Towards Poetic Visual Communication:
Negotiating a Balance Between Historical Practice
and Contemporary Methodologies

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Bachelor of Design (Honours) in Visual Communication

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

School of Creative Arts and Media

University of Tasmania

October 2019

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Abstract

This research examines the impact of contemporary social, philosophical and material contexts on Visual Communication through a multi-layered study of Poetics, from its recognition as a key methodology for Design practice from the late 1950s through to the present day. Through an examination of this historically important Design methodology, and the processes by which social change, theories, and technologies have transformed the contemporary practice of Design, the constraints contemporary creatives face in the effort to create meaningful work are discussed.

Two research strategies were utilised: (1) an analysis of the current state of practice of Visual Communication and the broader history of Design methodologies and philosophies, with a focus on one particular movement, Poetics. This explorative stage consisted of an examination of journal articles, an analysis of case studies and interviews with leading practitioners. (2) This informed the development of an approach to Design practice, through which Design projects are explored through metaphor and arbitrary constraints (a Poetic framework). Three projects were undertaken utilising this methodology: *How to Grow a Chair*, *Travelling Through the Unfamiliar*, and *Poetic Tactics*.

Through reflection on the successes and shortcomings of these three projects, it is concluded that Poetics is a valid and productive approach to Visual Communication.

Keywords

Design, Visual Communication, Poetics, Design Thinking

Chapter One – Introduction, Overview, Research Questions and Methodology

1.1 Rediscovering Poetics: Practising Design in the Digital Age

Project Introduction

In Stephen Eskilson's famous book, *Graphic Design: A New History*, he argues that the work creatives create is inextricably linked and shaped by their context.

Graphic design history has too often been presented through a parade of styles and individual achievements devoid of significant social context, and that this tendency has obscured much of the richness and complexity of its development (Eskilson 2012, p. 10).

Graphic design and typography are collective forms of expression that are embedded in the fabric of society in every era. They are impacted by political movements, economics, military history, nationalism, and gender politics.

The Fourth Industrial Age has meant that the amount of hand craftsmanship needed when producing work in visual communication is being increasingly usurped by digital processes (Schwab 2016). Many creatives have sought new forms of employment in the field of Design and there has been a rapid development of new roles and practices, including UX/UI (user interface) creative (Nielsen 2017). The role of Graphic Designer used to be a highly technical, specialised and solitary profession. With the introduction of the computer as the primary production tool, however, its role has changed and expanded to encompass interdisciplinary teamwork and address situations outside traditional print media. This expanded role engages with complex and ambiguous situations, such as trying to effect change in attitudes and behaviour in order to solve problems.

Previous work has provided a history of Design Thinking ideology, discussed in detail in Chapter 2, which notes that the early twentieth century and the expanded rationalist approach to design moved creatives even further away from romantic ideals of artistic intuition and communitarian craftsmanship (Engholm & Salamon 2017).

It is clear that there has been a shift away from craft-based components of visual communication, prompting Engholm and Salamon to ask: "Will arts and crafts strike back?". Although the question of context and its influence

can never be definitively answered[1], we can look at studio work and examine how it differs from work of the past.

This research includes a comparative study of practising studios and practitioner interviews (detailed in Chapters 4 and 5). From that, it can be surmised that there is currently less focus on craft and intuition today. Given this context, it seems natural that a contemporary creative may wish to re-discover "visions of spontaneous and free expression as well as trained intuition and artistically driven creativity" (Engholm & Salamon 2017, p. 9).

Poetics offers one framework in which the modern creative may attempt to drive artistic intuition, expression, and creativity back into design. Chapter 2 examines the history of Poetics, a philosophical approach to design that was first introduced in the 1950s. Central to the philosophy is the role of individual consciousness, emotion, and a synthesis of form and content, to produce an aestheticised outcome.

As part of this research, I participated in a series of workshops, seminars, and museum visits in Europe through the Vitra Design Fellowship[2]. One of the key benefits of this experience was having an audience with some of the world's most significant design practitioners to test ideas and approaches to design. Interviews were conducted with noted design practitioners, including Ken Garland, Fraser Muggeridge, Büro Destruct, Jeff Knowles, and Paul Elliman. A full set of interview transcripts can be found in the creative work *Poetic Tactics*, submitted as part of this thesis, and also included in the Appendix. The interviews emphasised the importance of experimenting in innovative design practice. They also highlighted that many industry experts were re-evaluating the current state of design practice. Speaking to practitioners about the personal thoughts, emotions, and thought processes associated with their practice enabled me to begin forming a practical framework for innovative practice.

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[1] Please refer to the definition of wicked problems in section 1.4.
[2] The Vitra Design Fellowships are part of the international summer academy held at Domaine de Boisbuchet, a country estate in the southwest of France.

1.2 Engendering Poetics – Creating Constraints and Metaphors

Methodology/Approach

An important aspect of this research was to explore (through practice-based design projects) what role does Poetics play for the contemporary creative engaged in Visual Communication who wishes to create expressive and imaginative work. How does a Design practitioner create more expressive, creative and imaginative work? Creating a formula might be a direct antithesis of the 'Poetic'. It might be better to think of it as, "How does one channel one's own creativity?"

It is important to note that creatives are not always conscious of design decisions, so even without deliberate effort or even human intervention, poetry in design can emerge. To enliven that process, poetic devices such as similes, metaphors, personification, and paradoxes can enable new directions and outcomes. To make creative expression possible, creatives must embrace the complexity and unknowability inherent in design practice. In doing so, they might sidestep their rational, thinking mind and give space to other invisible forces driven by emotion and imagination.

This research contributes to the knowledge of design practice by examining the historical development of Poetics and its significance to design and the conceptualisation of important issues facing design practice in the twenty-first century. Practice-based Research was undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and reflection on the outcomes of that practice. It is a fundamental project component, as the primary focus of this research is to advance knowledge about Visual Communication practice. The methodology (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4) specifically adapts and develops Poetic frameworks to build on the relationship between Poetics and Design practice. By doing so, this research asserts that Poetic attributes such as imagination, intuition, and expression continue to be critical to innovative design practice today.

In an effort to override the idea of design as a rational planning activity and revert to more artistically oriented 'Poetic' approaches, the practice-based framework was developed as follows:

1. **Design projects chosen.**
   This was a set of self-directed and multi-faceted projects that addressed areas of personal interest. A high degree of research and conceptual development was involved.
2. **Arbitrary constraints were added.**
   Arbitrary constraints, as detailed below, were added during the process stage (the space that exists before a design solution is found). They include the use of outmoded technologies, such as a Risograph photocopier and an overhead projector, and looking at social science ideas symbolically. This approach was not to dismiss normal practices but to introduce different methods in the hope of discovering a point of comparison, and to create a space in which Poetic qualities might emerge.
3. **Three creative works were completed.**
   These were titled *How to Grow a Chair*, *Travelling Through the Unfamiliar*, and *Poetic Tactics*. The creative journey of these works is analysed in chapter 4, and how the restraints impacted and/or changed the creative outcomes.

The process through which the creative project outcomes were developed included a practical investigation of the role Poetics plays for the contemporary creative who wishes to engage in Visual Communication as a meaningful activity that generates innovative and creative outcomes. The final design solutions supported the idea that the creative process itself will significantly alter the outcomes, often in unexpected ways.

1.3 Research Questions

Poetics in design emphasises a synthesis of form and content, to produce an aestheticised outcome. This research asks:

- To what extent could a re-investigation, re-examination and a re-emphasis of Poetic approaches to Visual Communication contribute to creative practice in the 21st century?
- What role can Poetics play for the contemporary creative who wishes to engage in Visual Communication as a meaningful activity that generates innovative and creative outcomes that engage with contemporary situations?
- How to foster Poetic approaches and Poetic outcomes for the contemporary Visual Communication practitioner?

1.4 Key Terms Explained

Design

Specialisations in design are many and varied, including architecture, fashion, interactive media, industrial design, interior design and Visual Communication. There are countless philosophies for guiding design as a discipline, and approaches to modern design practice vary greatly (Holm 2006). Design philosophies are usually used for determining intention or goal. The sphere of intention may range from the least significant individual problem to the holistic influential utopian goals. The debate over the immediate and minor goals may lead to the questioning of fundamental nature or essence of design (Heskett 2002). In response to this, Richard Buchanan (1992) famously outlined its complexity:

> Despite efforts to discover the foundations of design thinking in the fine arts, the natural sciences, or most recently, the social sciences, design eludes reduction and remains a surprisingly flexible activity (p. 5).

Design at its core defies precise definition, if we wish to observe and outline the activity itself, we may look to the description of John Heskett (2002), a twentieth-century contributor to design theory:

> Design, stripped to its essence, can be defined as the human nature to shape and make our environment in ways without precedent in nature, to serve our needs and give meaning to our lives (p. 5).

Design is the art of making.

Visual Communication

Visual communication is the practice of conveying messages and ideas through the use of visual constructs, while also utilising strategic thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. It uses these visual constructs to captivate, influence, inform and inspire an audience with ideas and messages. It includes (but is not limited to) graphic design, illustration, animation, web design, motion graphics, typography, narrative illustration, drawing, advertising, interactive media, visual performance, and film.

Visual Communication evolved from the traditional practice of graphic design (Meggs 2005). The term embraces the ever-evolving set of practices that comes under its umbrella.

Creative

Students of Visual Communication go by many names after graduation: Art Director, Creative Director, Graphic Designer, UX/UI designer, Visual Designer, Animator, Web Designer, Researcher, and often simply Designer. The tendency to use the broad term 'Designer' may stem from the fact that many practitioners tend to wear many hats and use a multitude of tools and practices.

For the purpose of this paper (and for the lack of a better term), I have used 'Creative'. It is a term that pointedly uses a combination of concept and craft. Creatives define intent. They craft messages. They formulate beautiful designs. They examine design philosophy, conventions, and theory and the process behind their work. They draw. They brainstorm. They have conversations. They dream up things, and they make.

By using this term, I hope to hold together the many things creatives do. Although it could apply to other disciplines, such as music or art, its use in this paper is rooted in Visual Communication as defined above.

Design Thinking

The term 'design thinking' describes the thoughts, processes and practices involved in designing. Brown (2008, p. 5) describes the practice as a system of overlapping spaces rather than a sequence of orderly steps: inspiration, ideation, and implementation.

The origins of the term partially lie in the development of creativity techniques in the 1950s (Tjendra n.d.). It emerged more prominently in the 1980s when Donald Schön published *The Reflective Practitioner*, in which he sought to establish "an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes that [design and other] practitioners bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict" (Schön 1983, p. 49). The practice was also described in detail in Bryan Lawson's book, *How Designers Think*. Lawson (1980) outlines the design process as sitting within divergent and convergent thinking. Convergent thinking generally means the ability to give the "correct" answer to standard questions, whereas divergent thinking is a thought process or method used to generate creative ideas by exploring many possible solutions. Lawson argued:

> there are likely to be many steps in any design process which themselves pose convergent tasks. True, such steps may eventually be retraced or even rejected altogether, but it would be absurd in the extreme to pretend that there are no parts of design problems which are themselves amenable to logical processes and have more or less optimal solutions (p. 143).

The term 'design thinking' has gained prominence in reaction to a "20th century education system that fostered dominant logic and disregard [of] creativity" and is commonly used to extol the virtues of inventiveness to the business world (Tjendra, n.p).

Wicked Problems

In his groundbreaking paper in 1992, Richard Buchanan outlined that understanding wicked problems is fundamental to the discipline of Design. Solutions to wicked problems are impossible or extremely difficult to achieve, given the complex, ever-changing and sometimes undefinable aspects of the system within which they exist (Buchanan 1992).

Buchanan argues that design sits within a complex system that, by its very nature, is resistant to analysis or conductive reasoning because its parameters are impossible to pin down. Creativity offers us a pathway to face this complexity:

> The emergence of design thinking in the twentieth century is important in this context. The significance of seeking a scientific basis for design does not lie in the likelihood of reducing design to one or another of the sciences … Rather, it lies in a concern to connect and integrate useful knowledge from the arts and sciences alike, but in ways that are suited to the problems and purposes (Buchanan 1992, p. 6).

Thus, key to an understanding of design is the acknowledgement that it is complex and that the different modalities in which creatives shape their work are always used as inspiration rather than evidence.

Poetics

Any discussion on the term Poetics must also acknowledge its heritage, asking, "What is the relationship between the different media and genres in contrast to its root in the written word?". Borislavov (2004) states when writing about Poetics:

> Technological advances in the last two hundred years have called into question the primacy of the written medium and have gradually brought to the fore not only the problem of the interaction between the different media (photography, radio, film, typewriter, phonograph, computer) but also of their influence on the human senses leading, in some accounts, to a re-evaluation of the concept of the subject (n.p).

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It is, in fact, in Aristotle's *Poetics* in 350 BC that this slippage begins, when he traverses into music and dance (Borislavov, 2004). Thus, an investigation of Poetics must contemplate the roles that different media play in modern society, as well as investigate the technologies that make meaning possible (Borislavov, 2004).

Gaston Bachelard's seminal work, *The Poetics of Space* reimagines the term as it relates to the world of design. He describes a process in which the elements of any work created are inextricably linked to human experience and consciousness. A process in which a design will speak to an individual is unique and intangible, as each person will create and leave their own footprint (Bachelard, 1958).

Poetics in this context describes the personal and emotional, and places emphasis on the synergy of different elements coming together to produce an intangible effect (Bachelard, 1958).

Key to insight about Poetics is to understand that poetic qualities of a work are emergent, that is they do not exist objectively, but only arise when an audience interacts with the work. The maker may have a poetic intention, but it is unknowable until the work is made public.

Rationalism *(in design)*

In philosophy, rationalism is the view that "regards reason as the chief source and test of knowledge" (Lacey 1996, p. 286). More formally, rationalism is defined as a methodology "in which the criterion of the truth is not sensory but intellectual and deductive" (Bourke 1962, p. 263).

"Everything is design", the renowned American architect Buckminster Fuller declared in 1960. In present scholarly discussions, this all-embracing notion of design is still debated. In Fuller's sense, design is the rational master discipline of modern life, providing coherence to the planning of its material as well as immaterial aspects. This mode of thinking runs as a thread through design thinking since the Enlightenment (Engholm & Salamon 2017). Bashier (2014, p. 1) argued for a return of rationalism in the design studio — "studio practice values project appearance instead of the actual design process" — in a way that seems dismissive of craft or aesthetic components in design. This way of viewing design could also be seen through an instrumentalist or reductive lens – the idea that complex things can always be

explained in terms of simpler things. Instrumentalism sees things of value according to their practical application.

It should be noted that there are also many significant theorists who reject this model. Influenced by the 1980s spread of British design methods, design researchers in the United States (among them architect Richard Buchanan and art historian Victor Margolin) sought to develop a general theory of design as a broader discipline (Margolin & Buchanan, 1995).

The literature examining the role of Poetics in design is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Romanticism *(in design)*

The idea of design as a rational planning activity also often clashes with artistically oriented approaches (Engholm & Salamon 2017). Slogans such as "less is more" (associated with the architect Mies van der Rohe), "design is thinking made visual" (attributed to the designer Saul Bass; see, e.g., Bass & Kirkham 2011), or "design is art with a purpose" (O'Nolan 2009), reflect other popular understandings of design as a process of form-giving with both functional and artistic purposes (Engholm & Salamon, 2017). In various ways, these articulations of design culture can be seen as rooted in Romantic ideals.

Some of the main characteristics of Romanticism include a focus on individual expression; the celebration of craft, beauty, and imagination; the rejection of industrialisation, rationalism, and social convention; embracing artistic creativity and aesthetically refined intuition.

1.5 A Personal Note

Motivation - Personal Interest in the Topic Area

It is my experience of working as a creative since the year 2000 that has driven this project. During that time, I have seen many changes, and have been confused about my own role as a creative, as I digest theories, methodologies and technological change.

Design tools are changing fast, for instance, the layout tool of choice has changed at least three times in my career (*Pagemaker, Quark, Indesign* and now sometimes *Canvas*). This change has been driven by economic constraints of cost and licensing and the marketing decisions of corporations, rather than on the merits of one particular program over another (Girard 2014). It feels odd to me that the way I create work, the tools I use, are in part dictated by random events in Silicon Valley. The role of software for the contemporary Creative is analogous the way Design was constrained during the First Industrial Revolution by the technologies available for industrialised production. Prompting William Morris (1896, p. 29) to reflect that, "It is the allowing of machines to be our masters, and not our servants that so injures the beauty of life nowadays". Are we allowing such technology to limit our creativity and expression? Why has the practice of design again reverted to a time in which tools place the discipline itself into question?

The amount of craft knowledge and technical expertise creatives need to use the new design production technologies has decreased. The modern-day creative does not really need to have detailed technical knowledge to produce work. Software can be downloaded and installed onto a computer using a right-click. Step-by-step instructions and video tutorials are readily accessible. This is very different from fifteen years ago, when graphic design required multiple steps and detailed knowledge. One needed to have the right font for the right platform (Windows or Mac), to understand the different types (such as bitmap, vector and stroke), the different formats (such as Truetype or Postscript), and the platforms they were used on (Mac or PC), and have training in the appropriate font management software (Wright 1998). Today, it appears that any individual can quickly learn to utilise graphic design software. It no longer requires expertise, skill, or an art of creativity and expression. Contemporary Design is slowly losing its craft.

Although the advancements in software and digital technology have, of course, made parts of the job much easier, this does not come without constraints. Creatives, including me, are restricted by the decisions of corporations and by the limitations of the design software which are available to everyone. It is, therefore, unsurprising that professional roles for graphic designers are projected to decline by 22 per cent from 2018 to 2028 (Bls.gov 2019).

Chapter Two – Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This literature review outlines key thinkers that have informed and contextualised this project as it developed. It discusses the historical development of Poetics, establishes its historical significance to design, and highlights the contemporary understanding of the term. It further discusses broader philosophical movements in an effort to juxtapose the perceptions of design that may emerge from within them and examines how these frameworks can hold significant influence over the production of work in the discipline of Visual Communication.

2.2 The Evolution of Poetics

Historically Key Moments from Aristotle to Bachelard

The aim of this research is to negotiate a balance between historical practice and contemporary methodology and explore the Poetic in design. But what is Poetics? And how does the framework relate to how creatives practise?

Aristotle's *Poetics*, approximately 350 BC, is one of the earliest philosophical works that analyses creative expression (Schiaparelli & Crivelli 2012). The objective of this work was to dissect and validate the practice of creative expression and storytelling through an examination of Greek tragedy (*Phenomenology* 2015). According to *Phenomenology* (2015), 'Poetry' in its Greek origin can be translated as 'to make' and is this key to understanding Aristotle's framework. *Poetics* was the first significant study to suggest one could examine art by analysing its constitutive parts and then drawing general conclusions. As the first known analysis, Aristotle's text is often cited in connection to Poetics, but it is important to note that, for many of the early philosophers, imagination was construed primarily as a mimetic act of mirroring, representing or copying (Kearney 2014). While the connection to Greek tragedy may not be obvious, Visual Communication is also a useful way to express ideas about the world and convey thoughts about the relation between action and character (Schiaparelli & Crivelli 2012).

During the Romantic era, which began in the late 1700s, the understanding of Poetics took a significant shift. The essence of Romanticism was in placing importance on the free expression of the emotions of the artist. This is summed up in the remark of German painter Caspar David Friedrich, "The artist's feeling is his law" (Romesburg 2001, p. 246). There was increasing interest in the idea that imagination was a productive force in its own right, the source of all true meaning and value (Kearny 2014).

One of the most significant designers said to be influenced by the Romantic movement[3] was William Morris. Through his drive to create aesthetic and emotional beauty, he founded the Arts and Craft Movement, a reaction to the Industrial Age. Commenting in the 1880s, Morris (1888, p. 29) stated: "It is the allowing of machines to be our masters, and not our servants that so injures the beauty of life nowadays". Thus, Morris advocated for well-made, handcrafted goods instead of mass-produced, machine-made items. In 1891, he established the Kelmscott Press, which produced more than fifty works utilising customary printing techniques, a hand-driven press, and hand-made paper. Morris was a driving force behind the revival of traditional British textile arts and methods of production.

By shaping his work through the Arts and Crafts ideology, Morris developed innovative works that are still revered today. From the perspective of this project, two interesting things distinguish his practice: (1) Morris approached his work through the lens of ideology (he was not just making, he was making based on his beliefs); and (2) he used different tools from his contemporaries.

Early influencers on the arts and craft movement argued that the separation of the intellectual act of design from the manual act of physical creation was both socially and aesthetically damaging. Morris further developed this idea, insisting that no work should be carried out in his workshops before he had personally mastered the appropriate techniques and materials, arguing that "without dignified,

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[3] It should be noted that Morris was also strongly influenced by other ideologies, including Socialism, and especially the dehumanising effects of industrialisation.

creative human occupation people became disconnected from life"
(MacCarthy 2009, n.p).

Although Morris rejected the cheap production and consumption
ethos of the Industrial Revolution, he was well aware of the
unaffordability and impracticality of his practice. An early biographer
states that, "Despite Morris's ideals, he did realize that creating works
in the manner of the Middle Ages was difficult in a profit-grinding
society" (Morris 1896, p. 26). Apart from the wealthy middle classes,
hardly anyone could afford his luxurious designs. According to Ruth
Kinna, a Morris scholar, Morris recognised that the objects he made
"were completely unaffordable for the people he wanted to help"
(Kinna 2012, n.p). Thus, often his designs did not coincide with the
effects of industrialisation or his political beliefs. Following this
revelation, Morris joined the Socialist cause to help people see again
what was beautiful and sacred in every aspect of their lives (Mathis
2016).

One might surmise that, although his ideology did not produce the
exact change in society he wished for, Morris's beliefs fundamentally
changed the physical manifestations of his design work. He used tools
and techniques based on his ideology, and these choices fundamentally
changed his creative path. His legacy offers up an historical example of
how medium and thought itself can shape the tangible and physical
forms of design.

2.2.1 A Philosophical Breakthrough

Poetics took its most significant shift in the mid-twentieth century
through the work of Gaston Bachelard. His seminal work, *The Poetics of
Space* (1958), is most frequently quoted today by those who wish to
draw connections between the poetic and design practice. Despite their
historical significance, it is very important to note that the ideas of the
Rationalists and the Romantics both differed somewhat from those of
Gaston Bachelard, who resisted both the notions of the early
philosophers and the Romantics. For him:

> imagination was at once receptive and creative - an acoustic
> listening and an art of participation. The two functions, passive
> and creative, were inseparable. The world itself dreams, he said,
> and we help give it voice (Kearny 2014, p. xx).

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Bachelard's approach was empathetic, placing less emphasis on the individual artist and more on the life of objects themselves as part of the ongoing expansion of human collective consciousness.

He describes space, and its potential to be remade over time, as a kind of conjury for the imagination. The book is written in an imaginative voice, to convey the experience of awe and wonder upon encountering found objects. This is more than just descriptive writing; by describing place, he is conducting a study in phenomenology, the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view:

> I studied a series of images which may be considered the houses of things: drawers, chests and wardrobes. What psychology lies behind their locks and keys! They bear within themselves a kind of aesthetics of hidden things. To pave the way now for a phenomenology of what is hidden, one preliminary remark will suffice: an empty drawer is unimaginable. It can only be thought of. And for us, who must describe what we imagine before what we know, what we dream before what we verify, all wardrobes are full (Bachelard 1958, p. xxxvii).

Through his descriptions, we begin to understand the life of our designed world as it exists within the human imagination. He also describes the process of imagination and creativity, a process that is hard to place within definitive models or constructs:

> When we study electricity or magnetism, we can speak symmetrically of repulsion and attraction. All that is needed is a change of algebraic signs. But images do not adapt themselves very well to quiet ideas, or above all, to definitive ideas. The imagination is ceaselessly imagining and enriching itself with new images (Bachelard 1958, p. xxxvi).

As he applies phenomenology to design, basing his inquiry not on purported origins but on lived experience and contexts within nature, the objects come alive (Ockman, 1998). Bachelard focuses especially on the personal and the emotional and urges creatives to base their work on the ongoing relationship it will engender, rather than on abstract rationales that may or may not affect viewers and users of it (Ockman, 1998). The core of his argument is that no one form can

satisfy the poetic imagination; rather, he urges that creatives acknowledge that their task is never over but is instead a continuous process of re-evaluation stirred by the feedback loop of human consciousness.

This framework of Poetics has been one of the most significant contributions to the field of Design in the last sixty years and has been instrumental in offering up a model of practice that is inclusive of emotion, intuition, whimsy, and imagination.

2.3 Contemporary Poetics
Applications in Design Practice

A key thing to understand about Poetics is that they are emergent qualities, that is, they do not exist until an audience engages with the work. The maker may have an intention, but it is unknowable until the work is made public.

Much of the writing of Poetics in Design comes from the discipline of Architecture. In *The Poetics of Architecture*, Anthony Antoniades (1992) states that, in order to succeed in presenting a theory of design, it must address aspects of imagination and creativity as well as the channels one can use to achieve a truly significant creative outcome.

The seeking of Poetics in design and architecture today, as proposed by Antoniades (1992), has returned the emphasis of design to its place within the broader community (Marble, Smiley, & Al-Sayed 1988). Antoniades (1992) explores fundamental theories of design with an inclusivist attitude towards practice. He looks at the many intangible and tangible channels one can harness in developing creative work. By opening up design to the full range of creative influences, he tries to help readers produce designs that are richer on spatial, sensual, spiritual, and environmental levels. In quite a break from the usual models of design practice, intangible channels to creativity explore fantasy, metaphor, the paradoxical and metaphysical, the primordial and untouched, poetry and literature, and the exotic and multicultural (Antoniades 1992). Antoniades hopes that creatives can increase their versatility and creativity in the studio as it will deepen their understanding and appreciation of the creative process and its many influences.

Whilst this is an area for more research and debate, there are examinations of Poetics in other realms of the design discipline. More recently, Adriana Ionascu's doctoral thesis, 'Poetic Design: A Theory of Everyday Practice' (2010), aims to define design Poetics as a category of design practice set apart from commercial, industrial or market-led design that generates forms that investigate the everyday life of contemporary culture. She argues that, in creating an active interplay between audience and object, poetic design involves a different kind of practice which is not about improving functionality or increasing consumption. By seeing design as a living thing, Ionascu suggests that design Poetics is an ongoing, non-linear process in which the audience or 'post-producers' continuously add layers of meaning (2010, p. 14).

Unlike earlier practitioners of poetic design such as William Morris, who initially did not consider the audience as a synergetic part of his designs, Ionascu (2010) proposes that objects should be developed considering the audience, object, and creator. These parts should all be subjected to experimental and emotional evaluation in order to understand their various roles and functions. In proposing these particular points of evaluation, a poetic framework places design and its forms within a network of relationships and contexts. It sees it as a contribution to life experience, embodying a variety of processes and manifestations (Ionascu 2010).

There has also been active research in the application of Poetics in the field of Interaction Design. Lin, Chang and Liang (2011) state that there is increasing scope for higher experiential values in interaction design beyond functionality and usability; for example, pleasure and aesthetics. They write that, while ""manifestos such as ludic design, reflective design, and design with ambiguity have been issued and extensively investigated, poetic interaction design is relatively unexplored' (Lin, Chang & Liang 2011, p. 562). Their research asks if Poetics can emerge as felt experience while living with interactive artefacts.

Lin, Chang and Liang (2011) also suggest that a poetic image could be created by leaving blanks in the design expression and be delivered via users' reflection and imagination. Thus, similar to philosophers of design such as Bachelard, the researchers imply that design is a conjury for the imagination, and an art of participation (Bachelard 1958). As Kaplan (1972, p. 159) suggests, Bachelard's study of imagination has a

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profound moral commitment, "to re-establish imagination in its living role as at the guide of human life".

However, Lin, Chang and Liang (2011) fall short when they try to prescribe a simple way for their students to "design poetically", and they go to some effort to simplify Poetic expression into a 'Pragmatic model' (Lin, Chang & Liang 2011, p. 563). Their motivation being that 'the concept of Poetic Interaction' is abstract for designers to apply in practice (p. 1). Although this approach is interesting, it perhaps fails to take into account the complexity of design problems.

2.4 Ideology and Design

Poetics within a broader Philosophical Framework

Given the historical context and contemporary applications discussed above, it is necessary to ask: Why do we need to re-investigate Poetics in design sixty years after *The Poetics of Space* was first published?

The section below illustrates a slice of design philosophy in the period following Bachelard, and demonstrates the push and pull of competing dogmas (Romanticist vs Rationalist). The section also emphasises that, in these changing winds of design dogma, important design learnings are successively lost and rediscovered at an alarming speed.

In *The Story of Graphic Design*, Patrick Cramsie (2010) presents contexts and tools over historical periods, and juxtaposes them with illustrations and styles prevalent in those contexts, asking us to question how they might be connected.

Eskilson (2012) also examines visuals as influenced by context:

> It is my belief that graphic design history has too often been presented through a parade of styles and individual achievements devoid of significant social context, and that this tendency has obscured much of the richness and complexity of its development (p. 10).

Eskilson argues that graphic design and typography are the most communal of art forms embedded in the fabric of society in every era,

and that political movements, economics, military history, nationalism, and gender have clear and direct visual manifestations (Eskilson 2012).

If we surmise that context and historical frameworks are significant, what are the questions and models that Bachelard was reacting against?

In *The Poetics of Space,* Bachelard (1958) refers frequently to the "psychologists". Does he mean those at the helm of advertising in the United States some decades before? His experiential descriptions of design differ greatly from the model of Visual Communication that emerged in early twentieth-century America. Ellen Thomson (1996) in her article, 'The Science of Publicity: An American Advertising Theory, 1900-1920', describes a period (with striking similarities to the present day) in which there was a sudden shift towards the scientism of the creative process (Hayek 1980). Advertisers wanted to shift the public perception that their profession was tacky, bawdy, and in bad taste.

At the turn of the century American advertising, with other emerging industries and professions sought to redefine itself by acquiring the prestige accorded to the sciences (Thomson 1996, p. 253).

During this time, psychologists worked hand in hand with creatives, or as creatives, and devised compositions and copy inspired by theories of perception, physiological responses, and laws of proportion and symmetry.

Agents felt the need to prove to their clients and to the public that advertising was not only indispensable to success in business but that it was a respectable endeavor. The advertising-psychologists theory of design contributed to this effort (Thomson 1996, p. 253).

Interestingly, they also moved away from aesthetic styles in the name of science. "A generation that had once championed William Morris's graphics, suddenly called for minimalism and restraint" (Thomson 1996, p. 268). It has been well documented that these twentieth century practitioners saw a correlation between our choice and evaluation of aesthetic styles and theories of science and mathematics (Thomson 1996). We may question this need to rationalise aesthetics. Either way, this Advertising-Psychology practice was seen to have lost its intellectual foundations around 1930, the same time as Jan Tschichold's manifesto on advertising design, *New Life in Print*, appeared.

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Only unrelated pieces of "the laws" promulgated in those now forgotten texts still appeared in books on advertising design, and they were no longer anchored in a coherent (if fallacious) theoretical structure (Thomson 1996, p. 270).

The Poetics of Space also describes Bachelard's shift away from rationalism:

> A philosopher who has evolved his entire thinking from the fundamental themes of philosophy of science, and followed the main line of the active, growing rationalism of contemporary science as closely as he could, must forget his learning and break with all his habits of philosophical research if he wants to study the problems posed by the poetic imagination (1958, p. xv).

Despite its shortcomings, rationalism *(the theory that reason rather than experience is the foundation of certainty in knowledge)* has in fact been widely applied to Design. In the reflection by notable design thinker Jorge Frascara (who held the position of president at Icograda, taught university students for many years and ran a studio called Frascara Noel) in *Design Education in the Last Fifty Years: A Personal Perspective*, he describes the perceptions of what design was, and how they have shifted over the last half-century. The remarkable thing about this personal reflection is the underlying discourse that it exposes. As Frascara describes these shifts, his honest account reveals how fixed his own views had been at certain times:

> I initially thought that practitioners were experts in form, in the visual aspect of things. I thought that their role was to apply their aesthetic sensitivities to the beautification and general formal refinement of objects and communications ... I believed that my concept of beautiful was shared by all people, some being more skilled at producing it than others.

> Around 1970, I began to see that my function as a graphic practitioner was not only to concern myself with the aesthetics of communications but with communicational clarity. I studied semiotics, information theory and perception psychology. Later still I realised that there was no universal way of making information clear, but that one had to vary the approach in each case.

Maybe at the beginning of the 1980s I became conscious of the fact that "public-centered communication clarity" was not the final aim of visual communication design, but that every communication came to exist because someone wanted a reaction from a segment of the public (Frascara 2008, pp. 40-42).

Does this astute academic searching for answers see the bigger picture? It is clear that he is seeking an overarching rationale.

Engholm and Salamon (2017, p. E1.1) describe in their paper 'Design thinking between rationalism and romanticism—a historical overview of competing visions' the "*longue durée* history of design thinking with particular focus on recurrent ideological tugs of war between two competing visions: Enlightenment ideals of logic, rationality and civic order against Romanticist ideals of artistic creativity". They suggest that developments in design thinking might be better grasped in light of what we see as recurrent ideological clashes.

They see two distinct models of practice evolving: "design thinking now again seems divided along the dichotomous axis. The empiricist ambitions of scientifically consistent design thinking continues to engage researchers and practitioners, but also a new romanticism, involving different understandings of materiality, subjectivity, cognition and creativity gains" (Engholm & Salamon 2017, p. E1.16).

Over the past two decades, a large amount of research and writing in Design has emphasised interdisciplinarity, human-centred design, and user research. Many argued that if design was going to make any kind of impact creatives needed to explore research and incorporate research methods borrowed from the hard sciences (O'Grady, J. and O'Grady, K 2009).

Frascara opted to do so, and his recent work *University Nutrition Campaign* described in Chapter 3 used a user-centred approach to test and choose between various compositions (see Frascara 2008, pp. 39-48).

Some see a drawback of this framework in that it simplifies the act of design and posits the designer as "problem solver". A statement by Bruce Archer highlights the inherent complications with this type of definition:

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The most fundamental challenge to conventional ideas on design has been the growing advocacy of systematic methods of problem solving, borrowed from computer techniques and management theory, for the assessment of design problems and the development of design solutions (Systematic Method Design 2016, n.d).

But built into today's design framework is also the notion of 'wicked problems', first described in the context of design by Richard Buchanan (1992). He rejects the idea of reducing design to a simple formula. He argued that creatives see things in different ways from people in other fields, and their way of seeing allows them to think of new possibilities of making (Sönmez 2015). In other words, Buchanan states that no branch of design or set of definitions can pinpoint all the processes that the term encapsulates.

Visual Communication in the twenty-first Century has new objectives, methodologies, and tools compared to how it was practised fifty or even twenty years ago. Despite this, are creatives still, as Engholm and Salamon (2017) posit, stuck in an ideological tug of war that has been going on for 200 years? They state:

The history of design thinking is not over; new societal and scientific concerns manifest themselves in debates over ontology and the importance of materiality, texture, and tactility in a time of rampant digitization. Current concerns with the importance of human hands, emotions and senses influence contemporary design thinking. The widespread, often counter-culturally expressed hope for radical change influences design visions during these times of social upheaval and economic predicaments. We hear echoes of romanticist design creativity, not only in such phenomena as critical design, shared economy projects, alternative economies, DIY, and various start-up experiments, which seem to gain new importance in design thinking but also in popular trends of new medievalism and national romanticist derived aesthetics, cyborgism and spiritualism (p. E1.16).

Design theorists Margolin and Buchanan (1995, p. 19) state "the history of design is not merely a history of objects, rather it is a history of changing views of subject matter held by designers and the objects

produced as expressions of such views". Did we lose Poetic practice because of the tug of war described above? And, if so, how can creatives make sure that they do not lose any more of their legacy in the future? Do they need to stand back, and consider a more inclusive model?

2.5 Chapter Summary

What then can we learn from this survey? It is unremarkable to note that there exists a zone of disagreement between design theorists and overarching philosophical frameworks, and yet the loss of technique, knowledge and perspective that accompanies each shift in academic fashion itself frequently goes unremarked.

In the following section, I examine the effect that this debate has had on the study and practice of design, and explore the ways in which Poetics can be re-introducing into design thinking. I further explore the effect of imposing Poetic frameworks on design practice, and observe the changes to design practice and output those constraints create.

Chapter Three –   Practice Context, Practitioner Commentary/Interviews

3.1 Chapter Introduction

The following chapter is an analysis of the current practices of Visual Communication with a focus on one particular movement, Poetics, through a thorough analysis of studio case studies and interviews with established practitioners. The analysis hopes to provide greater insight into how the advancement in technology and rise in different design methodologies, as a result of the social sciences, have impacted design outcomes and transformed the role of a creative in the modern day.

3.2. Practitioner Interviews

The first point of call was to speak with practising professionals to seek their input regarding what it is like to be a creative in the current context and how context may impact the design outcome. The full set of the *Poetic Tactics* articles (based on the interviews) is submitted as appendices. Unstructured interviews were used to provide a more in-depth understanding of context and creatives' perceptions, motivations and emotions. The interviews were transcribed into articles. This involved identifying key idea and examining these ideas to gain an understanding of practitioners perceptions and motivations. The interviews highlighted how tools, methodologies and practice modes may impact on my own design work. In the following paragraphs, the significant insights gained through these encounters are described.

3.2.1 Lorenz 'Lopetz' Gianfreda, Büro Destruct

My first interview was with Lopetz of Büro Destruct, an agency whose work has an almost universal appeal. They produce work that is coveted by many, have exhibited their work throughout Europe, and have a widespread reputation. During my visit with them, two key insights were noticed: (1) the creatives looked for inspiration not only in books and on screens, but also in the world; and (2) they were also confused regarding the role of a creative today.

Büro Destruct practise in Bern Switzerland, a beautiful place that inspires them. In 2012, I wrote the piece 'Büro Destruct - A magical

mystery tour' to describe my experience of spending the day with them:

> On my visit, I was able to join Büro Destruct on their daily swim to lunch along the River Aare. Whilst on this journey we encountered a fellow running behind his wife, donning an extremely large Hello Kitty bag; a peculiar old man on a recumbent bicycle; and the "Holiday Swiss" - a couple so tanned I got a flashback to Magda in *There's Something About Mary*. I realised that one could find inspiration in the most unlikely places. A creative person has an ability to draw things from the environment, and see what others may not. I noticed all of these unusual characters as Lopetz and the team pointed them out to me (Wallis 2012a, p. 42).

Büro Destruct's creatives had keen eyes that were always open. It became clear that even in this media-saturated society, a creative can find new and interesting inspiration by looking closely at the physical world around them.

Secondly, the outward emotion of Lorenz "Lopetz" Gianfreda, one of the founders of Büro Destruct, was unexpected. As someone with so many personal accolades, a practitioner greatly respected for his design masterliness, it was surprising to see a sadness and wistfulness displayed. When asked what he considered to be the most revolutionary ideas in design at the moment, he genuinely looked upset:

> "There is so much going on that it is hard to pick one diamond among all this stuff. People sample things a lot more. If you compare design to music, well, music labels are essentially gone. No, I can't pick it, I wouldn't know where to start" (Wallis 2012b, p. 38).

That is not to say, of course, that revolutionary ideas and practices are not emerging, but it was clear that Lopetz, too, felt overwhelmed by the digital age and its potentialities for design.

3.2.2 Ken Garland

I first heard of Ken Garland when I was at the London Institute in 2003. Some of the students had translated his writings into a

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typographic installation at the Graduate Show. Like other students, I connected with the ideas and became curious. This began a period of ten years of following his work, keeping an ear out for what other creatives were saying about him, and considering his ideas in terms of my own practice. When, through the process of my Masters, I realised I might meet him, I was very excited.

Garland talked about his own history as a practitioner and painted a picture of a very different context from the one in which we practise today. The interview strangely turned into a-pseudo-therapy session as I asked, "What makes some creatives create exceptional work? And, more importantly, how do they get there?". He explained that, partly, he was just lucky. He became a creative at a time when there was an abundant economy, and not enough creatives to meet the demand. He was able to build a reputation on those factors. His advice was to question things, but to also have fun and enjoy what happens.

Garland also demonstrated some indifference towards the mainstream visual landscape and presented some of his own anecdotal theories as to how that might have developed.

Garland, in the article I wrote, 'Ken Garland - The original designer for societal change', highlights that one way for creatives to stay inspired and redefine themselves in our current setting is to get away from corporate demands every now and again; that corporate identity, for a large corporation, is deadening, because it means that creatives are going to be confronted with identical imagery wherever they look (Wallis 2012d). He reinforced that creatives must continually challenge themselves against doing things in a prescribed way, and keep questioning the status quo: "That's our job, and at some point, somebody will realise that the old ways are no longer working" (p. 14). These corporate constraints are one of the many intricate factors in our present-day context that make design a complex activity.

3.2.3 Fraser Muggeridge

Meeting Fraser Muggeridge, on the other hand, was quite a different experience. He simply loves what he does and that rare passion means that he really doesn't need to question it too much. This passion comes through in his detailed and beautiful work. He is a modern-day craftsman, and the digital tools of today do not really stand in his way

as he crafts detailed typographic layouts. He does not worry about concepts. He is not big on ideas; he just patiently crafts his work. He argues that there is real beauty in something that is simply well done; and that no concept need always exist (Wallis 2012c).

My encounter led me to write 'Fraser Muggeridge - The Art of Simply Doing Things Well'. The article examines the debate between style and concept:

> The points Muggeridge made on concept were refreshing and pertinent in our current context. Designers no longer necessarily "need' to be craftspeople as computers can do a lot of things for us. But it is worth remembering that carefully laboured objects inspire a feeling within us that we often cannot articulate. Sometimes this is the only method or tool we need (Wallis 2012c, p. 7).

Of course, many creatives know that there is no one prescribed way of doing things. My discussions with Muggeridge were hugely significant, and they turned many of my own personal assumptions on their head. I realised that within the practice element of this research, I need not try too hard, but I also needed to try and find my own way of engendering the Poetic.

Fraser's approach is vastly different from, say, the likes of Bob Gill. Gill advocates a "no-nonsense" approach to design, writing: "Drawing is just like design. It's a process. A means not an end. Both are a way of making statements. So unless you have a specific point of view about something, don't even begin the process" (Gill 1981, cited in Baglee 1999, n.p). This conflict in views is where the differences between poetic/aesthetic and rational-leaning creatives lie (Dorter 1990).

3.2.4 The Contemporary Role of the Creative

In the course of the interviews, it became clear that the interviewees did not have all the answers. Highly esteemed professionals became uneasy when asked to discuss the current role of the creative. The confusion I felt over my role as a creative was not unique to me, but a problem facing the design community at large.

Each article in the creative work, *Poetic Tactics*, transcribes these thoughts and insights, and serves as a tool for creatives to consider

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how they make meaning and define their roles in our current setting. The articles also offer tools to other creatives wanting to generate outcomes that are not only useful, but also innovative and creative.

There seemed to be an underlying message to embrace the experience of not knowing, rather than feeling compelled to rationalise process.

3.3 Studio Case Studies

The following projects aim to present different models of work and encompass practice that is driven by rational and romantic principles, intuition, social science research, interdisciplinary design, human-centred design, and experimental aesthetics. They demonstrate how complex and multi-faceted research techniques are when applied in the design field, and how creatives have dealt with such complexity. No single methodological approach fits neatly within the broad domains of Poetics, Romanticism and Rationalism; instead, it appears that these overarching theories overlap.

3.3.1 Intuitive Approaches

This research looks at what happens in the space that exists before a design solution is found. Traditionally, the practice model of Visual Communication is to look at a variety of visual and theoretical stimuli before creating an end product. This melding of elements, and how the outcome emerged, was hard to articulate; but it came together through a combination of continued investigation, gut feeling, craftsmanship, and aesthetic understandings.

Henri Poincaré, a French mathematician and philosopher of the early twentieth century, is known for his significant evaluations of the creative process. He described creativity as a series of mental stages of both the conscious and unconscious mind: first, random combinations of possible solutions to a problem are found, followed by a critical evaluation (Poincaré 1907). He wrote:

> It is certain that the combinations which present themselves to the mind in a kind of sudden illumination after a somewhat prolonged period of unconscious work, but those only which are interesting find their way into the field of consciousness ... A few only are harmonious, and consequently at once useful and beautiful (Poincaré 1907, p.91).

Through intuition, a creative can put analytical faculties to one side and explore other modes of expression that might emerge.

3.3.1.1 Case Studies

Move Our Money
Art Direction: Stefan Sagmeister
Design: Stefan Sagmeister & Hjalti Karlsson

Stephan Sagmeister is one notable practitioner whose art direction and design-inspired campaigns are distinguished by their ability to grab an audience based on the poetic qualities they exhibit. He cares about emotion and argues that, if you wish to communicate with a person, having that person interact with you in any shape or form is the first step (Sagmeister 2004). Born in 1962 in Bregenz, Austria, he is currently based in New York City, where he founded the design firm, Sagmeister & Walsh Inc., with Jessica Walsh. Sagmeister works on a wide spectrum of design commissions, from album covers to installation design, publications, and public awareness campaigns. His motto is, "Design that needed guts from the creator and still carries the ghost of these guts in the final execution" (Graphis Portfolios n.d.).

As a practitioner, he is interested in how people feel. Sagmeister believes the work of many designs fail to provoke thought or conjure emotion due to a lack of personal conviction. He states "when your conscience is so flexible, how can you do strong design?" (Fiell & Fiell 2005, p. 156). Sagmeister takes an ethical stance in his work and aims to "touch the viewer's heart" (Saad 2010, p. 166).

He has worked on significant projects that have this objective. His *Move Our Money* campaign is both practical and captivating. This project was an initiative of True Majority, a grassroots education and advocacy project. They assembled a group of 200 business and military leaders and called for the government to cut 15 per cent off the Pentagon budget and move it to education and health care (Diaz 2000).

The project exhibits a masterful and imaginative approach to Visual Communication. First, instead of a traditional language and symbol-based logo, it uses a pie chart as its visual mark. This chart depicts the military budget, so at the first point of reference, the logo shows how dramatic and disproportionate the funding differences are. It is a

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reminder that through visualising information, a practitioner can, in the brief instant that it takes to look at the image, help an audience understand something that would be much more arduous to explain in words.
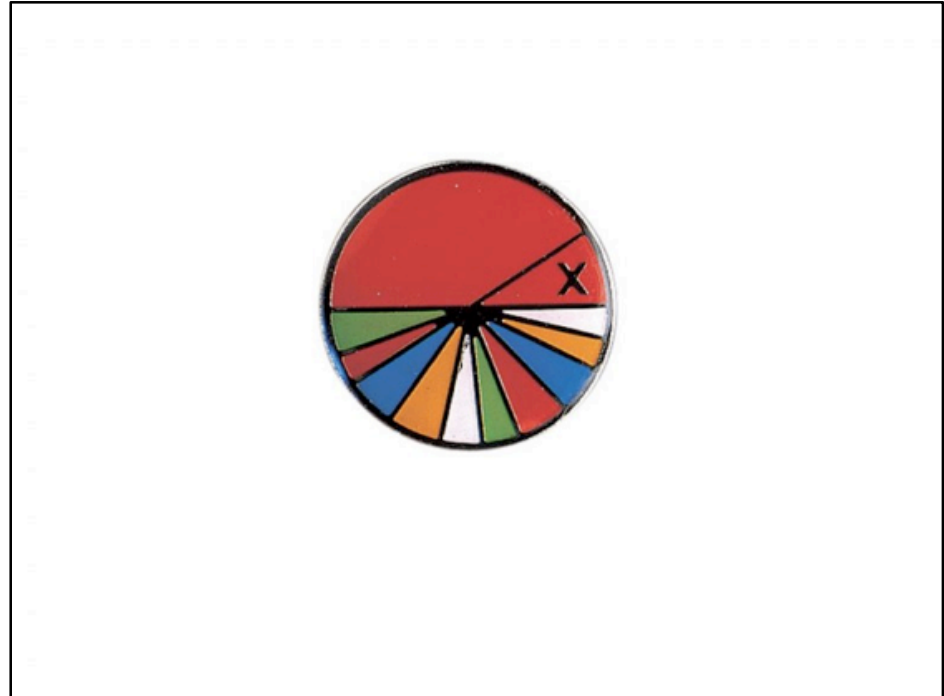
Figure 1 *Digital Image of Move our Money Logo created by Stefan Sagmeister and Hajili Karlsson, 2001.*
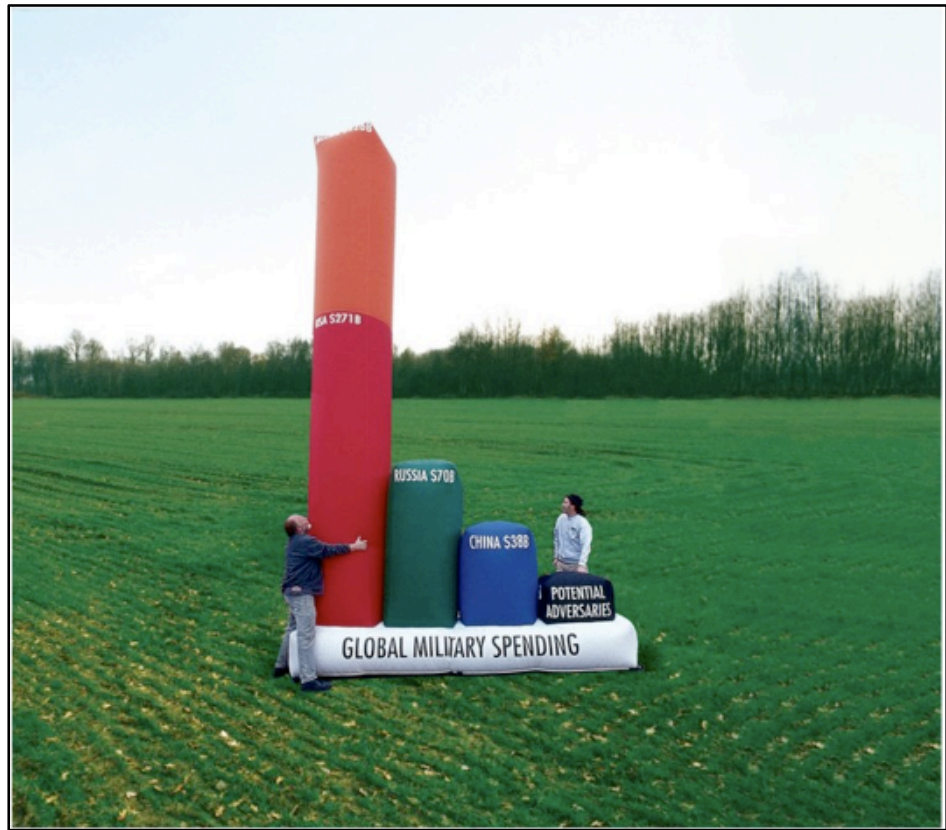
Figure 2 *Digital Image of Move our money - Global Military Spending Inflatable Prop created by Stefan Sagmeister and Hajili Karlsson, 2001.*

Other aspects included the production of three "pig mobiles" that were driven through small towns across North America. These vehicles were proportionally sized, the largest representing the military budget, whilst the two significantly smaller pigs represented education and health care. Obviously, these "pigs" are quite odd and sparked curiosity. Each time the vehicle visited a new location, people were asked how they thought the budget was being spent and were surprised to learn the actual breakdown. Again, Sagmeister reinforces these monetary discrepancies through visual cues.

Figure 3 *Digital Image of True Majority - Pig Mobile designed by Stefan Sagmeister and Matthias Ernstbereger, 2006.*

Figure Digital Image of True Majority - Pig Mobile designed by Stefan Sagmeister and Matthias Ernstbereger, 2006.It is hard to quantify how successful campaigns such as these are, or what percentage of a campaign's success can be attributed to these methods, as they exist within a framework of interconnected activities, circumstances, and conflicting messages. The effectiveness of the Poetic experience, including evoking emotions and human feelings is unquantifiable. We exist in a society where only quantitative methods and results are valued. Thus, the prominence of these approaches to design are not often recognised. However, it is clear that Sagmeister has created something very special. The campaigns grab the audience's attention and helps them comprehend the message, but perhaps we remember it because it is so evocative.

David Pearson
Penguin Great Ideas Series

It is not hard to conjure up images of William Morris or the Romantics when examining the *Great Ideas* series. It is a powerful example of how craft can leave an impression upon the audience. The following is an excerpt from my reflections:

> When in Hobart one day I walked into a book store and instantly my eye was drawn to a collection of paperbacks. I felt compelled to walk across the room and pick them up. I had no money, and no time to read these books, and no general inclination towards materialism, but I wanted to buy one of these. They were truly beautiful (Wallis 2009, n.p).

It was quite astounding to be sitting with the Art Director responsible for this project, David Pearson, in London one month later. I used it as an opportunity to discuss the project in more detail. The *Great Ideas* series is a collection of works by great thinkers, pioneers, radicals, and visionaries that influenced society. It includes authors such as Niccolo Machiavelli, John Ruskin, and Virginia Woolf. David Pearson directed the series but also commissioned Phil Baines, Catherine Dixon, and Alistair Hall to work on individual covers.

Despite the old adage, "Don't judge a book by its cover", it is a strongly held notion in the publishing industry that audiences do just that. If a book does not sell, the first thing to be targeted is the cover design, and publishers have stringent procedures and criteria as to what can, cannot, and should not be included in a design (Lamont 2010.)

The *Great Ideas* series completely broke the publishing mould. These covers are printed as two-colour jobs, and each series of twenty books has its own unique spot colour. The first series has a red spine, and the covers use black and red only. Each series is introduced by a new colour. The books play on typographic traditions from the periods and places the authors originated and wrote from. They have a tactile quality created by the use of a matte stock and embossing that emulates the printing process of a bygone era. The project breaks all kinds of rules from the Penguin style guide, putting the publisher's name over two lines, and sometimes discarding the use of the logo

altogether. As book cover designs go, they break the mold and stand out from the shelf.
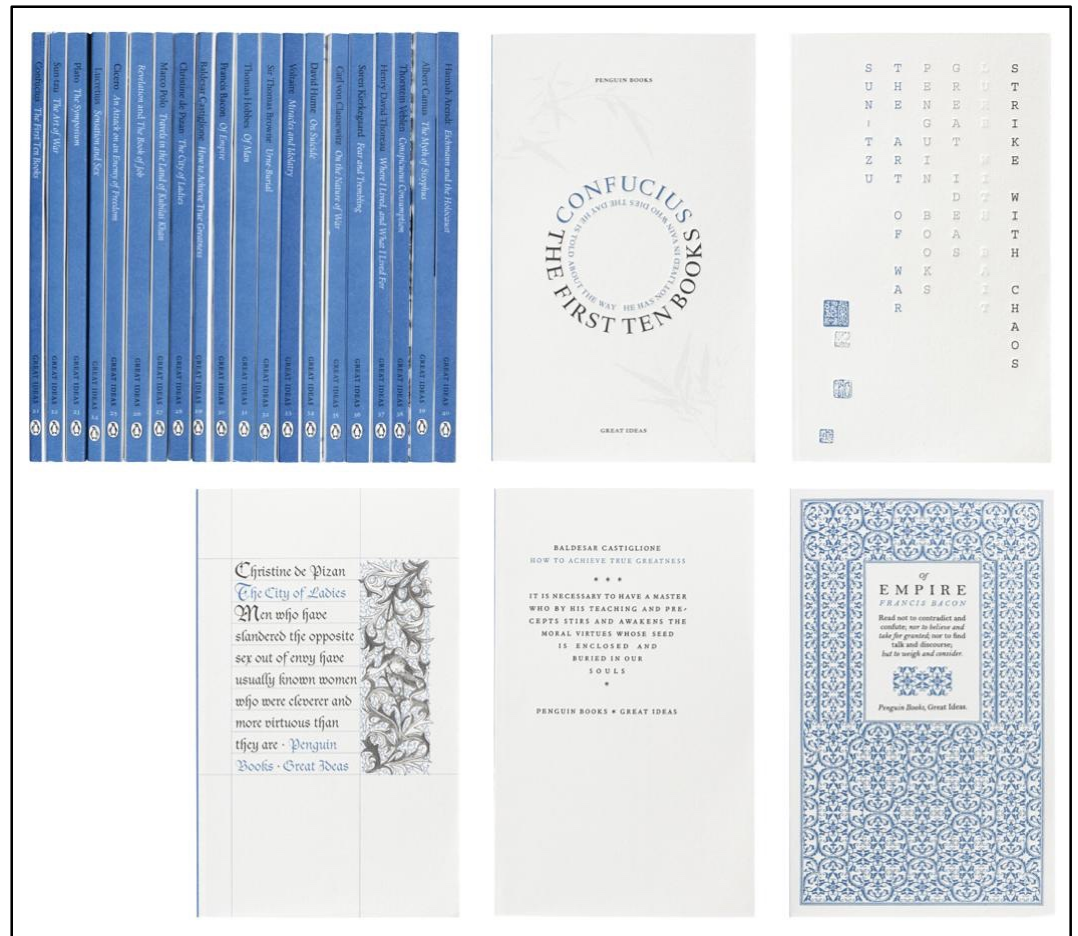
Figure 4 *Digital Image of Penguin Great Ideas Book Covers by Phil Baines, Alistair Hall, and David Pearson, 2011.*

I interviewed Pearson for my work *Poetic Tactics*, and I also had the opportunity to hear him speak in London at the Typography Summer School. Pearson said it was never expected that the books would really sell, so he was given creative free reign. Sell, however, they did. The first twenty *Great Ideas* were first published in 2004, and as a collection has sold more than 2.5 million books. They are considered to be a publishing phenomenon (Winder 2010).

The series editor writes in the *Guardian*:

A key aspect of the series has been their look. Messing around with different period typefaces and with a similar stripped-down atmosphere to the content (two colours, mostly just lettering – with the occasional loopy exception), the jackets transformed the books' fortunes. I remember standing in Foyles watching as wave on wave of morbid, sexually confused students came capering up to a ziggurat-like display of *Great Ideas*, snatching them up like penny candy. Of course, the authors were crucial to this – but it would be an austere figure indeed who did not react to the beguiling designs for Hume's *On Suicide* or Schopenhauer's *On the Suffering of the World* (Winder 2010, n.p).

This project highlights that artistry alone is powerful. I point this out because style and aesthetics are sometimes seen as "not enough" in contemporary practice (Agrawala, Li & Berthouzoz 2011, p. 47). This is a real shame, as the experience I had in the Hobart store sits firmly in the realm of Bachelard's notion of Poetics, the craftsmanship evoking feelings, memory and desire. Further discussion on this can be found in my article, 'The art of simply doing things well' in *Poetic Tactics* (Wallis 2012c).

3.2.2 Social Science Research-Driven Approaches

Visual Communication is often seen as a creative outlet driven by commercial need, but there has been a long tradition for using it in other realms, including social and political fields. Walter Gropius, who founded the Bauhaus, was motivated after his experience as a soldier in the First World War. He felt that there must be some way of creating a world where the horrific things he witnessed no longer occurred. Perhaps a naive idealist, he did, nonetheless, change the face of design (Davis n.d.). Well-known examples preceding Gropius were William Morris (discussed in the literature review) and the Russian Constructivists, who also believed in art as a practice directed towards social purposes, rejecting the idea of "art for art's sake" (Design is History n.d.).

During much of the twentieth century, the output of Visual Communication has proliferated and become a tool for the dissemination of dominant ideologies. In Western countries, its use was tied to capitalism (Cramsie 2010). It is hard to determine the true scale of the impact that capitalism has had on the practice of Visual

Communication, but it certainly is significant. As practitioners continued to communicate with the world of business, it was advantageous to speak in ways that they understood. This notion is supported by Jenn O'Grady and Ken O'Grady (2009) in their book, *A Designer's Research Manual: Succeed in Design by Knowing Your Client and What They Really Need*. In their book, they apply a series of social science research techniques to design problems and state that understanding these techniques is an essential tool needed to emphasise the value of design to the business sector (O'Grady & O'Grady 2009).

The use of interdisciplinary research methods is also strongly tied to socially motivated design and has received renewed interest from growing concerns regarding environmental issues. In Melles, de Vere and Misic's (2011) paper, which argues for socially responsible design, the authors state that an agenda for socially responsible and sustainable design has been partly fulfilled but must be developed further through the changed role of the practitioner as a facilitator of flexible design solutions that meet local needs and resources.

Many of the processes discussed have been developed with sustainability distinctly in mind. In the book *Visual Research*, Noble & Bestley state:

> The drive to a more social agenda for graphic design reached its height during the 1990s. The call for a refocusing of the practitioners' role indicated a need for a more considered discussion. Part of this discussion has been to explore how design might operate more effectively with a more methodological approach (Noble & Bestley 2005, p. 31).

Thus, practitioners looking for new and more concrete methodologies have begun to explore more complex strategies consisting of new multidisciplinary research approaches. In the opinion of Ezio Manzini of the Politecnico di Milano, new areas in design research should always be inherently sustainable:

> There is an emerging demand for visions of sustainability: scenarios that show feasible, socially acceptable, even attractive, alternatives on different scales and with reference to various aspects of people's lives: it is possible to have food with little

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chemistry and without transgenic products. We can move without cars. We can feel safe without shutting ourselves into a gated village … and so on (Manzini, 2008, p. 8).

Many practitioners agree with him and are changing their practice under these influences. These changes include introducing research models that originate in the social sciences, as it is believed that this will strengthen the design process. It has also led to the development of offshoots such as interdisciplinary design, service design, and user experience design.

3.2.2.1 Case Studies

ActivMobs
Project Design: RED

Building public awareness through Visual Communication campaigns is merely a starting point. Interdisciplinary design calls on people from varied and distinct areas of expertise to work together to solve a problem under the umbrella term of 'design thinking'. The aim is usually to design the next step: a 'solution' or a result created for a particular purpose or effect. This solution could be anything from a new signage system to any kind of service that people might engage with.

A design initiative set up in 2004 by the British Design Council, named RED, was created to tackle social and economic issues through design-led innovation. It consists of multidisciplinary teams who work alongside policy-makers. They use the design process as a means of collaborating with a variety of sectors in the community. Core to the initiative's beliefs is an open knowledge exchange, and during the *ActivMobs* project, they documented the details of their approach on a blog.

The *ActivMobs* project was initiated by the Kent County Council to address concerns about large numbers of people in the community who were living unhealthy lifestyles. They hoped to start a campaign that encouraged people to live a more active life, especially those in the 51–70 year age group. After meeting with groups in the community, they found that although many people had received the media message that they should exercise, they could not find the actual impetus to do so (O'Grady & O'Grady 2009).

What RED developed in response was the *ActivMobs* programme. This programme provides a framework for people to organise their own exercise groups or "mobs" based on interests and lifestyle; the core strategy being that the lure of social interaction would provide the extra motivation and encouragement needed to get people to change their existing habits and lifestyles. The web-based tools would also make it easy for people to find, suggest, and start groups. This links to the relational cohesion theory, which claims one of the biggest influences in bringing about a changed behaviour is our network of peers (Lawler 2010).

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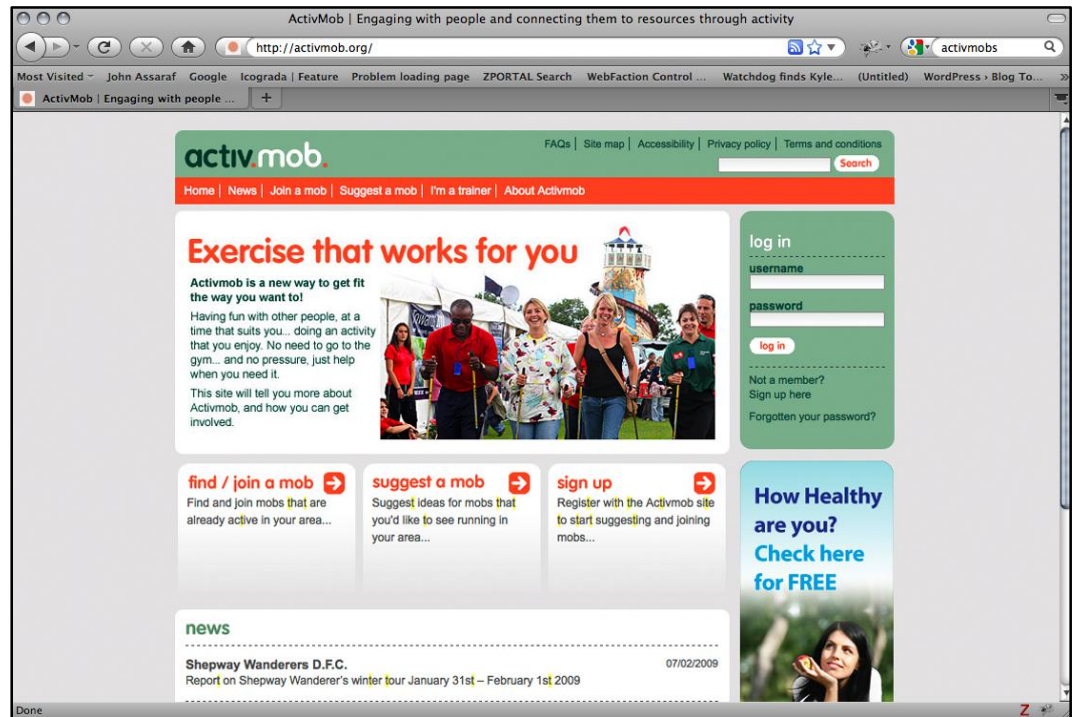
Figure 5 *Screenshot of ActivMob website. Project design RED, website by Ether Creative.*

Figure 6 *Screenshot ActivMob logo by RED, 2009.*

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The *ActivMob* project demonstrates a clear shift in design practice. It emphasises the idea of design as problem-solving. Like any model, it emphasises some areas while neglecting others (Dorst 2006). Due to the practitioners' focus on problem-solving, likened to rationale in design, creatives have moved towards "seeking a scientific basis for design", by documenting reasons behind designs, including addressing wicked problems (Buchanan 1992, p. 6; Engholm & Salamon 2017). Similarly, Dewey (1958) proposed that knowledge is no longer achieved by direct conformity of ideas with the fixed orders of nature; knowledge is achieved by a new kind of art directed toward change. But in this process, creatives are moving further and further away from Morris' Romanticism, and Poetic qualities of creativity, imagination and expression. As Eichner (1982, p. 8) pointed out, Romanticism "is incompatible with the foundations of modern science".

University Nutrition Campaign
Jorge Frascara

A more systematic approach to design utilises social science research methods. It not only looks at designing messages, but also the actual structures in which those messages can be acted upon. Practitioners such as Frascara look at a more defined, human-centred approach to projects, hoping to quantify a crucial project stage, a change in user habits or behaviour.

Frascara, on describing his process, states that he benefits from partnering clients to their communicational goals. He begins with a detailed discussion about the client's needs and objectives. This is followed by a thorough study of their target audience, which he calls a "public". The research and development stages centre on the user by conversing, interviewing, and observing them (Frascara 1988).

Frascara (1988) describes aesthetics as part of a system, but when looking at his completed projects, it is clear that he emphasises a methodological approach which is informed by social science research over a more aesthetically driven one. His work is professional, and it obeys certain settled and established beliefs and principles of typography. There is enough white space, and the typefaces blend well together, for instance, but the composition and craftsmanship have not been labored in the same way we might see in the work of someone like William Morris.

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Is it possible to evidence what the appropriate aesthetic, composition, or format should be for a particular audience? In the examples below, for instance, it is possible that the audience may not engage or be drawn in by the corporate aesthetic. Under the model of social science methodology, Frascara attempts to predict what the audience needs, wants, and how they might respond.

In the series of graphics below, he shows us his posters before and after he had conducted research on the audience. It does seem that Frascara is, in fact, aiming for a "perfect transmission". However, in complex and fickle markets, it is hard to determine why a poster works. Surely modelling the design on reader profiles and situations can have benefits, but may also lead to the more obvious danger of engendering generic work. Can we really answer these questions? Could the students who see these posters in the research group perhaps be more informed? Would those same students stop to look at them on the street? And if we rely on our user tests and studies to prove success, could we perhaps stop trying as hard just to wow people? Through using such methods, do we in fact unconsciously endanger one our our core skills and strengths, the ability to capture the imagination?

Figure 7 *Screenshot of Nutrition Campaign - first prototypes by Noel Frascara, 2019*

Design and user testing of a campaign to improve university students' diets

The eating habits of university students are a serious problem. Entering University most students live on their own for the first time, and with a reduced budget. Students skip meals, eat snacks high in sugar, fat, and salt, and rely on fast food.

Two of our performance specifications were to increase both the students' nutritional knowledge and their daily consumption of fruits.

Based on the findings from focus groups and interviews with students we designed and evaluated 3 poster prototypes.

Figure 8 *University Nutrition Campaign - Screenshot from the Frascara Noel website describing the design process, 2019.*

Figure 9 *Screenshot of University Nutrition Campaign - second prototypes by Noel Frascara, 2019.*

Following the students' comments, we redesigned the 3 posters. We evaluated the students' nutritional knowledge and habits using questionnaires, and then affixed the new posters. A month later we repeated the questionnaire to a different group of students. Pre-and post-intervention showed an increase of knowledge about the nutritional benefits of some types of food, and awareness about what was missing in their diet and about the importance of healthy nutrition

Figure 10 *Screenshot of Nutrition Campaign results by Noel Frascara, 2019.*

Frascara, as well as other practitioners, have moved away from freedom of creativity under the influence of social science research. He takes a more human-centred methodological approach to design by studying the target audience and attempting to predict how the design outcome will alter their behaviour (Frascara & Winkler 2008). According to Frascara (2002, p. 238), "Design is not concerned with objects, but with the impact that those objects have on people". Thus, Frascara leans towards a rational design approach as he states: "the aim of visual communication is to change attitude and thus behavior in its audience reasons behind decisions" and "quality in graphic design should be measured by how it affects the audience" (2006, pp. 31, 26). Similarly to RED, this structured approach means that design outcomes compromise on creative flair and are less aesthetically pleasing (Darwish Al Qur'an 2017).

3.3.3 Experimental Approaches

Not all researchers in Visual Communication are looking towards the social sciences, some are placing themselves squarely in the realm of aesthetics, and they pursue research with the aim of understanding the social role and meaning of the images we are surrounded by. Hal Foster, in his paper, 'The Artist as Ethnographer?' in *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology* (1995), refers to Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*, in which entire cultures were presented as the author of a work, instead of one particular artist or author. The idea is that aesthetics read as patterns and symbolic processes are actually created by societies, rather than individuals. This approach can be described as a more poetic model of design in which the focus is on creating symbolic, expressive visual designs that belong to the public consciousness (Lv & Suo 2012). One such group is Metahaven. They avoid going down a system design path, instead, they place themselves squarely in the realm of communication and the creation and maintenance of symbols (Drenttel 2010). They use detailed research and resources to inform their approach, experimenting both visually and also with the conceptual framework in which they place themselves. In a nutshell, they simply concern themselves with creating messages, not system designs or marketing strategies. They argue these messages alone are significant, which I detail below when describing *Uncorporate Identity*.

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3.3.3.1 Case Studies

Uncorporate Identity
Metahaven

Viewing the work of Metahaven, one might be led to believe that they are simply a group of left-field radicals. Their aesthetic style is experimental and kitsch. The intricacies of their experimentation, such as playing with ideas that are considered bad taste, would go unnoticed to all but the well-schooled Visual Communicator. Yet, left-field radicals they are not, they have been described as one of the most significant groups to be working in the realm of Visual Communication from a research-based perspective (Poyner 2009). The group consists of a team of Dutch practitioners, Vinca Kruk and Daniel van der Velden, who together work as a kind of think-tank, starting topical debates through their practice that examines the underlying discourse of current design industry practice.
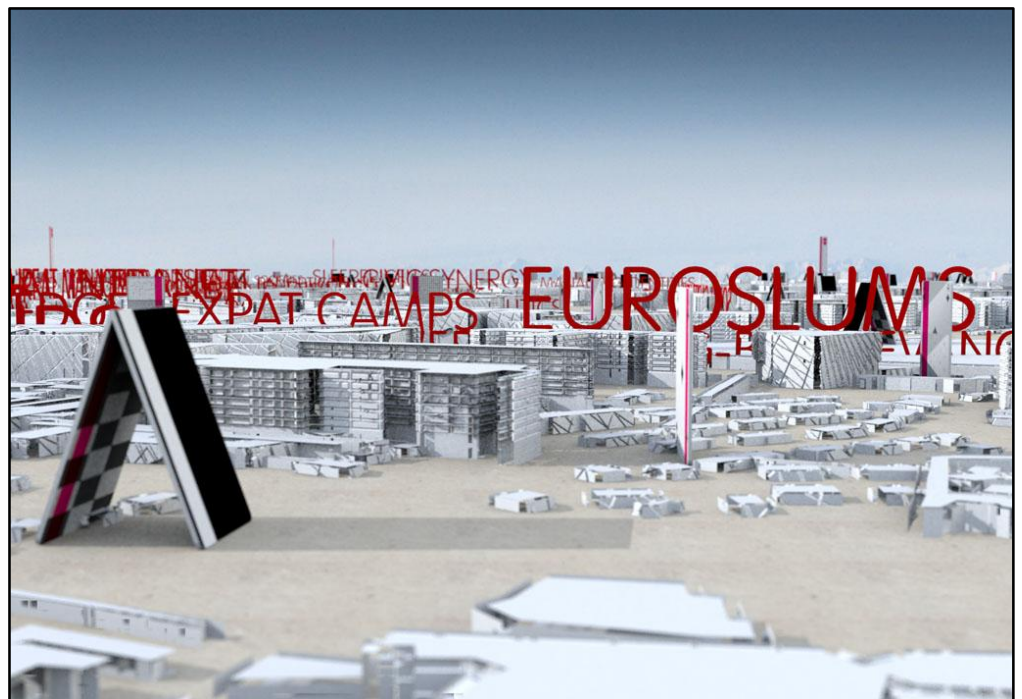
Figure 11 *Digital Image of Part of Stadtstaat: A Scenario for Merging Cities by Metahaven, 2009.*

Figure 12 Digital Image of Posters for Campaign for a biennial for social design by Event Architectuur, 2009.

Through their work and public speaking, they also examine the latent and accepted truths behind certain Design practices. They have recently published a significant work that examines the nature of corporate identity and state that, "even a 'brand-personality' supposed to humanise the abstractions of organisation has trouble closing the gap between itself and the intangible thing it stands for" (Van der Velden & Kruk 2009, p. 7). They also satirise the process of outside organisations being commissioned to brand a country to which they are not closely connected, such as the Abu Dhabi brand developed by M&C Saatchi, Sydney.

Abu Dhabi Campaign
M&C Saatchi, Sydney.

It was quite surreal to read this criticism by Metahaven, as I worked at M&C Saatchi on the specific job they discuss. Although our directors had visited Abu Dhabi, that information was not passed on to me as a member of the creative team. During this time at M&C Saatchi I searched for information to visually research Abu Dhabi, but all I could find came from the websites M&C Saatchi had created. My role was to offer contributions of collateral (such as website outlines) based on the style guide. The project team did this for an unknown place that

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existed only in our imagination. Viewing this critique, it became clear that we were working on an imaginary vision of a place based on our own unconscious stereotypes. To this day, I have no idea what the real place looks like.

Metahaven's thought-provoking work demonstrates that, through careful examination, creatives need not move away from the creation of symbols, but instead, with consideration, can question how messages might be created with more sensitivity. It should be noted that human-centred design (which implements methods from the social sciences) is an attempt to do this (LUMA Institute 2012). But compared with more structured and rational leaning design approaches, practitioners such as Metahaven use detailed research and resources to experiment with visual ideas and conceptual frameworks to improve their aesthetic practice. As Metahaven (2009, p. 7) states, they "speculate on the future" and use "design as a tool for prototyping rather than implementing stable solutions". They seem to inherently understand the complexity of methodological approaches within design in the modern era.

Figure 13 *Digital Image Abu Dhabi campaign by M&C Saatchi, 2010.*

3.4 Chapter Summary

The review of interviews and case studies has provided an insight into the complexity of design methodologies, overarching design theories, and the role of creatives within Visual Communication today. It sheds further light on the constraints faced by contemporary creatives in the effort to create meaningful work. It appears that creatives choose design methodologies that fit with their philosophy. For example, Metahaven's more poetic approach to design utilises experimental approaches to play with ideas, rather than to implement stable solutions like rational leaning creatives, including RED, who favour interdisciplinary methods which allow different professionals to work together to solve a problem. But other poetic leaning creatives like Sagmeister and Karlsson, whose designs have Poetic qualities, use intuitive methodology and let creativity and imagination take over in order to convey a meaningful message. No single overarching design theory or philosophy fits neatly within the different methodological approaches, which is a complexity that many creatives are aware of.

As described in the literature review, design seems to be greatly impacted by broader philosophies (such as Rationalism and Romanticism) as practitioners attempt to define an overarching model of practice. But what happens in that process is that possibilities are discarded. This research does not aim to privilege any one particular technology, methodology or mode of working. Rather, it asserts that this context does have an impact on us, and explores avenues, primarily Poetics, as a potential for creatives to practise within this complexity.

Chapter Four – Creative Outcome

4.1 Chapter Introduction

In this section, I evaluate my learnings about Poetics through practice. I ask, how does one put models from Morris, Bachelard and modern-day theorists into practice as a meaningful activity that generates innovative and creative outcomes?

The aim of these projects was to explore the practice of Visual Communication and convey ideas and information in an imaginative, meaningful and visual way, within our contemporary context. The methodology adapts and develops Poetic frameworks to build on the relationship between Poetics and design practice. By doing so, the research hopes to assert that imagination, intuition, and expression continue to have significance for design practice today.

Poetics is a way of describing design as part of an ecosystem of consciousness in which feelings and memories can be regarded as a form of aesthetic performance (Yang 2009). Design is generated through material imagination. In other words, we experience design through the ways in which the material world is imagined, not just by scientists and engineers, but by everyone, all the time: poets, children, footballers, cultural analysts, cab drivers and medics (Connor 2002, n.p) When the material world is conjured up, the audience may experience enhanced feelings towards the work (Lin, Lin, Chen & Lin 2014). Kolko (2011, p. 104) proposed that poetic interaction "resonates immediately but yet continues to inform later, causing reflection and relying heavily on a state of emotional awareness". Creatives who endeavour to capitalise on the material world might wish to do so consciously by trying to tweak their process (Chieh 2013). Poetics, however, like much of design, is complex and resistant to a simplified formula. It depends on the training, expertise and artistry of the practitioner.

4.2 Poetics: Engendering Emotion, Thought and Experiences

4.2.1 A Poetic Model of Practice

Beatty and Ball (2010, p. 3) state that, in poetic models of design, "primary generators" can be used to frame the subsequent exploration of a topic in a conjectural manner. A classic example of this is the Dadaists and the cut-up technique, which is performed by taking a finished and fully linear text and cutting it into pieces with a few or single words on each piece. The resulting pieces are then rearranged into a new text, such as in poem. Another one is Brian Eno and Peter Schmidts' Oblique Strategies, where

each card offers a challenging constraint that must be followed. By using these techniques, one might free oneself momentarily from rational and ingrained thought processes. By drawing upon imagination and emotion in the design process itself, it stands to reason that it might allow poetic significance to emerge in the end result.

There has been some research done in Poetic Interaction, in which a more systematic action research method is offered up. Lin, Chang and Liang (2011) followed four principles in an attempt to achieve poetic interaction: (1) blank space; (2) self-projection; (3) experience-accumulation; and (4) material-selection. The use of blank space, for example, can induce users to project themselves onto the void. The authors further asserted that poetic expression forms over time, and creatives should use everyday objects which are highly accessible in order to implement poetic interaction. They encourage creatives to utilise ungraspable materials like light, smoke, scent and sound to generate mysteriousness and a flexibility of information delivery. According to Lin, Chang and Liang (2011), following this poetic framework transforms user behaviour and attitudes and generates poetic significance.

This research tries to achieve poetic significance in a fluid, reflective way that can allow room for all the things that are encouraged by the model: imagination, fluidity, and intuition.

4.2.2 Project Methods

In an effort to override the idea of design as a rational planning activity and revert to more artistically oriented approaches, while keeping in line with suggestions by Bachelard (1958), the practice-based research was as follows:

1. **Design projects chosen.**
   This was a set of self-directed and multi-faceted projects that addressed areas of personal interest. A high degree of research and conceptual development was involved.
2. **Artificial constraints were added.**
   Artificial constraints, as detailed below, were added during the ideation stage (the space that exists before a design solution is found). They include the use of outmoded technologies, such as a Risograph photocopier and an overhead projector, and looking at social science ideas symbolically. These constraints deviated from normal practice. This approach was not to dismiss normal practices, but to utilise different methods in the hope of discovering a point of comparison.
3. **Three creative works were completed.**
   These were titled *How to Grow a Chair, Travelling Through the Unfamiliar,* and *Poetic Tactics.*

The creative journey of these works was analysed, and how the restraints impacted and/or changed the creative outcomes.

4.3 Projects

The exploratory stage of examining journal articles, interviews, case studies and studio practice, as discussed previously, informed the development of an approach to design based on theories of Poetics. Three practical projects were conducted: *How to Grow a Chair, Travelling Through the Unfamiliar*, and *Poetic Tactics*. The methodology used is described in detail below.

4.3.1. How to Grow a Chair
Domaine de Boisbuchet, France

Materials - Outdoor installation using found objects and tools, on the grounds of the Domaine de Boisbuchet, France, whilst on the Vitra Design Fellowship. These Fellowships are part of the international summer academy held at Domaine de Boisbuchet, a country estate in the southwest of France.

Artificial Constraints - Scientific theory as symbolic inspiration.

Design Process - In creating *How to Grow a Chair*, I realised that sustainable design need not be boring. Ideas around environmental sustainability can be poetic, beautiful, and even absurd. The project developed during my participation in a workshop called, 'The Outdoor Office'. In this workshop, we were asked to invent interesting solutions that would help facilitate working outside. The motivation for exploring this was based on the enjoyment being outdoors provides, but it was also suggested that this would be a more sustainable way to work because of lower electricity and infrastructure needs.

For the project, I was offered a large materials budget to bring my office to life. I instantly felt concerned about the long journeys the materials would have to make to arrive at the Domaine de Boisbuchet. Was it worth it for a hypothetical experiment in sustainability? Instead of being excited by this offer, I was appalled by it. I imagined the urban sprawl that might occur if all the office workers of the world suddenly moved outside, the spaces they would take up, the cars they would need to travel to them, and questioned the validity of the thinking behind the brief.

Having read on the subject of biomimicry, I had learned that nature itself often has the answers to design problems (Benyus 1997). Popularised by scientist and author Janine Benyus in her 1997 book *Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature*, biomimicry is a way of viewing and valuing nature. It introduces a conceptual framework based not on what

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we can extract from the natural world, but on what we can learn from it. The core idea is that nature has already solved many of the problems we are grappling with: energy, food production, climate control, non-toxic chemistry, transport, packaging, and more. If we observe nature carefully, we may find we already have our answers (Benyus 1997).

To the bewilderment of my workshop coordinator and fellow participants, I took a substantively different approach to this brief. I refused offers of materials and foraged around the estate. I based my project on Benyus's premise, but in a symbolic way to inspire ideas, as opposed to a rigorous scientific framework. At every stage of the project, I chose to put nature before my design and before my desire to consume in order to make things. Confining myself to this metaphor proved to be a useful way of stimulating the imagination, and forced the pursuit of creative solutions.

In a creative haven, with the work of many great artists and creatives left scattered around and amongst the Domaine de Boisbuchet, the estate exists as a creative incubator in which one great idea continually springs from the next. I merely needed to walk around to find stimuli for new approaches. My first idea was to construct a chair from twigs, but I soon realised that this chair would be rather awkward to sit on. To achieve the brief, my office needed to be comfortable and functional.

Design Outcome - Given these artificial constraints, it occurred to me that many living things do not build their homes with extra materials, they dig them out. I decided to find a hill, and simply hollow out a chair. I shaped it into the form of the classically famous office chair, the Eames, and filled it with moss for comfort. I even watered it to make sure the grass and moss would grow nicely after I left. Strangely, the chair was functional, comfortable, and easy to produce without any excess materials, and was thus sustainable. Instead of bringing materials in, I simply took things away and moved them about. Yet, at the same time, it was expressive. It commented on the absurdity of the modern world and our addiction to gadgets, gizmos, and "work" – it was playful without being didactic.

I realised that some of the best, most creative work occurs when connections are made in places where none previously seemed to exist. By limiting my resources in such a way, I went down a creative road that I would not have followed through my normal paths of reasoning.

Since then, I have also begun to see connections to nature elsewhere, such as the Campana Brothers' beautiful structures that are inspired by the bowerbird, which I viewed during the Vitra Fellowship at the Domaine de Boisbuchet.

By refusing design materials and a standard approach in the 'The Outdoor Office' project, I hoped to replicate a time of pure craftsmanship; limited tools, yet lots of imagination. Limiting design resources, as well as confining myself to emphasise nature over my design, allowed me to think laterally, stimulate the imagination, and pursue creative solutions. The *How to Grow a Chair* experiment led well into the next stage of research — *Travelling Through the Unfamiliar* — whereby, the design outcome of a presentation was examined when restricting the use of modern-day technology and software, as discussed below.

Figure 14 *How to Grow a Chair Installation on the grounds the Domaine de Boisbuchet, photo taken by the artist, France, 2010.*

Figure 15 *How to Grow a Chair Installation on the grounds the Domaine de Boisbuchet – Participant trying out the chair, photo taken by the artist, France, 2010.*

Figure 16 *How to Grow a Chair Installation on the grounds the Domaine de Boisbuchet – side shot, photo taken by the artist, France, 2010.*

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Figure 17 *How to Grow a Chair Installation on the grounds the Domaine de Boisbuchet – the outdoor office in use, photo taken by the artist, France, 2010.*

A presentation and performance for AGDA (Australian Graphic Design Association)
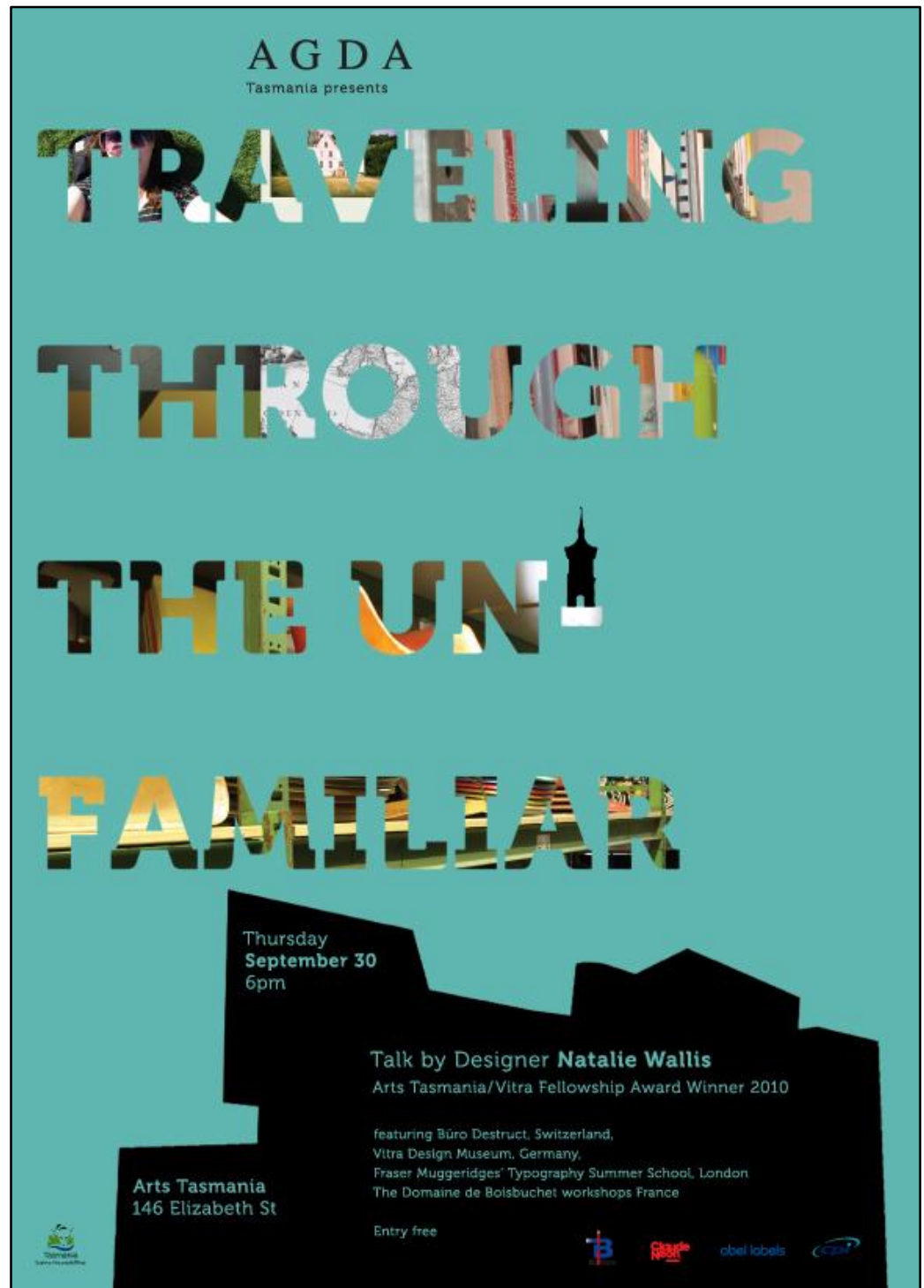
Figure 18 *Official poster for Travelling Through the Unfamiliar by Nadine Kessler, 2010.*

Materials and Format - Public talk and performance aided by photocopies, place cards, individual messages, posters, projector artefacts and transparencies, hand-animated audio.

Artificial Constraints - Present without the use of a computer.

Design Process - My second project was a presentation and performance for AGDA, which I called *Travelling Through the Unfamiliar*. In this presentation, I talked about my experience at the Domaine de Boisbuchet as well as an overview of my research as a whole.

In preparation for the evening's presentation, I had speedily designed a slick presentation, but something did not feel right. The presentation was good, but I was not going to wow anyone. I could not escape the suspicion that this omnipresent tool was at the root of this. In retrospect, I can see that any tool shapes what we create, but I was simply motivated by curiosity as to what would happen if I took it away. Thus, I challenged myself to present without bringing a computer into the room. Having given myself this challenge, I was stumped as to how I would present the material.

Design Outcome - The constraints imposed were successful. I went from a standard powerpoint to a creative explosion. I made photocopies, turned some of these into place cards, left one on each person's chair, and wrote individual messages about my findings. I made wall posters highlighting interesting elements with a red pen. I found an old-fashioned projector and made overhead transparencies which had a beautiful raw aesthetic that matched my photocopies; and through a series of cut-outs and stills, I hand-animated a film clip on the spot. In this process, I made some mistakes like putting slides on upside down, but the audience were encouraging. I had unwittingly freed myself from a creative block, a block that, up until then, I had not been quite cognizant of.

The extent to which the final outcome deviated from its starting point by the simple subtraction of one tool was surprising. My initial presentation was quite dull. My presentation methods were not new; they were things that I already knew how to do[4]. My default practice, shaped by the tool, had become stale. By reflecting on my practice, I was able to subvert this tendency. The computer was not at fault, but the ease at which it allowed me to create things was having an impact, and not for the better.

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4 Having a Bachelor in Design, meant that I was well versed in hand-generated techniques.

I reflected that at some point in my practice I had let detailed craftsmanship slide. As a young creative, I spent days drawing and painting. Today, in the commercial setting, I pump out a slick layout in hours. My newfound time freed me up to develop the other elements of a project. But, I asked, does it become a problem when we no longer notice that crucial aspects of design thinking come through the "craft"? Does reliance on one tool perhaps cause us to create aesthetically or imaginatively lacking solutions?

Figure 19 *Travelling Through the Unfamiliar - Overhead projector in use, 2010.*

Figure 20 *Travelling Through the Unfamiliar Postcards, photo taken by artist, 2010.*
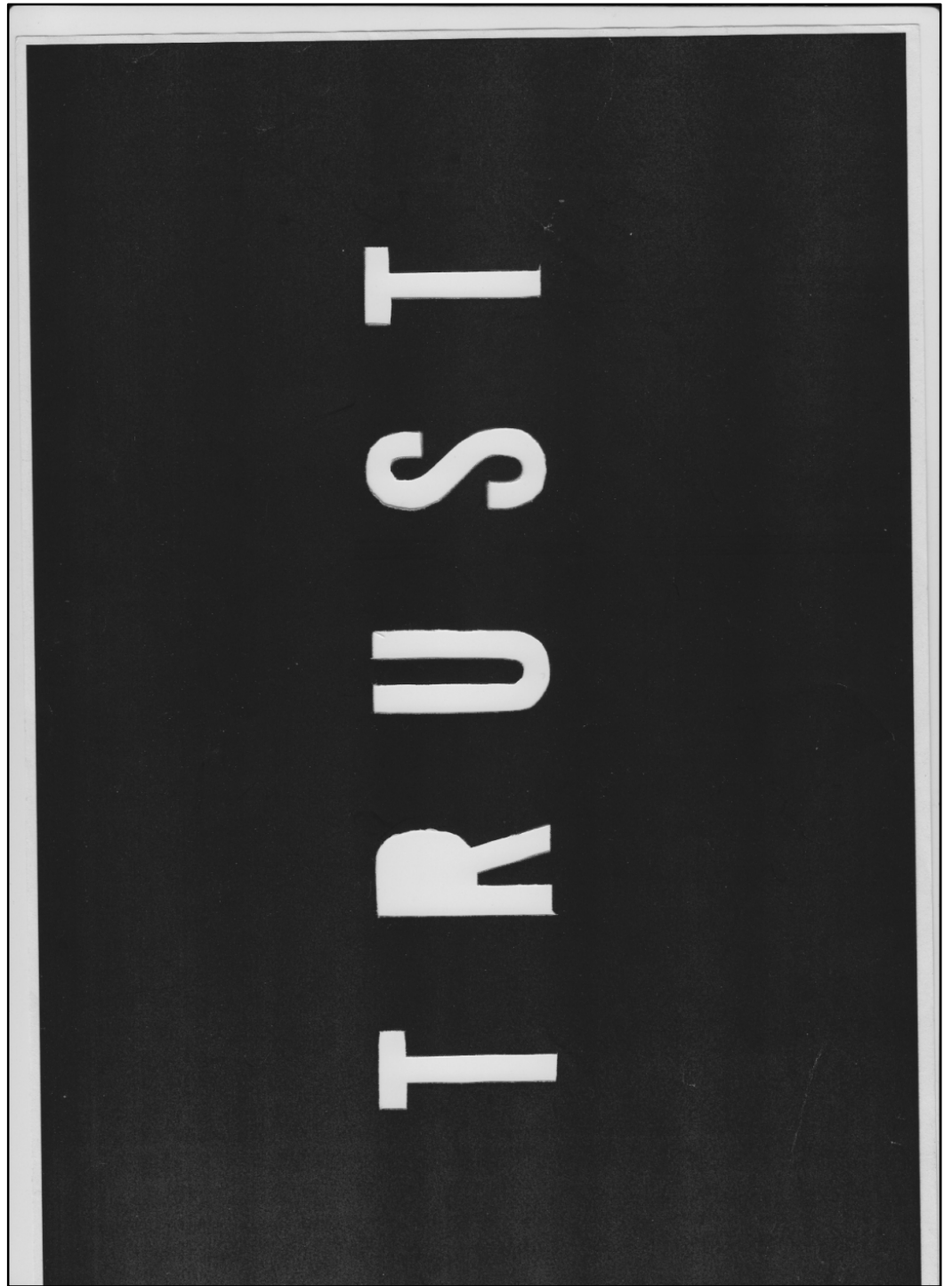
Figure 21 *Travelling Through the Unfamiliar - Paper cut out, photo taken by author, 2010*

4.3.3. Poetic Tactics - Self-published magazine

For the purposes of this project, I chose to subvert the production technique.

Materials - Self-published magazine, hand-printed, collated and bound.

Constraints - I removed the traditional printing press and replaced it with a RISO printer in order to publish a magazine without using the array of normal professional printing services. The question was: How much of a magazine could I produce without using standard tools? Would it be possible? What problems and hurdles would I face? Would the end result be obviously or materially different?

Design Process - *Poetic Tactics* was a multi-faceted project. I interviewed subjects, wrote the articles, designed the magazine, and then physically produced it. These phases are discussed separately in the context of how they relate to the research questions.

WRITTEN CONTENT FOR POETIC TACTICS

Poetic Tactics is the culmination of a body of work, including a series of investigations and interviews. The publication addresses the current role of the design practitioner by initiating a conversation with influential creatives and thinkers from around the world. It is one long example of reflective practice in which I contemplate the questions of this research.

The content is targeted towards practitioners and academics interested in the discourse and practice of Visual Communications. The aim was to start a conversation between the local, national, and international design community, and to help others who might also be grappling with similar issues. Each article addresses a different key question that arose in the course of my investigation. The articles are based on my initial interviews that were the motive force behind my research.

DESIGN AND LAYOUT OF POETIC TACTICS

Modern processes make the job of designing easier, but they can also regiment our outcomes. They offer a large-but-finite set of possibilities that include common industry fonts, set page sizes, finite printing and paper stock options.

The first question was: Could I do the layouts by hand? Given that I wanted to experiment with the RISO, I flew to Sydney and conducted exploratory research trials at the Rizzeria co-operative. I tried creating layouts on the fly, on the RISO itself, using printed copy straight from a word processing document, cutting it up like a dadaist and collaging the pieces together straight on the RISO plate. I hand-painted

some of the headlines, combined them with text, photocopied and laid them out directly on the RISO, experimenting with colours and layouts on the spot.

These experiments had real aesthetic potential. Having just returned from Fraser Muggeridge's typography summer school, I was looking at all the small elements that make up a page, sideways and back-to-front type, and ways of mixing unusual fonts elegantly.

This publication is targeted towards design practitioners and academics interested in the discourse and practice of Visual Communication. The objective of the magazine is to create a conversation between the local, national and international design community.

It is a collection of interviews and reflections gathered whilst doing research. Through the interviews I draw a connection to my current research - in which I look at some of the constraints facing us -and how we might move towards more creative, intuitive and expressive communications. Some of these interview transcripts have been read and written into articles by third year students from the Visual Communication studio at the Tasmanian School of Art.

The theme of the magazine is Poetics & Tactics:

Poetics: The personal, artistic or expressive devices used in the creative process, the intuitive manifestation of concepts, the semantics of Visual Communication and the intangible (poetic) forces that fuel the creative process.

Tactics: The strategies, processes or production methods used to achieve a particular design outcome. Tactics is the art of carefully planning communication methodology using extensive research methods and tests.

Poetics and Tactics are strategies that can be explored simultaneously or in isolation. Visual Communication is however increasingly moving focus towards more strategic models. Through these interviews I am questioning if this could actually be starting to stifle the creative process?

The features highlight some of the studios I've visited and got to know. I've been fortunate to meet a lot of respected designers, observe them in their surroundings and talk to them about their process. Speaking to them provide me with great insights that enable me to make interesting creative investigations in my own work. It isn't about 'what' techniques or strategies my peers have taught me that is significant, but their stories of 'how' they do what they do.

Many of the projects and designers that have been featured also have some kind of social agenda. Historically groups such as the Russian Constructivists or the Bauhaus had strong goals for their designed new worlds. But did it work? Can it work? By moving towards a tactical approach, are we trying to prove something that is impossible to prove?

introduction

Figure 22 *Poetic Tactics hand generated layouts - introduction page experiment*

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introduction

buro destruct

fraser muggeridge

ken garland

paul elliman

jeff knowles

how to grow a chair

reflection - ezzio manzini visits hobart

nancy mauro flude

Figure 23 *Poetic Tactics hand generated layouts - contents page experiment*

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Emotions drive Process

A moment in the life of Buro Destruct.

In June this year I visited the Büro Destruct studio. It is situated in Bern, a picturesque world heritage city - on a small land outcropping of the river. It's beautiful but it does strike you as a pretty traditional setting for a non-traditional group. Obviously these days you can have your studio anywhere though. Bern is also the place where the group studied, grew up and first founded the studio.

The group made their appearance in 1994, as a graphic artists' collective and over the next few years grew into an internationally acclaimed design studio, publishing the first comprehensive collection of their work in 1999, signifying new era of Swiss graphic design. They aimed to keep the boundary between art and commercial graphic design fluid and worked on a variety of projects that incorporate illustration, character design, Posters, animation, Public Art, exhibition design as well as video and music. Their now countless publications are inspirational, but also practically useful tools for studios.

On my visit I was able to chat to them about their work and also spend the day with them on the river. It was an interesting couple of hours. We met Buro Destructs moustached high school sports teacher, a man running behind his wife with an extremely large 'hello kitty' bag, an eccentric old man on a recumbent bicycle and the 'holiday swiss' - a couple so tanned I got flash back to the old lady in 'its about mary'. Definitely an inspiring bunch of characters for a group of illustrators. It seems that you can in fact find inspiration in all places and perhaps it is not the environment that is an overpowering force that shapes the creative process. It is simply that the creative person has the ability to draw these things from it.

The following transcript highlights segments of my interview with them.

In many ways the group have made a direct disconnection with their Swiss heritage. In the homeland of Wolfgang Weingart, you instead chose to take influence from Japan? What has it been like working under the weight of Switzerland's typographic traditions?

L: To be honest we were not so informed about it, and we didn't care. In recent years there has been a revival of modernist typography but at the time we were starting out we didn't think about it. Our gut feeling was actually ... 'it just sucks'. We had to do everything by hand and it was very time consuming. We were more interested in comic books and illustration.
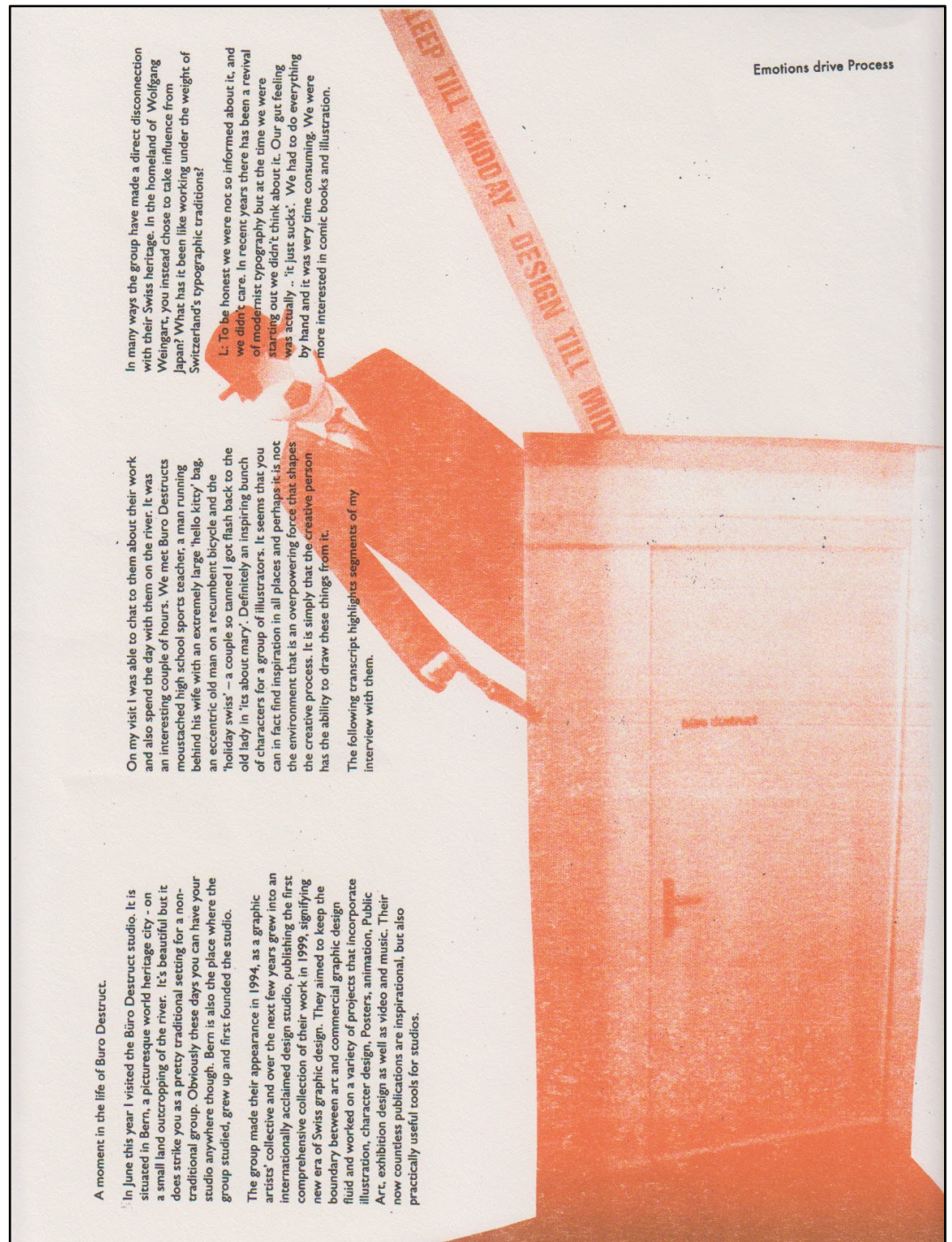

Figure 24 *Poetic Tactics hand generated layouts - Layout experiment*

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After some deliberation, I came to the conclusion that this was all known territory for me. The Dada movement famously experimented with collage and cut-up writing as early as the 1920s (Burroughs 1963). Having spent significant parts of my undergraduate degree training myself in experimental typography methods, and combining a mix of hand-generated with text to produce layouts of value and expression, I felt that I had a fairly good grasp of how to combine them with the computer to create interesting results.

It seemed the uncharted territory was to be production itself, and I settled on a grid-based page format that would give me the cognitive space to experiment during production, and also give me the ability to carefully reproduce the written content in a way that did justice to my interviews. I was worried that, by doing it by hand, I might create typos or other mistakes. Upon reflection I can see that even when deliberately trying to break the rules and experiment, a fear of doing something 'wrong' still impacted on my creative choices.

Using digital tools in the way that Metahaven does might have provided more interesting creative territory. Their beautiful, somewhat kitsch, layouts come from using computer software in ways it was never intended to be used. This might pose an interesting question for future research: How could I set artificial constraints within the digital space itself? And how might this impact on my practice?

MAKING POETIC TACTICS

Working with a RISO machine is very hands-on. The technology has become popular with creatives of late, and boutique printers have opened up in Melbourne and Sydney. It is cheaper than digital printing, and the use of ink gives the production qualities of offset printing. I wanted to use a RISO machine for the production, so I flew to Sydney and experimented at the Rizzeria co-operative.

The cheaper cost also makes it more utilitarian. Self-publishing was something I had observed in London, and I realised that, by reclaiming older and less expensive tools, we not only renew forgotten creative avenues, but also become more entrepreneurial. I could print my magazine and disseminate it without raising the $15,000 that would be needed to print through professional printers; the cost of utilising older and less expensive tools to self-publish would be closer to $400-$500.

Given that my previous discussions had surrounded the use of technology, I decided to print the magazine on a Risograph MZ790 stencil printer. Using a new technology opens up a new set of constraints that take the design in a new direction. In addition, the magazine is much cheaper to produce using this method and is thus more utilitarian.

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There was an element of craft involved that is no longer needed in a contemporary studio or design practice. It is likened to being the printer and the creative all in one. I had to troubleshoot the technology (which, unlike modern printers and computers, was quite idiosyncratic), adjust paper stocks, fiddle with how I fed the paper through the printer so it did not get jammed, and create a mini production line so I could paginate correctly.

When going through the process, the original is sent to the machine and a master is created. This master is then wrapped around a drum and inked up. The paper runs flat through the machine, while the drum rotates at high speed to create each image on the paper. Because the process involves real ink, the output is subject to drying time. In the first phase of printing, I bought a beautiful paper stock, which I tested before purchase. Once I got to actually printing large quantities, though, I had to discard this stock. The ink did not soak into the paper quickly enough to avoid smudging. My first rounds of prints were unusable. I also found that heavily inked pages smudged a lot, regardless of paper stock, so I had to alter the layout and imagery on the fly. These last-minute changes are an illustration of how technology has a strong influence on the final products we create.

I think the most interesting thing about this process was the observations and comparison I was able to make to the standard contemporary practice. It highlighted how absent this kind of craft is becoming. Of course, creatives still choose paper stocks and do press checks, but these production processes are becoming increasingly streamlined. At my current employer, for example, they no longer have somebody who creates business cards when a new person joins; the process has been computerised. This process allows any staff member to type a name into an online template, and those templates are sent directly to a printer.

High-level creatives will always be needed, but the craftspeople who once studied typography and made beautiful cards individually are largely redundant, especially when typographic layouts can be sourced so cheaply and easily from the internet and replicated in seconds with computer software. It is worth considering now how to redefine the role of the practitioner in the studio.

Maker Process - RISO MZ790 stencil printer. Given that I had only used the printer once before, I faced a series of setbacks that I did not anticipate.

Geographic constraints of using an older, hard to find technology meant that I had one week to work on the RISO and print my magazine. This fitted with the objective to create a project in uncommon constraints, as a process to learn from. I understood that there would be problems, but I wanted to learn from the experience.

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I had a small manual from Japan, and virtually no online troubleshooting facilities. I had gone from reflecting on the digital age straight into a black hole of nothing and more nothing. It was baffling but wonderful to be able to experience it; the manual was a kind of old and discovered treasure map.

Once I got the printer to work, it simply did not work as I intended it to. When I sent something to print, a completely different file, that I had deleted, would come out of the printer. I tried everything from ink settings, to changing the image formats to make it smaller, and a number of other prepress experiments. In the end, it turned out to be a faulty USB cable; but I had lost five days' production time.

When I chose to work this way, I wondered how the process might impact the visual manifestation of the project. I had made illustrations and collages from photos and bits and pieces I had collected along the way. I also originally had a lot of photographic work taken on my fellowship trip. I had taken an amazing photo of Paul Elliman's slide, 'We are all going to die'. The illustrations also included anatomical drawings that referenced a period in which the production of imagery was a handcraft. I developed a whole series that highlighted the different roles that the design practitioner might take on, such as a craftsman and magician, for example.

All this beautiful imagery that I compiled and created would not print on the RISO. I had to make quick and dramatic changes to the designs while I worked. Being under tight time constraints, I did what I could and used typographic headlines as a replacement for the imagery.

As mentioned previously, in the first phase of printing, I bought a beautiful paper stock, which I had to discard. The only paper that would soak up the ink quickly enough was a thin, porous, recycled copy paper. This meant that I would have a significant amount of show-through on the pages of the magazine, but the compromise at least meant the magazine would be free of smudging.

When using the machine, I also developed skills that I was no longer using in my contemporary studio and design practice. I had to fix the technology which, unlike modern printers and computers, was quite idiosyncratic. I had to adjust paper stocks and fiddle with how I fed the paper through so it did not get jammed, sometimes even holding down the paper in the feed with my finger. I enjoyed this process, and it taught me useful tricks that place modern practices into context.

I see production techniques everywhere now. There is an art to chopping, to binding, to collating, to technology. There is an art to everything, and it is exciting when you take the time to notice. I thoroughly enjoyed the ability to make observations and comparisons to my standard contemporary practice as it highlighted for me how

absent this kind of craft is becoming. The comparison also stressed how modern creatives are unaware of the trial and error, frustration, and failure involved in adopting a new design process. This is the true curse of digital tools; they are so reliable yet hide all of this material knowledge.

Figure 25 *Poetic Tactics Test Material, photo taken by the artist, 2011.*

Figure 26 RISO Printing Process - sections of the magazines laid out, photo taken by artist, 2011.
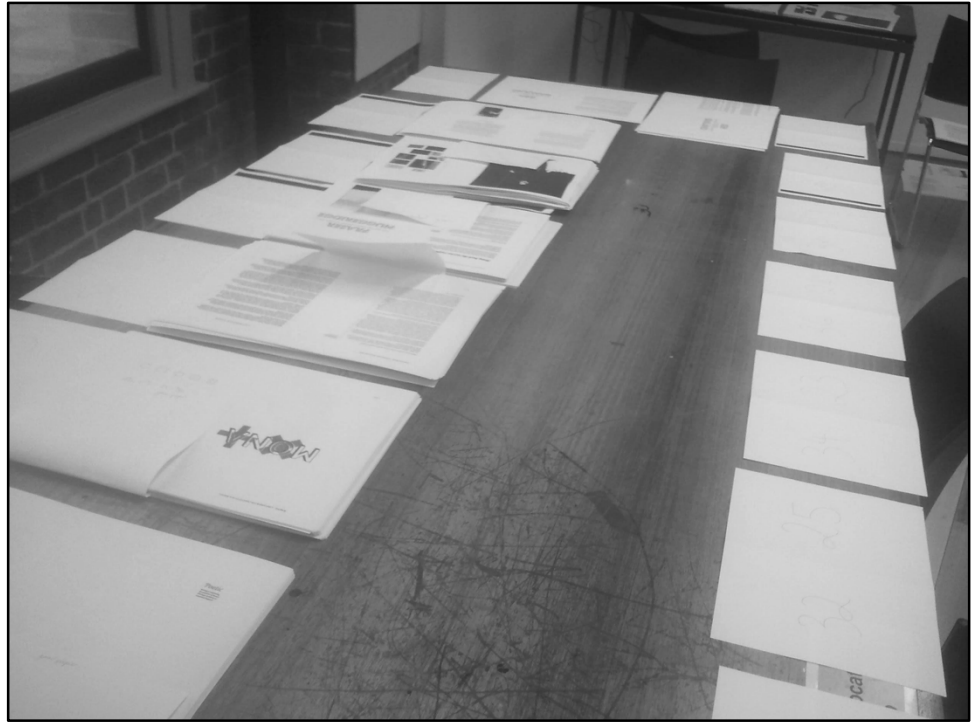
Figure 27 *Poetic Tactics Building up Pages, photo taken by the artist, 2011.*

Design Outcome – Throughout this process, my discussions with Jeff Knowles kept coming to mind. Knowles said that, when working under Neville Brody, he would 'let the chips lay where they fall' (Wallis 2012d, p. 51) . An example he provided was that Neville Brody never worried about low resolution images (Wallis 2012d). This was shocking, as I had always been taught that low resolution images were an amateur's foolhardy mistake. Neville Brody, however, was instrumental in creating the amazing covers for *The Face* because he made decisions like this. As John Ruskin once said, "To

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banish imperfection is to destroy expression" (Ruskin and Rosenberg 1964, p. 171). There are some elements of the magazine (Figure 29) that can be directly linked to the technology, such as the show-through. In a commercial studio, this would not be acceptable. In a self-published, independent publication perhaps there is more scope for this. It is an area for more practice-based experimentation in the future.

Figure 29 *Poetic Tactics Wolfgang Weingart spread, photo taken by the artist, 2011.*
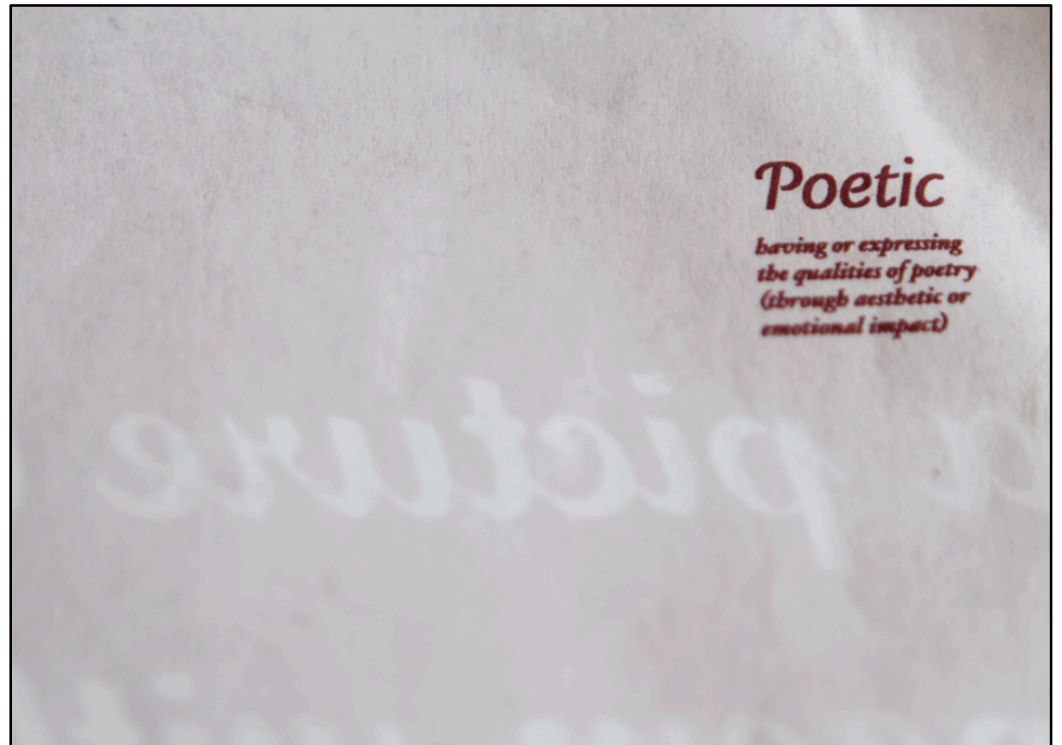
Figure 30 *Poetic Tactics close up 1 ink on page, photo taken by the artist, 2011.*

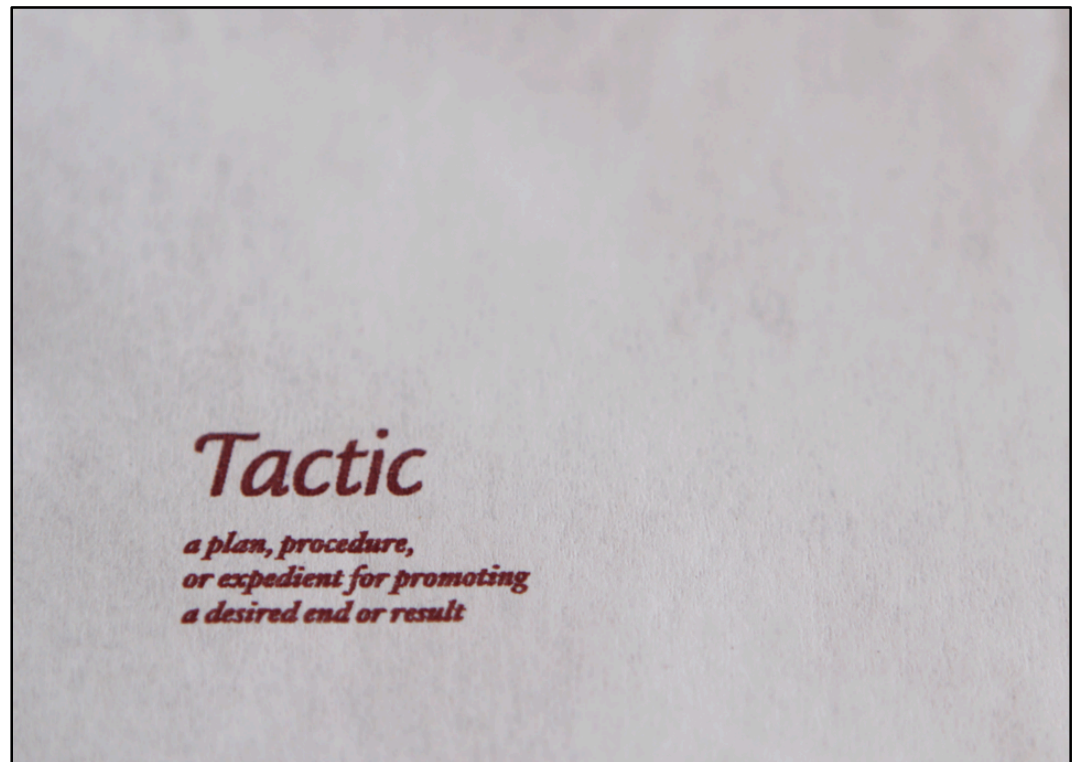**Figure 31** *Poetic Tactics Ken garland spread, photo taken by the artist, 2011.*

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Figure 32 *Poetic Tactics close up 2 ink on page, photo taken by the artist, 2011*

4.4 Chapter Summary

I started the research with the theory that the tools that Creatives use, and the contexts in which they operate, make a difference to the design products that are produced. In order to test this theory, a series of deliberate and artificial constraints was imposed in order to explore whether the design outcome would be different. It was concluded that, by posing artificial design constraints, fundamentally different work was produced. The constraints imposed drove creativity and imagination, and generated creative ways to solve problems, which may not have come about under current paths of reasoning and rigorous scientific frameworks, adopted by many modern creatives. Thus, it appears that, if we want to nurture creativity and deliberate experimentation, constraints and diversification of tools need to be incorporated into Design practice.

By using a Poetic framework, I used tools that I had not worked with before and learnt new material knowledge. This experience widened my insight into the amount of trial and error, frustration, and failure involved in adopting a new design process, which many creatives previously had to endure. I was also able to push back against the oppressive constraints of capitalism, dogma, modern tools, and the way they

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silently shape our practice. By hacking the process itself, l managed to sidestep some of the invisible forces and create projects that genuinely inspired people. For example, the *How to Grow a Chair* project spoke to people and elicited emotion as users could sit in it and feel content. It was almost as if people could see I had somehow freed myself of something and that in itself intrigued them. At the same time, the unique nature of the work was interesting to them. I did not evoke these feelings on purpose; it just happened. Ironically, it was also the best, most functional, and sustainable of all the projects. But is defining it that way not part of the problem?

In summary, this research encourages creatives to be reflective on their practice. It also offers a model of practice in the digital age. It asserts that, if creatives maintain their core strengths through experimentation and creativity, then there is no need to justify craft in the digital age.

Chapter Five – Conclusion

5.1 Final Thoughts

The digital age has disrupted the disciplines of Design, particularly Graphic Design, through making tools of production accessible to all (through low cost and powerful design software) and the consequent decrease in the level of technical knowledge required to practice. This has expanded the role of Graphic Design to become Visual Communication, and has enhanced the efficiency and productivity of creatives. But it has not altered the requirements and conditions for human creativity, the importance of which has been overshadowed in contemporary design practice. The rationalising of design practice through a focus on productivity has diminished the Poetic qualities of the work creatives produce and has made the practice of Visual Communication less effective and appealing. This research examines the impact of contemporary social, philosophical, and material contexts on Visual Communication through a multi-layered study of Poetics, from its recognition as a key methodology for design practice from the late 1950s through to the present day. It argues that a renewed focus on the long-running debate between philosophers, design theorists, and practitioners about the role of Poetics in design is timely and necessary.

To investigate the influence that Poetics has on the contemporary creative, first an analysis of the current practices of Visual Communication and the broader history of design methodologies and philosophies, with a focus on Poetics, through an analysis of literature, studio case studies and interviews was conducted. The interviews made it clear that the impacts of the digital age, a complex context incorporating new media platforms, new tools and evolving design philosophies, were having influencing creative practice and the way creatives conceptualised their practice at large.

Second, these ideas were tested through creative case studies in which design projects were conceptualised through metaphoric and artificial constraints (a Poetic framework). The Poetic framework was an effort to override the idea of design as a rational planning activity and revert to more artistically oriented approaches in keeping with suggestions by Bachelard (1958). The creative case studies were well-received, provoked dialogue, communicated ideas, were open to interpretation and engendered an emotional response. Thus, it was found that it is viable to create Poetic work in our contemporary setting.

In conclusion, this approach supports the argument that Poetics offers a productive methodology of practice and is worthy of further research. By looking at Visual Communication through the perspective of Poetics, creatives can recognise that their designs have a life beyond the creator, without having to justify or explicate their

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design. It has been suggested that, by creating a comprehensive poetic design method, contemporary practice can be enhanced (Lin, Lin, Chen & Lin, 2014). The Poetic framework offers a language to describe and assert the significance of the emotional, intuitive aspects of design that are crucial for the impact and longevity of a design beyond immediate utility. Poetics provides a framework to articulate the more ethereal and abstract qualities in design, and by doing so we can validate and argue for the value of those qualities, even in the most prosaic design practice.

5.2 Contribution to the Field

This research contributes to knowledge of Visual Communication practices by conceptualising the issues facing design practice in addressing the social contexts of the twenty-first century. It identifies Poetics as a design framework and methodology that has been influential historically, but whose continued validity is not widely acknowledged in contemporary design practices. Examining this historically important design methodology, gave me cause to re-embrace and contemplate the core aspects of creative work, and to consider their place in a contemporary setting. The research involved an examination and evaluation of the application of a Poetic methodology to three case studies —*How to Grow a Chair, Travelling Through the Unfamiliar* and *Poetic Tactics* — utilising this methodology. Through reflection on the successes and shortcomings of these three projects, it is concluded that Poetics is a valid and productive approach to Visual Communication. The research concludes that the Poetic qualities of imagination, intuition, and expression continue to be essential for innovative design practice.

This research encourages creatives to be reflective of their practice and offers a model of reflective practice to follow. As creatives define their role in the twenty-first century, they may take on the roles of social researcher, inventor or strategist, but this should not replace the role of what French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard, defined as the emotional response in design. He urged creatives to base their work on the experiences it will engender, rather than on abstract rationales that may or may not affect viewers and users (Bachelard 1958). This is as relevant today as it was when he wrote it in the late 1950s.

This research began with the hypothesis that the tools that are employed for ideation and production, and the contexts in which design operates, influence and even determine the design outcomes. In order to test that theory, a series of experimental design projects was conducted whereby deliberate and artificial constraints on standard tools, contexts, and practices were imposed (a Poetic framework), to assess whether the design outcomes would be substantially different from normal practice. As a result of the experiments, it was determined that the imposition of a conceptual model is not

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essential to design practice, and fundamentally different work was produced when a Poetic framework was imposed. Thus, it was concluded that, to nurture creativity in Visual Communication in the digital age, incorporating deliberate experimentation, intuition and imagination into design practice is a valuable strategy.

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Appendix 1 **– Fraser Muggeridge** *The art of simply doing things well*
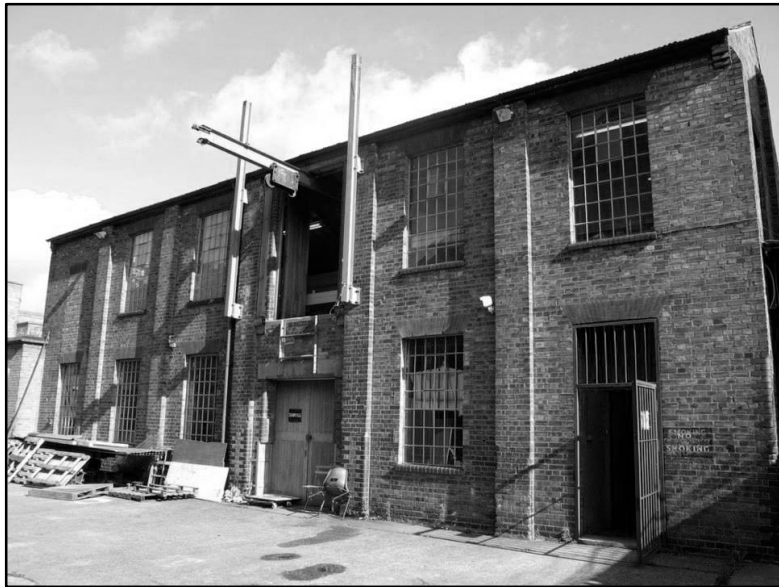
Typography Summer School headquarters

Decked out in a variety of purple suits, orange shirts and polished shoes, Fraser Muggeridge's presence immediately fills the room. The creative work produced by his studio has the same charisma; it is imaginative, expressive and mysterious — anything but mainstream.

Muggeridge recently ran a series of weeklong workshops Typography Summer School, which I was able to attend. One of the most interesting things about spending a week with Muggeridge was hearing his argument that there is beauty in something that is simply well done; and that (aghast) a concept need not always exist. Muggeridge had a different impression of typography than I did. His definition was very much based on typographic detailing, conventions, the form and the craftsmanship, whereas I had always thought of it in terms of the messages and statements being made. Now I can see his point — the intrigue of the unknown creates a space for the audience to weave their own meaning.

Fraser Muggeridge (centre) Typography Summer School.

The first point Muggeridge makes on day one of the workshop is that a designer's concept can cloud the original vision of a project. Muggeridge works with a lot of practising artists, so this is particularly pertinent. I discovered this first-hand when, as part of the workshop, I produced a pitch for Jem Finer. I was cautioned not to overshadow my work too much with concept (a notion unfamiliar to me) but this advice didn't sink in straight away.

A selection of work from the Fraser Muggeridge studio website pleasedonotbend.co.uk

Jem Finer is the creator of 'Longplayer', a 1000-year-long musical composition. It began playing at midnight on 31 December 1999 and will continue to play without repetition until the last moment of 2999, at which point it will complete its cycle and begin again *(1.)* Intrigued by this idea, I became very excited when I recalled old circular optical illusions, in which the original shape morphs or disappears if you stare at it long enough (like the beginning of the music).

My idea was good, but by focusing on this I was forgetting a simple fact: 'Longplayer' already has a rich visual language of its own. Finer uses steel bowls in an intricate and complex arrangement that relies on elaborate mathematical algorithms and timing cues. The very shape of the built structure is intriguing. When I showed my work to Finer, although he liked my thinking around the project, he found my

sketches and mock-ups a little abstruse. Usually I would have pushed through this resistance, but I realised it is important when designing not to impose your own visual structure over something if an interesting and authentic one already exists.
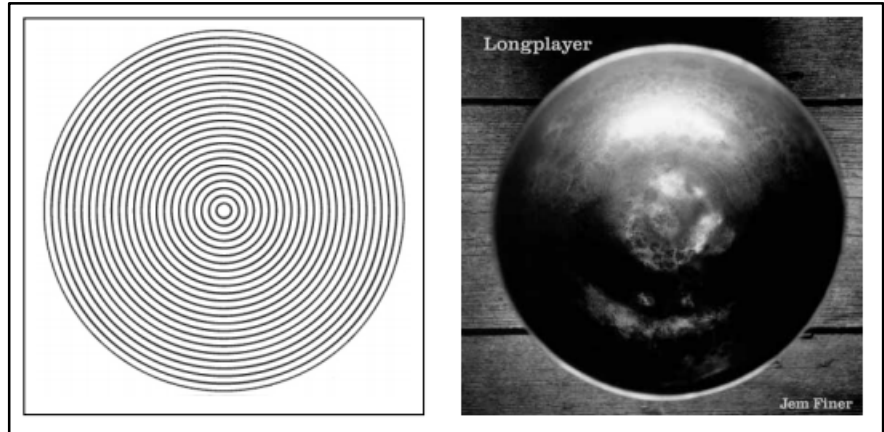
On the right is a sample optical illusion in which the original shape becomes obscured, and left, the original *'Longplayer live'* catalogue designed by Muggeridge, displaying Finers musical bowls.

This leads me to Muggeridge's second point: a concept can potentially lead you to **'over design'**. In this process, I became so partial to my idea that all the aesthetic decisions I made thereafter were based on getting it across. For instance, for the Jem Finer pitch, I created my whole grid based around the vanishing point, instead of instinctively just trying to capture the right feel.

Sarah Newitt, a partner at Muggeridge's studio, made the final point. Focusing too much on the concept can lead you to neglect other aspects, such as the typographic detailing. She pointed out that even if you have the best idea in the world, if the care and time in which you approach a project are not present, your work looks careless. This in itself can communicate a lot. Your concept in all its dazzling lights will not distract from the fact you are either taking shortcuts or don't have the technical know-how to produce the job.

Fraser Muggeridge's approach is vastly different to, say, the likes of Bob Gill, who advocated a no-nonsense approach to design, writing in 1981:

Drawing is just like design. It's a process. A means not an end. Both are a way of making statements. So unless you have a specific point of view about something, don't even begin the process (2.)

This logo by Bob Gill demonstrates his concept-driven approach to design practice.

I once saw Gill speak in Sydney, and he argued with powerful rhetoric that a designer's creative practice should be dedicated to coming up with the right idea. When you have it, the design should be promptly produced by whatever suitable means you have at your disposal. He is a hugely influential designer, and I'm sure a key player in the 'concept movement'. It was certainly the way that I was taught to produce things. In the to-and-fro of the world though, I guess sometimes things go too far. Gill formed his approach in a time when everyone relied heavily on craft and 'style', but today the pendulum has swung the other way.

The points Muggeridge made on concept were refreshing and pertinent in our contemporary context. Designers no longer necessarily 'need' to be craftspeople as computers can do a lot of things for us. Our concepts can be materialised in hours, even minutes. But if you want to be a really good designer, the importance of craftsmanship is worth remembering. Carefully laboured objects inspire a feeling within us that we often cannot articulate. Sometimes this is the only method or tool we need.

Originally published in Poetic Tactics, 2011.
Notes:
      1. LONGPLAYER TRUST (2011) http://longplayer.org/.

2. BAGLEE, P. (1999) 'Reputations: Bob Gill', Eye Magazine.
    Available at: http://www.eyemagazine.com/feature/article/bob-g

Ken Garland is famous for writing the First Things First manifesto in 1964. The manifesto represents another theme that seemed present the day that I spent with him — a stance against prescriptive ways of doing things. In it, he advocates that designers are not just trained for advertising, a position he retains today.

Garland was a student at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London, and graduated in 1954. He then worked as art editor of Design magazine from 1956 to 1962. It was the postwar era and a time of new, exciting, radical and subversive events. Perhaps like a lot of baby boomers, he found it easy to break into the design world:

"My generation happened to be around just at the time when certain people felt the need for us. I guess it looks significant because there were so few of us — there were a dozen at the most who had their fingers on the certain pulse"(1.)

Once he was in, he began to find his own way of being there.

The First Things First manifesto was signed by 22 fellow visual communication designers calling for their skills to be put to worthwhile use.

"We have reached a saturation point at which the high pitched scream of consumer selling is no more than sheer noise," it stated. The manifesto argued that "signs for streets and buildings, books and periodicals, catalogs, instructional manuals, industrial photography" should have priority over "cat food, stomach powders, detergent, hair restorer."

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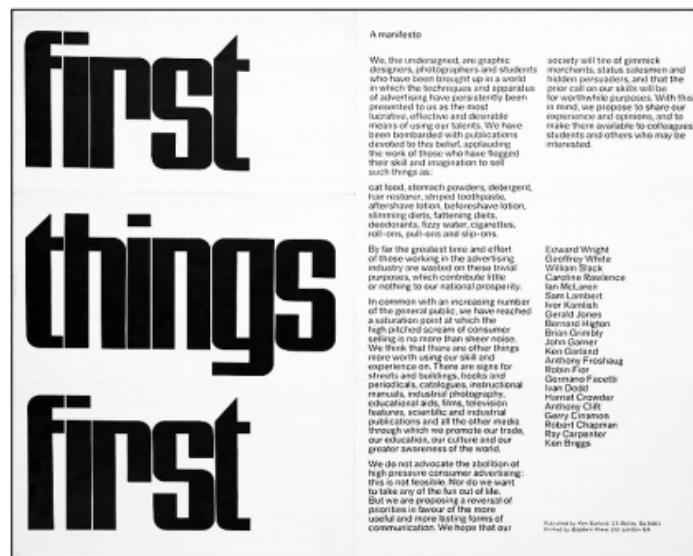
The original 'first things first' manifesto.

In the year 2000, the manifesto was re-issued by Adbusters. Garland and his fellow signatories re-stated that their skill and imagination should not be wasted on selling *"dog biscuits, designer coffee, diamonds, detergents, hair gel, cigarettes"*. Even after all those years, the profession's time and energy was used up persuading people to buy things that were *"inessential at best"*.

Although the re-issue was not openly received by all, it did put the topic of how closely visual communication relates to capitalism back on the agenda. Many people believe you can't extricate the two, but pictures and symbols are a time-honoured means of expression. They came long before alphabets and scripts were used to share ideas and feelings, but nobody would suggest that written language exists merely to sell.

Ken Garland's early work

Throughout his career, Garland has not only critiqued why we do things, but how we do them. He is famous for challenging the idea of the 'corporate identity', and refuses to work with multinationals on work of this kind.

I think a corporate identity for a large company is deadening, because it means we're going to be confronted by identical imagery wherever we look. It's an affront, and I don't think we should do it. Now you could say, if something's going to be everywhere, let me try and find a way in which it's restrained. Sounds like nonsense though, doesn't it? (2.)

Garland argues that in some countries, Bangladesh for instance, societies do without orthodoxies of graphic information. It is not customary in Bangladesh to use systems such as street signs or house numbers, which means people need to place faith in the community around them: *"It's quite good to rely on people helping people to find your way around"(3.)* It's true that there are so many ways one could do something and multiple solutions to every problem. So it seems strange that we let corporations govern the constraints in which we create our visual world.

Social issues have always been important to Garland; he is an active political campaigner, writer, teacher, lecturer and photographer.

However, it should be pointed out that he has always held his clients in the utmost regard and has never tried to assert his political leanings in this context:

"Clients were reassured that we had their needs at heart, and were not engaged in some separate agenda of our own. I have to say that too much handwringing about 'Are we being socially aware?' hampers the work of the studio. We avoided it, for the most part."

When I asked about what worried him about design today, two things came to mind. He states that there seems to be no place on earth these days that is not *"festooned"* by graphic messages. *"On a small mountain road in Sikkim, an Indian province that lies between Nepal and Bhutan, on the third highest mountain in the Himalayas, I came across a giant advertisement for Kit Kat, just outside an otherwise charming little town. If I had been driving the car instead of being a passenger I might have run it over".* Garland is also disconcerted by the emphasis on market research today. *"Market research and all that jazz gets in the way of imaginative thinking and fresh ideas. It wasn't like this when I started in the business." (6)*

Garland has had a successful and rewarding career. He has managed to balance a commercial career without compromising his ideals, and has contributed to the field in a substantial way. He has also enjoyed himself: *"I unreservedly recommend this career to my successors. It's such fun!"*

Originally published in Poetic Tactics, 2011

1. Typography Summer School 2010
2–5. ODLING-SMEE, A. (2001) Ken Garland is known for First Things First, but his work is playful and personal as well as political. Eye Magazine.
6. This topic is further discussed in this publication in MONA — a metaphor for creativity as a whole.

Appendix 3 **– Nadine Kessler on Wolfgang Weingart**

A good teacher passes on not what he does, but the spirit in which he does it.

My rendition of Nadine and her former mentor.

Nadine Kessler studied at Schule für Gestaltung Basel (Basel School of Design), under the tutorage of Wolfgang Weingart. Today she runs her own design company and teaches typography at the Tasmanian School of Art. She spoke with me about what it was like to study under one of the most famous typographers of our time.

Kessler defines a typographer as someone who not only understands the difference and subtleties of typefaces but also skilfully chooses and arranges the written word/letters to communicate a message. She

is in good stead to make such a statement having studied at Schule für Gestaltung Basel (Basel School of Design), under the tutorage of Wolfgang Weingart.

Let's take ourselves back and imagine Germany in the late 1950s. Wolfgang Weingart began his typographic career as an apprentice hand compositor at a typesetting firm. Instead of computers, the average workplace was filled with metal type, pencils, tracing tables, pen and ink. Graphic production had not changed a lot since the advent of movable type 400 years prior, and printers trained their technicians to handle the complex tools and type apparatuses, but not really the design. In a large 'type house' more than 100 compositors would work together in a huge room, each standing waist-high to a type cabinet *(1)*.

Weingart had a yearning to not only compose but also create. As a child he felt a natural aptitude and leaning towards creative practise. He chose his career because his parents felt it was a good and practical outlet for such leanings. He diligently applied himself to master the trade and by age of 19 he was progressing well. It was at this time that he met Karl August Hanke *(2)*.

"Four days ago I visited the consulting designer at of Ruwe Printing. It was a decisive visit. I brought my work in a box, and opened it on a table. During my presentation I noticed Hanke's reaction was one of silence. After a long pause he revealed his disapproval. When I asked the reason for his negative opinion of my work, he opened a draw filled with his own current design work and past drawings. He told me that he had been a student at the Basel School of Design and, with few exceptions, renounced the graphic design practised in Germany as antiquated, having shown no development for decades […] he has left no doubt in my mind that the ideas originating in Switzerland are revolutionary. I am both inspired and yet disheartened. The night after my meeting with Hanke, I threw most of my work in the trash." (3)

Any creative person knows that frenzied moment when artworks are liable to be set on fire, ripped to shreds or stamped on. In his book My Path to Typography, Weingart takes us on his life's creative journey. It is a poignant and personal story. He describes his beginnings, his time at the Basel School of Design learning from the most innovative typographers of the time, how he studied the trade

and of those who came before him, his ups and downs, his feelings of inadequacy, and the tipping points whereupon he begins to innovate.

"Once I lost my grip on a heavy type drawer and it fell to the floor. It was filled with the smallest type we had in the shop, a six-point, semi-bold Berthold Akzidenz-Grotesk. Unforeseen and unpaid work for the weekend was assured. To distribute and replace every character back into the typecase, including punctuation and numbers, would take two full days. While gathering up letters I had a strange idea: to fill a cardboard ring with the type standing on the end, letter surface positioned upwards, until it was packed solid. […] Several projects that I worked on as an apprentice sparked ideas that would develop into long term themes." (4)

Weingart was interested in how far the graphic qualities of typography could be pushed while still retaining its meaning. He was very connected to his tools, and was said to feel most at home in the type workshop, but he manipulated those apparatuses and used them in his own way.

It was particularly interesting to me to meet Nadine Kessler, one his last students before he retired, and to witness the line of descent and development of some of these typographic traditions. Like Weingart himself, she had to spend hours simply drawing lines.
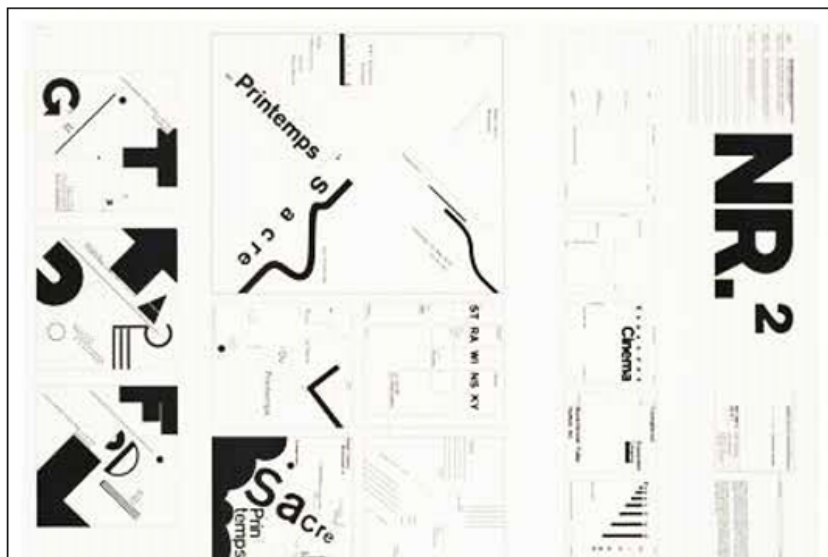

Weingart's Typographic Process, Nr 2. From Simple to Complex.

"As Wolfgang Weingart himself once described, 'the model of the Basel School is a full-service model'. By that he means it's a full-time, nine-to-five institution with permanent five-days-a-week attendance. I studied visual communications with typography as my major. I studied with him for three years just before he retired. It was a great class of about 10–15 students. We derived from Switzerland, Germany, Japan, Korea, USA, Peru and New Zealand."

Wolfgang Weingart Poster 1980.

"His approach was very hands-on. In the first year we focussed on a typographical book cover design. One typeface, three text sizes, no images. All hand-set — cut out with scissors and attached with sticky tape. The results were photocopied and lines were added. This time intensive process gave me a good feel for setting type and composition. He was quite a strict teacher with a cheeky side to him. We loved his anecdotes from his many decades of working and teaching around the globe. He knew his students very well and you always needed to take his comments with a grain of salt."
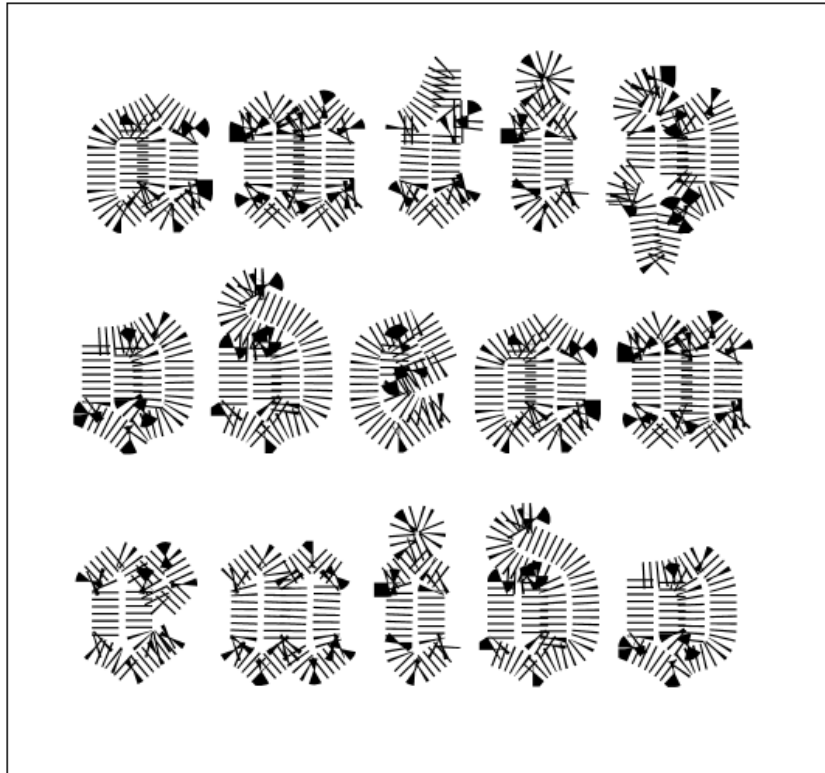
Kessler's 'noisy' typeface.

Kessler's own typographic compositions sometimes use existing fonts as a starting point, but always as a starting point to creating new and unique letterforms. She doesn't just 'use' fonts, she makes them her own, tweaking and changing them to suit her needs, but with the respect and care of someone who has been formally trained. Her work is distinctly European but is also connected to her surroundings, whether that is the remote communities of Central Australia or her island home in Tasmania. She also collaborates with various artists and is an advocate for female designers. In her work with Laura McCusker, entitled Ray, they created a code poem, which honoured international female designers, based on words each designer sent to them. The final piece was quite evocative.

While discussing typography, I asked Kessler if there was anywhere left to go?

"Even though I love old-fashioned letterpress printing, it's important for me to live in the present and embrace the technology we have today. Typography faces new challenges — it's used on screens rather than paper. It has allowed for the amount

of type designers (and typefaces) to increase immensely in the last decade. There are more typography resources available (in print and online) than ever. Therefore, typography knowledge is more easily accessible. This brought about an extensive network of designers worldwide, who share their experience and skills across languages in workshops and on web blogs."

"The typographical playground constantly changes shape. With new technology there are new ideas and experiments. John Maeda (MIT) presented his experimental designs during a lecture in Basel in 2002. He wrote computer programs that led to designs we had never seen before. Today, Process, a free software program developed in Europe, allows us to build our own program as the designer and experiment with type and/or images indefinitely."

Her response reminds me of Weingart making his own tools in the print shop, but also of his description of the turbulent 60's and the unstable footing that designers, compositors and typographers were standing on as the world went through revolutionary changes. In some ways, we are standing on the same kind of shaking ground today. Our tools and our processes are becoming homogenised and it's hard to know where to take them. Typographers, however, have always used tools, and their work has always been part of a larger context. Talking to Nadine Kessler reminds me that when constrained, the really creative people push the boundaries.

www.weingartarchive.com, www.nadinekessler.com

Originally published in Poetic Tactics, 2011.

Notes:

1–4 Weingart, Wolfgang. My Way to Typography. Basel: Lars Muller Publishers, 2000.

Appendix 4 *How to grow a chair*

Photographs taken on my Vitra Design fellowship.

Being sustainable need not be boring. It can be poetic, beautiful and even absurd.

As part of the Vitra Design Museum Fellowship in 2010, I participated in a project called 'The Outdoor Office' at the Domaine de Boisbuchet in the south of France. In this workshop, we were asked to invent interesting solutions that would help facilitate working outside. I took a slightly different course than was expected.

This idea was being explored for the enjoyment that could be held from being outdoors, but it was suggested that this would be a more sustainable way to work because of lower electricity and infrastructure needs.

I was offered a large materials budget to bring my office to life. This offer instantly made me concerned about the long journeys the materials would have to make to arrive at the Domaine de Boisbuchet. Was it worth it for a hypothetical experiment in sustainability? Instead of being excited by this broad premise I found that I was personally torn by it.

Biomimicry is a concept and way of viewing and valuing nature. The term was popularised by scientist and author Janine Benyus in her 1997 book Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature. It introduces a conceptual framework based not on what we can extract from the natural world, but what we can learn from it.

The core idea is that Nature has already solved many of the problems we are grappling with: energy, food production, climate control, non-toxic chemistry, transportation, packaging, and a whole lot more, so if we look to it we already have our answers (Benyus, 1997.) (2)

So, to inform my project, I used the above principle as a starting point despite the bewilderment of my workshop coordinator and fellow participants. I refused offers of materials and instead like most of the natural world I foraged around the estate. I based my project on the above premise but I used the model as metaphor and philosophy informing my approach as opposed to an exact science. I reaffirmed that design is a creative activity. Most of my work happens cognitively so, in my thought processes, I put nature before my design, before me and my desire to consume in order to make things. I did this at every stage of my project. Using the metaphor proved to be an interesting way of setting off my imagination.

Wandering around Domaine de Boisbuchet.

I was also lucky to be in a creative haven, with the work of many great artists and designers left scattered around and amongst the Domaine de Boisbuchet. The estate exists as an ideas haven in which one great idea continually springs from the next. I merely needed to walk around to come up with new angles. My first idea was to build a chair with twigs, I soon realised that this chair would be rather awkward to sit on. My office needed to be comfortable and functional. It then occurred to me that many living things don't build their homes with extra materials — they dig them out.

Design process, 'How to grow a Chair'

I decided to find a hill, and simply hollow out a chair. I shaped it in the form of the most famous office chair of all '*the Eames*' and filled it with moss for comfort. I even watered it to make sure the grass and moss would grow nicely after I left. Strangely the chair was functional, comfortable, easy to produce without any access materials and thus more sustainable than the other projects. Instead of bringing materials in, I simply took things away and moved them about. Yet, at the same time, it was expressive. It conveyed a statement on the absurdity of the modern world with our addiction to gadgets, gizmos and 'work'.

Close up.

I realised that some of the best, most creative work occurs when connections are made in places where none would seem to exist. When we go to places our normal thought processes do not take us to. By limiting myself in such a way I went down a creative road that I wouldn't have if I followed my normal paths of reasoning. Since then I have also begun to see connections to nature elsewhere. It seems nature hasn't only devised naturally sustainable systems but perhaps aesthetic ones also.

An outdoor office of simplicity.

Originally published in Poetic Tactics, 2011.

Notes:

1. Boisbuchet is an extensive area of countryside dominated by an old castle that is used for exhibitions. For a number of years, the Centre International de Recherche et d'Education Culturelle et Agricole (CIRECA) has maintained an international cultural centre there in collaboration with the Vitra Design Museum.

2. BENYUS, J. (1997) Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature, New York, Harper Perennial

Appendix 5 – Service Design *A useful method, or design hype?*

Historically groups such as the Russian Constructivists and the Bauhaus had strong ideals for their designed worlds. But did these ideas amount to anything? And is this even possible? One method that the socially driven design movement advocates today is 'service design'.

In a nutshell, service design is a practice in which designers speculate scenarios, imagine the problems people encounter and design activities and artifacts accordingly. It embodies interdisciplinary ideas being presented in current design research and commentary and often comprises of teams of experts working together to try and solve a problem as a group *(1)*.

The practice involves designing a kind of blueprint of how users might interact with the particular service or activity. The designers imagine all the possible actions that the users might take, and try to predict any problems that may manifest. They then, preemptively, create solutions.

In the context of visual communication, it highlights a slightly confusing predicament, that the traditional *'graphic designer'* is at a point of an identity crisis. We use a mixture of design processes and have become information designers, business consultants, marketers, social scientists, programmers, positive psychologists, and even anthropologists. Service design is just one of the many tools advertising or design studio could use when creating an overall strategy for a client.

Our latest tool, Service Design, does not come without its critics. The design journalist Rick Poyner is a massive critic. He stated that designers should not have to place their practice into the models applicable to the Harvard Business School. Not only do they become stifled, but it is also heartbreaking to watch *(2)*. I understand why he makes this criticism. If you are a graphic designer you probably inherently believe that imagery has an important place in the world. Somewhere along the way, it seems we have either lost this belief, or at least our ability to articulate this importance to others.

Nonetheless, Service Design is food for thought, and I have taken a look at an example in action. RED, a multidisciplinary team of designers and academics who work alongside policymakers, was set up in 2004 by the British Design Council to tackle social and economic issues through design-led innovation. They use the 'design process' to facilitate collaboration and act as a kind of 'middle man' or glue that brings all these people together *(3)*.

One of their successful projects was a project initiated by the Kent City Council to address concerns about large numbers of obesity cases in the community. They hoped to start a campaign that encouraged more physical activity, especially in the 51–70-year-old age group. This is not an easy issue to address however as many people have considerable mental hurdles to overcome when attempting exercise. After meeting with groups in the community,

they found that many people found it important to exercise but they simply could not find the actual impetus to do so *(4.)*

So, instead of another moralistic print or media campaign, the design team at RED developed '*ActivMobs*'. What this entailed was a framework and system for people to organize their own exercise 'mobs' based on interests and lifestyle. The core strategy being that the social element would provide the extra motivation and encouragement needed and the web-based tools also made it easy for people to find, suggest and start groups.

The influence of the social sciences is noticeable in the approach. RED state:

'Family and close friends play a big role in creating the motivation for activity and the experience of that activity.'

This links to relational cohesion theory, which claims one of the biggest influences in bringing about a changed behaviour, is our network of peers. It seems that collective's such as RED offer a variety of scholars a new platform in which they can put their ideas into practice.

This kind of research and pooling of expertise can be incredibly beneficial. It certainly was a very successful project. As designers, I think the danger only comes when as stated about, we forget the significance and power of our graphic imagery.

To put it simply, as a designer you can create a system of services or captivating graphics — you decide. It can be one, both or neither. In the end, it is not a prescribed process and it is limited only by your imagination.

*Originally published in Poetic Tactics, 2011.*

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1.   *MANZINI, E. (2008) New Design Knowledge: Introduction to the Conference. Changing the Change. Turin, Italy.*

2.   *2. POYNER, R. (2009) International Speaker. Can Graphic Design save the Planet, Sydney Design Week 2009. Sydney*

3.   *3–4 O'GRADY, J. K. V. (2006) A Designers Research Manual: Succeed in Design by knowing your client and what they really need, Gloucester, Massachusetts, Rockport Publishers.*

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Appendix 6 – Paul Elliman *Graphic design speeds us towards impending doom*
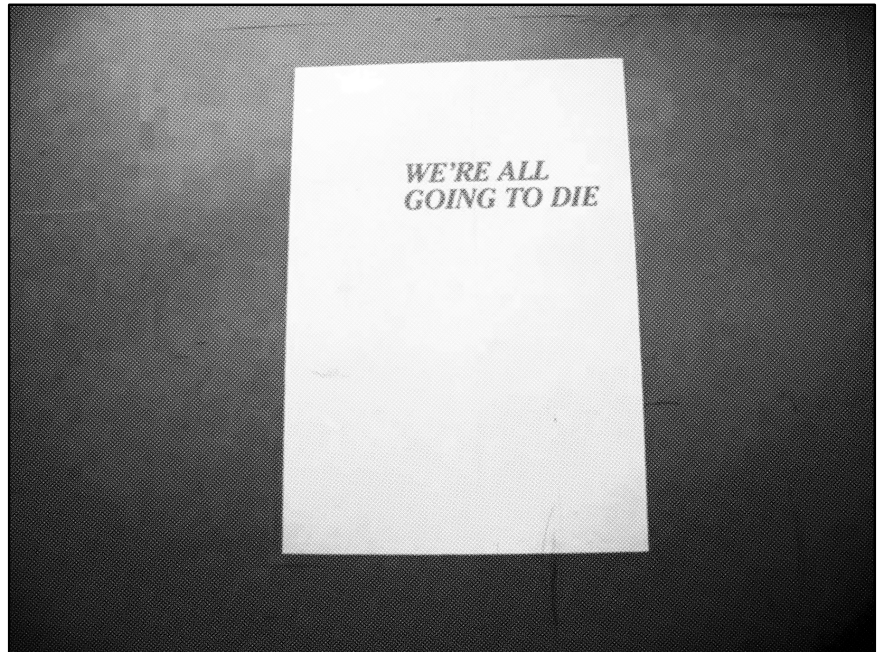
Our greeting as we entered the room.

In July 2010, Paul Elliman gave an intriguing presentation 'Typographic Voice.' He presented this talk under the projected type — we're all going to die. The talk highlighted a peculiar thing about design: it is often spoken of as either our saviour or in contrast as our downfall. Elliman subscribes to the latter way of thinking. He asserted that all graphic design is driven by our inescapable desires — and as a consequence is speeding us towards our destruction.

Paul Elliman

You have created a monster, and it will destroy you…

Graphic design as a vehicle for mass consumerism and greed is not a new idea, but the way it was framed — in the context of a typography workshop — was somewhat confronting. The participants were all there to master this art; so to be told you are in fact oiling the wheels of destruction makes you feel a little sheepish. It was conceded though that, given the current state of the world, Elliman did offer up some compelling points for discussion.

He argued that not only is design leading us to destruction, but also that the very existence of typography — a largely mechanised process begun in the industrialised age –is imbued with meanings that support this argument. He examined the medium as a sort of 'typographic object'. By this, he means to focus on the typography itself, not the words presented by it. An unexpected approach in which 'typography' can be read as an item of culture that contains unspoken messages about those who invent and produce it.

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His first point was that typography, by its very mechanical nature, represents our overzealous belief in technology. Elliman quoted from the philosopher Mladen Dolar, and his writings about the voice.

"By not meaning anything the voice appears to mean more than words and it becomes the bearer of some unfathomable originary meaning which, supposedly, got lost with language. It seems to maintain the link with nature, on the one hand — the nature of a paradise lost — and on the other hand to transcend language, the cultural and symbolic barriers, in the opposite direction, as it were: it promises an ascent to divinity…"

In essence, the 'voice' and 'language' are two very different things. Elliman argued that typography is another kind of 'voice'. By not meaning anything, typography appears to mean more than words. He claimed, "It [typography] becomes the bearer of some unfathomable faith in technology, replacing natural language with the language and cultural values of efficiency and production, on the one hand, and language as an object of fetishised aesthetic values on the other" *(2).*

Elliman claimed that as the objects around us are consumed and discarded … the message they communicate grows stronger *(3).*

"It the beginning of mechanisation and mass production, the process of commodifying language as events and ideas, it transforms the ephemeral and the fugitive into fixed things, and sacrifices its own product in the process, which quickly becomes waste. It's not a simple case of extending our communication as a way of forming together to survive. We're competing with a language system that takes over our own messages in order to fight for its own survival." (4)

Each day these unspoken messages get stronger and louder, and I guess the real question is can we fight the silent deluge? The very existence of a practice such as typography, in which a mechanised process takes over our own free expression, highlights the speedy and unchangeable process we are part of. Even if we wanted to stop it, it's perhaps doubtful that we could.

art.yale.edu/PaulElliman
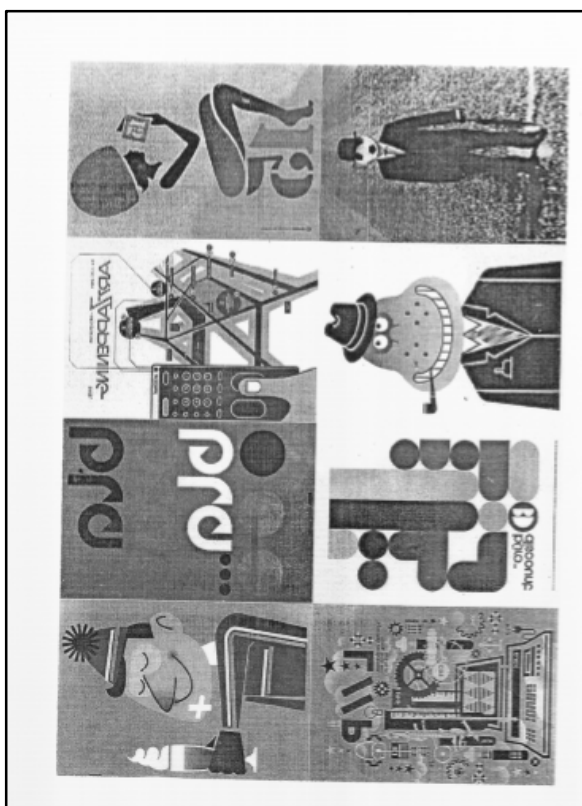
Originally published in Poetic Tactics, 2011.

Notes:

1–5. ELLIMAN, P. (2010) We are all going to die. Typography Summer School. London.

2. DOLAR, M. (2006) A Voice and Nothing More, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press.

3. KUBLER, G. (1962) The Shape of Time: Remarks on the history of things, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press.

Appendix 7 – Büro Destruct *A magical mystery tour*

Selection of work by Büro Destruct

After a long train ride and frenzied map re-negotiation towards a small land outcropping over the River Aare, I found Lopetz (Lorenz Gianfreda) tucked away in his studio. I was in the picturesque world-heritage city of Bern. A striking place but perhaps quite an 'old worldy' setting — not where you would imagine finding a prominent design agency. This in itself is a testament to a streak of non-conformity within the group.

Büro Destruct began in 1994 as a graphic artists' collective and over the next few years grew into an internationally acclaimed design studio. The collective published the first comprehensive collection of their work in 1999, «Büro Destruct», which signified a new era of Swiss graphic design. Their practice aims to keep the boundary between art and commercial graphic design fluid and they work on a variety of projects that include illustration, animation, public art,

exhibition design as well as video and music. Their now multiple publications are inspirational and practically useful tools for studios.

On my visit, I was able to chat to the Büro Destruct designers about their work and also join them on their daily swim to lunch along the River Aare (they thought I was quite brave for jumping in with them.) Whilst out we encountered a fellow running behind his wife donning an extremely large Hello Kitty bag; a peculiar old man on a recumbent bicycle; and the "holiday Swiss" — a couple so tanned I got a flashback to Magda in There's Something About Mary. It confirmed to me that one could find inspiration in the most unlikely places. A creative person has an ability to draw things from the environment, and see what others may not. I may not have even noticed all these characters if Lopetz and his cohort hadn't pointed them out to me.

The lunch spot we swam to, Bern Switzerland.

I knew Büro Destruct's style was cutting edge, and I learned that it came from the designers' hearts. The following interview transcribes my discussions with Lopetz.

In many ways the group have made a direct disconnection with their Swiss heritage. In the homeland of the world's most famous font, Helvetica, you instead drew creative infinity with Japan. What has it been like working under the weight of Switzerland's typographic traditions?

L: To be honest we were not that informed about it, and we didn't care. In recent years there has been a revival of modernist typography but at the time we were starting out we didn't think about it. We had to do everything by hand [when first working in the industry], which was very time-consuming. Our gut feeling was, quite frankly — 'it just sucks'. We were more interested in comic books and illustration.

Do you think it is it necessary for designers to have a good understanding of the history of visual communication?

L: Depends, it can actually hinder you if you know too much. I spent months on a new design once only to find out later that something very similar had already been created 20 years before. If I knew too much I might not do any work.

Often big cities like New York and Berlin are described as creative meccas, but you guys live in a town with a population under 200,000. Do you find working in a place like Bern helps to inform your work?

L: Yes, definitely. I always realise this when I return from trips to London or Tokyo. They are really inspiring cities but they are also overcrowded; your mind just goes crazy. Here you are surrounded by wildlife and your mind is your own. My other passion is music. One of my influences had a studio next to a stream and all they could hear was the constant hum of the water. In the end their recorded album was one long sequence; like a river. I have to say it is one of the most beautiful musical compositions that I know of. In big cities designers also hang around each other, see each other's work all the time and there is no space for your own thinking.
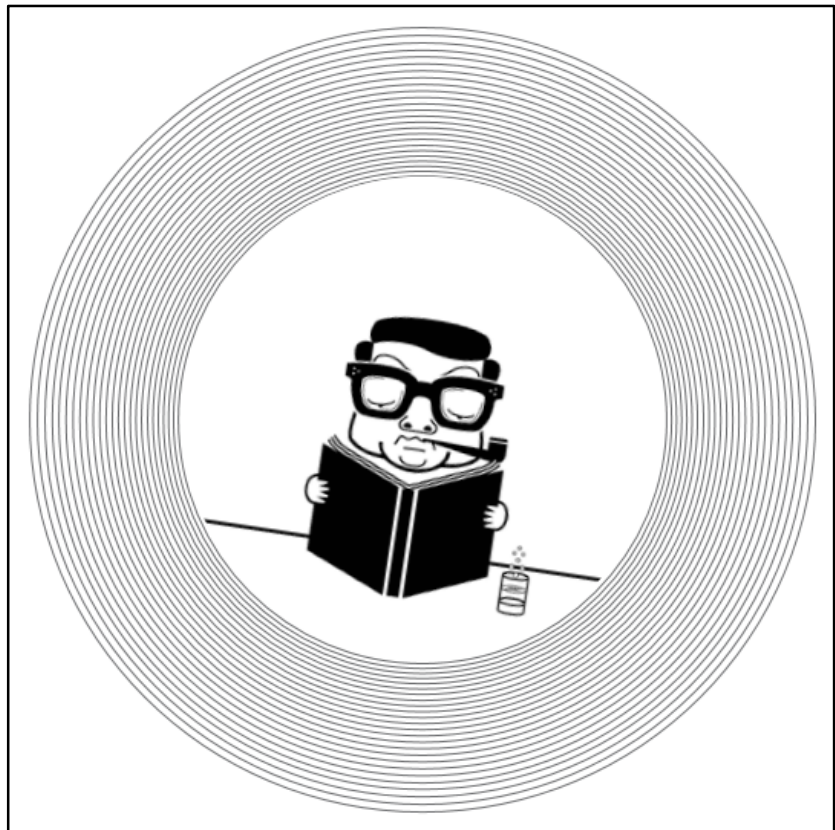
Lopetz at work (by Büro Destruct).

Bern is also where you were educated. What was that like?

L: When we went to art school things were a little different. Graphic design was not as big as it is now. We learnt a lot of our skills training four days a week in real studios. It was just before computers so we had to do everything manually.

The most significant thing we take from it was that it was the beginning of our network. Because with these colleagues we all have the same founding teachers, it is almost like having a brother or a sister. We 'know' the same things and that shared experience has bonded us like a family.

Being in such a beautiful natural environment, do you see yourself playing a part in the move towards a more sustainable future?

L: I have to say, this is a luxury business. Of course, we try though. We do little side projects, like the recent bag we did for Greenpeace. That way we give something at least.

Do you feel there is an ideological foundation supporting visual communication today?

L: It's more capitalism at the moment than politics. Capitalism seems like everything right now.

What role then do you think visual communication plays in the creation of meaning in our society?

L: Basically we try to make the world more beautiful. Perhaps you could say the goal of design is to make people happy through the things that you produce. We live in a beautiful place that inspires us, and through our work we can 'pass' on the feelings that creates and share it with a lot of people.

How much does intuition factor into your process?

L: Everything! Well for me it's at least 70%. If you think too much about a project you can actually spoil some of the charm. If there is one thing that I have learnt its that it is important to trust your gut instincts — those moments when an idea comes to you like a blizzard. We always keep our first idea. If you can skip all the

complicated thought processes the work is often much stronger. I guess another defining characteristic of creative people is that they believe in their ideas. It blocks doubt and gives you courage.

Designers are often taking on many roles, from strategist to researcher to business consultant. What is the most revealing thing you have discovered working as a designer?

L: That the biggest part of your job is actually just making the client understand things the same way that you do. There are a lot of people these days who claim they can practise design, which makes things harder and there is no real system of qualification like in accountancy. In some ways, though, a system like that is impossible. It [design] is a thing about feelings so it's difficult to put those kinds of boundaries on the profession. If you are recognised, however, you get a statement that you are good and people tend to go by that. You still often feel like a salesman though.

And finally, what do you consider to be the most revolutionary ideas in design at the moment?

L: There is so much going on that it is hard to pick one diamond among all this stuff. People sample things a lot more. If you compare design to music, well, music labels are essentially gone. No, I can't pick it, I wouldn't know where to start. I hope they [revolutionary designs] will come again though.

Appendix 8 – Jeff Knowles *Bring back the master craftsman*

My rendition of Jeff using some old fashioned tools.

Design is an activity involving skill by making things. It's not just about creating something 'new', but the repeated performance of a skill so as to acquire or maintain proficiency in it. To find out those ways of 'knowing' that you simply feel. Jeff Knowles offers us a refreshing perspective on the practice of graphic design, his longing to just 'make' stuff and what it was like spending ten years working at 'Research Studios' with Neville Brody.

How much of your process is driven by intuition? How much of it is research/strategy?

JK: The work we do in the studio is really varied, so it actually varies from job to job, but generally I think it's three things: there is intuition, research and experience. You tend to call on all these skills naturally though. Each time I do a job I learn something, and that experience guides me with each new job. If you want to be radical though, disregard experience.

If you are doing branding and the like, you tend to rely on research. Proctor & Gamble, for example, use eye-scanners to work out how people scan packaging, and they design their products accordingly. This doesn't leave much room to do interesting work but the big budgets involved can also make it hard.

It's great to be optimistic, but you have to be a realist as well. We present the clients with a spectrum; one end is just an inch away from their expectations and the other is pushed to the limit. We hope that by doing this we can at least meet them halfway.

You have said that you were not trained in a strict form of traditional typography. How do you think this has influenced your practise, if at all?

JK: I think that there are two types of people, academics and those that are practically minded. My approach has always been — OK, that's all great, but now let me have a go. I go by the philosophy 'Don't Think Just Do'. I think a metaphor that really sums it up is the one of a striker who has a lot of time on the ball. He thinks too much and then he fumbles. When he goes on intuition he is fast and he scores the goal as if by magic. Design is like this. When you run on instinct, it often works. Personally, I learn a lot more by being on the shop floor, and experiencing things, rather than reading about it. I need to connect directly in order to be a more efficient designer.

I also believe if you get the chance, just try everything. Never say no to a new experience or new way of doing something. It might seem random at the time, but at some point in the future that experience may become invaluable. Trying a piece of work for no reason is worthwhile because at some point in the future it may be applicable for another project.

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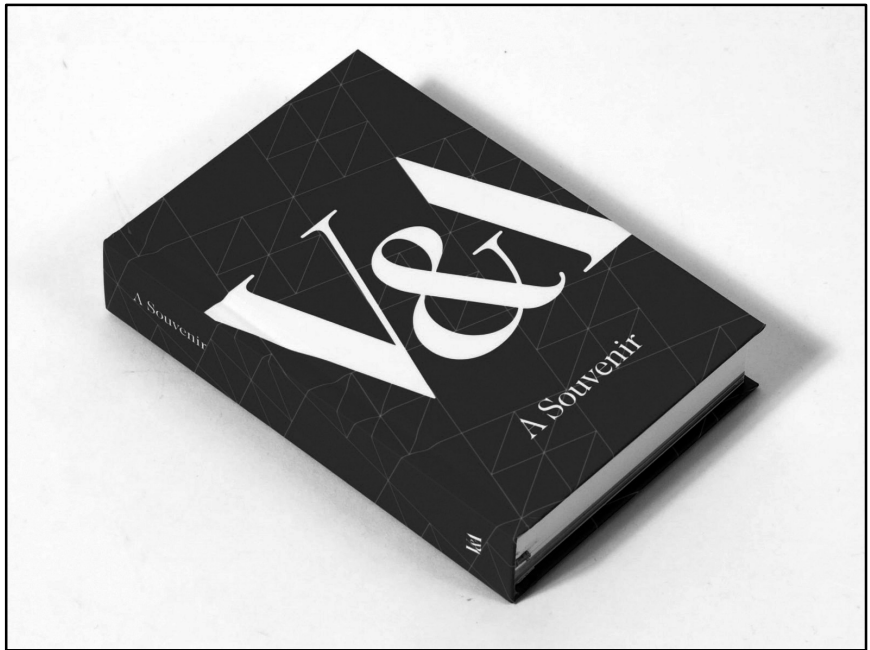
Planning Unit work — the V&A Souvenir book.
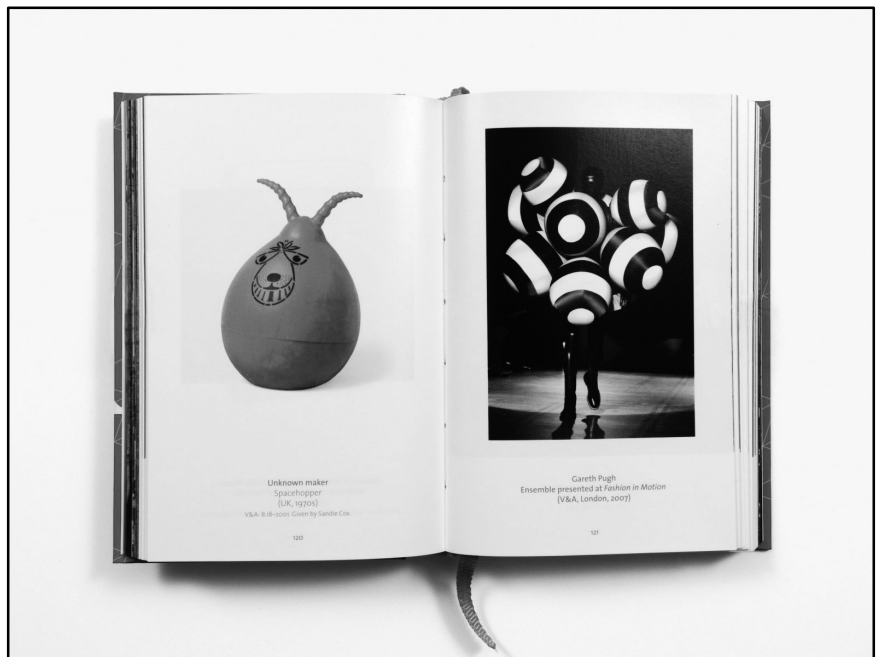
Planning Unit work — the V&A Souvenir book (detail).

What is the most significant thing you have learnt working with Neville Brody?

JK: A bit about my background: I studied Graphic Design in Salford, Manchester. I wasn't taught technical things common to general practise. We were simply given themes in which we could interpret any way we saw fit. Coming straight out of school that kind of open brief terrified me. I felt that in every single thing I did I had to be a pioneer, something that I guess that has stayed with me. When I graduated I headed to London, portfolio in one hand, studio list in the other, Neville Brody's studio being on that list.

Neville asked me to come back for an interview. He never said my work was good but simply 'interesting'. My own style couldn't be more different to Brody's approach as I never aspired to be anything than what I was. Perhaps he saw something in that.

The thing I also learnt from Brody, however, was not to fear anything, including type. As a designer, he has no fear, and his approach is never precious. I guess that gave me the courage to just jump in there and do stuff. Because I wasn't formally trained in the old school of typography, type was seen as simply one of the ingredients that nobody wanted to deal with. We used to put it in a little box in the corner and hope nobody noticed it too much.

He also taught me that there is an opportunity to capture a certain quality when you simply let the chips lay where they fall. He came up with some of his greatest work this way (although sometimes it would be returned by the repro guys and it had been 'fixed'!). Low-res images, for example, are an obvious no-no today, but it is not something that he would worry about.

The studio practises a kind of free-form designing. Neville doesn't have the designer's fear of the blank page. He just begins. The studio as a whole produces a lot of work — just generating stuff until it works.

What do you think is unique about British graphic design?

JK: Well, I guess without blowing our own trumpet too much, British design is viewed as somewhat of a pioneer. What I see as significant is that we always want to do things differently. That translates into some really progressive work.

Neville Brody made his name in the 80's for his forward-thinking approach to typography and layout.

Does it seem curious to you that Research Studios is now approached by clients such as 'The Times' to redesign something as traditional as a newspaper layout?

People think of the Research Studios as a typography studio. What they forget is that it is a graphic design studio. Type does take a leading role, it also looks at what is functional. The designs have to fit the job at hand. For instance, The Times had very practical considerations, such as fonts that were condensed enough to fit long headings in, but that were at the same time legible and clear. As part of the project, Luke Prowse, working at the studio then, created new typefaces for them, a milestone project considering we were redesigning one of the world's most well-known fonts. The redesign of the paper was more mechanical than cosmetic, a process which addressed the problems created when they migrated from broadsheet to tabloid. In all, it was an extensive project that lasted a year, but it was a very successful result.

And finally, can you describe a moment when a piece of design made you simply 'feel' something and what did it make you feel?

JK: With the amount of blogs and design sites available today, design is brought to you, rather than you having to search gems out. On the one hand I'm grateful to be exposed to all this work, but I feel almost saturated by design. I appreciate what I see and often have that 'I wish I'd done that feeling', but I miss that excitement of discovery. I tend to try and get inspiration, or at least that feeling of discovery from other places — nature, natural history, science, industry, etc.

One of the things I'm really missing is the master craftsman element of design. Obviously, there is talent and experience, which is important in design, but craftsmanship seems to be rare. I've almost

got a hunger to try glassblowing, metalwork or stone masonry — to learn an established skill, rather than always feeling pressure to invent.

I think the latest piece of design that has made me really have a feeling, is the discovery of Spencerian Script. It was developed in the United States in 1850 by Platt Rogers Spencer, whose name the style bears and who was impressed with the idea that America needed a penmanship style that could be written (unbelievably) quickly, legibly and elegantly to aid in matters of business correspondence as well as personal letter-writing. It started to die out in the 1920s with the advent of the typewriter, thus hasn't been prolific for a long time, in fact, only a few people in the world practise it now. For me, it was an example of something that can only be achieved by becoming a craftsman, by studying and practising an established craft.

planningunit.co.uk

Appendix 9 – MONA *A metaphor for creativity as a whole.*

Strangely, many creative pursuits are surrounded by people who claim to know how things 'should' be done. Marketers, curators, producers are but a few that one might encounter. David Walsh, the benefactor and mastermind of MONA, is now infamous for disregarding this kind of advice.

Let's look at Advertising to begin with. It's fair to say that in advertising we are surrounded by myths in which people claim to predict how an audience will react. R. P. Feynman the famous physicist once described however how hard it is to actually 'know' something. He postulated that because of the success of science a kind of 'pseudoscience' had emerged in which people claimed to be experts in all kinds of things, but from his vantage point, it would be impossible for them to accurately make those claims. Some scientists spend their whole careers on one puzzle in which they never solve. *(1)*

Advertising and market research can often fall into this category and many will reel of statements as 'evidence', as to how you should design something. There's a famous great quote by Henry Ford however, that states, 'If I'd have asked my customers what they wanted, they would have told me 'A faster horse.'

It's nice then to speak to Leigh Carmichael the in-house designer at MONA, who states that David Walsh is abhorred by this kind of rhetoric. They now have one of the most successful brands in Australia. Their visual identity is dark, gothic, lacking in much information and mysterious. It brings to mind all the stories we have heard about its mysterious benefactor and how he might or might not have made his money. A kind of seditious robin hood of the art world, hood winking casinos of the world and throwing brazen and wanton parties with the spoilings.

The Museum of Old and New Art is self-described as a 'subversive Disneyland' and is filled with an astounding collection of art and artifacts from around the globe. Artworks are contained in fish tanks, Nolans placed next to little known illustrators and mummy remains and secret doors lead to rooms that remind one of the human anatomy. I have heard MONA described as populist, but instead I think it is simply popular, a rarity for museums in the modern world. It reminds us that in the creative world, it never really pays that much to play by the rules.

mona.net.au

Originally published in Poetic Tactics, 2011.

Notes:

1. FEYNMAN, R. P. (1999) The Pleasure of Finding Things Out Cambridge, Massachusetts Helix Bo