

Chapter Nine

Making Academic Publishing More Public

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This volume seeks to understand the limits of disciplinary structures in the context of broader concerns about the future of academic practice. I join this discussion from the perspective of both a humanities and graphic design scholar – my work sits at the intersection of communication design and urban studies. While I would not have had the original meeting of German studies and German language scholars on my own disciplinary radar, I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute from the point of view of someone with questions about academic publishing practices, the role of form, and circulation in the production of knowledge, in a manner that interacts with those questions being asked here about discipline: How do the dominant media and designed characteristics associated with academic publishing, such as written journal articles and monographs employing specific kinds of expert languages, contribute to, and/or limit, the capacity of the contemporary humanities to “transverse disciplines” and widen its substantive impact? What kinds of expertise, methods, and collaborative configurations could enact a reimagination of contexts for humanities practice? How do discipline and medium interact within current confines of humanities standards and norms? How could they interact in the future? In this chapter, these questions will be approached via the example of *Urban Pamphleteer*, a publication that I co-edit in collaboration with the University College London Urban Laboratory.¹ When framed as a design experiment that seeks to intervene in the conventions of academic publishing, *Urban Pamphleteer* provides an example from which some learnings can

be drawn in relation to the above questions. In the concluding section, these become the basis for a series of prompts designed to provoke greater engagement of graphic design with academic publishing.

Urban Pamphleteer was started by myself and architectural historian and urbanist Ben Campkin as a collaboration between the University College London (UCL) Urban Laboratory, a multi-faculty research centre at a large Russell Group university (where Ben has been director and I hold a non-stipended fellowship), and the Central Saint Martins (CSM) Graphic Communication Design Programme (where I am currently director). We invited a CSM graduate, Guglielmo Rossi, to work with us as a designer and as a third core member of our team. The first issue was published in 2013 with funding from a small UCL "impact" fund, which covered production expenses for the first three issues. We were interested in the potential for a publication situated at a threshold between academic output and community facing, and which could interact with approaches to impact, a term that had by then become instrumentalized by the British government in their approach to regulating research and higher education institutions.²

Each of the eight issues published to date has been organized around a topical question of concern to researchers at the Urban Lab and of immediate relevance to one or more specific communities: first was "Future & Smart Cities," then "Regeneration Realities," "Design & Trust," "Heritage & Renewal in Doha," "Global Education for Urban Futures," "Open-Source Housing Crisis," "LGBTQ+ Night-time Space: Past, Present & Future," and "Skateboardings." Individual pamphlets range between thirty and fifty pages and include short contributions of written pieces of less than nine hundred words as well as visual matter bringing together the work of university-based urbanists with that of community groups, built environment professionals, and artists/designers. Depending on the topics, different guest editors,

organizations, and sources of funding have been involved. Each pamphlet is designed and typeset with a bespoke approach, printed in two colours on basic recycled paper and saddle-stitched in an edition of a thousand, employing free typefaces, and is launched at a public event, free of charge (back issues are sometimes sold at art book shops and fairs to recover costs, and donations are accepted online). In 2017, by request and after we started to run out of some back issues (and without budget to reprint), we launched a website where all current and back issues are made available in their entirety. As a way of maintaining *Urban Pamphleteer's* print-first approach – we always had in mind the idea that it could be left behind on the tube and picked up by someone else – the website was designed around manual scans of the printed editions.

The goals of *Urban Pamphleteer* are described at the start of each issue:

In the tradition of radical pamphleteering, the intention of this series is to confront key themes in contemporary urban debate from diverse perspectives, in a direct and accessible – but not reductive – way. The broader aim is to empower citizens, and inform professionals, researchers, institutions and policy-makers, with a view to positively shaping change.

Proposals for contributions are accepted via open calls but editors often solicit specific contributions, sometimes in association with events. There is a three-phase non-blind editorial review process with substantial back-and-forth on intellectual and creative approaches, relationships to the broader themes of the issue, visual presentation and accessibility of writing. Contributors to *Urban Pamphleteer*, who are normally volunteers, assign a limited licence to reproduce their intellectual property but retain ownership of their work. Since its launch, *Urban Pamphleteer* has won awards and been featured in a range of publications and events. It has also

directly informed professional decision-making, policy discussions, and public hearings around a range of built environment issues in London and other parts of the world.

This chapter builds on questions regarding the design and impact of academic publishing that I began to raise in a 2018 article titled "Producing Knowledge with Billboards: Graphic Design and Research." The article was written in response to recent debates about what constitutes research for graphic design in the context of the precarity and configuration of the contemporary university. Particularly in the context of this volume, it is important to note that these debates, as the title implies, were also highly disciplinary, albeit with different concerns and stakes to those of German language and German studies academic communities. Questions raised about the credibility of graphic design as a field of research both by the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) and as part of debates regarding promotion requirements for graphic design academics in North America meant that our field had to either develop its approach to research or seek new approaches to demonstrating its existing strengths. My interest in contributing to this volume is motivated by both of these. Stuart Bertolotti-Bailey argues, "graphic design only exists when other subjects exist first. It isn't an a priori discipline, but a ghost; both a grey area and a meeting point."³ To borrow the term from the editors of this volume, *transversal* is a core feature of graphic design.

The 2018 article was developed around a 2015 design project, "London is Changing," which began with a website targeted at people who were moving into, out of, or around Greater London. Participants were asked a series of short-answer and open-text questions including where they were moving from and to, why, and how they felt about their move. Excerpts from their responses were published on networked digital billboards around Central London. The intention of the project was to demonstrate a situated and independently facilitated conversation

about issues facing London, in particular, a crisis in the affordability of housing, as a critical response to problems with existing local government approaches to public consultation, including poor levels of engagement.

I originally began writing the article in response to an internal argument at my own institution (a specialist art and design college) regarding whether "London is Changing" should be counted as research, or not, for the purposes of the REF. Reflection on the significance and outcomes of "London is Changing," and in particular why it is so difficult to frame as research, became the basis for a productive broad reconsideration of the definition and valuation of graphic design research. Tactically, by packaging the whole discussion as a peer-reviewed journal article, I would also be ensuring that the project could count as research from a regulatory and personal career development perspective. At the same time, in the writing I took some issue with an academic system that rewards articles published in poorly designed and circulating formats employing a particular kind of language that only university affiliates have access to and that only a small number of people will ever read.

The fact that I needed to reformulate "London is Changing" as a journal article in order for it to "count" felt like it went against much of what graphic design stands for, and should stand for, even in the university context. At the same time, the exercise gave rise to some new insights about the project, and the comments provided by the two anonymous reviewers were extremely helpful in maturing the argument. A key question that I raised, and that I build upon here, is whether or not it makes sense for those involved in graphic design, a discipline that is arguably defined by its experimental approach to publishing, to focus on conventional or externally prescribed forms of scholarly publishing in an attempt to strengthen its position as a field of research. And, building out from this, wouldn't this deny the greater academy a key

aspect of the potential contribution of a graphic design perspective to wider academic research and publishing, and reinforce counterproductive presumptions about interactions between medium and scholarship? Returning to the discussion of *Urban Pamphleteer* specifically, I will now draw out a set of examples that demonstrate some of the specific opportunities for academic practice afforded by a less default and more community-facing approach to publishing.

For each issue, we try to identify a specific target audience as well as a wider community audience and make connections between them. *Urban Pamphleteer* no. 2, "Regeneration Realities," edited with Ben Campkin and David Roberts, was produced as a committee on regeneration was forming in City Hall. It covered topics such as social cleansing and place imaginaries from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives, featuring illustrations and maps in addition to writing and photographs. A contribution by community group called Southwark Notes Archive used information obtained from a freedom of information request to generate two maps that demonstrated the displacement caused to tenants and leaseholders of the Heygate Estate, which had recently been demolished in Elephant and Castle as part of a large regeneration scheme. The inside back cover reproduced an online survey inviting readers to submit their views to a survey being conducted by the London Assembly. Copies were also distributed to all members of the assembly. During the editorial process, some contributors brought questions regarding the ethics of university collaborations with community groups to the attention of the editorial team. Concerns were expressed about a tendency towards imbalanced intensive short-term engagements that fulfilled the needs of students and faculty without taking sufficient responsibility for long-term implications for communities. The issue was also taking shape in the context of the increasingly prominent roles that university building projects had been taking in regeneration schemes in different parts of London. We decided to include a removeable insert

authored by JustSpace, an umbrella community organization in London, which set out a number of ethical principles and best practice guidelines to facilitate better such collaborations.

Urban Pamphleteer no. 3, "Design & Trust," featured a piece of ethnographic writing by Threshen Govender and Andrew Charman about South African *shebeens*, or unlicensed social clubs/bars.⁴ We took a visual approach to combining a selection of their field notes with one of their photos as a simple way of making the material more accessible and meaningful. This issue was launched and distributed at a meeting of the Designing Out Crime Association (DOCA), an international crime prevention association that has been criticized for taking an environmentally deterministic approach to crime reduction. The issue was launched at a special event attended by many members of DOCA and featuring talks by contributors and panel discussions that helped to ~~frame~~ improve discussions of issues and ideas ~~regarding~~ around crime prevention through environmental design.

Given the success of launch events for previous issues, we also decided to try positioning a workshop at the start of the process where we brought together built environment professionals with technologists and community organizers to brainstorm interventions in London's housing crisis. This group brainstormed in mixed-disciplinary groups in response to a number of speculative sketching challenges, such as how to cut estate agents out of the process of matching Londoners to homes using peer-to-peer technologies. The issue that resulted, *Urban Pamphleteer* no. 6, "Open-Source Housing Crisis,"⁵ included an introduction to the work of a collective called Concrete Action, a leaks platform where UK-based built environment professionals such as architects, planners, and local government staff were invited to report anonymously on unethical activities. Another piece that came out the workshop was a set of illustrations and instructions, a technical hacking recipe for people living in buildings with balconies to use items they already

have such as Wi-Fi routers and televisions to get together with their neighbours to create individual and collective building-wide outdoor display systems – this was called the BBC, or the Balcony Broadcasting Company.

When Urban Lab was commissioned to produce a data set on the history of LGBTQ+ nightlife in London as part of the launch of a LGBTQ+ cultural infrastructure map, an inaugural project of a newly formed "Culture at Risk Office," this became a basis for the publication of *Urban Pamphleteer* no. 7, "LGBTQ+ Nighttime Spaces: Past, Present & Future," partially funded by the Museum of London.⁶ The data set had been created with reference to an eclectic range of archival material ranging from magazines and newspapers to interviews to personal collections of ephemera. When we reviewed the range of archival material such as club fliers and community newspapers from which the data were extracted, particularly in relation to its presentation in the final report, we felt that the quantitative data on their own were not a sufficiently full expression of the history they represented and needed a methodologically queer counterpoint. In this case, we decided to use *Urban Pamphleteer* to provide this counterpoint whilst also providing a new platform for publishing the data beyond the typical audiences for local government reports. We wanted to raise questions about the potential role of queering publication in the queering of knowledge production. As a way of hinting at this formally, we decided to experiment with shifting from black with one spot colour to an issue containing absolutely no black and no white, but instead yellow, pink, and purple.

UCL's motivation to support the first few pilot issues of *Urban Pamphleteer* was directly related to imperatives to better demonstrate the impact of academic research. However, the publication's success raises some questions about why outcomes and impact in academia are so often approached and understood separately from one another. What about scholarly publications

makes them so un-public that they need public-ness to be bolted back on after the fact? In the medium term, for the urban lab in particular, the success of *Urban Pamphleteer* has contributed to the development of a broader ambition to approach the relationship among traditional academic outputs, community facing and policy-facing research, and the physical logistics of knowledge production in and with cities and citizens in more experimental and fluid ways.

As a case study, *Urban Pamphleteer* demonstrates that there is much to be immediately gained by academics in the pursuit of more experimental approaches to publishing and publishing-based collaborations. In addition, in the long term such experiments would contribute to greater understanding of how the conventions and media associated with academic publishing are constructed and might be reconstructed.

University-based graphic design has faced a number of challenges in establishing itself as a substantive field of research. A contribution to the transmutation of scholarly publishing into a more resonant and public activity at a time when the broader project of scholarship is in question is also an opportunity for university-based graphic design to demonstrate what I think is a yet unrealized potential to contribute to the larger project of human knowledge. On this basis, and to conclude, I will zoom out from *Urban Pamphleteer* and articulate some "draft" prompts for collaboration to provoke greater engagement of graphic design with academic publishing in other fields. These are a starting point for something that I hope can develop into a resource that is conducive to university-based graphic designers and potential collaborators across disciplines.

Making Academic Publishing More Public

Form and circulation are aspects of the production of knowledge.

The originality, significance, and rigour of knowledge cannot be separated from its realization or mobilization.

Journal articles and university press monographs should not be considered "pure" containers of knowledge.

The instrumental characteristics associated with prescriptive academic formats, ranging from prose styles to typography to referencing systems, are often understood as what makes an academic publication scholarly, with only limited variation across disciplines. While such conventions have meaning and history, they are too often presumed to be inherent attributes of, or requirements for, knowledge rather than reinterrogated as intentional choices.

And there's no such thing as "pure form" either.

Likewise, some graphic designers (as well as other designers and artists) have a tendency to imagine that it is possible and desirable to experiment with form in a way that has no ethical implications or other external significances. This is to deny a range of important cultural responsibilities associated with craft, particularly within communications and mass media.

Open access is important, but it is not the same as accessible writing, or wide relevance.

So much discussion about the future of academic publishing focuses on the politics of open access. At the same time, there are questions of how to formulate publications so that they engage wider audiences and communicate more effectively with marginalized or under-represented groups. It is arguable that many academic publications, even where they present anti-

racist or anti-colonial arguments, are formulated and presented (and distributed) in a way that is ultimately exclusionary.

Greater awareness of and more direct engagement with ~~the~~ audience(s) allows for more meaningful and larger-scale impact.

The default audiences for academic publications are almost always other academics. This has the effect of re-entrenching both the realities and stereotypes of academics being engaged only in conversation with one another to the extent that they become irrelevant and limit the relatability, applicability, and ultimate significance of academic practice. Again, this has an important relationship to debates regarding inclusion.

The principles of peer review are more important than the conventions. We need creative and experimental approaches to incorporating them.

Peer review is an important broad concept with the potential to facilitate and safeguard originality and rigour in knowledge production. However, it tends to be organized in a fairly fixed format that depends on free labour and is easily co-opted to serve individual agendas, thereby substituting performances of the gestures associated with collegiality and community for a genuinely supportive process that is healthy for the long-term development of our subjects.

We need to be aware of the weight of our voices and how we are claiming and performing expertise and credibility.

One thing that graphic designers and humanities researchers have in common is a belief in our approaches to expression that can reduce the potential for discourse by cultivating an overly technical or authoritative tone. When a graphic designer selects a typeface for a monograph, they will often choose something that extends the credibility of the author. These are powers and privileges that need to be treated carefully and continuously checked as part of publishing processes.

We also need to take more informed and creative approaches to building on existing work, and experiment with how to document and make this process transparent and accessible.

It is common for graphic designers to reference and build upon the work of others without explicit citation or documentation. In addition to supporting a stronger research culture in graphic design, to do this would be of enormous benefit to our students, particularly those from less privileged backgrounds in terms of prior education. To do it creatively would represent a significant contribution to wider academic communities.

There are many ways to take systematic approaches to methods and demonstrate awareness of their implications.

Similarly, graphic designers don't tend to communicate or write explicitly about how they create knowledge. At the same time, they are particularly adept with systems and have the potential to contribute creatively to the development of new methods for knowledge production.

It is important that we take responsibility for what and who is included and excluded through our work, what it argues and who it reaches, and that we become more aware of its other ethical dimensions.

Graphic designers and artists have a significant history of experimental approaches to ~~collaborations~~ collaborating with publics. At the same time, discussions regarding the ethics of collaboration are not common enough in university-based graphic design. And disciplines with more mature entrenched approaches to research ethics do not often take a collaborative approach to publishing or attend to the ethical dimensions of publishing (outside of rights and permissions).

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¹ The ISSN numbers for *Urban Pamphleteer* are 2052–8647 (print) and 2052–8655 (online). All issues of *Urban Pamphleteer* can be accessed in their entirety online: <http://urbanpamphleteer.org>.

² Kate Williams and Jonathan Grant, "A Comparative Review of How the Policy and Procedures to Assess Research Impact Evolved in Australia and the UK," *Research Evaluation* 27, no. 2 (2018). See Williams and Grant for an overview of the development of impact as a component of research evaluation in the United Kingdom (in the context of a comparison to Australia).

³ Stewart Bailey is cited in Peter Bil'ak, "Graphic Design in the White Cube," accessed 11 August 2020, https://www.typotheque.com/articles/graphic_design_in_the_white_cube.

⁴ *Urban Pamphleteer* no. 3, "Design & Trust," accessed 3 August 2020, <http://urbanpamphleteer.org/design-and-trust>.

⁵ *Urban Pamphleteer* no. 6, "Open-Source Housing Crisis," accessed 3 August 2020, <http://urbanpamphleteer.org/open-source-housing-crisis>.

⁶ UCL Urban Laboratory, "LGBTQ+ Night-time Spaces: Past, Present + Future," accessed 11 August 2020, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/urban-lab/sites/urban-lab/files/LGBTQ_cultural_infrastructure_in_London_nightlife_venues_2006_to_the_present.pdf.

⁷ The following points are revised from a presentation at the College Art Association in Chicago in February 2020 to an audience composed largely of graphic designers.