in many ways, more descriptive rather than evaluative approach tend to ignore what Latour himself defines as "good matters of fact"—reminding everyone that not everything is a construction—but, as Hal Foster points out, giving inanimate objects 'agency'—creates a kind of "quasi-subject"—an actor who is more virtual than real (Foster, 2012, p. 7).

Ambitious Judgment

In 2016, in a telling rebuttal to those who believe that interest in criticism is waning, a newly published book on criticism written by A. O. Scott, the film critic for the *New York Times*, provoked lengthy reviews in both *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic* (Scott, 2016; Heller, 2016; Wieseltier, 2016). Particular to both reviews was a consideration of the nature and value of authority in critical analysis. Writing for *The New Yorker*, staff writer Nathan Heller argued that Scott's criticism carried authority because it avoided the overarching theoretical frameworks that governed the evaluations of the scholar-critics of the past (F.R. Leavis and

Clement Greenberg for example). Heller claimed that such theoretical approaches handicapped critical judgment by not being adaptable to change. In contrast, critics like Scott, Heller continued, won allegiance by seducing readers rather than demanding deference—by suggesting that their experience and the experience of their readers was or would be the same. Authority, in this case, Heller explained, is based on sharing what one sees "without the distraction of special preparation or theoretical commitments" (Heller, 2016, p. 66). Yet, for Leon Wieseltier, the critic and past literary editor of *The New Republic*, this approach presents a problem rather than a solution. Reviewing Scott's book for *The Atlantic*, he lamented the ways in which rigorous analysis has been eclipsed by an "intellectual weightlessness," in cultural criticism today (Wieseltier, 2016, p. 39). Citing Scott's work as an example, he warned against criticism that was "a jovial blur of local perceptions and easy paradoxes...of big ideas chatted away" (Wieseltier, 2016, p. 39). Presented as a kind of "winking worldliness," an entertaining range that "correct[ed] high thought with the social and economic lowdown," such writing, Wieseltier argued, sidestepped the mental struggle associated with research and reflection and resisted the important discipline of conclusion (Wieseltier, 2016, p. 39). Calling for a serious approach to criticism—one that embraced thoughtful and sustained argument as a way to develop and expand intellectual possibility, Wieseltier underscored the need to reconsider the authoritative role of the critic. In so doing, he also gestured toward the original meaning of authority itself. Derived from the Latin term *auctoritas* (and its root *augere*), authority, historically, was about establishing a relationship to the past—about recognizing a foundational idea and not only carrying it forward into the present, but augmenting it. In the eighteenth century, when reason supplanted adherence to custom or allegiance to the Divine, such augmentation became more about the possibility of rational elaboration—about

the ways in which extended reasoning could both encourage understanding and inspire participation in social and cultural dialogue. Considered in this context, criticism becomes authoritative rather than authoritarian—a productive mode of communication that respects considered opinions precisely because they provide the foundation for meaningful dialogue and growth.

Although there has been a decline in graphic design criticism recently, it is a positive sign that designers and critics have voiced the need for more considered, long-form writing in the field. Responding to Rick Poynor's 2005 appeal for more design criticism, Glenn Adamson (2005), past Director of Research at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and current Director of the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, made the case for critical dialogue that is constructive rather than destructive. What critics are searching for, Adamson claimed, was "a lineage of internal debate and theory that constitutes a space for distinctive and somehow 'productive' thought". Others seem to agree. Noting the increasing amount of writing about design in independent magazines as well as online, John L. Walters implored graphic designers to take writing seriously. Observing the variance in quality that such writing demonstrates, Walters challenged writers to engage in more original research (Walters, 2011, p. 67). Interviewed in the same special issue of the (now defunct) design magazine *Grafik*, the writer and educator Ellen Lupton echoed Walters' challenge when she made a case for a more rigorous approach to graphic design criticism. Acknowledging the growth of independent publishing in graphic design as evidence of a palpable interest in producing texts, she questioned the audience as well as the object for such publications—their stature as "artifacts and evidence rather than reading material" (Lupton, 2011, p. 70). Given the predominance of visual material online, Lupton argued, magazines offered an alternative as they could offer something "slower and deeper" (Lupton, 2011, p. 70). Quoted in the same issue of *Grafik*, Justin McGuirk, the design critic for

The Guardian, reinforced this view. Offering the nineteenth-century art critic John Ruskin as an example, McGuirk not only underscored the value of more thoughtful criticism, but also the importance of contextualized judgment—the possibility for complex arguments to carry their own authoritative weight. Seen in this way judgment is not viewed as spiteful or self-righteous, but an essential part of discourse—one that opens rather than closes down debate.

> [...] there's another kind of criticism – classical criticism rather than the newspaper variety – that doesn't seek to change events but to find meaning in them. This search for meaning is more compelling. At its height it raised the work of criticism above mere commentary on an event and into the event itself. I see this as a creative act distinct from the social act of crusading criticism. And, crucially, the critic doesn't have to be right (McGuirk, 2011, p. 68).

At a time when there is not only less criticism in the graphic design field, but when the criticism that does exist assumes increasingly atomized forms, the call for long-form criticism seems opportune. Noting that such criticism could be more discursive in its structure and tone also makes sense and suggests a middle way between the mere assertion and the evasion of judgment. Ultimately, as the art historian James Elkins (2003) has emphasized, one should not shy away from the authority of judgment. It is important to know what critics think. Yet, such judgment should be 'ambitious.' It should be the result of broader comparisons, of knowledge and time, and of self-reflection. Addressing criticism in this manner would encourage finer distinctions. It also would remind us that the ways in which we analyse what we see and make as well as the conclusions that we draw from this analysis matter.

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Appendix I2
Defamiliarisation, Brecht and Criticality in Graphic Design, Peter Buwert

Our lives are habitual. We habitualise what is familiar in order to be able to function day to day, and through this a vast chunk of our living becomes automatic. The process makes life easier by decreasing the confusion and tension of having to constantly develop new responses to previously encountered situations. The habitual way of thinking eases the stress of confrontation with the unknown, giving us a strategy to quickly disarm and digest it. Our default tendency is therefore to habitualise everything to the greatest extent possible.

In the essay *Art as Technique* (1917) the Russian formalist poet Victor Shklovsky (1893–1984) describes habitualisation as an 'algebraic' process. Instead of paying precise attention to each object of perception, we skip over the details and assign it a rough placeholder symbol, as X or Y symbolises a complex number in an equation. Thus, rather than having to formulate a response to the unique encounter with the object, we can bypass conscious thought and simply deploy a learned response to the familiar symbol.

Once something has become habitual and familiar, it effectively becomes an acceptable component of our perceived reality. Shklovsky's warning however, is that we are liable to apply this tactic to situations which should never be considered normal or acceptable: things which should be known not as normal but as wonderful, or terrible. If we degrade things which are truly extraordinary by accepting them as merely ordinary, we are either denying ourselves the pleasure of appreciating the abnormally good, or wilfully subjecting ourselves to the horrors of the abnormally bad. In order to fully experience life it is necessary to recognise, appreciate and respond to the truly extraordinary things.

Designers, as creators and shapers of our social reality, are deeply involved in the operations and processes of habitualisation in contemporary life. It follows that designers must also therefore take some responsibility for the consequences of these effects, whether the impact of a design's contribution to the social sphere is to enrich and enhance human experience of life, or merely to make it more efficient.

There is a time and a place for both these possibilities. The design of road traffic signs, for example, relies heavily on habitual recognition of familiar symbols to create a safe and efficient environment for all road users. However, design which seeks to question received wisdom, to challenge ingrained subconscious patterns of behaviour and to provoke critical thought needs to operate on precisely the opposite principle. While design can encourage patterns of habitualisation, it can also be used to shake us out of our habitual ways. Approaches to design which claim to foreground criticality would do well to pay close attention to the underlying processes which can either create and sustain, or disrupt this everyday phenomenon of habitualisation.

Automatic habitualisation of the familiar is, in general, a functional arrangement allowing us to go about our business without the exhausting impracticality of having to be constantly aware of our own activity. However, when we unexpectedly regain conscious awareness of a habitualised action or experience, the results can be quite disconcerting. Occasionally, while walking down stairs, I suddenly become aware of the subconscious movement of my feet, and as the action of walking switches from autopilot to manual I have to grab the handrail to stop myself tripping as it takes a second for my conscious mind to work out exactly what my legs are supposed to be doing. Many can identify with the moment of existential anguish communicated by the character Linus in the comic strip *Peanuts* on suddenly becoming aware of his own tongue:

> It's an awful feeling! Every now and then I become aware that I have a

tongue inside my mouth, and then it starts to feel all lumped up... [...] I can't help it... I can't put it out of my mind... I keep thinking about where my tongue would be if I weren't thinking about it and then I can feel it sort of pressing against my teeth... Now it feels all lumped up again... the more I try to put it out of my mind, the more I think about it... (Schultz, 1963, np).

Defamiliarisation then, as Linus discovered, is the deeply unsettling moment of psychological disorientation experienced when something which has always appeared familiar suddenly becomes unfamiliar: the moment when something is comprehended in a new way, with amazement and astonishment, not because of any bizarre quality of the object itself but precisely because the item in question had previously been considered so ordinary and acceptable, and is now, upon re-examination, found to be truly extraordinary. Recognition of the two components of this dynamic—the significant twin powers of habitualisation and defamiliarisation—is vital to the pursuit of criticality within design, or indeed any other area of human endeavour.

The fundamental prerequisite for criticality, is not in fact the ability to criticise, but to recognise and point out problematic features in an existing situation which could be other than they are. The source of criticality's power flows from this ability to imagine ways in which things could be different. It is only in this speculation on alternative possibilities for existence, that criticality is capable of becoming a productive social force. Where habitualisation runs uncontested, these alternatives will inevitably go unnoticed and unexplored.

Criticality that only draws attention to those areas of life which we already recognise as imperfect, is of limited value. In order to fulfil its true potential, criticality must first equip itself with the sensitivity to recognise, reveal, and expose those elements of life which are consistently and systematically overlooked: those crushing invisible burdens, injustices

and oppressions which are constantly accepted by many as components of an inescapable natural reality. The ability to recognise and cut through the habitualised veneer of the everyday is therefore absolutely vital to the critical project.

The term Shklovsky proposes to describe this potentially traumatic disruption of algebraic habitualisation is "ostranenie" which is often translated as estrangement or defamiliarisation (Shklovsky, 1917). Ostranenie is not just an observable phenomenon or state of consciousness, but a *process* that can actively be brought into being through the application of specific methods. Shklovsky suggests that ostranenie is in fact the principal technique, purpose and identity of art:

> Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar", to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged (Shklovsky, 1917, p. 12).

In Shklovsky's description of the "algebraic" habitualisation process, in order to achieve "the greatest economy of perceptive effort" (Shklovsky, 1917, p.12) we reduce the full experience of commonly encountered objects and phenomena to a single simplified symbol, an identifiable but vastly simplified rough outline. As he writes, it is as if we have wrapped the object loosely in a sack; we can still identify the shape and therefore know what this symbol means, but we no longer engage directly with the object itself. (Shklovsky, 1917, p. 11)

Shklovsky's proposal is that art can intervene in the algebraic process, breaking the habitualised symbolic connection, thus forcing us to reengage our perceptive faculties to investigate objects and experiences afresh. The viewer must look

for longer, and think harder to identify and understand something previously assumed to be known, but which has now become strangely unfamiliar. The sack which previously operated to ease the burden of perception by outlining a simplified symbolic shape, now becomes a camouflage cloak. Rather than just glancing at the sack, we must pick it up, feel it, give it a shake, perhaps even open it up and look inside in order to find out what is hidden within. This increasing of the "difficulty and length of perception" is the technique which breaks the spell of the habitual and creates the condition of defamiliarisation required to allow the proper experience of astonishment at the wonderful strangeness of the everyday object.

But what might this purposeful subversion of the default habitualising impulse which opens our eyes to recognise the extraordinary within the ordinary look like in the real world? Though Shklovsky was one of the earliest to write explicitly about methods for defamiliarisation, if one looks for practical examples of creative practices of defamiliarisation, one name stands head and shoulders above the crowd: German playwright, theatre director and poet, Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956).

For many today, their only direct experience of Brecht's work is likely to have been exposure to the lyrics of a song he wrote as part of his 1928 play *Die Dreigroschenoper* [The Threepenny Opera] about the character Macheath, a murderer thief and rapist, which which was later translated and popularised (in a considerably watered down form) as the jazz standard *Mack the Knife*. Beyond this, Brecht is best known as an innovator and pioneer of radical methods within his theatre practice. Throughout the course of his creative career as playwright, director and poet, Brecht proposed, theorised, tested and developed a complex, sophisticated, and ever evolving practice centred around defamiliarisation.

The key method in Brecht's practice was the *Verfremdungseffekt*. This was famously manifested in Brecht's theatre practice through techniques specifically designed to bring about a condition of defamiliarisation within the audience, such as: sabotaging the illusion of reality on stage by having the actors directly address the audience and purposefully act 'badly'; discouraging empathetic audience identification with characters by making them dislikeable; subverting suspense by displaying signs announcing the outcome of each scene before the action takes place; unexpectedly breaking up the action with musical numbers; actively making visible the stage lighting, equipment and musicians. Beneath these relatively obvious interventions lay more complex practices. The idea of *Gestus* (Brecht, 1964, p.198-201) proposed that an actor's performance on the stage should not simply mimetically represent the occurrence of an event, but should be able to make visible the full range of social conditions and factors leading up to the situation the character is found in and therefore offering an insight into any decisions or actions which they may now take. The concept of *Epic* narrative, or *Autonomization* (Jameson, 1999, pp. 55–65) suggested that the scenes of the play should not build and rely upon each other in a linear fashion, but should instead remain autonomous and "fully capable of life" (Brecht, 1964, p. 70) each on their own terms even if separated. The principle of *Historicization* maintained that plays should not be set in the present, but in distinct historical periods in order that the narrative may be seen not as inevitable but as a culmination of circumstances each of which could have been altered. In this way, conditions in the present may in turn come to be seen not as inevitable but rather as changeable and improvable (Dickson, 1978).

The overall aim of the Verfremdungseffekt is to encourage a condition of active critical spectatorship within the audience. Crucially, this active critical spectatorship within cultural space is pursued as a necessary step towards the development of active critical citizenship in society. Often mistranslated as *alienation*, the word *Verfremdung* is a relative neologism to the German language, appropriated by Brecht to describe the *internal* alienation of defamiliarisation, which was central to his

Design as criticism. Francisco Laranjo, LCC, 2017

critical project (Bloch, 1970). In an essay discussing whether the purpose of theatre should be entertainment or instruction, Brecht compares the crucial difference between the response of the audience member in the everyday dramatic theatre, with the response he wished to provoke through his Verfremdungseffekt utilising 'epic' theatre:

> The dramatic theatre's spectator says: Yes I have felt like that too – Just like me – It's only natural – It'll never change – The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are inescapable – That's great art; it all seems the most obvious thing in the world – I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh.

> The epic theatre's spectator says: I'd never have thought it – That's not the way – That's extraordinary, hardly believable – It's got to stop – The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are unnecessary – That's great art: nothing obvious in it – I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh" (Brecht, 1964, p. 71).

According to Brecht's thinking, in our everyday lives we lose touch with our own critical faculties as we come to accept the cultural, social, political and economic structures surrounding us as normal, natural, inevitable, ultimately unchangeable, and therefore pragmatically acceptable realities. We seek relief or escape from this experience of the inevitable everyday grind of reality through culture, art and entertainment, whereby we subject ourselves to a further distancing from our critical faculties as we slide into models of passive spectatorship that reinforce our passivity by promoting a one-way mode of cultural consumption.

Brecht famously berated the theatregoing audience of his day for "hanging its brains up in the cloakroom along with its coat" (Brecht, 1964, p. 27). Walter Benjamin quotes Brecht describing the common man's experience of culture as: "his accustomed opiate, his mental

participation in someone else's uprising, the rise of others; the illusion which whips him up for a few hours and leaves him all the more exhausted, filled with vague memories and even vaguer hopes" (Brecht cited in Benjamin, 1999, p. 149). Continuous over-stimulation leads to desensitisation. Aesthetic overload ultimately brings about a lasting anaesthetic effect (Buwert, 2015). Patterns of habitualisation which promote passive consumption rather than active critical thinking and activity can be encouraged and maintained by cultural aesthetic means.

Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, opposing this condition of mental anaesthetisation, is an attempt to counter the loss of criticality within the passive spectator by causing that which is familiar or habitual to become estranged and thus defamiliarised. The anaesthetic is shaken off, the illusion of normality as inevitable and unchangeable is broken and a situation of dis-equilibrium is created. Rudely awoken from their cognitive lethargy, the spectator must now struggle to come to terms with this imbalance by actively using their own mind.

The attitude Brecht wished to cultivate in his audience was not that of an emotional captive, drawn in and enthralled by the realism of the performance and empathetic identification with the heroes of the story. Instead they should remain emotionally disconnected, dispassionate, as if at leisure within their own home, smoking a cigar, reading the newspaper and weighing up the events set before them. The key principle is that rather than disappearing within the escapist spectacle of entertainment, the spectator will still be entertained, but during this entertainment will remain in possession of their own rational faculties. In this way, they might retain the capacity to make their own judgements with respect to the issues they encounter, rather than merely consuming a pre-packaged experience of that content. The goal of the *Verfremdungseffekt* is to achieve a productive defamiliarisation which causes the spectator to wake from their passivity to realise that the way things are, is not the way things must always be: that reality

is not fixed and inevitable but constantly changing, and is therefore changeable. In this way defamiliarisation makes space for the perception of alternative possibilities, and in doing so opens up spaces for criticality.

The core power of the *Verfremdungseffekt* is found in this ability to create space for criticality by simultaneously staging multiple conflicting ideological positions and agendas, laying them bare and offering them up for interrogation. Brecht's work certainly had quite specific political agendas. His methods, however, are not tied to any ideology. The aim of the Verfremdungseffekt is to open a space for critical thinking in relation to all of the ideologies at play within a situation. Though many of Brecht's plays are outrageously didactic in form, clearly telling the audience what the correct way to think should be, the genius of the method lies in constantly undermining this authoritarian stance by demanding that the spectator not be taken in by the spectacle. If the spectator wishes to do what they are told, they must make this choice on their own terms.

Despite his many detractors – and there have been many, both during his lifetime and posthumously, on account of his politics, his personality, and his work (Willett, 1984) – Brecht's theories and practices of defamiliarisation have had great impact on critical creative practice far beyond the world of theatre. Many critical practices operate in distinctly Brechtian ways, perhaps without even knowing it. The trick up the sleeve of almost all contemporary critical speculative design, for example, is to create an uncanny sense of defamiliarisation by presenting nearly credible versions of current reality, subtly tweaked to reflect uncomfortably upon the now. However, there is a fine line to be walked here between defamiliarisation as a productive strategy for encouraging active criticality, or merely as a mildly amusing diversionary entertainment.

Looking for examples of sustained engagement with Brechtian-type strategies in the context of critical visual communication design practice, the work of two individuals immediately spring to my mind. The first is Dutch graphic designer Jan van Toorn, whose work has an unmistakably Brechtian character. In *Design's Delight* (2006), Van Toorn describes his *dialogic* approach to visual communication design in this way:

> Unlike the classic form of visual communication, the dialogic approach is a connective model of visual rhetoric with a polemic nature and polyphonic visual form. A storytelling structure that seeks to reveal the opposing elements of the message and opts for active interpretation by the spectator (Van Toorn, 2006, Acetate Insert).

While much of Van Toorn's work, might at first glance appear to be composed of scrappy compositions of entirely unrelated images, closer consideration reveals carefully constructed intertextual and reflexive visual narrative strategies. Rather than being persuaded of the incontrovertible truth of the message's content, the viewer is presented with a visually proposed argument. The reflexive nature of the designed form reveals the socially and ideologically constructed nature of this argument. The effect is that rather than being aesthetically manipulated and convinced to choose a predetermined position from a limited range of options offered by the design, the viewer is invited to engage in an internal mental dialogue with the presented content, through which they may develop their own position in relation to the matter in question. It is in this regard that we can begin to draw parallels between Brecht's Verfremdungseffekt and Van Toorn's account of dialogical design. A primary aim of the Verfremdungseffekt was to use the moment of defamiliarisation to lay bare the full range of ideological forces in play within the given situation exposing them to evaluation and judgement by the critical mind of the viewer. In the same way, Van Toorn's dialogical design subverts expectations of visual communication

design, opening up a moment of defamiliarisation in which the open and slightly ambiguous nature of the visual elements presented form an unresolved sphere of debate which draws the inquisitive mind into the process of active interpretation.

Though Van Toorn offers a compelling theoretical case for the use of the dialogical approach to visual communication design in society, the practical implementation of these ideas is easier said than done, and the effectiveness of much of Van Toorn's work in terms of actually producing such instances of dialogical communication in the real world is debatable. Van Toorn's calendars for the printer Mart. Spruijt produced throughout the 1970s offer perhaps the strongest examples demonstrating the subtle complexity of his dialogical approach at work. The raw image content of these promotional calendars ranged thematically year by year from contemporary and historical newspaper images, to portraits of celebrities and ordinary members of the public, to flat dull images of natural and built environments. When considered as part of the weekly serial narratives of the calendars, what at first appear to be fairly random unrelated and crudely constructed compositions begin to develop into subtle but deeply complex and unresolved visual arguments on issues ranging from press mediation, to cultural diversity, to the nature of truth and reality itself.

The nature of these 'arguments' remains open and relatively ambiguous in character. This is not, however, to say that these arguments are unfocussed, indiscriminate or indeterminate. Van Toorn often describes his process as one of carefully calculated intertextual visual journalism. Rather than making conclusive claims and thereby shutting down dialogue on an issue, the arguments staged by the Mart. Spruijt calendars open up new spaces for debate in relation to their precisely curated subject matter. Such an approach to the design process is inherently critical and demands a degree of critical thought from the viewer as it

subversively disrupts the conventional linear operations of visual communication. Van Toorn's work, though by no means perfect, represents in this way a pioneering model of critical design practice with a distinctly Brechtian flavour.

A second example of sustained engagement with Brechtian-type defamiliarisation strategies in visual communication practice, can be found in the work of the documentary filmmaker Adam Curtis. Curtis weaves together found archive footage to construct unexpected narratives about well-known historical and cultural phenomena and events. His trademark techniques of rapidly edited montage, crudely constructed no-nonsense text overlays, deadpan voiceover, and use of eclectic and unexpected backing tracks combine to create a jarringly radical break from the conventional experience of contemporary documentary film.

It is Curtis use of these techniques to simultaneously disrupt and challenge expectations of both the documentary medium, and received wisdom within the subject matter of his films, which makes his work an outstanding example of Brechtian-type strategies at work in filmic visual storytelling.

These defamiliarisation strategies are most obvious to see in Curtis' use of music and editing to play with pace and tone. In one memorable sequence towards the end of the final episode of his three-part series *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace* (2011), Curtis draws out and presents a tragic historical narrative thread on events and circumstances surrounding the Rawandan Genocide and ensuing conflicts. This is initially soundtracked in the conventional way with a gradual build-up of brooding strings over newsreel footage. However, this menacing soundtrack is suddenly cut, and switched out for the bouncy piano of Floyd Cramer's 1961 hit dancehall instrumental *On the Rebound* which reframes this unimaginably tragic account of horrific genocide and brutal civil war as a comic caper, nothing more than a game. The pace of editing also changes simultaneously, from lingering shots to fast paced jump

cuts keeping time with the upbeat music. The chaos of refugee camps and military movements is transformed into a perverse dance.

This sudden, unexpected and slightly shocking switch in tone is a textbook example of Verfremdungseffekt. In Curtis' film this defamiliarisation brings into question our accepted knowledge of these recent historical events. Into this moment of disorientation he reintroduces parallel threads brought up earlier in the episode: the Western demand for African minerals to build consumer gadgets, and a British scientist's failed quest to search for the origins of AIDS in chimpanzees in the Congo. The viewer, having anticipated the conventional linear documentary presentation of authoritative reality, is disoriented by the encounter with an unpredictable presentation of a complex multi-faceted narrative. While Curtis does offer an account linking these disparate threads, this is far from a fully resolved conclusion. Rather than being presented as the one true single perspective on 'the way things really happened', complex stories are constructed out of a messy array of found fragments of reality. These narratives are encountered as just one possible way of viewing events, and the constructed and interpreted nature of reality is exposed. In this way the viewer is invited not merely to passively accept the presented argument but rather to actively, critically engage with the content.

The examples of Van Toorn and Curtis' practices demonstrate the potential that Brechtian-type defamiliarisation methods can bring to the critical project in contemporary design practice. Such work offers glimpses towards a more substantial and constructive model for critically oriented visual communication practice than much of that which presents itself as critical design today.

The literary critic Fredric Jameson has suggested in *Brecht and Method* (1999) that Brecht might have been best pleased with a legacy not of his personal genius or historical importance, but rather for his usefulness. For graphic design that seeks to be critical, Brechtian methods

of defamiliarisation could prove to be very useful. Today's visual spectators, living habitual lives in an ever increasingly visually saturated world, are no less prone to hanging their brains up with their coats as those of Brecht's day were. Methods of defamiliarisation offer an opportunity to break through the habitual and open up spaces for genuine criticality. For this defamiliarisation, as Brecht wrote, is "the alienation that is necessary to all understanding. When something seems 'the most obvious thing in the world', it means that any attempt to understand the world has been given up. What is 'natural' must have the force of what is startling" (Brecht, 1964, p. 71).

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Operationalising the Means:
Communication Design as Critical Practice,
Jan van Toorn

**What is critical consciousness
at the bottom if not an
unstoppable predilection for
alternatives?** — Edward W. Said

The Message as Derivate

The force of conviction of my modernist upbringing as a designer explains my fascination with the formal aesthetic side of the classic idiom of communication design. At the same time I am constantly surprised by the fact that, under pressure of the current socio-economic conditions, modernism time and again succeeds in keeping its original liberating social intentions out of sight by concentrating on the very form itself; a conceptual and communicative shortcoming that is concealed in the abstractions of thinking and the elegance of form. This is true of all forms of cultural production, but especially of the "forbidden territories", as Pierre Bourdieu (1979) calls them, which are less under scrutiny, such as the arts, architecture, design and so on. These are all disciplines that play a large part in the most far-ranging aesthetic production of capitalism ever known; but it is a production that lacks the sense of reality and spirit of rebellion of the avant-garde to look the 'monster' of the power relations under which it works in the eyes. This is intellectual and artistic deficiency that reduces the achievements of the great modernist works and ideas to that of isolated individuals in an ahistorical context.

Equally disturbing by now is a postmodernist aesthetic activism that due to this need for tranquillity in artistic production, increases the atrophy of its emancipatory capabilities and ends up in a frankly classic practice using a revolutionary terminology, but in actual practice fulfils no other than a kind of institutional opposition. This is like leaders who call for revolution, but whose social strategies, procedures and language use are routine.

Now that the democratic public sphere has collapsed in the profit-driven, managerial and academic inflation of the worldwide neo-liberal climate, communication design's optimistic pragmatism and belief in providing great services ends in an attractive speechlessness, knowing no other way to stay in place than the personal fashion of unbounded influence. It is a type of cultural production of the creative industry that Fredric Jameson (2015) —correctly in my opinion—compares with the derivates of the financial economy that subsume our experience under the empty fictions of conceptualisation and promotion.

The meaning and visual quality of the message are thereby no longer a means but an end. We cannot distance ourselves any longer from this stagnant state of our work in the consensus media. The influence of the false dilemmas of the public debate has become so strong that the mediatory "incubators of new social forms"[3] like architects and designers, as Rem Koolhaas (2003) puts it, can no longer turn away from the unchecked mass mediatisation and displacements of meaning that they help to produce. All the more reason to put up a fight against the raging dualisms and antagonistic egocentrism of a world in which almost everything becomes elusive through a conceptual and aesthetic self-mystification as a dangerous impasse to liberation and equality. It is also high time to land in reality as professionals and to invest in a visual journalism that takes up a deliberate position against current correctness: to projects that, removed from aesthetics as such, deal with and

Cultural production is social commitment. (...) Computers don't have built-in social consequences. How is one to identify with the messages? Empirical observation, data, are socially conditioned, are related to modes of production, give shape to forms of sociality. In spite of the forces that determine it the given should be worked through, should be related to reality, to everyday life. Which is a question of method, that is to say political.
— Susan Buck-Morss

contribute once again to the public sphere to further progress and social change. Freedom, after all, is an activity; a call for a committed reinvestment in the substantive democratic and multiform realities of human exchange.

Strategy and Method

About a decade ago Andrew Blauvelt (2008) still expected that design would begin to explore "its performative dimension, its rhetorical impact and its ability to facilitate social interventions".[4] But communication design sacrificed the common good and once again became a matter of fine-tuning the usual ideological escape route of combining an artless belief in the intuitive act of aesthetic inspiration and digital technology as the ultimate outcome. This is often either a form of naiveté or just a sort of polite strategic gesture with a compromised aesthetic and weak intellectual stand, entirely lacking any realistic ideology and agenda.

This is why our situation today first of all calls for the rediscovery of a politically aware, empirical form of operationalisation of the means. After all, the choice of a political subject or a critical position does not in itself make the message political. It is the way the message is intended and shaped that is by definition political. Even though the word strategy is common in postmodern design discourse, its programmatic and strategic considerations underlying the intentions regarding the effects of the message on the recipients are hardly considered today. A more aware, investigative visual communication, however, should realise that

1—In this range she distinguishes: functionalism, formalism, informalism, productivism, dialogism. See: Kuijpers, E. (2014) *Strategies in Communication Design.* Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum.

The Great Method is a practical doctrine of alliances and of the dissolution of alliances, of the exploitation of changes and the dependency on change, of the instigation of change and the changing of the instigators, the separation and emergence of unities, the unselfsufficiency of oppositions without each other, the unification or mutually exclusive oppositions. The Great Method makes it possible to recognize processes within things and to use them. It teaches us to ask questions which enable activity. — Bertolt Brecht

the socio-public space is not something given, but a condition outside the capsule of design to be dealt with critically and practically at the same time: doing away with the autonomy of the design object, actively trying to explore the freedom of the symbolic field, striving for more meaningful and transparent action.

Terry Eagleton (2012) distinguishes in this connection two elementary concepts, their strategies and forms: "This classical conception, of the form of the artwork containing but not subjugating its contents, is less suggestive than the concept of structuration. Structuration mediates between structure and event, in much the same sense that a strategy does. It signifies a structure, to be sure – but a structure in action, one constantly in the process of reconstituting itself according to the ends it seeks to achieve, along with the fresh purposes it keeps producing (...)".

Els Kuijpers (2014) has convincingly elaborated this model in a communicative spectrum of five strategic positions[1] based on the intended working vis-à-vis the spectator. Her research shows a sliding scale of strategic positions that vary in accordance with the variation of standards for a political or other kind of awareness to negotiate, resist, or make a difference in the world. It makes clear the dimensions of the potential room for manoeuvre when the autonomy of the traditional design object and its perceptual wholeness are abandoned and where the opportunities lie for the tactics of dissent action in the media.

In this sense strategic insight is a basic condition for a genuinely critical practice. It forms the basis for a radical change in method and language use followed by a series of practical steps that turn abstractions into a contemporary and projective elaboration of the commission as the foundation for the structuring and *mise-en-scène* of the message. Bertolt Brecht's lapidary definition of his "great method" (Jameson, 1989) is an inspiring example of

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such a critical and speculative thought in action, leading to a plot and scenario that ask for and enable a more meaningful and reunified sensorial language use.

Structure and Articulation

Now that private and individual interests have become rooted on a massive scale all over the world to the detriment of the public and general interest, the ability of language use in the media to signify and confer meaning has been corrupted to a considerable extent by professional mediation. It is an accommodation in which design plays a dominant and visually determinant role, resulting in the residues of representation and style, of individuality and skill. In short, communication design transferred from the sphere of the 'exchange of meaning' to a stylistic orientation driven by technological, administrative and institutional discourse. In this light, the politicisation of the instruments of criticism is more than urgent. An absolute condition for success is the linguistic awareness that all language is based on its bi-articulate, twofold nature. A combination of fact and fiction as a multi-stranded form of experience and interpretation offers a potential for meaningful intervention in the message that will lead to a recasting. This goes beyond modernist institutionalisation and harks back to the 'fresh roots' and experiences of the cosmopolitan heritage of the modern.

That does not make this text a plea for the abolition of the achievements of the current practice of communication design. On the contrary, it is an argument for a broader, dialectical, journalistic and political approach that makes it possible to reformulate the commission in the light of its workings and the current state of the conditions of production. At the same time it is a plea for a deep interest in the working of the message and an practical investment in an open, multifaceted language use without which a truly critical practice cannot not exist. To communicate is a verb, "a structure round which we must circle, looking at it from all sides, peering down from above,

investigating from below" (Lissitzky, 1968, p. 343). Designers on the whole, however, trained as they are in the conceptual order of the text, are not familiar with the non-verbal, associative vocabularies of language. Even less do they feel at home in a language use that, driven by its operational intentions vis-à-vis the spectators and readers, replaces the conventional idea of communication as an objective form of representation of the world, with a complementary language use of a model allowing mediated and multiple interpretation.

All the same, that reunification of the senses related to the practices of life lies at the core of the liberating force of what Viktor Shklovsky (1917) calls a "dialogic practice". That is first expressed in the design process in the use of the editorial ground plan structuring the message's story, by distinguishing between 'motif' and 'plot'. Respectively defined as the basic elements of the narrative in logical and temporal terms that enables the unrolling of the subject, including the delay and retarding of a series of motifs which leads to the "defamiliarisation" of the message.

The creative process that results from this is not only a great pleasure but also a constant investment in the meaning and visual richness of the message. Here too the estrangement of the dialogic model replaces the conventional relation between performers and spectators. As a practice that seeks to demonstrate the why and what of the subject, it is thus unable to act without a well-spoken, polylinguistic language use – a form of hypertext as a visual, spatial, digital, etc. multi-literacy that shows its argument and exposes it in a variety of forms, leading to what Pier Paolo Pasolini (1972) calls the "free indirect style". The consequence is a language use that establishes an inverted order

The meaning of the text (...) is not an object but a practice. It emerges from a constant traffic between work and reader, so that (...) the act of reading is a project in which one receives back one's own response from the other (the text) in transfigured or defamiliarised form. — Terry Eagleton

to deconstruct and chart the world in an unusual sense, enabling activity and interpretation, so that the final word is never spoken.

It is from here that the real work starts, investing in the far-reaching skills of the verbal and non-verbal forms of expression – bearing in mind that the liberation of the viewers and readers is not so much to unify as to share our differences, to undo the supposed factualness of representation and replace it with the controversial figures of interpretation.

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Learning Design Histories for Design Futures: Speculative Histories and Reflective Practice, Noel Waite

> The conceptual frameworks that influence historical accounts also influence speculation about the future. In this respect, history and futurology share a subtle affinity. They are both children of the moving present (Buchanan, 2001, p. 73).

The affinity between histories and futures has always been a central concern of my teaching, research and practice. I might use different terms according to the context—heritage and innovation in museums or design history and design futuring in education—but I share with Richard Buchanan a desire for a robust design culture in the present that makes a sustainable contribution to humanity's future. This essay takes the form of a reflection on my own practice as a design teacher, and discusses the value of speculative history for design students, as well as a recent example in practice. The educational case study is based on a paper I presented at the first Teaching Design History workshop organised by the Design History Society in 2010, which coincided with the launch of the *Design History Reader* (2010) by Grace Lees-Maffei. Having taught design history, criticism and theory for seven years in the Design Studies Department at the University of Otago in New Zealand, it was gratifying to see a relatively comprehensive published reader that bore some resemblance to the various readers I had compiled for undergraduate courses. However, talking to the design history teachers, I became aware for the first time about a tension that existed in the UK between the teaching of design history and its relationship to studio practice. Since being made compulsory in tertiary education in the UK in the 1970s, design history had grown to be an established discipline (or, at least, sub-discipline of history), but there was a perception amongst students that it lacked relevance to studio practice, or at least had become divorced from it due to different methods of delivery and outcomes (studio vs lecture, design vs essay). While this did not necessarily coincide with my own experience, it did make me consider the relationship of history and practice in tertiary design education.

The relationship of history, theory and criticism to practice is frequently debated in design, as it is in many other disciplines with demanding professional practices. However, design's prescriptive, projective and prospective orientation often sees history relegated to educational outsider status, confined to the lecture theatre and excluded from the studio. In other words, there is a perception that too much emphasis on descriptive, critical and retrospective analysis of design hinders innovation, and so an artificial divide is maintained: History is the object of formal disciplined and critical study, not the subject of practice. History is dead and inevitable; design is alive and unpredictable. There are, however, many notable examples where this is not the case: Design Studies was initially proposed by Paul Rand during a visit to Carnegie Mellon in the 1970s as a series of courses to help students reflect on and understand the principles of design; Philip Meggs' monumental *History of Graphic Design* (1983) was researched and designed with his students, and in New Zealand, typographer Kris Sowersby of Klim Type Foundry is amongst those type designers who make extensive use of 18th and 19th century type specimens to refine and develop his remarkable 21st century type designs.

Reflective Practice
In my case, the primary motivations of design history still remain: to create an adequate critical history of design in New Zealand as both a contribution to national history and global histories of design. However, my primary role as a design historian is not to educate the next generation of design historians, but to educate critical, creative and reflective design practitioners, as well as to sustain research-informed design practice within an interdisciplinary Design Studies

undergraduate programme. It is for these reasons that I introduce design history as a fundamental design research process. If students can master the basic methods of historical scholarship, they are prepared for more advanced design research methods.

I designed a second-year undergraduate course in 2006 called *Design Futures* as part of an Honours programme, which sought to develop and extend design students' research skills. Despite the name, the first half of the course was devoted to design history, and the second half to scenario building and futures methods. Each module was assessed by an assignment entitled, respectively, *Hindsight* and *Foresight*. This aimed at ensuring that students understood historical precedent and could identify trends that shaped the present and could plausibly inform future scenarios. However, the two modules were discrete within the course and lacked an adequate transition from histories to futures. In addition, a number of the scenarios students initially generated in the futures module tended towards utopias and dystopias. This seemed to be a result of students basing their scenarios on current data without consideration of historical trend development. There was also a student perception that design historical research was research about design and had little relation to current practice, whereas scenario building was research for design in that it informed strategic design. In discussion with my colleague Nick Laird, we considered various ways to better integrate the two modules that would result in a stronger relationship between historical analysis and scenario development. The breakthrough for me was provided by reading *New Zealand As It Might Have Been* (2006), a collection of speculative histories by leading New Zealand historians. Various well established historians took key moments from New Zealand's history, such as the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi with indigenous Māori and the location of the capital city, and considered plausible alternative scenarios that were consistent with historical evidence. The book helped me both reconsider key moments in my

[1]—The French philosopher and historian Étienne Gilson is widely attributed with saying "History is the only laboratory we have in which to test the consequences of thought."

country's history, and reflect on contemporary issues of biculturalism and a North/ South divide in political power engendered by these rigorous re-imaginings of my nation's history. The linking of historical analysis and scenario development seemed to be a good fit for addressing some of the issues identified in my first iteration of *Design Futures*, in that history could provide a 'safe' laboratory[1] in which to test scenario building where the future is actually already known.

Speculative Histories
Called by a number of different names—allohistory, counterfactuals, alternative, speculative or virtual histories—this particular method of design history proposes 'what-if' scenarios about the past. Anyone who has reviewed the finalists in a design competition after the winner has been announced will probably have begun such a speculation about what might have been. While the method gained academic credibility in the 1990s with the publication of Geoffrey Hawthorn's *Plausible Worlds* (1991) and Niall Ferguson's *Virtual History (*1997), many historians argue that considering alternative course of action available to historical actors at a given historical moment has always been a tacit part of historical analysis. In order for historians to develop arguments why certain decisions were made, they had to consider what other options were open to the historical agents. In practice, this means the basic research question changes from 'What happened and why?' to 'What might have happened and why it did not?', or in cases of individual design 'could someone have acted differently?'

This mode of inquiry is premised on the idea that history is dynamic and contingent, and very few human decisions are inevitable. It also has the effect of returning a sense of agency to historical actors and facilitates empathy and deeper understanding of the historical choices made, as well as ethical consideration of

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consequences. However, it is important that the imaginative premise is supported by empirical means, and that some form of hypothesis has to be developed and tested against contemporary evidence of what alternatives were actually considered at a given historical moment. This entails identifying key decisions and turning points in the past, taking account of prevailing conditions, and providing plausible explanations for alternative courses of action. It is therefore a disciplined creativity that supports critical analysis and consideration of narrative structure. Steven Weber has also described speculative histories as "mind-set changers" (Weber, 1996, p. 270) in that they encourage open-mindedness to alternative historical interpretations and the implications of historical events.

Speculative Histories in Teaching Practice
To some degree my motivation in introducing speculative histories to design education was to change students' perception about the value and relevance of history and its methods. The method explicitly introduces a creative element into critical inquiry, encouraging students to consider and develop alternative interpretations. At a more fundamental level, reconstituting history in this way encourages students to reframe problems in general and be critical of assumptions, especially historical ones. As well as reimagining the past, it also affords design opportunities to visually represent the alternative history.

   In 2009, I changed the Foresight (futures) assignment to Allosight (the prefix allo- is from the Greek for 'different, other'). Students had already completed a piece of design history research (Hindsight), and had applied the basic principles and methods of design history (as set out in John Walker's *Design History and the History of Design*). They were then asked to select a significant design, decision, incident or event from two general histories of design and one New Zealand design history, and write a short factual summary of 500 words supported by a single photograph, before creating a

speculative history of 1500 words. What struck me was the enthusiasm for, and extra effort into the assignment and the diversity of topics chosen. These ranged from changes to the design of the Berlin Wall, a reversal of results in the 1954 World Cup football final, Al Gore's election as President, America without Bauhaus designers, and our local cityscape without a controversial sports stadium. Each considered the effects of change, including the effectiveness of the design of the Berlin Wall in separating people, the effect of sport championships on brand value, sustainability, American design education, and public funding of sports stadia. Many assignments redesigned artefacts and media from the past to simulate accurate historical communication of their alternative history. Two particularly notable student examples can be highlighted: architect Richard Neutra's modernist public housing project for Elysian Park Heights in Chavez Ravine in Los Angeles, and the early death of fashion designer Christian Dior. The first student's interest in Neutra was sparked from his previous Hindsight assignment of Neutra's *Case Study Houses* (1945–1966). By considering the plans for Elysian Park Heights and its implementation, he discussed a plausible gentrification and displacement of people it had been intended for. The second student considered what if Christian Dior had lived past 1957, and her Allosight project lead to a fourth-year dissertation on the importance of succession planning in fashion brand identities built around a single name.

   In his book *Design Futuring* (2009), Tony Fry states that "Looking back teaches ways to think about how to project forward. It can be a way to formulate key questions and to create 'critical fictions', enabling the contemplation of what would otherwise not be considered" (Fry, 2009, p. 39). From my experience, speculative history is a challenging and sophisticated method which encourages design students to reflect upon about the nature of history, question received interpretations, identify and empathise with challenges faced by historical

figures, simulate alternatives and develop coherent narratives. Below are summarised some of its core learning benefits for those interested in incorporating the method within their design teaching:

• Supports critical research and tests deductive reasoning skills;
• Challenges the assumption of the inevitability of history;
• Supports understanding of the significance of human agency;
• Provides an opportunity to apply graphic design to history;
• Requires careful consideration of narrative formation;
• Introduces scenario building into design history, the relationships of driving forces, and the importance of plausibility as a test of scenarios;
• The exploration of the past, discovery of alternative interpretations, and prototyping alternative histories relates well to the three stages (Exploration, Discovery and Prototyping) of participatory design as set out by Spinuzzi (2005)
• Identifies social issues and analyses the ethical consequences of decision-making;
• Provides an opportunity for disciplined creativity.

In terms of my teaching, the main challenge lay in defining and selecting topics that are supported by a breadth of secondary research while, for students, identifying key turning points and evidence of historically plausible alternatives requires careful attention to the literature. In my experience, the benefits outweighed these challenges and the results aligned well with the first two levels of Futures Literacy as set out by Miller (2007), awareness and discovery. Awareness consists of developing temporal and situational awareness 'that change happens over time, that people do harbour expectations and values, and that choices matter' (Miller, 2007, p. 348), while discovery involves 'consistently distinguishing between possible, probable and preferable' futures to encourage a 'rigorous imagining' (Miller, 2007, p. 350)

of possible scenarios to inform strategic decision-making. What I saw in students who used speculative histories was a greater awareness of their present-day assumptions and a genuine pleasure in the nuanced process of discovery the method entailed.

Speculative Design Practice
The method also has application outside the classroom, as evident in a project initiated by designers Sarah Maxey and Catherine Griffiths in 2015 in response to the results of New Zealand's Flag Consideration Project. The two-year, NZ$25million government-initiated Flag Consideration Project sought public submissions for a new flag design. The government-appointed 12-person Flag Consideration Panel then reviewed all 10,292 flag designs and announced a long list of 40 flag designs in August 2015. This was reduced to a shortlist of four (later increased to five) designs, which were ranked in the first referendum in November/December 2015, with a final binding referendum between the current and preferred alternative fern flag scheduled for March 2016. There was considerable debate about the absence of professional designers on the Flag Consideration Panel, so Maxey and Griffiths asked twelve New Zealand designers, artists and vexillologists in October 2015 to select flag designs from the 10,000+ submissions to New Zealand's Flag Consideration Project, providing a comparative chart of the results.[2] The published chart bears the disclaimer that this alternative design view is 'not a solution, but a visual statement.' This speculative history–what if designers and vexillologists had been included in the selection panel–provided an alternative to the government's process, and was a critical act to draw attention to the lack of professional design expertise on the 12-member Flag Consideration Panel[3] and the resulting narrowness of the long and short-list selections.

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Back to the Future

In both theory and practice, speculative histories provide a healthy challenge to orthodox thinking. Speculative histories reveal an important aspect of creative thinking that informs historical research—the importance of inquiry-led discovery, the active possibility of human agency, and the potential for the reinterpretation of history—and, in my experience, its application by design students encourages a more active interest in design historical research and a clearer understanding of its relationship to, and potential for design practice. It also offers a safe historical laboratory in which to test out and critically evaluate hypothetical scenarios and their consequences which brings us back to the present needs of design education and, in the case of New Zealand, the future of that country's flag.

2—See: *nz Design – 98 flags.* In: *Threaded.* Available from: http://www.threaded.co.nz/articles/2015/10/15/nz-design-98-flags

3—See: *The nz flag — your chance to decide.* In: New Zealand Government. Available from: https://www.govt.nz/browse/engaging-with-government/the-nz-flag-your-chance-to-decide/

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A Politics in Method

After almost a year of trying to persuade sceptical institutions still rooted in a craft-centered, product-driven, expert design approach to develop a practice incorporating field research, we were finally given the green light by the Liberal Arts department to teach a methods course at my old alma mater, the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, one of the more elite private design schools in Karachi. My colleagues and I had selected a site which would be used as an object of study: Karachi's Civil Hospital, a venerable public institution established in 1898. Over the course of the semester we were to lead undergraduate students through the basics of designing research for complex systems.

The class turned out to be simultaneously one of the most satisfying and frustrating experiences I have undertaken to date. The hospital was a sprawling, crowded, unplanned hive of activity, servicing thousands of urban and rural working class and peasantry every day. Many of these patients could not read or write and spoke only regional dialects, travelling miles from their village or town with their families in tow to pitch camp inside the hospital grounds, sometimes for weeks, as they waited for treatment. In the large courtyards and grounds in between buildings, vendors would set up their stalls and carts to sell goods to the hordes of outpatients. Where signage systems failed, a small army of self-appointed orderlies shuffled in between buildings acting as guides and errand-runners. For 50 rupees (roughly $0.50), they would go run and buy the medicines you needed, find the doctor

1—Interestingly, this was happening around the same time as the idea of social innovation was beginning to gain in popularity in the social and management sciences (see Drucker, 1957; Lapierre, 1965).

2—Alexander in particular subjects the entire idea to a scathing critique in an interview with Max Jacobson, calling it a "barren and intimidating concept" (Design Methods Group, 1971).

3—Readers interested in an explanation looking back at the failure of the first generation of the Methods Movement and the subsequent development of the second generation of methods might want to look at Horst Rittel's interview with Donald Grant and Jean-Pierre Protzen (Design Methods Group, 1972).

A Method in Politics

1. Within the current landscape of toolkits, literature and conferences on design for social innovation, humanitarian design, or social design—I will stick to the short 'social design' here—two terms from its lexicon have been instrumental in its rapid global adoption: design methods and design thinking. No toolkit, book, lecture or workshop opens without a clarification or homage to these two terms. One cannot (presumably) practice social design without clearing them. Some examples of this include IDEO's toolkit *Design For Social Impact Toolkit* (2008) and Nesta's *Design, Impact and You Toolkit*, books such as Andrew Shea's *Designing for Social Change* (2012) and most recently, Ezio Manzini's *Design When Everybody Designs* (2015), and also conferences like *Big Think, A Better World By Design*.

The first generation of design methods were developed in the 1960s with the explicit aim of externalizing and formalizing the design process, demystifying what had hitherto been considered as a largely black boxed process[1], and opening it up so that other stakeholders could be involved in the design process. The history of the Design Methods Movement has been troubled: key figures such as Christopher Alexander and John Chris Jones later distanced themselves from it[2], mostly due to what they feared was the tendency of designers to rely overly on methods to the exclusion of developing flexibility and sensitivity in their work, especially when dealing with projects with rising levels of complexity. In particular, there was a realization that at the very least, the first generation of methods did not add anything to the way designers had designed traditionally[3]. Subsequent generations of thinkers on design began to turn to the analysis of specific aspects of creative problem solving as observed in the processes of expert practitioners in order to propose better, more flexible models of what designerly activity was. This led to the emergence of the term 'design

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thinking' from Nigel Cross with his designerly ways of knowing based around design codes and object languages (Cross, 1982), to Donald Schön's observation of design as reflective practice, constituted as a dialectic between the designer and his materials (Schon, 1983), to Horst Rittel's view of design as a process of argumentation (Rittel, 1988). Cross, tracing the history of the Methods Movement and its practice of design as science down to Schön and arguing for design as an interdisciplinary practice uniquely concerned with the artificial world, concludes that "we must avoid swamping our design research with different cultures imported either from the sciences or the arts" (Cross, 2001, pp 227).

Today, it seems that both the Design Methods Movement and design thinking are enjoying a heyday within the context of social design, having become a significant part of its discourse and rhetoric. This rhetoric becomes especially visible embodied in the form of the *methods toolkit*, that principal instrument of the humanitarian design firm or social organization seeking to employ designerly practice to its own repertoire.

The basic anatomy of the social design toolkit, if we begin to dissect it, is formed thus: there is a statement of intent, usually on behalf of the toolkit's makers, outlining how they believe the toolkit will be able to empower the organization using it, a definition of design thinking, a description of the design process and the methods employed, and then the methods themselves, with details of when, where and how to use them. But how is design thinking and how are methods, reproduced within the social design toolkit?

For example, in IDEO's *Design Thinking for Educators Toolkit*, we find that "Design Thinking is a mind-set. Design thinking is about believing we can make a difference, and having an intentional process in order to get to new, relevant solutions that create positive impact" (IDEO, 2011, p. 11). Internalizing this mind-set, the toolkit assures its readers,

you wanted, or wheel your ailing relative to the requisite ward. In the absence of planned formal systems, clients, caretakers, and opportunistic entrepreneurial individuals had designed for themselves and between themselves informal systems that meant to plug the gaps.

Early on, it became obvious to both faculty and students that even narrowing down to a specific area of focus and finding a community of willing stakeholders was going to prove difficult—each problem was tied to another, and each presented unique barriers, some linguistic, some political, some socio-cultural. While the school is also a teaching hospital with hundreds of medical students, we did not have the safety of hospital uniforms or expert status to mask our class. Small things like the manner of speech and the way we moved through the crowds gave us away, and groups of students would often find themselves accosted by patients with small chits of paper asking for interpretation, vendors seeking to sell wares, or beggars looking for a small donation. A group of students wishing to understand in detail the way in which medical records were archived found that the entire collection was in the hands of a small number of archivists who had been employed for decades, and had become quite adept at retrieving specific records, employing a system of stacking records completely based on the memorization of a taxonomy divided by theme, time and space (e.g. 'this particular case from ER must be in the records from such year, kept in this part of the room'). The system had never been digitized because of political reasons. Not only the archivists, but an entire retinue of workers above and below them would have been rendered redundant and laid off. Creativity notwithstanding, we found that many of these practices were developed and inscribed in a confluence of power relations, and under the constraints of hierarchal and material limitations.[17]

Students expressed that, over the course of employing both more traditional methods meant to study and explore situations and generative methods where they tried to collectively brainstorm solutions, they

key to which is being human-centered, collaborative, optimistic and lean, is the gateway to understanding that "the design process is what puts Design Thinking into action. It's a structured approach to generating and evolving ideas. It has five phases that help navigate the development from identifying a design challenge to finding and building a solution" (IDEO, 2011, pp. 14).

This is followed by IDEO's social design methodology explained through a series of steps incorporating a variety of tools and methods that can be employed.

It becomes immediately evident from the example given above that there has been a shift in the way the toolkit introduces design thinking. One could argue that perhaps this is necessary: after all, the aims of the Design Methods Movement and subsequent writers on design thinking were to articulate the process in order to turn it into a pedagogical tool for designers, while most social design toolkits are aimed at teaching design to non-designers. But this shift is a curious inversion: from being the profession that needs its tacit practice articulated so that it can be practiced more self-consciously, it is now the designer who proudly sits in the driver's seat and lays claim to all the answers. And so what the designer is doing through the toolkit is trying to convince people who are not design experts, whether professionals from other disciplines, grassroots social workers, managers, or policy makers, that there is a tangible, structured process that they can follow and get results.

It is also worth noting that, on the one hand, what these toolkits seem to ask is tantamount to a leap of faith, and this is done by reducing design thinking to a set of methods: design thinking will get you results, since it has proven to be innovative time and again within professional design practice, but for it to get you results you must believe in it and the values it espouses (which, incidentally are the very values that social innovation prizes: a results-focused attitude, collaboration, action-oriented, pro-development etc.), its techniques

found that the politics of class often came between them and useful research. Sometimes, only in exchange for favours would individuals agree to an interview, and even then there was a sense among students that when asked questions like why they did something a certain way, many interviewees would either answer obliquely, lie, tell them what they thought they wanted to hear, or wave off saying 'that was how things were done', even after repeated attempts to engage. Some students reported the opposite, talking about how, once identified as belonging to an upper class background, they were harangued by patients with a long list of grievances and complaints or overwhelming obsequiousness.

It was the latter that really brought home to students the realization that their very presence as 'makers' intending to make an intervention in the system came with political baggage. Far from the easy descriptions of social engagement and community-enabled design practice found in many of the key texts dealing with social design, they found considerable roadblocks and far from radically reframing the system, they found their work always at risk of being subsumed within the politics of the system itself. Had it not been for an ongoing stream of critical evaluation poring over research findings correlated with extensive secondary historical research and a sensitivity to local behaviours and attitudes, one would have had trouble separating the nuances of what was true from what was false, of how people made meanings and how desires were formed. Most students, after several months studying the hospital, expressed that what the experience had made them particularly conscious about was how deeply embedded in class privilege their own assumptions about design were. Whereas at the beginning of the semester most would have casually dismissed the hospital's services as unplanned and undersigned, inefficient, slow and corrupt, what they in fact found was that many of the hitherto informally designed systems in fact exhibited a flexibility that allowed them to cope and scale with the magnitude of people they were dealing with. At the same time, the need to streamline these systems

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to give better service meant building an acute sense of the politics of working and intervening within the space. In the end, while acknowledging the usefulness of many methods, many students articulated a dissatisfaction with the human-centered design process, arguing for a deeper, more immersive process of slow observation and trust-building rather than the lean, in-and-out, process driven approach that most toolkits and methods books advocate.

Even after the semester ended and we continued to work on the project outside of the constraints of a class, we found that we had to abandon the guise of the expert, finding that an explicit commitment to understanding the political before transforming it was needed in order to be able to begin making any kinds of propositions for intervention. For example, one of

our insights into the reasons for why people were more comfortable asking self-appointed middlemen for instructions rather than the nurses or uniformed orderlies had to do with ideas of a perceived social and professional 'hierarchy,' where employment meant a kind of status that affirmed a distinction between the formal and informal orders of the system working in parallel, and where the self-appointed but 'formally-sanctioned' middlemen mediated this divide. While it can be argued that these 'undesigned' solutions are conservative, destined to replicate entrenched relations of power and labour, one can also note that they represent a careful, organically evolving, and above all, stable and flexible means of dealing with the unique set of problems encountered in their context. Above all, because they emerge from the bottom-up instead of being aspects of a totalizing system imposed from top-down, and because they give otherwise excluded subjects a way to negotiate the system in a freer, but also more familiar and accessible way, we

4—The French sociologist Bruno Latour gives an account in *"An Inquiry into Modes of Existence"* of the way religions speak as speech that is meant to be transformational in its delivery, and contrasts it with the discourse of science, which speaks to deliver information. I argue that design discourse works in this sense in much the same way as religious discourse, in that it speaks with the aim of transforming the listener in its address.

and its rules. In sum, design thinking, in an oddly Latourian[4] turn, turns back on itself and becomes oddly scientistic: like scientism, it requires an almost absolute faith in its own universality and authority.

There is also a second dimension to the claim to universality that toolkits like IDEO's make as well: their particular claims to knowledge and ways of doing things are not only usable by anyone but also anyone *anywhere*. For example, Frog Design's *Collective Action Toolkit* asks: "Is it possible to inspire design thinking outside of the design world?" And then the answer: "frog set out to prove the practice is universal by creating the Collective Action Toolkit, a set of resources and activities to help people accomplish tangible outcomes through a set of guided, non-linear collaboration activities... It is currently available in English, Chinese and Spanish, with more languages to come. The kit is a demonstration of frog's commitment to social action and goal to make design thinking universal." (Frog, 2013).

Both these claims to universality can and need, we believe, to be questioned, and, for the purposes of this article, it is the second that I particularly wish to take up and examine more closely. It is worth asking, what does happen when the universal toolkit with its universally applicable forms of knowledge is translated and exported to other countries? Whose hands does it end up in? How is it used? How does it transform the social sector? What happens to local design practice when it arrives? What happens to local designers?

Questions like these have been raised before in earlier debates around the politics of social design as the movement was gaining steam, perhaps most notably in Bruce Nussbaum's fiery critique labeling the work of Project H and other design firms that sought to do global humanitarian work as a form of techno-social imperialism. Towards the end of the debate, Nussbaum argued that social design, in privileging and imposing its own values and ways of doing things, ignored the voices and knowledge of local communities of experts: "...

what do you do when the local elites are good guys who simply don't want you doing good in their country for historic reasons? What do you do if they are highly educated, speak your language, go to the same conferences, belong to the same 'global elite culture', and still don't want you proposing solutions to their country's problems just because? Do you ignore them, work around them, argue that your mission is of a higher order than nationalism? Do you ask what *they* are doing to help the poor in their country? And finally, what do you when those local elites who question your presence are design elites—just like you. I'm not sure, but I believe that the reaction to humanitarian design that I saw in Asia was from this group of local design elites. They are a growing, powerful force in India, China, Brazil, and elsewhere—and we need to know what they think. What they really think." (Nussbaum, Design Observer, 2010)[5]

So, what do they really think?

2. On arriving back in Karachi after spending two years away in the US in 2013, I returned to find the landscape of design practice rapidly changing. In the span of two years, a startup culture was beginning to establish itself with both local governments and private investors developing incubators[6], erstwhile traditional engineering, computer science and business schools like the newly established IT University and LUMS, one of the most prestigious business schools in the country, were starting to become interested in the promise of design thinking[7], and both new NGOs like the Pakistan Innovation Foundation and well established institutions like the British Council launched annual programs focused on encouraging local entrepreneurship, supported with foreign funding from institutions like the UK's Department for International Development. Design thinking, a term virtually unknown before 2012, has now become a near-ubiquitous buzzword for describing generative entrepreneurial process. While there was

argue that such spaces of the marginalized become what are called 'border' spaces, in line with Walter Mignolo's concept of border thinking: "Today, silenced and marginalized voices are bringing themselves into the conversation of cosmopolitan projects, rather than waiting to be included. Inclusion is always a reformative project. Bringing themselves into the conversation is a transformative project that takes the form of border thinking or border epistemology—that is, the

alternative to separatism is border thinking, the recognition and transformation of the hegemonic imaginary from the perspectives of people in subaltern positions." (Mignolo, 2000, p. 731) Border spaces co-exist and negotiate with planned, designed, top-down space, and defy efforts to order them into any kind of planned and developed space according to hegemonic exterior logics.

While we are still working through the implications of the project, it has become clearer to us that to practice design in the complex, messy environments of the Global South, caught between modernity and tradition, orality and literacy, industrial and pre-industrial materiality, requires a very different kind of designer: not someone who is an 'expert' (in the conventional Pakistani way), or even a 'facilitator' (here, 'facilitating what?' becomes the key epistemic question), but a kind of 'border-designer'.

We propose this as the third way. The border-designer does not seek

5—For a complete archive of the entire debate and its various conversations, see http://designobserver.com/feature/humanitarian-design-vs-design-imperialism-debate-summary/14498/.
6—The first of which was Plan 9 in Lahore, set up in 2012 by the Punjab Information Technology Board under the leadership of Umar Saif; since then, the Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA), has set up another major venture, the Nest I/O, in Karachi, with dozens of smaller accelerator programs around the country.
7—ITU has established its Innovations for Poverty Alleviation Lab (http://www.ipal.itu.edu.pk/), and LUMS the Social Innovation Lab (http://www.socinnlab.org/), as research centers through which they do both public and private sector social design, although their models tend to vary, with IPAL acting as a working extension of the Ministry of IT while SIL acts as an incubator for the business school.

to make sense of situations according to any pre-given theoretical frameworks and their political baggage, but traces the flows of power and resistance and how they manifest in materials and practices, operates with an acute awareness of their own political affectivity, and then decides whether and how best the border can be sustained and strengthened, or if need be, weakened or demolished. The border-designer creates both with and also without the community – this is not the disengaged, black box practice of the expert, neither is it the activity of co-designers, where underlying discourses frame the collaboration of both designer and community, but the calculated, deliberate activity of the designer acutely aware of the epistemological and political foundations of their practice, of where parts of socio-technical systems need to be strengthened, reinforced or preserved, and where they need to be shifted or even destroyed in order to make room for the new to emerge. The border-designer recognises the epistemic foundations of colonial reproduction in existing material systems and can identify alternatives in the form of practices expressed by the marginalized that have emerged in both the absence and the perpetuation of the planned. Like the middlemen and mediators that navigate the borders of the Civil Hospital, the border-designer weaves a careful negotiation between the designed and undesigned, between resiliency and fragility, between the unchanging and the new.

8—For example, just prior to my departure for the US in July 2015, the Acumen Fund approached me to help assist in running several workshops on human-centered design methods for their fellows together with designers from IDEO as part of their partnership with the firm (see: http://acumen.org/blog/human-centered-design-common-aspirations-uncommon-action/).

almost no discourse about research or method in design a few years ago, method toolkits now dominate the horizon of practice, picked up uncritically by the social sector on the basis of their promise to deliver good solutions[8].

Having contributed to these developments over the last two years, travelling around the country conducting workshops, delivering lectures, and teaching design in various local schools, I have become uncomfortable with the idea of design thinking and the way in which it has arrived in Pakistan, divorced from its larger history and the kinds of debates happening around it in the Global North. Part of this unease is also because it has arrived, as we shall see, framed as a vehicle for championing a particular model of development that ties all too well into both the current government's agenda of projecting the appearance of a prosperous, developing economy to boost trade and foreign investment, and into the social sector's proclivity to be seen as effective in a context as deeply problematic and unstable as Pakistan's.

At a time when design toolkits and thinking proliferate rapidly in the country's social sector, both the small professional community of designers and the local schools have remained surprisingly critical and cautious, and for good reason. Art and design programs in Pakistan have generally seen themselves as safeguarding and preserving traditional practice, culture and craft, and historically, there has always been a close relationship between design practice and local artisanship – most resident faculty have side practices where they work closely with artisans and craftsmen, to whom often a surprising amount of the design process is delegated – especially with respect to translating sketches into materials and workable forms. Similarly, and until recently, there was very little conceptualisation of design as complex socio-technical problem solving. Historically, the emphasis has been on meaning-making with design as a form of culture-creating practice. This reflects the fact that most design schools in

Pakistan have traditionally housed graphic, textile and fashion design departments, but industrial and interaction design are new disciplines, and in well-established schools like the National College of Arts the boundaries between fine art and design departments have been fluid, with faculty often teaching in both[9]. It can also be argued that until recently, having been a profession confined to and tied to the interests of an extremely educated, globalized, but small upper middle class that has always shared unclear, permeable boundaries with the vastly more internationally recognised and considerably wealthier fine art community, the Pakistani design community is also wary of what it sees as the democratization of design with outsider groups now intruding into what used to be exclusive social and cultural space. Then there is also the history of visual arts playing a political role in the country; painters, sculptors, and graphic designers could often get away with scathing critiques of government and society where other disciplines could not. Thus, art and design schools have traditionally seen themselves as resisting to what they see as instrumental, neoliberal, and even violent tendencies in society and state.

These traditional ways of practicing design have now been disrupted with the arrival and popularization of design methods as the handmaiden of particular models of development championed by an ascendant technocracy. Design schools have been caught almost by surprise, and now find that they have to deal with the requirements of a radically different professional landscape. Historically, the majority of the local design community has to date remained relatively small, restrained in scope to certain niches of industry, and quite humble in its aspirations. There is a general acknowledgement that the design profession is a luxury, having historically been practiced by the (upper) middle class. It lacks the votive force necessary to create systemic change in a country with a history of decades of piecemeal progress, hard won by dedicated social workers and destroyed by misguided

10—Parveen Rehman, Joint Director of the Orangi Pilot Project and a highly influential social worker in Karachi, was assassinated on 13 March, 2013, it was rumored, by the local land mafia. The case still remains unresolved. See http://www.dawn.com/news/796514/who-will-dare-to-be-parveen-rehman.

11—For a critique of the *Orange Metro Project* (2015) and the history of communal marginalization by successive governments in Pakistan, see http://www.dawn.com/news/1219398.

12—The Pakistani state's sanitization of public space in the name of progress has been critiqued brilliantly here by Yaminay Chaudhry: http://herald.dawn.com/news/1153271/anxious-public-space-a-preface.

political agendas, change of rule, or even assassinations (the murder of the social activist Parveen Rehman, director of the *Orangi Pilot Project* (OPP) in May 2013 is a particularly tragic example[10]). There are exceptions to this, of course: the architect Arif Hasan and his Urban Resource Centre have been significantly involved in both the OPP and leading the fight for land rights, studying the development of Karachi and other urban centers for decades. Local design schools are very critical of initiatives like the *Punjab Safe Pani Company* (2015) or the Orange Metro[11] (2015) projects, which they see as primarily politically motivated, with politicians funding massive development projects to get re-elected and invite foreign investment, using social design as 'due process' in order to appease foreign and local donors, and in the process often using violence to get rid of undesirable actors[12]. By association, the introduction and dissemination of design thinking in the social sector has therefore come to be associated as a tool for the state to maintain the status quo, rather than for radical structural reform. Even when not used as a tool of state control, I found local designers questioning, rightly: is design as a tool for innovation, involved in creating ever more products to "solve" problems which cannot be easily reduced to simple causes, constituted as 'lacks' (a lack of clean drinking water, lack of connectivity to the internet etc.), really the way they want the practice to change?

Design tools and methods are thus never, as most toolkits and models claim, value neutral, but always arrive laden with political and cultural baggage. The claim that packages delivering design methods to social designers and workers in the developing world are 'neutral', in the sense that they are just methods, and that politics lies in the domain of their human users, is false. They would not have been picked up had they not already belonged to, and created through, a politics of their makers and sold on the kinds of promises they make. In this sense, the ready adoption of toolkits by NGOs, incubators, and

startups seeking to promote a lean, fail-fast and iterate approach to tackling what are incredibly complex, entrenched systemic problems constitute a form of what the Argentine philosopher Walter Mignolo calls 'epistemological colonialism' (Mignolo, 2002), in which what and how people working within the social sector in the Global South come to understand, know, and design for the world in frame predetermined by discourses set in the Global North.

This is the most frightening thing about the uncritical adoption of design toolkits: that in becoming the de-facto way of practicing social design in the hands of powerful actors like government organisations and foreign-funded NGOs, they crowd out alternative voices that would caution models of development based on unconstrained growth. Moreover, by marginalizing extant professional communities of practice they actually hamper the ability of the discipline to grow and change to accommodate new areas of practice by prefiguring those spaces to receive only a certain form of design practice. In all of the workshops I conducted with incubators, startups and NGOs over two years, there was a persistent tendency among both donor agencies and incubatees to treat the methods as due process rather than as crucial to really understanding and modelling systems – this was because there was little investment in any goals outside of developing a product or service, which is certainly not what local schools and practitioners want to move towards. Design thinking thus becomes a means of extending the 'colonial matrix of power', what decolonial thinkers like Mignolo and Anibal Quijano have identified as the global Western hegemony over systems of economy, sovereign authority, subjectivity and knowledge under the rubric of growth and development – it becomes a way of thinking that suppresses and marginalizes local knowledge, thought and expertise.

Far from the claims to universality that the toolkit makes, decolonial thinkers like Mignolo, Quijano and Arturo Escobar propose that in order

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13—This move to recover a long historical tradition of scholarship and practice has been mirrored in the sciences too - see the report on Muslim science published by *Science at Universities of the Muslim World*: http://muslim-science.com/science-at-universities-of-islamic-world-2/.

14—See for example, the work of Coalesce Design Studio, a multidisciplinary design studio that has gone on to display work internationally: http://www.designmena.com/insight/dubai-design-week-pakistan-pavilion-creates-traditional-courtyard-using-local-rosewood-and-henna-dye.

15—'Mazaar Bazaar', a collection of articles on communication design and other forms of visual culture, contains a number of essays devoted to how popular contemporary styles and aesthetics are deeply rooted in religious and mythological iconography.

to challenge the three-pronged economic, ecological and cultural hegemonies of global capitalism, growth and development over natural sustainability, and cultural homogenization, local practices cannot be divorced from a dedicated politics that stresses an 'ecology of difference' (Escobar, 2008). Such a decolonial practice of design would be rooted in the need to imagine alternate institutional arrangements and address systemic inequalities and biases, to be politically active and critical, and to be concerned with the preservation of traditional forms of life while extending them as alternatives to globalization-as-colonialism. So far, little offered in current literature on design thinking points toward such a practice, with the exception of the practice of ontological design developed by Tony Fry and outlined most recently in *Design in the Borderlands* (2014) coedited with Eleni Kalantidou, one of the few works that acknowledges how practices of design developed in the Global North are exported to the Global South, extending Anglo–European ways of thinking and being as well as affirming political and economic power.

Locally, one can begin to trace the beginnings of design practices of resistance, as local designers and design schools are working toward the recovery of a design tradition from Muslim and Indian sub-continental heritage[13] by locating practices usually associated with design thinking today within a larger history of making artifacts and environments, and by experimenting with marrying vernacular forms, philosophies, and understandings with new materials and methods[14]. Local publications on design and culture have focused on the links between design as a practice deeply tied to spirituality and faith, something that the rationalist, secular Anglo–European tradition has tended to de-emphasize[15]. Very recent initiatives like the Anti-Art University that are actively pursuing decolonial agendas seek to problematize and contest academic institutions that chose to turn inwards and depoliticize themselves as the space for political engagement gradually shrunk in the post-9/11 era: "Policed by Rangers

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16—In addition to my own account of teaching methods, I might add that many of the leading art/design schools of the country have now begun to incorporate design studies and research methods courses into their curricula. For example, the Indus Valley School of Art & Architecture has a lab dedicated to practice-based research in architecture and interior design (http://adrl.io/), and universities like szabist, Karachi University and Habib University have made humanities and social science courses compulsory for design students.

17—Almost all of the early key texts on design methods felt the need to distinguish between cultures that design knowingly and cultures that do not – for example, in *Notes on the Synthesis of Form* (1964), Christopher Alexander makes a distinction between "unselfconscious" cultures that rely on tradition and repetition, which are inflexible and unresponsive when it comes to dealing with new problems, and "conscious" cultures which are concerned with planning and envisioning the new. Similarly, the designer We still find this in contemporary texts by prominent designers such as Ezio Manzini making the similar claims that conventional modes of design by non-experts entail "'following tradition' and 'doing things as they have always been done'" (Manzini, 2015), before suggesting that it is expert designers who, as coordinating methods and processes with a larger vision of how things should be, should classify as facilitators and leaders in any situation at hand. Instead, we found that local solutions to problems were innovative, intelligent, and deeply sensitive to present political, social and cultural conditions. We argue that these binary distinctions become particularly unhelpful when applied to the practice of design in general in Pakistan. For example, Manzini's categorization of "cultural activists" who are involved

and surrounded by barriers, our art institutions today display their investment in reproducing and subjecting their student bodies to the daily humiliations and disciplining of hegemonic power structures and relations (…) we seek then, in the Karachi Art Anti University, not to build structures or walls, but a refuge. To build what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney call 'the fugitive public' — to flee the halls and corridors of institutionalised education and instead occupy and claim street and public space in the city as sites of study" (Tentative Collective, newspaper article, August 2, 2015). And lastly, there have been cautious moves to integrate design methods into studio classes, while not necessarily following the proscribed methodologies of imported social design or buying into what is seen as its overly optimistic but culturally and politically insensitive ethos (see the right hand column).[16]

And so, coming back full circle, one can conclude that what we need are not toolkits, nor their 'universal' definitions of design thinking or their processes, but new, diverse philosophies and frameworks that are tied to local knowledge and practice, informed by local politics and ethics – perhaps what we need are methods developed locally and drawing from local ways of interpreting the world and how designers act within it, freed from the epistemological necessities of 'scientistic' validation.

Great challenges remain: the lack of government support for the arts and humanities; the instrumentalization of education by bureaucratic structures; and the endangered status of social workers, artists and designers alike as it becomes ever more difficult to express views and undertake work that runs counter to entrenched political interests in an increasingly violent country. There is also the problem of escaping the orbit of a history of design as an elitist practice deeply intertwined with the politics of class and social hierarchy. As more and more design programs open up and cater to students from more diverse backgrounds, the field is slowly becoming more and more democratized. Yet, the emergence of a truly decolonial practice of design, one that does not

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necessarily rely purely on foreign universal claims to knowledge and of where value lies (in growth, consumption, socio-technical innovation etc.), and at the same time is well equipped to deal with the unique problems of the Global South: designing for scales unimaginable in the Global North, rampant illiteracy and a largely oral culture, and basic infrastructural problems in even the largest cities, has yet to be seen.

And yet, as the country's situation becomes ever more urgent and dire, both old and new academics and practitioners have been galvanized to begin searching for new ways to design. It is still early days, but there is hope that the discipline matures so that local designers do not have to rely on foreign exports of knowledge, and where the social sector can rely on the expertise of locally trained designers. Maybe one day, as modern economic and ecological paradigms prove insufficient in tackling growing crises like climate change, population displacement, and political instability, it will be methods and frameworks developed in conditions of adversity and resiliency and drawing from the immense wealth of local knowledge from the Global South that will find their way to the Global North to learn from.

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Appendix I6
The Imperial Code, Or,
What if I Told You It's the Colonial Matrix
of Power?, Matthew Kiem

The push to impose computer coding under the banner of 'universal literacy' is an iteration of the colonial civilising mission. To adopt a phrase from decolonial thinker Walter Mignolo, this is the latest mutation of modernity's rhetoric of salvation (Mignolo, 2007). As with nineteenth-century campaigns to promote public literacy, the arguments that are now being made in favour of programming have an eschatological edge (Vee, 2013). Learn to code lest ye be damned. The sermons of media theorist Douglas Rushkoff make it clear that the theological resonance is not metaphoric. It is sincerely felt and integral to the entire enterprise. At the festival *South by Southwest* (2010) he presents his Manichean vision as an article of faith: "I do believe that if you are not a programmer, you are one of the programmed. It's that simple." In the drive towards Singularity you are either 1 or 0, Master or Slave.

Against this level of mania the recurrent controversies over scripture classes in secular schools feel like somewhat of a diversion. Today the doctrine of *sola scriptura* is practiced more often with respect to the likes of JavaScript rather than the gospels. Any assumption that there is a clear distinction between Western conceptions of technology and theology looks shaky. This is no coincidence. As David Noble reminds us, the former has its origins in the later (Noble, 1999). All significant concepts within Western theories of technology, it seems, are secularised theological concepts.

It is as if these missionaries think coding is something people don't already know how to do. Not coding in the mechanised computational sense but as being able to read and recreate worlds of meaning. Coding as a mix of plural systems of symbolic inscription, each of which afford a sensibility that can also be broken down and out of, reordered and disordered, dis/re/articulated with other systems.

We learn to code when we learn to talk, write and draw, dance, act and sing. We can learn football codes, martial arts codes, and fashion codes. We learn codes for introducing ourselves to other people, for sending emails, and culinary codes that allow us to tell the difference between inedible raw fish and sashimi. When we connect what is at hand to different possibilities, like a broken chest of drawers that could be mended or repurposed, we decode and recode. In *Design Futuring* (2009) design theorist Tony Fry identified this move as a redirective practice, a way of making time by redesigning cultural codes.

Script is inscription. It points to the inseparability of ideas and matter (Mellick Lopes, 2005). Information systems, whether composed of speakers, books, or machines, are both affected and affect through their materiality. This has consequences for how worlds are built and experienced, something that design theorists such as Terry Winograd and Fernando Flores (1986) and Anne-Marie Willis (2006) have called ontological designing. Mathematical thinking, for instance, evokes a formalised mode of codification, one that can support, extend, and constrain other codes. Notation allows music to be shared like a novel or play but comes with the risk of masking multiplicities within and between notes. Western varieties of common and civil law – which has its origins in the Roman *codex* – are practiced quite differently to Indigenous law. Indigenous scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson has described Indigenous Law as an "intersubstantiation of humans, ancestral beings, and land" (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p. 84). Norman Sheehan, also an Indigenous academic, explains how this conception relates to and emerges out of coding design. In his words Indigenous Law is "a Law of individuated and diverse mutualism", the knowledge of which "has been coded into language, design and ceremonial forms" (Sheehan, 2004, p. 115). Information and Communications Technology professor

Steve Goschnick (2015) claims, without any sense of irony, that computer coding is analogous to other forms of language, save for it having no tolerance for ambiguity. The violence this implies for people and things that do not conform to system categories goes unremarked.

Sheehan offers 'respectful design' as a way to repair the wound of a bad relation between different systems of coding (Sheehan, 2011). By contrast, Swinburne University of Technology now lists "Digital frontiers" as one of five key areas of research. Given the recklessness implied in term 'frontier' – who and what lives on the other side, and what violence might they sustain for resisting the next wave of expansion? – it comes as no surprise that decolonisation is not listed as one of the other institutional priorities. Such a decision can only be read as purposeful for the discussions concerning the digital and decolonisation are underway in other locations.[1]

Why, at this moment, are people being asked to take a leap of faith into coding utopia? The resources that elites have deployed in the push to promote computer coding should give pause for thought. In a promotional video for code.org, Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg observes that "the whole limit in the system is just that there just aren't enough people who are trained and have these skills today." This is the classic capitalist complaint over labour costs and access to new markets dressed up, once again, in the myth of universal progress. Here code.org's focus on women and people of colour is worth reflecting on. In the late 1970s and 1980s there was a design assisted movement to discourage women from entering computer sciences (Stein, 2011 & Henn, 2014). Now that enough white men have made their billions and established hegemony the push for expansion is on. The point, to be clear, is not that such exclusions are ever legitimate. Rather, as Melinda Cooper and Angela Mitropoulos (2009) have shown, what is at stake concerns whose interests, which systems, and what kinds of futures are served by these shifting terms of differentiation and ex-/inclusion. While the criteria for entry might change,

systemic limits and differential status codes remain in place. Those who can code are divided according to their relative dispensability, and further divided from those whose inability to code is seen as a mark of deficiency rather than difference.

The Matrix films (1999 & 2003) invited audiences to imagine a binary universe, one part composed of computational code and another that was not, with the later being as problematic as the former.[2] Drawing on Mignolo's strategy in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (Mignolo, 2011, p. xvii), I would propose thinking about the colonial matrix, the system of power that sustains the idea that there is only one code, the Western code. This is the code that decolonial thinkers such as Mignolo look to break, as a means to shift from seeing Western modernity as The One True Code to one amongst a plurality of options.

Designed things embody codes for designing our sense of the world. In *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (2000) the philosopher Vilém Flusser speaks of the camera as an apparatus that designs functionaries, people whose sense of the world has been designed by the analytical reasoning embedded in the technological device. He writes of Auschwitz, the German Nazi extermination camp, in the same terms, as the realisation of an apparatus that designed people who could no longer think or act outside bureaucratic codes (Flusser, 2012; Mitropoulos

1—See, for instance, the Center for Global Studies and Humanities' dossiers on Decolonizing the Digital/Digital Decolonization at globalstudies.trinity.duke.edu/projects, and the dialogue between Tony Fry, Eleni Kalantidou, and Walter Mignolo in *Design in the Borderlands* (2014).

2—While the Wachowskis, directors of *The Matrix* trilogy, made various visual gestures to the work of philosopher Jean Baudrillard and his concept of *simulacrum*, Baudrillard distanced himself from the films arguing that the point of his work is not to play upon the difference between the virtual and the 'real' but to disrupt the binary itself (Genosko & Bryx, 2004). Mignolo's use of the terms 'matrix' and 'code' arises from a different set of concerns to that of Baudrillard, that is, the enduring structure of the 'colonial difference' and its impact on how knowledge is created, recorded, distributed and (mis)interpreted.

& Kiem, 2015). Auschwitz was a case where an apparatus geared towards dehumanisation determined that genocide was the most rational solution. But this was neither the first nor the last time such a thing occurred. Flusser's whole point is to say that the logics of the apparatus persist as a propensity of the Western program(mer).

When historian Tony Barta compares the exterminations that took place within the colonising structures of Australia and Germany he points to a morbid reversal of process (Barta, 2001). In Germany, behavioural codes and racial classifications prepared the way for extermination. In Australia, the attempts to exterminate Indigenous peoples came first. For those who survived, a blood-quantum system was codified in order to facilitate the removal of children from their parents, all for the purpose of inducting them into the Western code.

Today, borders are managed by sophisticated risk analytics systems that are designed to immobilise would-be asylum seekers before they board a plane. This doesn't stop people – it just forces them to find more dangerous routes. The user interface of these systems, however, have been created using 'human-centred design' methods in order to improve the productivity of border force agents. Risk management itself has been codified into international standards that are used to plan and finance infrastructure projects, including detention camps (Mitropoulos, 2015). School children are screened and monitored, their behaviour coded and decoded for signs of 'extremism'. Asylum seekers are forced to sign stringent codes of conduct that make life on a protection visa even more precarious (Mitropoulos & Kiem, 2015). Professional standards help to ensure a predictable conformity amongst workers, teachers, and students.

How many computer coders does it take to change the world? Or more to the point, what are the implications of producing an expanding surplus of entrepreneurial systematisers, procedural totalisers; people who have been trained to seek out and read

others as 'underdeveloped', backward, or problematically (dis)ordered. Social activist and author Courtney Martin (2016) recently criticised privileged do-gooders for assuming the problems of exoticised others were simple. While the piece received positive attention, Martin's proposal to target a more local "unexotic underclass" requires a more critical reading. This is a term coined by C.Z. Nnaemeka (2013) in a piece that includes the following passage:

> Now, I can already hear the screeching of meritocratic, Horatio Algerian Silicon Valley,
>
> "What do we have to do with any of this? The unexotic underclass has to pull itself up by its own bootstraps! Let them learn to code and build their own startups! What we need are more ex-convicts turned entrepreneurs, single mothers turned programmers, veterans turned venture capitalists!
>
> The road out of welfare is paved with computer science!!!"
>
> Yes, of course.
> There's nothing wrong with the entrepreneurship-as-salvation gospel (Nnaemeka, 2013, n.p.).

This is the techno-theology of the civilising mission, the rhetoric of modernity, the grammar of imperialism: the Western code. It is the charting of territories and populations for salvation by means of 'development'. All, it seems, so that start-up missionaries might fulfil a sense of purpose. This is one of the reasons why Martin's piece fits so comfortably in *The Development Set*, a publication funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It seems its job is not to critique developmentalism so much as generate new investment markets by rebranding the poor and the means of their salvation.

For over 500 years the Western code has been used to impose a sense of there being only one legitimate way to

be human. To contravene this code is to risk being seen as a lesser kind of human and, thus, dispensable, lacking, or need of saving. On these terms, to refuse 'help' is to be seen as 'ungrateful'. The violence of coding as salvation is the materialisation of the Western code in new forms. This is not a disruption of the colonial matrix so much as its mutation (Fry, Kalantidou, and Mignolo, 2014, pp. 180–181). An apparatus of control composed of silicon, plastic and heavy metals, of minerals taken from someone's land, devices built by factory workers, all linked to waste disposal processes that demand exposure to concentrated toxins.

The point is not to demonise computer coding but to suggest that the combination of conformity and non-relational thinking is a mode of violence that sustains the colonial matrix. Decoding the divine mission of computer coding opens a more vital field of possibility. Here the imperial violence of the entrepreneurial spirit yields to hacking with a sense of respect and responsibility; people who can jam, delink, and redirect the operating systems that sustain the colonial matrix. This is not about computing itself so much as computing finding ways to connect and disconnect in support of modes of becoming that diverge from the logics of the colonial matrix.

This possibility is not new and it is not being led by the Western imperial coder(s). As researcher Felipe Fonseca (2014) suggests in his discussion of *Gambiarra*, the Brazilian culture of repair, there is a world of difference between an attitude of hacking to repurpose and a techno-evangelism that makes without any thought for what it destroys.

My friends are coders of all kinds, but they are the ones who are driven towards short-circuiting distinctions between self and world, analogue and digital, risk and security, ideas and life, technology and poetry, justice and professionalism. Not simply because they can but because respectful forms of breaking and remaking is a way to oppose imperial violence and create the kinds of worlds that support plural differences.

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From our perspective here in 2025, it all seems inevitable. But maybe it wasn't.

When Adobe released the desktop publishing software PageMaker 6.0 in 1995, it started monitoring and collecting its users' activity online. In one of the many black-and-white booklets inside its colourful box, it is still possible to read in the fine print that 'data related to the customers' use of our software will be collected to improve our products'. After just three years, the company had to build a large compound in the outskirts of Ottawa to store all the information being gathered. By the time Adobe Creative Suite was released in 2003, more than 180 engineers were working exclusively in managing, categorising and processing all the data generated by programs such as Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Acrobat, Premiere Pro, Dreamweaver and After Effects. But this task was consuming too many human resources and was not cost-effective.

As automated tasks 'to optimise workflow' became popular among designers – the number of people working in data processing was cut to a third and replaced by bots. These bots could categorise and archive all the data generated by the software packages' users – mainly graphic designers. On an almost global scale, they were able to produce detailed reports on habits, processes, steps taken, recurrent detours, variations and the final product. When Adobe bought the online portfolio-showcasing platform Behance in 2012, the aim of tracking every designer's activity was made evident, although disguised as just a 'boost to empower creativity' and launch their next product, Adobe Creative Cloud. But the goal was not to empower designers, but to automate profit. The Creative Data Library was ready to be explored. Soon there was no alternative for anyone needing to design but to pay for a subscription. Software

had effectively flattened tools, process and output into an inevitable standardisation. The global homogenisation of graphic design and visual culture was a key political conquest to further push consumer control and its respective monetisation.

Post-Behance boteconomy

In 2013, many software giants received the first lawsuits for unauthorised surveillance from disciplines such as graphic design, film-making, product design and architecture. Settling the disputes for an undisclosed fee, software packages became free as long as its users allowed the monitoring to continue, as articulated in revised terms and conditions. Surveillance, said the group of CEOs at a press conference, is necessary to make products better. The hashtag #boycottAdobe trended worldwide for a few days but surveillance smoothly established itself in the design profession as an inevitability. However, groups of designers and associations were formed in early 2014 who vowed to work only offline, and not to upload any work to platforms that could merge data from multiple sources.

When Adobe launched Adobe Automated Cloud (AAC) in late 2017, the company was already able to offer graphic design services in a completely autonomous way. It had been testing transactions via the distributed database blockchain for eight years. Its design bots traced in real time what was uploaded to Behance. They automatically integrated this data into the ever-changing algorithms of iterative parameters that generated design solutions for clients worldwide. These had been operated by beta-testers since 2009, which worked remotely from various countries, and Adobe charged a fee in every transaction for allowing each designer's bot access to their design database. This 'Uberisation' of graphic design further reinforced the precarious state of the profession in the aftermath of the financial crisis. Designers earned a living in two ways: 1) operating their design bots to fulfil a design service; 2) feeding the centralised design bot network by informing the system about the

rationale behind their decisions. The reality of this was expressed in the popular romantic comedy *My Boss is a Bot* (2018), in which Ashton Kutcher played a designer in midlife crisis, who eventually develops a profoundly moving admiration for his boss.

The designers' clients – predominantly bots due to the automation of marketing jobs – asked for more human and less digital work. This led to a partnership between Google and Samsung to develop a network of facilities manned by robots. These bots could simulate 'humanness' through calligraphy, drawing or screenprinting in jurisdictions with no corporate tax. Designers could request any robot-drawn type and have it delivered in less than three hours by drone. But the feature these beta-testers enjoyed most was that their own bots could be working while they were sleeping, pitching to automated clients ... for free. The designer's job became bot management.

The new normal

In an interview published in *Computer Arts* in 2018, Jessica Walsh told an editor bot: 'It's only me and Stefan now, plus two robots (Gigi and Lulu). They draw type very well, even on bodies and complex sets. The rest of our branding work has mostly disappeared, as the bots do incredibly cool work. Times have changed ... Stefan is definitely not happy.' Walsh continued: 'We are lucky to be recognised globally, so we have clients who still support us, but the younger generations don't really see the difference between my work and Gigi's ... especially because she does it instantly!' They photographed Gigi and Lulu naked to launch a new service, but she notes that, 'the bots didn't get the joke.'

Bruno Brûlé, CEO of Artificial Design Intelligence (ADI) – the corporate merger solution to avoid the bankruptcy of Moving Brands, FutureBrand, Ogilvy & Mather, Brand Union and Wolff Olins – was interviewed around the same time. He said, 'In the early 2010s all graphic design looked like it was done by robots anyway, so at ADI we are trying to operate in a market that is today dominated by bots.' All the partners, he said, 'are now working remotely, as renting studios in big cities has become completely unsustainable. The self-driving IDEO capsules "work-on-wheels" are ideal, because they just roam the cities and designers can have meetings and feed the bots with data at any time without actually owning or renting their workplaces.' Brûlé finished with a bold statement: 'If everything looks the same, whether it's made in LA, London or Seoul, we may as well just let bots do it. Designers are largely not needed any more. Only a few are useful to monitor glitches in the system and help bots make decisions in some rare cases. Our goal is to develop our central bot for a few more years before we let automated technology make every single design decision.' [Ed's note: It emerged later that Bruno Brûlé himself was the first in a highly effective new line of robot CEOS. Such managers were perennially popular with bot investors.]

The death of DIY

The design services Fiverr and 99designs closed in 2018. Ultra-cheap, generic design made by designers was no longer profitable. The same was true for studios surfing the waves of rapidly changing trends. Bots had developed detailed databases of style from all historic periods. Clients could browse long lists of designers and studios and order work as if it had been made by them. Some went to court and could receive royalties in every transaction: groups such as Pentagram, Landor and small studios such as Spin and Barnbrook with highly recognisable formal styles. Bots love trendsetters.

Type design was automated with high levels of precision, even though a few type designers were still needed to design typefaces for non-Western languages. 'What can you design in one month that a bot can't do in one minute?' a client famously asked the designer Erik Spiekermann.

At local government agencies for startups, design bots were recommended for new businesses. Design consultancies were automated, powered by anthropomorphic

robots with access to vast governmental and private databases. For example, Sigourney Smedley, a plumber, wanted to have a simple visual presence on wearable devices and on the robot that she assists during working hours. The digital customer service informed her that a free bot would provide a generic logo, mixing traditional plumbing elements such as water, tools and pipes based on a database with 10,000 previous logos per sub-category. To get something more specific, she would have to pay $50 for a graphic designer-assisted bot and have access to premium databases holding historic libraries. For better customisation, she would need to grant access to her social media timelines. The robot asked access to her 'data traces'. She settled for the free bot.

Many bot services were available at the ACS – Automated Citizen Shop. Here millions of bots compete to pitch case studies on large screens. Or they simply transmit to – and frequently spam – wearable devices pitching business consultancy and unwanted publicity. Stuart Smith was just an example. Since childhood, this piano teacher had had an interest in handcraft and logo design. When he wanted a logo for his business, he thought in a designerly way, being concerned about his audience as well as the integrity of his music and pedagogy. But for an annual subscription of $29.98, a bot would instantly provide a logo, website and badges based on his Facebook account, as well as of five of his pupils. What would have taken him at least a week of hard work was done instantly at high levels of accuracy. He even got a blueprint of a piano for free, which he could 3D print for an extra $100. Among the many premium features of his subscription were regular reports and analytics on the performance of his brand, automated social media management (socialbot), and permanent upgrades to his brand via the company's award-winning creative algorithm.

Offline education for a toxic profession
When it became evident that bots increasingly optimised trends and were able to quickly replicate design processes, *Times Higher Education* rated graphic design as a 'toxic profession'. Designers were effectively locked out of a system that was designed, updated and upgraded for them. Botdetox™ camps became popular among young generations while established designers refused to communicate online. They allowed only landline phones in their failing studios, sustained by academic positions that were becoming redundant. Nostalgic students and alumni of prestigious design colleges worldwide protested for the right to study design. But the institutions insisted on closing courses: 'Did none of you read *Inventing the Future* [by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, 2015] ten years ago?' asked RISD's president in a statement.

Fierce competition was provoked between thousands of letterpress and screenprinting workshops and robots using the same tools in remote warehouses. Many closed down. Nostalgia for craft and manual labour came at a cost. When stepping down as Dean of the School of Communication at the Royal College of Art, designer Neville Brody stated, 'At best, graphic design is now a hobby. Graphic design history is literally the future.'

Bots for better living
By the time the New York Times best-seller The Automated Life was published in late 2018, nearly half of the technical graphic design schools and courses had closed. All were replaced by Adobebots that with VR headsets could 'teach Illustrator in a day'. This was part of VR for All – an imperialistic initiative by Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook Foundation.

Students enjoyed being taught InDesign by Giambattista Bodoni in an Italianate setting without leaving the comfort of their parents' basement. Design schools were deemed immoral by industry leaders – that is, the managers of the most highly-rated bots. Students did not want to pay high fees to learn something obsolete they could neither practise nor be paid for.

As a result, two types of design schools survived. One, a centralised, manual, nostalgic, craft school. The second, a cooperative of small, nomadic design

schools built around systems thinking and political activism. The former mostly focused on the conservation of tradition and history. The latter sought to challenge the infrastructure that shapes and predefines the way people think and live. Meanwhile, the Russell Group had expanded to a global university superpower with nearly complete control of the job market in the wealthiest cities of the Global North. Its chairman declared that the future would continue to be dominated by robotics and bot studies, the most popular disciplines. In the short description downloadable to every device, it was possible to read that the Russell Group 'encourages cooperation with bots for better living, not the kind of hacktivism that seeks to disturb the normal functioning of our educational systems'.

Beyond denial

Now, in 2025, designers are data managers. Design bots work for and with marketing bots. Graphic designers and the design press have let themselves be regulated by the marketplace. Trying to escape automation, thousands of designers have moved away from big cities to countries where this process is slowed. Others have sought solace in Ecuador, which banned automated labour in 2020. With technological advancements, designers' lack of interest in infrastructure was revealed to be suicidal. Companies came after graphic designers' information and they gave it away for badges, stickers and likes.

Designers are now mostly information intermediaries. A devastating gulf has opened up between the residual manual labour of letterpress, screen-printing and calligraphy, and the long, rigorous, research-led and -based design with reflective and critical analysis. The rest – the majority of graphic designers – have disappeared, apart from a few who survive with faithful, technophobe clients.

The design practice that is not automated is one that is not easily replicable. It bases its methods and problematisation on many disciplines and detailed cultural, social and political analysis of the context in which it works. And – importantly – it is one that constantly considers and involves those who will be affected by it, debating its consequences in an open manner. So far, bots are still flawed in developing such an approach. But not for much longer. Democratisation, accountability and transparency continue to be increasingly difficult utopias. A key issue continues to be our difficulty in understanding and changing the way algorithms make their biased decisions. They reaffirm the Western canon of good design, serving interests with increasingly obscure and inaccessible criteria. These concerns apply to the majority of creative disciplines – graphic design is by no means alone.

In 2016, anthropologist Lucy Suchman announced at the AI Now conference that the fact that 'we pay coders more than childcare workers is less about skills and more about how we value the work'. The same can be said of education, culture, and of course, design. So it is not that there were not enough jobs for designers at that time, but that they were simply undervalued. Retrospectively, many disciplines regret overlooking Suchman's writings since her book *Plans and Situated Actions* in 1987 and her subsequent research on automation and drone warfare. Design is no exception.

Automation was looming in 2016. But designers were too busy funding nostalgia on Kickstarter via good old Modernism. Trolling os icons on Dribbble was more entertaining than debating and dealing with a political issue that would shape the way we now work, think and live. For most designers, it is all far too late.