Graphic Design History's Adulthood:

A historical survey of the birth and adolescence of graphic design history through a study of discourses and published texts

Fares Bou Nassif
Lijnbaanssteeg 1B
1012 TE Amsterdam
Tel.: 06 1865 6880
Student number: 2205679
E-mail address: fbf400@vu.nl; fares.bounassif@gmail.com

VU University Amsterdam
Faculty of the Arts
Master's programme in Comparative Arts and Media Studies, specialisation Design Cultures

First supervisor: Frederike Huygen
Second Reader: _____

August 2012

I hereby declare that this thesis is an original piece of work, written by myself alone. Any information and ideas from other sources are acknowledged fully in the text and notes.

(place / date) (signature)

Contents

Preface

"If you can design one thing, you can design everything."

— Massimo Vignelli

The research that lead to this thesis, the springboard for theoretical study of graphic design and design thinking in general, was inspired and motivated by that statement, many years ago, during my undergraduate studies. It created an insatiable desire within me to find evidence to corroborate this, to develop a scholarly approach that would introduce students to graphic design by showing them design thinking in all its manifestations. From this starting point, the search for a connected history between graphic design and any of, or all, the other design professions – product, industrial, fashion, space, social – was the drive behind all my studies. As such, this project was meant to uncover and re-situate graphic design within the broader context of design.

It was much later into this research when it became evident that this was irrelevant. Graphic design studies has not been and cannot become a descendant, or branch, of the wider study of design because of its purpose and heritage, if for no other reason. Defining all other design disciplines as object-based, and thus referring to them collectively as *object design*, one would find that their aim is to consistently create a functional solution to a problem, to fulfil a tangible need, even if different ideologies of object design could bring about arguments of form over function, or its inverse. Graphic design, however, can be said to concern itself not (only) with presenting solutions to problems but rather with delivering messages to audiences – which is a more specific problem-solving task. Many would argue, and correctly so, that graphic design is about both solutions and messages, problems and audiences. While this is essentially true, and its inverse is likewise palpable, the primary attentions of graphic designers are different from those of object designers: namely, communication.

There is also another key difference that must be considered, since our occupation here is the study of graphic design *history,* not practice: the heritage of these disciplines and practices. The

history of graphic design has been chronicled from three commonly accepted incidents: the invention of writing, the invention of the printing press, and the beginning of advertising[1]; the history of object design could, in theory, have begun with the invention of the wheel[2], the beginning of the Italian renaissance, and the industrial revolution. With origins and goals that are so different, regardless of when we choose to begin our story, it seems impossible to connect the two accurately and effectively as one discipline and profession[3]. More importantly, it has proven to be non-consequential.

Then, this thesis strove towards the creation of a compendium of texts that would inform and educate the potential graphic designer or historian through the use of one critical path to develop another: an assessment of graphic design discourse (history and theory) which, in turn, would present a framework from which to develop the reading and reference list that could contribute to the cultural growth of the pupil and the discipline. To put it more simply, the first portion of this paper would define the definitions, problems, and proposed solutions common to graphic design discourse. The second portion would present a model of study that may well be incorporated by educators across the board in order to further a student's engagement with the intellectualisms and the stories upon which the discipline is built, allowing them to assist in the growth of their field. Initially, the hope was that this could be achieved through a study of the tangible histories of graphic design. A short conversation with Hendrik-Jan Grievink, art director and co-editor at Next Nature, put things in a different perspective. His assertion that he prefers recommending books that give students tools rather than push historical stories at them[4] was a catalyst in reshaping this paper. Books such as McLuhan's *Understanding Media* and Barthes' *Mythologies* were some of the texts he considered essential to a designer's education. Here, the discussion became rather interesting, and the consideration of a wider array of texts came into play. What finally cemented the drastic shift from historical compendium to something that resembles more of a manifesto of tools was the

---

[1] Here the reference is to advertising in Europe at the start of the Industrial Age near the end of the 19th century, not American advertising in the post-WWI and WWII eras.

[2] While this author has not personally found a book to corroborate this, the assumption that object design began with object invention is the basis of this statement.

[3] Victor Margolin, however, proposes to do just that (and a little more) in his upcoming *The World History of Design* (Berg Publishers, 2014).

[4] Casual conversation with Hendrik-Jan Grievink

recent (a mere few weeks before the deadline to this paper) release of *Graphic Design: History in the Writing (1983-2011)* by Catherine de Smet and Sara de Bondt[5], which is an anthology of previous writing that "documents the development of the relatively young field of graphic design history from 1983 to today, underscoring the aesthetic, theoretical, political and social tensions that have underpinned it from the beginning"[6]. While the text itself does not necessarily cover the exact context from which the works here have been selected, it has led to a reconsideration of the first approach to the 'education' of a design specialist.

Except, that is not the direction this paper ended up taking. While Grievink's stances were on point, *History in the Writing* was a restructuring influence, and the original ideas were all dropped. It was when the chronological laying out of the history of discourse in the field presented itself that a more poignant thought and thesis came to mind: an analytical survey would best suit this work. The books that had initially been selected were cut down in size. Other texts were added, had to be added, to provide an appropriate sample. The attention and tone of the paper changed so as not to produce another reading list, regardless of how scholastically sound it attempted to be, but rather continue in the critical tradition of the conferences and critics of graphic design history: assemble the relevant discourses and use them as a launching pad for new discourse.

The thesis is divided into three modules. The first describes the discourses involved: from the birth of graphic design history with Philip Meggs's *History of Graphic Design*, Massimo Vignelli's 'Call for Criticism' and his landmark speech at the first national conference on graphic design history hosted by the Rochester Institute of Technology, through its adolescence, concluding with the most recent stances on the state of graphic design history as a discipline. Through the milestones, four key names are selected as the foundation for the methodology that drives this thesis, as described in the second module: Victor Margolin, Andrew Blauvelt, Steven Heller, and Rick Poynor are scrutinised for their writings on the subject of graphic design history publication, criticism, and writing, leading to a semi-structuralist approach to the comparative review of texts according to preset criteria. The third and final module commits to the selection of eighteen books and

---

[5] Oblog 2012

[6] From the publisher's website, available here: http://occasionalpapers.org/?page_id=1995

thoroughly putting them to the task of meeting the rigorous requirements of those who helped define the discipline.

Where this paper fails is in its inability to produce a more comprehensive review of a larger sample, where the texts that are not a positive reflection of the field are also presented. While the advantages and disadvantages of these works, or their adherence and disadherence to the criteria, are listed, it is difficult to find many faults in the texts that help define the right direction in which the field must progress: the eighteen are the books with the least misgivings. A more adequate survey would have included at least sixty books, covering both the valuable and the meaningless, giving everything a much more rigorous data analytical approach. However, this was not the goal or scope of this paper. The intent here is simply to bring to light the current evolution in the field and point out what can be done to better enhance said field. In some cases, the recommendations at the end of this paper are already being applied. In most cases, they have had agents of change calling for their application for many years, with limited success.

The chapter that follows begins with the definitions and the background literature necessary for a more holistic understanding of the issues described and discussed in the rest of the paper. These definitions and histories are then used to develop a methodology in the chapter succeeding that, from which the review of the books begins and to which said review observes.

Then and Now: The State of Graphic Design History

"The tracing of separate strands of practice that sometimes intertwine within a professional category but also have their own trajectories"[7]

— Victor Margolin

Design History and the History of

One book many graphic designers are not familiar with would be John A. Walker's *Design history and the history of design*. While the whole text is of obvious value to any designer, for our purposes, we refer only to the first chapter. The definitions Walker uses act as a standard in the study of design history, and while they can be debated endlessly, the specific syntax is not of this paper's concern. Let me, however, start by agreeing with Walker: "it is unfortunate that the same words 'design' and 'history' have to be employed, albeit in a different order, to refer to different things."[8] His chapter continues to state, meticulously, that the history of design is what he calls the object of the design historian's study: it is the chronicling of past creations by designers; it is the production of designers, named and classified. Design history, he continues, is a descendant of art history, while being its own discipline today.

Walker's text goes into much detail to define the two[9]. Just like every other book and publication mentioned in this paper, it very much belongs in the compendium of valuable reading for graphic designers. For our purposes, however, we will attend to the simpler definitions of the two: *graphic*

---

[7] Margolin 1994, p.237

[8] Walker 1989, p.1

[9] Walker 1989, pp.2-3

design history is the combination of discourses, theory, critical analysis, and other intellectualisations of the past, production, and practice of graphic designers, while the history of graphic design is the simpler, ordered cataloguing of the output of graphic designers over the years. Theory versus history, really.

Throughout this paper, the breadth of writing on, or in relation to, the history of graphic design is catalogued, alongside that of writing on graphic design history. Surveying and studying publications on graphic design history (and the history of graphic design) that give a different perspective on these histories, regardless of whether in the strain of general design history or simply from a different point of view, offers an intriguing set of questions and points to remarkable directions for the curious. It is clear that there is a driven attempt by some members of the academic and professional communities to generate the necessary written works. In the United States in particular, this attempt has been conducted regularly, particularly over the last decade, and has continued to produce quality writings on desirable subjects. The literature discussing this, which this chapter sets out to outline, points to a particular series of articles published between 1994 and 1995 that have, more or less, defined the scope of what was to come after them – while summarising what came before them. Also, while most academic discourse is commonly carried in journals of that sort, it would seem that some graphic design magazines have devoted their pages to the same degrees of inquiry and within the same standard, and have been elevated as primary referential sources by some key members of the community itself, despite the controversy and criticism that ensued. Quality publications such as *Print* magazine, *Eye*, and *Design Observer*, among other less graphic design centric titles such as *Communication Arts* and *Creative Review*, produce and endorse journalistic writing from some of the most widely recognisable design educators and critics, thus arguably cementing their status as journals simply through the rigorous impact on discourse and activity their articles have produced. These magazines are also consulted, especially for their recurrently recommended 'reading lists' and the commentary that ensues.

The key issues in graphic design history and the writing that has happened around its discourse have been successfully presented by the *Visible Language* series of issues entitled 'New Perspectives: Critical Histories of Graphic Design', edited by Andrew Blauvelt in 1994/5. A fundamental article in that series is Victor Margolin's 'Narrative Problems in Graphic Design', which

will be discussed at length in the following pages. However, the drive to establish graphic design history as a discipline of its own was begun a decade before these publications, and had sprung up from a somewhat different discussion. More intriguingly, it has been championed and developed through the collaboration of designers with their peers, as well as with the occasional historian and non-designer.

Let us define our purpose as: identifying writing *about* graphic design, and where necessary visual culture, since the 1980s, and establishing its effectiveness, while maintaining the value and importance of books that came before and are still widely referenced by writers and designers alike – categorically dividing the works in such a way as to map their relevance to *contemporary* visual communication as a whole but, more importantly, their relevance to the advancement of graphic design history as a discipline in its own right.

The History of Graphic Design History

While the origins of graphic design are a matter of debate, and the particular breadth of what graphic design is remains in flux, the beginnings of a formalisation, and institutionalisation, of graphic design theory and history can be traced to the early 1980s – with dialogues, or at least an interest in them, having started in the mid 1970s[10], when design history started to establish itself in the UK and the US.

The definition of graphic design history and the idea of theory as essential to graphic design could be said to begin with Massimo Vignelli's[11] keynote address at the first national conference on graphic design, held at and organised by the Rochester Institute of Technology in 1983[12], alongside the emergence of Philip Meggs' *History of Graphic Design*. Vignelli's lecture, later published as an

---

[10] Meggs 1985

[11] Massimo Vignelli is described as the most vocal supporter of the old guard of graphic design Modernism and Basel school methodology. Along with his wife, he owns Vignelli Associates, one of the most accomplished design studios.

[12] Bondt & Smet 2012, p.7

article, 'Call for Criticism', of the same year, did even more to emphasise the imminent need for critical analysis and intellectual discourse around the subject[13]. In the years that followed, his ideas were adopted by many influential writers and designers, most prominently Michael Bierut[14], who – as former employee of Vignelli Associates – frequently describes the influence the man had on his work and writing. In Bierut's seminal essay of 1989, 'Why Designers Can't Think', which targets the uncritical, untheoretical, uncultural approach of design schools across America, dividing the broad range of schools into modernist schools, obsessed with Swiss design, and process and portfolio schools, dedicated to training their students to produce more, faster, without any concern for the analytical, provocative methods of design thinking. This essay continues to inspire more and more debate on the subject, almost displacing and obscuring Vignelli's earlier attempts, despite being in accordance with them. Both texts, essentially, call for a broader, more culturally informed education for designers, and for a vast historical grounding, as part of establishing a more informed base for the designer.

With Bierut's call for a more critical approach came a more theoretically-grounded publication from the students and alumni of the Cranbrook Academy, a title that was highly regarded by some and panned by others: *Emigre*. Bierut's plea for a critical reassessment of design schools and academies were regarded as revolutionary by some, most notably Rick Poynor[15] who, in 1994, describes the impact of *Emigre* and its contemporaries on graphic design practitioners' approach to theory, or what he considers "the new guard's victory"[16]: an openness from the American institutions of graphic design to the chaotic, conceptual work of American designers in the nineties. Poynor's interest lies in the impact that American graphic design, with *Emigre* as its spokesperson,

---

[13] Vignelli 1983

[14] A vocal member of the graphic design community, and one of the most famous names in contemporary American graphic design, Michael Bierut's two primary career milestones are his time spent at Vignelli Associates and his current tenure as partner in Pentagram. His writings on the field have made him a respected and admired member of the community, with his particular attention of design practice and the benefits it could accrue from its incorporation of other cultural studies, including graphic design history.

[15] Since the early nineties, Rick Poynor has been a resonant voice in graphic design criticism and an advocate of graphic design history. He is a British journalist who has taught in several design schools in the UK, and is a very active member of both the professional and academic aspects of graphic design education, history, and criticism.

[16] Bierut et al. 1997, p.65

would, or could, have on the rest of the world, particularly in the UK, and the significance of the push for a more critical, more intellectual, approach to design that would maintain the relevance of the graphic designer at a time of intense change. Specifically, the rise of the personal computer and desktop publishing suites that was starting to make simple craftsmanship obsolete, alongside the intellectual components that Cranbrook alumni and others who participated in and generated a postmodern visual discourse, would ensure the non-obsolescence of the graphic designer. According to him, "designers need to convince clients [...] that they have special talents to offer" and, he argues, that "the best hopes for achieving this necessary evolution lie in the spirit of critical reflection, energy, and vision that are transforming the theory and practice of graphic design in the 1990s."[17] His article could be considered to have been motivated by Andrew Blauvelt's[18] 'New Perspectives: Critical Histories of Graphic Design', published earlier the same year, which is the series of articles that analysed and reassessed the state of graphic design history, positioning it and preparing it for the formative years that would follow. With the shift pioneered by *Emigre* and the Cranbrook designers, due to a direct or indirect reaction to Bierut's 'Why Designers Can't Think', the field of graphic design history and the graphic designer's critical and historically aware engagement with his discipline had manifest itself so intensely that it became necessary for a re-evaluation of these writings. This is where Blauvelt's work was ground-breaking, leading to the Educator of the Year award from the Graphic Design Education Association in 1995.

A key publication and a milestone in graphic design writing, Blauvelt's consecutive issues of *Visible Language* questioned the ideas of graphic design history and the viewpoints of the historians thus far. One of the most monumental and pivotal moments and publications in graphic design history, Blauvelt's accomplishment in the generation and editing of this series is second to none in that it levelled a set of criticisms on the state of the canon and the directions historians should begin to take, while also giving designers a genuinely 'new perspective' from which to approach their studies. Blauvelt's opening essay dissected the current state of discursive spaces within the discipline,

---

[17] Bierut et al. 1997, p.67

[18] Currently the Design Director (since 1998) and Curator (since 2005) of the Walker Art Center, Andrew Blauvelt began his career as a design instructor and professor around North America, holding several chairs in the respective departments. His work has been recognised as highly thoughtful and critical, with his dispersed commentary being published regularly in academic journals such as *Design Issues* as well as other journals like *Eye* and *Design Observer*.

building up to describe the numerous arenas ripe for development within the field[19]. It was, however, the selection of articles, most notably Victor Margolin's 'Narrative Problems of Graphic Design History', that ultimately most effectively inspired change and made impact. Michael Bierut's review of the series most aptly summarised its final output:

> "our traditional conception of graphic design history reduces what is actually a complex and ever-shifting melange of incident and influence to a falsely organized canon of images, indelibly associated with separate histories of (mainly) great men. Fundamental to graphic design is the relationship between word and image, and as Derrida and others have shown us, no territory is more beset by ambiguity and disconnection; attempts to invent fixed relationships are thereby doomed. Consequently, traditional design history can be attacked from every angle. It focuses too much on the product (the full-color plate) rather than the means of production; it "privileges" certain kinds of work above others to serve faintly sinister ends; it fails to acknowledge the social sciences, Marxism, feminism, linguistics, semiotics, and anything else that a lecturer can't make a slide out of; and, finally, it's just plain too reductively simple-minded. Blauvelt calls instead for a plurality of histories to fill out the picture."[20]

David Crowley succinctly summarises Blauvelt's edited series of articles with a broad statement, where it seems to him that the overarching investigation the three consecutive issues attempts is the "relationship to design history as it is currently practised"[21], while also inquiring about "the study of the history of graphic design which is not a study of graphic designers"[22]. The series did not proceed to revolutionise graphic design history; it revitalised it, giving it form, and was a key incident in the maturity of proto-graphic design history into a full discipline. The bulk of this thesis, as the following chapter shows, works on assessing the key criteria established in that series of articles, and goes on to apply them, along with other, future publications, to develop a guideline for the evaluation of the current state of graphic design history publications.

---

[19] Blauvelt 1994

[20] Bierut 2007, p.32-33

[21] Crowley 1996, p.229

[22] Crowley 1996, p.229

After Blauvelt, Before Now

The years that followed the pivotal writings of the mid-nineties produced much debate. While Guy Julier and Viviana Narotzky's 'The Redundancy of Design History' (1997), arguing against the perpetual return of the chair as the sensible approach to the study of history, is definitely not about graphic design, it does fall within the discourses involved here if only because of its relevance to what can be considered the "redundancy" of graphic design history: writing that consistently repeats itself does *not* produce new thought. It fell into place when, after attempts to cull the series of articles on graphic design history into readers for mass publication, and with the rise of academic awareness of graphic design history as a discipline, it became clear that much writing, up to that point, had been limited in its evolution. While certain aspects of this criticism do still hold today, this was one of the many key debates that Blauvelt's 'New Perspectives' would begin to unfold. Matthew Soar's[23] *Theory is a Good Idea* (2001), in a similar spirit, stresses the relevance and importance of expanding the consciousness of designers so that they learn to incorporate elements of interdisciplinarity, such as the academic language of theoreticians (Derrida, Barthes, Baudrillard, and McLuhan) and the popular syntaxes of new media, film, music, and their peers. Whether it be Bierut's insistence that such smaller things as being aware of stage director Robert Wilson[24] are as relevant to a designer's education as the knowledge that Massimo Vignelli created the iconic New York Subway map in the 1970s[25], Peter Bilak designed the Fedra, the difference between a serif and a sans serif, or Barthes' resonant declaration that it does not matter whether wrestling is a staged performance or not[26], a designer's education does not end with the acquisition of the technical skills of visual production. Matthew Soar insists that theory is the medium that would help propel the work of designers, and their own understanding of themselves, forward. Steven Heller's

---

[23] Matthew Soar is a graphic designer from a communication and media studies background who, at the time of these debates, was completing a PhD dissertation on the historical impact of graphic design from a political perspective. He later became quite active in critically challenging perspectives on the shortcomings of graphic design criticism and education. He currently holds the position of Associate Professor of Communication Studies at Concordia University in Montreal.

[24] Bierut 2007, pp.12-13

[25] Bierut 2007, pp.136-138

[26] Barthes 1991, p.15-25

'The Beginning of History'[27] pushes this further, after having argued in 1997 that graphic design is a descendant of advertising[28], and must be acknowledged as such, he went on to describe a different aspect. Heller's introduction to *Graphic Design History*, reiterating the call for a more historically aware community of designers, puts forward a few points that are pooled together in the years to follow, generating the final necessary push for real action towards a new historical approach. Most uniquely, however, he argues the need for more engaging writing, culminating the short piece with a call to young writers to be "motivated to raise graphic design history from a parochial recounting to an invigorating drama that informs and inspires us all"[29]. Combined, their efforts describe a new direction in the assessment of graphic design and its histories, one that is more critical, more intellectual, and more sophisticated. In many ways, the beginning of the 2000s gave rise to a more visible fulfilment of the discourses of Blauvelt and Bierut, with regards to their attention to historical and cultural studies, respectively. Gradually, the new designers were developing a cerebral approach to their work that was giving space for graphic design history to grow as an area of discourse, although not yet as a discipline in its own right.

Bierut's 1989 article was, years later, referenced in Ralph Caplan's 'Why Designers Can Think'[30], and then once more in Joe Marianek's 'Why Designers (Still) Can't Think'[31]. While Bierut decried the state of the education of the graphic designer, blaming the schools for their disinterest in culturally expanding the horizons of their students, Caplan, over fifteen years later, signalled an improvement. He saw an active, self-initiated attempt by designers to investigate their intelligence and natural proclivity to critical thinking and intellectual discourse, despite the schools' natural tendency to avoid the subject all together. Marianek shortly afterwards shows us a different side: students who do not find a need to learn and read on a wider scale than what is directly relevant to practice, citing Bierut's original intentions as honourable and agreeable, but arguing that educators today *do* try to introduce their students to intellectual curiosity. It would seem, assuming both Marianek and Caplan are correct, that the intellectual curiosity introduced by educators is

---

[27] Heller 2001, p.181-183

[28] Heller 1997

[29] Heller 2001, p.183

[30] Caplan 2006, p.235

[31] Marianek 2012

later reflected in their desire to expand their minds when their professional careers begin to mature[32]. Following through with Heller's persistence on and push for graphic design history, they all write of history as relevant to a graphic designer's education as much as the craft itself, with their position clearly iterated in Heller's 'The Beginning of History': "lest ignorance overshadow talent, graphic designers should be literate in graphic design history"[33]. This call has since been championed by many writers, most vocal among them Rick Poynor.

Now:

The attempt to pursue a deeper understanding of the importance of writing to graphic design, the relevance of history and historiography, and the significance of a cultivated mind has permeated research efforts and discourse. The dam began to break shortly after the emergence of a new generation of thinkers on design, in time for the new guard that Poynor mentioned in 1994 to hand over to another generation. With Stephen Eskilson finally publishing a new tome that attempts to tackle a similar vastness of subject matter as Meggs's original text in 2007, other history books begin to appear[34]. In 2008, Poynor and Denise Gonzales Crisp, discuss the state of graphic design history in the *Design Observer* article 'A Critical View of Graphic Design History', and the publication of Johanna Drucker and Emily McVarish's *Graphic Design History: A Critical Guide* – shortly after Eskilson's attempt. One statement that resonates throughout the text by Crisp and Poynor is key to understanding the relevance and direction of graphic design history publishing as it stands since it began to boom with the publication of Eskilson's history: "Scholarship in graphic

---

[32] Some critics and writers today, however, believe that the new breed of graphic design students, those graduating in the years following 2010, have sincerely begun to disregard the value of critical engagement and design history. Since Caplan's article from 2005 is not reflective of the same period that Marianek writes about (2012), this is a plausible argument that should be investigated. However, this issue is beyond the scope of this paper.

[33] Heller 2001, p.181

[34] Although Roxane Jubert did publish *Typography and Graphic Design: From Antiquity to the Present*, a year earlier, it was not as widely distributed and remains fairly unfamiliar. It is also considered to be not as significant to English language readers in that it did not raise any new issues or unearth much detail, except in that it gave a deeper view of Nazi-era Germany than Meggs' work had at the time. It was, however, seminal as a French language graphic design history text.

design is a fairly recent player compared to other design disciplines, and frequently alien to undergraduate curricula.'[35] While this holds true even today, the tide does seem to be changing, if the active publishing of denser texts for undergraduate students is anything to go by – publishing that is motivated by a larger demand due to the increased interest in written, contextualised graphic design history. In Poynor and Crisp's assessment of Drucker and McVarish's history, we find another issue broached by Poynor that reflects a return (or continuation) of the discourses highlighted by Blauvelt's original contribution: the search for the presence of individuals in the chronology of production persists. Poynor argues that the input and commentary of individual designers is necessary to allow for a deeper comprehension of perspectives, something he finds Drucker and McVarish choose to mistakenly avoid, while Crisp is less critical, attributing this absence of 'sources' as more of a convenience and intentional simplification[36]. Ultimately, what their discussion displays is a duality of opinions and opposing factions of design discourse coming together in a critical environment to help fulfil the needs of graphic design history as a discipline, intentionally or otherwise falling into the same discursive spaces that Blauvelt encapsulated in his critical histories. Poynor and Crisp find the critical approach refreshing, something that Blauvelt was adamant should become a fundamental part of graphic design history writing, while Eskilson's attention to the newer faces in contemporary design helps expand the canon in ways Meggs had disregarded at the time. Their combined attempts, alongside other history writers that followed, are more directly confronted in a later chapter in this thesis, but suffice it to say that their publications gave critics and educators alike a new opportunity to apply the intellectualised discourses developed in the the decade prior to their release, giving effectively valuable and productive opinions that would later help improve the quality of writing within the discipline of graphic design history as a whole.

One argument that seems to have persisted, unresolved, however, was brought to light in Teal Trigg's 'Designing Graphic Design History[37]. While the article goes on to study graphic design magazines in general (such as *Emigre*, *Dot Dot Dot*, and others), focusing on New Zealand's *The*

---

[35] Crisp & Poynor 2008

[36] Crisp & Poynor 2008

[37] Triggs 2009

National Grid, Triggs's survey of published histories[38] of graphic design presenting the bulk of written work as produced, mediated, and consumed by the designers themselves is its relevance to the advancement of the field. With the exception of Rick Poynor and a handful of emerging writers, most commentators on graphic design and its historians have been designers themselves, according to her. While this has offered a multitude of advantages, its consistent production of writing geared for designers has, at times, isolated and marginalised writing from and for the non-designer, the historian and theoretician. This, she argues, has been somewhat of a drawback.

As of May 2012, *Design Observer*, in partnership with AIGA and the Winterhouse Institute, announced the launch of a new series of essays on the subject of "the contributions of local design leaders and legends"[39] in graphic design histories, sparked by two of Blauvelt's articles on the subject at *Design Observer*. In a discussion of the expansion of the subject matter of the canon, recapitulating the aim and outcomes of his primary work of the mid-1990s, Blauvelt concluded that: "Although the thrust of the *Visible Language* project was to ask what a critical history might examine, in the end it was more interested in historiography than history"[40]. As Blauvelt continues to express his interest and fascination with remarkable designers and writers such as James Sholly, he expresses a new vision for the future of design history:

> "graphic design history today seems to have stalled [...] there are more monographs than before, more course offerings in schools and a few more survey books, but the deep interest that the field once held for the history of its own practice seems to have waned. Where are the conferences? Where are the debates? Perhaps it's the intense focus on contemporary culture, or the changing nature of that practice [...] causing us to look forward rather than glance backward. Perhaps it was just a passing moment of professional maturation, an opportunity to take stock of the practice that graphic design had become, that enabled the frenetic activity of the 1980s and 1990s. Most likely, such interest was possible because that contemporary moment was better aligned with the past. History became a great source of inspiration for many designers in the 1980s, just as modernism (which billed itself as timeless) was poised to become history. *What I do know is that*

[38] Triggs 2009, pp.326-333

[39] The Editors 2012

[40] Blauvelt 2010

graphic design as a practice, a profession and a discipline, doesn't hold much of a future without a better and richer sense of its past."[41]

It was shortly after these statements when Rick Poynor, once again, reacted (this time less directly) to Blauvelt's concluding statement, describing a new situation for the study of graphic design history in his article for the *Design Observer* entitled 'Out of the Studio: Graphic Design History and Visual Studies': he questioned and proposed the possibility of merging the two fledging disciplines into a single, comprehensive program that would allow both to flourish. Describing the *Visible Language* project of 1994-5, and its failure to bear any genuine fruit, Poynor declared that this "ambitious project appeared to promise a dawning era of intellectually challenging, revisionist graphic design history writing that would in time have a significant effect on the field of book publishing"[42]. Clearly, Poynor finds that, in 2011, the state of graphic design history publishing had not improved much, with only a few titles being published per year on the subject.

It is what Poynor has to say about the histories of graphic design history education that brings his article into the same range of relevance and importance as Blauvelt's 'An Opening: Graphic Design's Discursive Spaces' and Victor Margolin's 'Narrative Problems of Graphic Design History'. Let us begin with the latter, and move backwards to conclude this chapter with points of view that Poynor uses to establish his argument, in light of the other writings he describes throughout the article.

Narrative Problems of Graphic Design History

The complexity of devising an appropriate scope for the research of this paper begins with the diversity of activities within graphic design itself: with the varying activities defined as graphic design, from illustration, typography, infographics, and book design to new media approaches such as website design, animated television commercials, and numerous screen-based and print centric

---

[41] Blauvelt 2010

[42] Poynor 2011a

visual communication, it becomes difficult to distinguish an accurate measure of what is a history and what is not. Victor Margolin puts together a concise argument that, basically, culminates with: "what a history of graphic design should explain is how the various activities that fall within the construct of graphic design practice are differentiated."[43] He begins, briefly, with the key issues in narrative structures, citing Hayden White's historical representations and postmodernist views of graphic design history, with Linda Hutcheon's *The Politics of Postmodernism* as an example, stating that they "refuse to make a distinction between fact and fiction and, in effect, treat all history as fiction"[44], presenting the debatable state of what he describes as "history as objective reality"[45]. His treatment, as such, takes into account the points raised by White regarding the subjective influence of the historian's attempt to order the events of history, and goes on to question the methods that graphic design historians have applied to their work, from the representativeness of the canon to the narrative choices historians have made[46].

From there, Margolin gets to his point: presenting previously written histories of graphic design and assessing their merits and shortcomings, from timelines to treatments. He starts with a consideration of the 'origins' of graphic design, with regards to when the timeline of histories should begin, according to Meggs (*History of Graphic Design)*, Craig and Barton (*Thirty Centuries of Graphic Design: An Illustrated Survey*), and Enric Satué (*El Diseño Gráfico: Desde los Orígenes hasta Nuestros Días*, or *Graphic Design: From Its Origins until Today*), concluding in support of Hollis's introduction to his *Concise History*:

> "Visual communication in its widest sense has a long history [...] As a profession, graphic design has existed only since the middle of the twentieth century; until then, advertisers and their agents used the services provided by 'commercial artists'."[47]

Therefore, while the debates of the similarities and overlaps between visual communication and graphic design are many, the definitions used by Hollis, Margolin, and all those who accept their model, are much more specific. Visual communication would, accordingly, begin with writing on

---

[43] Margolin 1994, p.243

[44] Margolin 1994, p.234

[45] Margolin 1994, p.234

[46] Margolin 1994, p.235

[47] Hollis 2001, pp.7-8

cave walls, from the pictorial onwards. It's history would span the breadth of non-oral human communication, incorporating the histories of writing, message-conveying painting, and much in between, carried through into professional graphic design as used for communication. Meanwhile, graphic design can be considered as the professional activity of the commercial artist assigned to produce content that communicates, or self-commissioned producer of visual content specifically as a means to deliver messages. Its history begins with the poster designers of the mid to late nineteenth century and continues to include the varied degrees of professionalisation and institutionalisation of the activity in the twentieth century, in different places (Germany, Britain, the US, and other parts of the world), and to differing degrees, combining to form a holistic view of the world history of graphic design.

Once Margolin sets the definition from which he sees the formation of the origin of the history of graphic design, he moves to discuss the other misgivings or accomplishments of the books he describes; the arguments of the graphic designer as the institutionalised, professional designer, not the visual communicator, typographer, or illustrator, is a prevailing theme throughout. From the disagreements Margolin has with how the histories are presented, to the general disregard for the non-professional productions, and with the idea that an "important factor in the canonization of graphic design pieces is the visual satisfaction they give to the trained graphic designer"[48], there is a call for something more tangible, a more organised system of selection of relevant works. Ultimately, the argument is simple, despite having far-reaching effects and complex applications: there are many varied professions that, at times, meet to form the profession of the graphic designer. Margolin agrees with Hollis in that visual communication and graphic design are not two interchangeable terms for the same activity. He suggests graphic design be considered a sub-group of modern (i.e. beginning in the nineteenth century) visual communication; while the history of visual communication concerns itself with the "semantic issues of how things transmit communicative intentions, its principal subject matter is the act of communicating itself"[49], graphic design history does not intend on dealing directly, or particularly, with the act of communication, but rather the signs and semiotics of said communications – within the spheres of intentional *graphic* communication.

---

[48] Margolin 1994, p.240

[49] Margolin 1994, p.239

Essentially, he suggests to isolate and then merge the multitude of historical narratives that have developed over time (illustration, typography, or advertising each have a rich story separate from graphic design) and introduce them as individual practices that have simultaneously and consistently assisted in the development of the practice of graphic design, giving its history heroes and innovations, if only in that the two activities collaborate to produce said genius. This seemingly slight issue of judgment and selection of artefacts is another particularly vivid discussion that Margolin initiated with Adrian Forty shortly before his article on the narrative problems, that he brings into this essay as well: "the judgement of quality in design is central to the enterprise of design history. I do not believe that quality is the primary concern although it raises necessary questions about how different people give value to products."[50] This debate of what qualifies as a design continues to plague historians: what exactly *is* the canon that should be the central reference for design history? Martha Scotford's 'Is There a Canon of Graphic Design History?' is a key text in discussing this issue, where she enumerates the various visuals that have been published, concluding that the canon has been defined through the unintentional, and yet unmistakable, repetition of artefacts in the various forms that they have been displayed and presented.[51] She defines the canon as the artefacts that are most familiar to graphic designers and graphic design historians. As she specifically concluded in 1991, "if we need a canon, if we really need to label and separate, we need to assess better what canon exists and to amend it to make it institutional, conscious, responsible, and truly meaningful for all"[52]. In 2008, she writes about the difficulty of assessing a new canon using new media: this time using new information that she gathered from the Internet, instead of her book-based research of the late 1980s, she finds that the lack of credibility presentable on the many websites requires a very considered vetting of information[53]. Using her same counting system, with a more scrupulous approach to her sources, she turns up 30 new names in her canon, adding up to a combined 93 designers (many of whom are artists too)[54]. Her experiment gives plenty of thought into the validity and veracity of the canon, most notably the question of the quality and significance

---

[50] Margolin 1994, p.235

[51] Scotford 1991

[52] Scotford 1991, p.44

[53] Scotford 2008

[54] Scotford 2008

of the canon, although it offers little answers. The simplicity of the test itself leads us to interesting conclusions, with such things as "the most popular name for a designer is William"[55] being part of the findings. Nevertheless, it is this simplicity that gives strength and credibility to the work of critics of [graphic] design history.

Discursive Spaces, Then and Now

Margolin's essay on these problems of narrative is of indispensable value to this paper, since selecting a canon of published texts from which to begin was instrumental to the final study of books suggested in chapter four (*The Books, Considered*). While the discussion of the canon of graphic design centre around the designers involved, whereas this thesis concerns itself with the canon of texts, not designers, the relevance of those same arguments help define the value of specific books by virtue of the canon each of them presents. The issues raised almost two decades ago are still present today: how should one define graphic design with respect to visual communication as an activity; does graphic design effectively begin with the institutionalisation of the profession, or at an earlier date; what is a graphic design artefact, and how does the community categorise valuable and quality design productions; is the history of graphic design better served by considering "separate strands of practice"[56], each with its own trajectory? The compounded answer to all these questions can be placed in parallel to Bierut's 'Why Designers Can't Think', and possibly Poynor's many debates on the subject of the credibility of a graphic designer's theoretical grounding for criticism and cultural understanding of production[57]: as Andrew Blauvelt so directly posits, "graphic design history has been constructed in service to the legitimization [sic] of professional practice"[58], emphasising the secondary nature of theory to practice so consistently

---

[55] Scotford 1991, p.43

[56] Margolin 1994, p.234

[57] One key example of this perpetual debate can be found in the comments of Michael Bierut's 2005 *Design Observer* article entitled 'On (Design) Bullshit', where Poynor and Bierut initiate a vigorous discussion of the 'truthfulness' of a designer's work, and whether or not bullshit is an acceptable attitude for designers to adopt when pitching their work, as well as the effects articles like Bierut's have on students

[58] Blauvelt 1994, p.198

visible in the discipline. Unlike Poynor, however, Blauvelt is in support of this secondary status that theory has been relegated to, stating that graphic design history as "a field of study without practical application is unlikely and undesirable"[59]. That is not to say that Poynor believes that graphic design history as a discipline in itself is institutionally feasible: he argues that for the field of study to progress, it must merge with the wider net of visual studies, a discipline that is also stagnant and possibly waning.

The state of the discipline has been observed at two distinct instances, by both Blauvelt (1994) and Poynor (2011). Both take on a wide array of issues, attempting to cover the breadth of their concerns, while offering takes from outside of the discipline of graphic design history itself. Blauvelt writes, in 'An Opening: Graphic Design's Discursive Spaces', of the distinct marginalisation of graphic design history in the spheres of the larger design history discipline[60], explicitly explaining the need for the prefix 'proto' in defining the discipline of graphic design history. This paper attempts to describe the end of this need, and how graphic design history should no longer "compensate" by incorporating the heritages of other "relevant areas"[61], since it has now developed its own history rather successfully – although incorporation, as described by Margolin[62], has been the primary catalyst in this process. Poynor's point of view, however, is accurately representative of contemporary graphic design: with visual culture, or visual studies, becoming securely and inexorably intertwined with graphic history, both producing and mediating each other, it becomes logical for the history of one to be that of the other. In his words, graphic design history "is still in a state of becoming" and "as a terrain of intensive and sustained research and study[, it] barely exists at all"[63]. Despite the much wider terrain that his article attempts to cover (the vastness of visual culture and the debate of the institutionalisation and formalisation of graphic design history as a discipline is not exactly the aim of this thesis), one key argument in Poynor's essay that strikes home is rather simple: graphic design writers have "created a body of writing that appears from the

---

[59] Blauvelt 1996, quoted in Poynor 2011a

[60] Blauvelt 1994, p.206

[61] Blauvelt 1994, p.207

[62] Margolin 1994, p.243

[63] Poynor 2011a

outside, when it is noticed at all, to be merely of professional interest"[64], blaming this on the inability of designer-writers[65] to separate themselves from practice, or to dedicate their writing to the purposes of historical record and critical analysis. In Heller's words, graphic design history "must be presented in ways that underscore design's cultural resonance [...] history must show that graphic design is not the product of a hermetically sealed environment"[66]. This is a lot to bring together, with the opinions that Poynor suggests coming from varying outposts of the wider field of graphic design, with educators and practitioners alike quoted presenting differing solutions from differing perspectives. In Poynor's view, it is this confusion of graphic design history being seen as belonging in the studio and the design schools by some, while others attempt to define it as a theoretical discipline in line with art history and cultural studies, that diverts its ability to grow and improve. He argues for the case of the academic and scholarly evolution of the discipline, away from the practitioners spheres of influence, but continues to declare graphic design history as dependant on and intrinsic to the study of graphic design. This uncertainty plaguing graphic design history as a mature discipline is exactly where he finds it could benefit from the more established heritage of visual studies. Blauvelt, however, has different concerns, the more detailed issues facing the development of a much younger discipline that had not yet become torn between homes in academic departments.

Targeting the more detailed aspects of graphic design history, issues that are meant to assist its growth, not its placement, Blauvelt argues against the 'hero worship' that has been borrowed from art history, expressing the "transitory nature of graphic design" that has "paradoxically [...] contributed to the object-oriented nature of most, if not all, histories of graphic design"[67], citing several recent examples as critical of this approach, one of which can be found in the same volume of *Visible Language*[68]. He advocates several conditions for a valid history, based on the theories

---

[64] Poynor 2011a

[65] As described by Teal Triggs, designer-writers are those who write about graphic design from within their experiences as graphic design practitioners, and are thus limited in their capacity to retain objectivity.

[66] Heller 2001, p.182

[67] Blauvelt 1994, p.208

[68] Baker 1994

posited by Michel Foucault[69], expressing the direction that the three issues of *Visible Language* will be taking in the defence and critical appraisal of graphic design's histories, concluding that:

> "The complex nature of the design process necessitates an understanding of it which intergrates [sic] knowledge from many different disciplines and in the process develops its own particular account. For the discursive spaces of graphic design to be opened for investigation requires that the defensive posturing and the shoring-up of the walls of graphic design history be exchanged for the active examination of the 'limits' of graphic design."[70]

Poynor agrees, stating that his aim "is not to suggest that graphic design history does not have a place in the studio as an essential part of any graphic design student's understanding of the discipline", adding that "a view of graphic design history that sees it as being only, or even primarily, for the purpose of educating graphic designers and that seeks to confine it to the design studio will continue to restrict the development of the subject" [71]. He differs in that he sees the maturity of modern day graphic design history not as presiding within the scope and in alliance with graphic design practice, but rather in the larger realm of visual culture: "In a field as broad, provisional and unstable as visual culture [...] the traditional pursuit of encyclopedic [sic] knowledge is no longer tenable" and the study should be approached "collectively rather than as a series of discrete disciplinary units, such as art, film and television (or for that matter, graphic design)"[72].

Blauvelt introduces his paper by explaining the declaration of the "proto-discipline" that is graphic design history as lacking a "body of autonomous knowledge"[73]. It is this body of knowledge that Poynor insists cannot be wholly manifest while graphic design history continues to be bed with the studio. He uses the many discussions that had been sparked by the papers presented at the London College of Communication's *New Views: Repositioning Graphic Design History* symposium in 2005 as his starting point, most notably, he discusses Jonathan Baldwin's attitude. In Baldwin's own words: "innovation and creativity are at the core of everything we teach and practice. If design

---

[69] Poster 1989, p.73; Blauvelt 1994, p.213

[70] Blauvelt 1994, p.216

[71] Poynor 2011a

[72] Poynor 2011a

[73] Blauvelt 1994, p.206

thinking cannot be the underpinning aspect of our own practice as educators, how can we hope to teach it to our own students?"[74]. It is this philosophy that brings Poynor to think of graphic design history's "second outpost" within the territory of visual culture or visual studies[75]. It is also this use of design thinking that pushes him to bridge the divisions between the studio (i.e. the design school) and the academy (i.e. the scholarly, academic department), visual culture and design history. Blauvelt could not have suggested this at his time, for several potential reasons, most obvious of which are the infantile status of visual studies at the time and the still significant difference between the production of graphic design and that of visual culture. In our information age, this is no longer the case.

The work of Blauvelt is perceived to be the defining factors of the childhood of graphic design history. His attempts and critiques were directed at the growth of the discipline from infancy into adolescence. Poynor, on the other hand, was more concerned with how graphic design history could grow into a more mature discipline, readying it for adulthood. While he saw it as still too shackled by its collaborators from differing backgrounds to be able to fulfil Blauvelt's expectations of it, he sought to give it room to deliver on its potential by moving it out of the studio. Margolin expanded on Blauvelt's concerns, deliberately and systematically dissecting the structural and contextual weaknesses and strengths of design history and what little graphic design history was available at the time to set targets and goals for future historians. Blauvelt was more concerned with a more holistic view of where all this could go. Heller, as a devoted historian himself, found rejuvenation for the discipline in the quality of writing and the playfulness of narrative forms, further enhancing the directions Margolin and Blauvelt were aiming for. Poynor absorbed the three pioneers in the construction of the spaces of graphic design history, and suggested various avenues for its success. These four opinions form the basis of the following chapter.

---

[74] Baldwin 2006

[75] Poynor 2011a

Methodology: Blauvelt as Guideline, Poynor as Successor

"the first thing to be said is that in relation to all its users, structuralism is essentially an activity, i.e., the controlled succession of a certain number of mental operations"[76]

— Roland Barthes

Research into published works has been covered in a variety of different contexts and from a diverse series of platforms, while rarely having been undertaken in an academic pursuit as an end in its own. The idea of a comprehensive assessment of the combined published efforts of writers (be they journalists, scholars, academics, or hobbyists; historians or designers) has not presented itself in any shape or form in the previous review of the literature available to us. It does not seem to be that the overview of literature on graphic design history has been the preoccupation of anyone within, or on the margins of, the discourses of design, graphic design and their histories.

This thesis's ambition to produce a thoroughly comparative study of the literature was aided, in part, by its reliance on previous definitions and discourses. The attempt to develop a methodology necessitated three key definitions. While a specific definition of graphic design history that is universally agreed upon is difficult (Poynor and Blauvelt are key examples of strong forces within the proto-discipline who continue to disagree), the classification of texts and the criteria upon which the adequacy of these texts should be established has already been, more or less, agreed upon. Naturally, with a field as young as graphic design history, even such simple questions as whether or not a book is a chronological history of graphic design or a synchronic graphic design history is still open to discussion, and the dynamic nature of the field at the moment is what gives it the chance to define its own parameters. As Poynor, among many others, has repeatedly explained, it is an advantage to graphic design history that it is still innately interdisciplinary, when all

[76] Barthes 1972

older, established disciplines in the humanities and liberal arts are struggling to broaden their scope and adopt this ad-hoc, more incorporative and collaborative, nature[77].

One major concern of this thesis's research was that over-complication of the study and the possibility of an undue amount of philosophical language shifting the attention of the work from its more pragmatic goal into something more academically inaccessible, less enshrined to the needs of the "closed shop of design academia"[78]. While Poynor's argument in his criticism of academia's attitudes did not refer to the necessitated elitism of thought and language that exists in academia, the heaviness of philosophically critical writing generally creates texts that are not within reach of non-academics, if only because the casual reader will find little interest in the material. Also, an undergraduate sophomore would be more likely to ignore a piece of writing that cited too much Derrida and Barthes, preferring instead a piece that read like a Michael Bierut speech or an Ellen Lupton seminar[79]. These thoughts in mind, the methodology generated for the application of the research and content analysis involved in this paper had to exist within a certain scope of simplicity and conciseness. As such, it was initially developed based on the definition of graphic design history, the criteria upon which it is judged, and the classification of the sample of texts (or, in this case, the multitude of texts available that fall under a specific 'target group' – further elaborated in the classification of this chapter). To begin with, this criteria was discovered during the literature review and research contextualisation process, in the preceding chapter.

Criteria

The previous chapter attempted to highlight the compounded efforts of series of critics and academics in formally instituting a discipline that has yet to break into a mainstream, with debates

---

[77] Poynor 2011a

[78] Poynor 2012b

[79] Ellen Lupton is currently the curator of contemporary design at Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum and director of the Graphic Design MFA at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). Her most famous publication to date is her *Thinking With Type*, a typographic manual now in its second edition. She regularly lectures on the subjects of typography and graphic design research, offering seminars, workshops, and their like.

generally skewing away from the direct issues this proto-discipline should attend to,[80] veering instead towards where the discipline should be based.[81] Ultimately, however, several criteria for the establishment of an appropriate body of autonomous knowledge were identified, based on statements made (or reiterated) by Margolin, Blauvelt, Heller, and Poynor. These criteria can be placed into a number of discursive spaces:

- the breadth and depth of published writing on graphic design history is minuscule and should be enhanced if the proto-discipline should ever hope to grow;
- content and contextualisation of material and the choice of artefacts needs to be more scrupulously considered[82], as should tone and style[83];
- insufficient research hours have been committed to the improvement of the canon in graphic design history[84];
- graphic design historians have not managed to establish sufficient objectivity when assessing the artefacts involved[85].

Definition

Once these criteria were developed, another common ground was established: although there is no common agreement on what graphic design history should be, there seems to be a representative sample that defines what it is today. While the definition used in this paper might be controversial, we shall presume that, since it incorporates the majority of discourses while maintaining the generalities and objections advocated by the opponents of certain elements of this definition, graphic design history is:

---

[80] Scotford 1991; Blauvelt 1994; Baker 1994; Heller 2001; Triggs 2009

[81] Heller 1997; Poynor 2011; Baldwin 2006; Triggs 2009

[82] Margolin 1994; Poynor 2011a

[83] Heller 2001

[84] Blauvelt 1994; Poynor 2011a

[85] Blauvelt 1994

Constituted by the amalgamation of writings and *visuals that complement writings* that describe the history of graphic design in its most banal form[86], its most comprehensive form[87], and its most critical form[88], and all such chronological writing on the subject. This includes writing that is more oriented to specific periods[89] or specific designers[90]. Furthermore, graphic design history includes writing that describes the issues graphic design has faced, or the historiography of graphic design and its history[91]. Lastly, graphic design history is writing that makes use of this history of graphic design to look ahead and learn from itself, primarily by evaluating contemporary graphic design in the same way that it should assess and mediate past graphic design. Its goal is to improve its ability to mediate itself to designers and to the general public. To put this shortly, **graphic design history is *writing* that describes, mediates, and evaluates previous and present accomplishments in the field of graphic design for the purposes of enhancing the production of graphic design in the future and to its consumption**.

Classification

This definition was quickly applied to the mass of books currently available at the nearest bookstore, which lead to a clear justification of categories. The books were therein classified as 'historical', 'theoretical'/'critical', and 'reflective'. With the classification of the sample developed, the definition at hand, and criteria present, the methodology had to be constituted and developed. Ultimately, the intent became to attempt to reassess these criteria, so as to discover if the current state of publishing is still in a similar stagnant position as described by Poynor one year ago.

---

[86] such as Steven Heller's *Graphic Design: A Timeline*

[87] such as Philip Meggs's *History of Graphic Design*

[88] such as Johanna Drucker and Emily McVarish's *Graphic Design: A Critical History*

[89] such as Rick Poynor's *No More Rules: Graphic Design and Postmodernism*

[90] Paul Rand; Tibor Kalman; etc.

[91] This refers to critical essays, very much like those introduced in the previous chapter that define the discourse, but also writings produced for the benefit of the enhancement of the education of the graphic design historian's understanding of the discipline and its practice. Exemplary texts include, but are not limited to, the *Looking Closer* series and texts such as *Graphic Design History* (Heller 2001), and *Design Writing Research: Writing on Graphic Design* (Lupton and Miller).

The appropriate portrayal of the current state of published works had to take into account that only texts in (or translated to) English would be of value, giving them a wider, international character. This limited the use of many works of significance available in the myriad of European languages, as well as the handful of texts from other parts of the world. Ideally, books that are not accessible in what is considered the international lingua franca are considered inaccessible to this study.

The subject matter involved had to be limited to graphic design history according to our definition, but that statement was at once ambiguous and specific. While clearly excluding such key texts such as Ellen Lupton's *Thinking with Type*, it still included works such as monographs and other more specialised texts that, despite being relevant to a history of sorts, were not textual in that they concentrate more concretely on the visual work of the designer. The target group had to be narrowed down slightly further, since the general purpose of this survey was not to be entirely exhaustive, but rather to take a reasonably sized sample so as to be able to identify a trend in more ambitious works; it was quickly rephrased 'graphic design history whose content is not limited to one individual or small movements or organisations' but, while this revoked the usage of designer monographs, it still included another aspect of graphic design history that was not part of the focus of this study: period movements; texts such as Rick Poynor's *No More Rules: Graphic Design and Postmodernism* were considered relevant because of their focus on contemporary issues, while historical surveys of Pop Art and the early movements of De Stijl, the Bauhaus, or general Modernism are not – Target group: 'graphic design history whose content is contemporary and is not limited to one individual or small movements of organisations'. This target was consistently narrowed down so as to avoid works of less impact on the sphere of published texts, while also considering that some books that had not received wide distribution were still significant in defining graphic design history.

The final target group of published books can be concisely described as:

English language graphic design history texts whose content is contemporary, comprehensive, diverse, original, and impactful, and texts that seem to fulfil the criteria meticulously elaborated in the writings of Margolin, Blauvelt, Heller, and Poynor.

This allowed for a selection of texts outside the specific realm that were emblematic of the changes and efforts of the avant-garde of graphic design critics, historians, and educators, so as to develop a more representative sample of the current state of graphic design history publishing efforts.

With that target group in mind, the selection process was not original in any particular way: it simply considered all texts referred to by the key articles in the literature review, it looked into all the bookstores in the city of Amsterdam that housed works on graphic design, and it considered the published works of the most commonly recognisable names in graphic design history. Lastly, it sought out work by less recognised names that had a direct impact on the peers, colleagues, and acquaintances of the author of this thesis, and mapped them according to the above target statement.

Work and Activity

The three decades following the second world war were a time of cultural, academic, and commercial affluence in the West, with the American Dream being exported worldwide, the end of colonisation and the shedding of the last remnants of European political imperialism, and the philosophical and critical renaissance of France and its European contemporaries. Foucauldian power mechanics, Derrida's deconstruction, the rise of post-war Modernism and the development of postmodernism as a mode of thought all factored together with television and the unstoppable rise of the media empires of the world, alongside the golden age of advertising (although, arguably, the true golden age of advertising is happening now, not in the 1960s[92]). In the middle of all this, French scholar, philosopher, and writer Roland Barthes began publishing articles and books that would later define an entire field of study and influence many others. Among those many

[92] Nelson 2012; Cleveland 2011; Hoffman 2012

publications was a short essay that could be considered, in today's language, equivalent to a long blog post, entitled 'The Structuralist Activity', first published in his *Critical Essays*[93]. The key term here is *activity*.

The primary tenants of the theory behind structuralism are most succinctly explained as the abstraction of systems through the identification of the various units that define their structure, and the use of this abstraction to understand and manipulate their meanings as simulacra for the development of an interpretation of signs that would better explain their interrelationships. Roland Barthes's activity approach makes this even more poignant: structuralist activity is essentially the reinterpretation of the interpretation of a function – with functionality being the key[94]. Barthes's response to structuralism is considered a post-structuralist activity, just as Levi-Strauss's appropriation of Saussure's structural linguistics to anthropology[95], and Lacan's to psychology. This renewed debate brought attention back to structuralism and semiotics resurged in the 1950s and 1960s. Structuralism has been, over the course of its discourses, variously described as a movement, a school, and an activity. The idea of structuralism as described by Saussure, Levi-Strauss, or Lacan is not the precise purpose of this diversion from the methodology of this paper, despite its relevance to the ultimate positions taken by semioticians in the 1960s. Barthes's is, also, not. Saussure's argument of structure, however, is still the framework from which post-structuralism operates, and is of importance to properly comprehending the relevance of Barthes's structuralist activity to this thesis. As Malpas and Wake summarise it, the idea of Saussure's structuralism is threefold:

> (i) it gives us the notion that language is not natural but systematic;
>
> (ii) that language is the primary system of cultural existence and that it works to structure what we think we know; and
>
> (iii) it shifts the emphasis of cultural study firmly in the direction of attention to texts and the evidence they can be said to provide of the linguistic construction of meaning.[96]

---

[93] Barthes 1972

[94] Barthes 1972

[95] Levi-Strauss 1963

[96] Malpas & Wake 2006, p.7

These three tenants can be translated into a more vividly applicable methodology for our purposes, taking into account Roland Barthes's activity theory. The language in play here is akin to the criteria declared over the past eighteen years by our four primary historical critics, a set of rules that are not naturally present but developed as a system; it is that criteria that structures the realm of knowledge from which we make assumptions on the validity and historicity of information; the meaning of the histories and their creation is thus governed by the study of the criteria as defined in the beginning of this chapter.

The revealing factor here is the nature of the distinction that Barthes makes between the work and the activity, as he expounds upon it in his short essay: "we recompose the object in order to make certain functions appear, and it is, so to speak, the way that makes the work"[97], which is why his idea of structuralism is embedded in its activity, not its work. A quick analysis of the article gives us a brief explanation of what that activity entails: making sense of a particular object or artefact is the primary purpose of structuralism, and it is this breaking apart and rebuilding alongside a parallel interpretation of meaning within the structure of the original artefact that makes the activity effective. Essentially, it is what Millennials[98] today are accustomed to doing on a daily basis (which is also partly what Barthes anticipated at the end of his article): you take a film like *Due Date* (2011) and you compare it to, for example, *Planes, Cars, and Automobiles* (1987) and – despite it already having been announced as a remake and thus 'let the cat out of the bag' – you encounter a more or less identical storyline, since although the events differ, the structure of their happening is analogous to one another. While this association is simple, the "dissection" is not the purpose of structuralism: it is only the first half of a two-part process; "once the units are posited, structural man must discover in them or establish for them certain rules of association: this is the activity of articulation"[99]. This is the dual activity that Barthes describes: dissection followed by articulation leads to a final understanding that makes structuralism important, "it manifests a new category of the object, which is neither the real nor the rational, but the functional"[100]. Ultimately, Barthes

---

[97] Barthes 1972

[98] Millennials is becoming the more commonly accepted name for the Generation Y, arguably referring to those born between 1982 and 2002.

[99] Barthes 1972

[100] Barthes 1972

considers the value of the structuralist activity one of meaning fabrication, not meaning exposition, bound by the desire to comprehend the how and why, not just the what.

While structuralism is a very important activity for the design historian and especially for the design practitioner, it is neither directly relevant nor helpful for our purposes. However, the idea of the dissection + articulation = function formula developed by Barthes is highly effective at producing a valuable design and methodology for the assessment of the numerous texts available to us in comparison to the Blauvelt, Margolin, Heller, and Poynor criteria developed over the past two decades. The structure here, however, is one guided by the criteria, while the activity involved in the dissection is only applied to the books that will be reviewed in the coming chapter. The reviews will not be typical in that they do not intend on being representative of the content, but rather in how those particular texts fall within the structure of the criteria established for them: the reviews are the articulation phase of the activity. As such, the previous chapter of this paper can be seen as the dissection phase, while the upcoming one clearly manifests itself as the articulation of the idea, so as to give us a functional use for the body of knowledge that has been created by the educators and writers of graphic design and its histories. The question here will be whether or not this formula does in fact uncover a functional value within the sample and a discovery of how much work is needed for this sample to grow sufficiently for it to completely fulfil the criteria. In a sense, it is a structuralist question borne from a structuralist activity, but it is fulfilled through a much more mundane process of comparison to a checklist.

The Books, Considered

"How can one design if the past is unknown? As a political tool it helps to understand the language of persuasion, even if the goal of the design brief is not to change politics."[101]

— Steven Heller

The published history of graphic design and graphic design history is a medley of texts that have little in the way of genre, more towards a thematic inclination for classification. The most widely recognisable type of graphic design history text would be those books that offer a general survey of writings directly focused on summarising and chronicling the events of the past. Such books can be, not entirely erroneously, said to be offspring of Philip Meggs's *History of Graphic Design*. This copiously republished volume, alongside the iconic *Graphic Design: A Concise History* of Richard Hollis, constitute the breadth of publishing within the sector for over a decade. We find a gap of serious, noteworthy history texts, until Stephen Eskilson releases *Graphic Design: A New History*. Thereafter, among others, the traditional list would include Johanna Drucker and Emily McVarish's *Graphic Design History: A Critical Guide* and Patrick Cramsie's *The Story of Graphic Design*. Once these general histories are considered, we move on to more specific histories: Robin Kinross's two seminal books on typography, Guy Julier's history of advertising as parallel to design history, postmodernism for undergraduates by Rick Poynor[102], and other unusual approaches to the past of graphic design – such as Steven Heller and Veronique Vienne's *100 Ideas That Changed Graphic Design*. From there, we consider two texts of special import: *Bibliographic: 100 Classic Graphic Design Books* by Jason Godfrey, and *Graphic Design: Now in Production* edited by Andrew Blauvelt and Ellen Lupton. The anticipated *The World History of Design* by Victor Margolin would have been

---

[101] Armstrong 2009, p.99: Steven Heller "Graphics.com interview: Steven Heller", graphics.com 2007

[102] Other books of note that focus on particular movements that still maintain their influence on contemporary design and its histories include

also be discussed, although the focus will be on the paper of the same title that Margolin wrote, rather than the book, since the (expectedly) large tome will not be published until 2014[103]. These series of texts purport to cover a most diverse and eclectic collection that would prove to be effective in giving a reasonable sample of the variety available to the historian.

Following these texts, more attention will be paid to the theoretical constructions that have been published: starting with Ellen Lupton and J. Abbot Miller's *Design Writing Research* and moving on towards *Seventy-Nine Short Essays on Design* by Michael Bierut, both infamous in their contribution to the critical education of a designer and in formulating the vast value of design thinking, while also being key texts in defining both. Thereafter the *Looking Closer* series edited by Michael Bierut, Steven Heller, and William Drenttel[104], a collection that singlehandedly covers the massive bulk of discourse in graphic design and graphic design history over the past two decades, is given a full analysis and thorough breakdown. Georgette Ballance and Steven Heller's *Graphic Design History* and Catherine de Smet and Sarah de Bondt's *Graphic Design: History in the Writing (1983-2011)* combine to complete the circle of writing about writing the history of graphic design history.

While the intent and design of this research focuses on whether or not certain books fulfil the predefined criteria, this chapter will be divided into two parts: the first will give a brief, non-comprehensive overview of the texts in question, so as to familiarise the reader with their content; the second will be a series of lists that describe the qualities of these books in a more data-centric, quasi-quantifiable manner.

The Histories of Graphic Design

Philip Meggs first published his history in 1983. Richard Hollis came next in 1994. *Graphic Design: A Concise History* does a great job of enumerating the past of the graphic arts, standing out as a book as iconic as Meggs' *History of Graphic Design* at least in its ubiquity. Then, in 2007, Stephen Eskilson

---

[103] Poynor 2012b

[104] Jessica Helfand replaces William Drenttel for the third volume of the series

finally brings a new book to the stage, quickly followed by a series of other 'history of' graphic design books, from Johanna Drucker and Emily McVarish's *Graphic Design History: a critical guide* to Patrick Cramsie's *The Story of Graphic Design*. These books, compiled, form the veritable and verifiable history of the discipline. While others have been published, these stand out as being particularly popular. It used to be that Hollis's text allowed for a quick read and overview of the discipline, giving the reader an efficient survey that then allows her to turn to Meggs' much larger tome, the ultimate reference resource. Then, in the mid-2000s, publishers started taking notice, and a fresh rush of history of graphic design books were green-lighted.

The *Concise History* begins with poster design in 1890 in Europe and develops under the now familiar timelines of the years that follow, up to and including the late 1980s[105], covering the profession in sufficient depth. Meggs, meanwhile, is the encyclopaedic reference of graphic design history, beginning with the prehistory and ending with today, covering everything in the traditional art historic way, briefly describing social, economic, or political considerations at the time. Eskilson's *New History* gives particular attention to the technological changes from the beginning of the industrial age and William Morris's Arts and Crafts Movement through until contemporary times, considering the impact of different manufacturing advancements on the role of graphic design and the evolution of business's effects on the prioritisation of design. His coverage of wartime graphic design in Russia, Europe, and the US is thorough and highly related to social changes, again giving graphic design history its place in the wider spectrum of humanity, where the last two decades feature as man and the digital age forever changing the profession. Drucker and McVarish choose, instead, to begin in 35,000 BCE, with the start of communication, followed by writing and what they term as 'classical literacy'. With the very brief prehistory and early classical times, *A Critical Guide* presents the history of graphic design as beginning with the start of book design and the illuminated manuscripts. The book then develops in typical critical form, with chapter titles that betray a postmodern[106] review of the historical material present, with a design that allows for fluid, modular study but also dynamic systematic approaches to the text. Cramsie covers the same pre-

---

[105] The second edition, published in 2001, covers the 1990s and the break into the 21st century

[106] Postmodern here is used to imply any form of Critical Theory developed or reasserted in the second half of the twentieth century: structuralism, deconstruction, phenomenology, along with a host of other philosophical traditions.

graphic design, with an introduction that lightly contemplates the meaning of graphic design and what it encompasses, giving more emphasis to artefacts than individuals without disregarding the importance of the pioneers in the field. Chapters, although chronological, tend to mix the movements of a period with one another, putting them into parallel but related perspectives that give them a new angle and a different outlook. Not all of these new books were well received, and many critics were particularly eager to scrutinise the texts so as to find the next great history.

The first of these new books[107], Eskilson's, received a painful review from the *Design Observer* for the many discrepancies within the volume[108], although his detailing of contemporary graphic design and the influences of postmodernism is the most thorough of this list, with his attention to the effects of digitalisation on the practice being highly curious and vividly informative[109]. Comparatively, and striking a good balance, Cramsie's presents an unusually long pre-Industrial Age history, accounting for over one third of his book, and the most constructive contribution to the pre-history of graphic design – he gives designers and historians many lessons from the Classical and Medieval eras, with his discussion of the development of paper and the question of what exactly Gutenberg invented being of particular intrigue. Drucker and McVarish's approach was much more critical (as the name suggests), in that it applied a visibly denser line of questioning to the works it considered, while also "[demonstrating] the fact that design bears import and kookiness equal to all human endeavors"[110], according to Denise Gonzales Crisp, gives this text a mutually general and specific tone and content that Poynor was critical of, declaring it as distracting from the task at hand[111].

What Drucker and McVarish do ultimately create, however imperfect, becomes a work of immense importance that challenges the histories of all that come after it to be as involved. Their

---

[107] Roxane Jubert and Serge Lemoine's *Typographic and Graphic Design: From Antiquity to the Present* was published in 2006, as a translation to the original French. While this book is valuable in its tackling of Nazi design and as an addendum to Meggs's history, it did not offer much more to English speaking audiences than the Meggs history, and was considered a footnote to the history of publishing in graphic design history at the time.

[108] Twemlow & Wild 2007

[109] The new 2012 second edition of Eskilson's text promises to amend these many errors

[110] Crisp & Poynor 2008

[111] Crisp & Poynor 2008

targeted assessment of graphic design in how it was perceived by the social groups it was aimed at, in how it was consumed, brought in a layer of design history that was common to the wider field but alien to graphic design history: consumption and production methods were studied to better value or criticise the artefacts in question. The book they offered told more of a story than previous tomes, giving the reader an engaging setting to learn more about the field. Meanwhile, Cramsie's attentiveness to what most graphic design historians consider the history of visual culture and visual communication makes for an unorthodox definition of graphic design, giving it three characteristics combining to declare graphic design as any two dimensional production of word (and, after the invention of photography and lithography, image) that is innately reproducible[112], even though it does attempt to introduce with more depth the many trajectories that Margolin spoke of in his paper on problems with narratives. He starts with writing and the development of communication into the scribal book, leading to Gutenberg essentially representing the birth of graphic design, as a story if not as a profession. the Eskilson's work, although not particularly effective in its historiography, does bring to light numerous works from the more contemporary designers that other texts had not considered. Most importantly, however, Eskilson's work was a milestone in that it brought about a new desire to attend to the histories of graphic design.

The combination of all five of these books gives us a varied, multi-layered, complex history of graphic design. While other, smaller or less comprehensive, histories have been written and do offer a view that contends with these five, they do constitute a mass of compiled knowledge that acts as a reference and canon for the histories. Each with its own weaknesses, all devoted to the advancement of unique agendas, and all (somewhat, at least) designed to be used for what Drucker and McVarish describe as "systematic study"[113], they work well today to give a bigger picture. Meggs is the most recognisable, and arguably reliable history of graphic design; Hollis gives the reader a quick glance, to refresh or simply skim through; Eskilson offers a highly valuable and revisionist history of contemporary design; Cramsie gives us the older, oft ignored, history of visual communication; Drucker and McVarish bring Meggs's work (along with all the others') under the microscope while concurrently placing them in the wider context of world events.

---

[112] Cramsie 2010, pp.10-11

[113] Drucker & McVarish 2009, p.xi

Let us then, for the purposes of not evaluating each book individually but their combined value to the field, disregard whatever shortcomings any particular book has so long as there is another book that compensates. Collectively, they manage to produce a history that is at once informative, engaging, accurate, and current, comprehensive and so representative, and critical enough to be mindful of the many mistakes the historians of graphic design as well as the practitioners themselves have made over the past. Their most obvious failure is in their inability to accurately represent the lesser known, non-canonical works of Western[114] designers, and their disregard – or cursory reference to[115] – non-Western design. Together, they offer a wholesome review of the history of graphic design. What they lack, however, is a freshness and an originality that the next series of history of texts, books that are not as far-reaching or vast in their attempts succeed to do. With the exception of the highly anticipated Margolin text, all of the following books are highly specific works.

Other Histories of Graphic Design

Robin Kinross's *Modern Typography: an essay in critical history* (1992) is a different kind of book, with a different target audience. With Margolin's trajectories in mind, it makes sense that texts that cover histories of the separate disciplines that combine to constitute graphic design are as important as the general surveys. As such, and since the importance of a sensitivity to and intuitive understanding of typography is indispensable to the designer's education, this is one of many non-plural trajectories of graphic design history[116]. There is no brief introduction that is as accurate and broad as this book, despite Kinross's clear resolve not to be exhaustive. While developing a more wholesome, wider definition of 'modern' in typography, Kinross points to several accomplishments

---

[114] Western would include Europe, North America, and Australia, with Russian design rarely considered (with the exception of the Russian Constructivists and the Communist creations, both marginalised but included for their influence on Western designers).

[115] Chinese design is mostly considered prior to the 20th century, where reference to printmaking and the Chinese artistic style is considered; Japanese and Latin American design feature briefly in most recent editions of these histories, but not sufficiently; African, Indian (and Central Asian), and Middle Eastern design is largely ignored.

[116] Others would include histories of new media, of illustration, and monographs of poster design and Bauhaus or Pop Art creations

within typography and its history that others have frequently simply brushed past, and does so in language that is at once grand and enjoyable. Small mentions, such as Sweden's minor evolution of typography in the WWII period alongside the Swiss typography,[117] for example, give the reader the opportunity to consider the histories of other aspects of typography and graphic design from different perspectives. Furthermore, his incorporation of the political, economic, and social considerations of the time are so intrinsically linked to the development of the field, in practice and for pragmatic reasons, that they offer a more exhaustive look into the often familiar incidents of type history. More importantly, Kinross's text shows how these books have evolved into something more, or as Matthew Carter puts it: "This book aims to break down that separation by considering issues other than visual appearance, and by avoiding the 'bibliophilic nostalgia' so prevalent in typographic culture. This leads to some interesting reassessments, for example of nineteenth-century typography." The examples in the book, ranging from novels and road signs to railway timetables and printers' manuals, give the reader a fresh perspective of the older history; its scope, starting with the initiation of critical typography in the late seventeenth century and carrying through to the crisis of 1973, is also remarkable, considering its size. That it does not attempt to tell the whole story on its own is part of its virtues: for those with a more detailed interest, the bibliography is conveniently elaborate and notes on all the references used within the book are very handy.

As a plus, Robin Kinross is a man whose writing has helped enhance the discipline with quality works and a critical eye that demands attention, and so introducing undergraduates to him is as vital as the texts themselves. In another of his books, *Unjustified texts: perspectives on typography*, Kinross gives the reader a much wider view of the universe from which a graphic designer or typographer is born, by simply compiling a series of his own writings from over the years. In his own words, and in fitting with Bierut's 'Warning: May Contain Non-Design Content', Kinross stresses that the book is about "typography (though the book's subtitle might have run on to 'graphic design, and design as a whole, with some dashes into architecture, and broad-brush cultural commentary here and there too')"[118]. Consistent with this statement, intellectuals such as D.H. Lawrence, Carl Gustav Jung, and George Bernard Shaw still manage to appear in the index, despite their non-association with the generalities – or specificities – of design. With particular emphasis on semiotics, as well as

---

[117] Kinross 2004, p.146

[118] Kinross 2002, p.9

thoughtful pieces on typography and the culture that surrounds it, this book is a distinctly historical and philosophical resource for graphic designers that, although at times outdated (in particular some pieces prior to 1990), is of valuable substance to the development of the historian's view of the meanings behind the production of graphic artefacts, as well as their progression in time, in their ability to give light to opinions before commercialism and material culture affected such changes to social and professional activity as is prevalent today. Key texts of note would include 'Semiotics and Designing' for what could be considered Kinross's flawed comprehension of the future of graphic design and society, and the joyfully politicised curiosity of typographic tradition and style 'Large and small letters: authority and democracy', are both beautiful examples of how Kinross gives the reading new light on existing knowledge. His pieces on individuals ('Richard Hollis', 'Eric Gill', 'Jan Tschichold') are also remarkably valuable, at least in their insights to the workings of some of the icons and pioneers of graphic design and its history.

Books that bring graphic design into the larger context of design in general are hard to find. Guy Julier's *The Culture of Design* does exactly that, where his study of the importance of culture to design, as well as the economic environments that have shaped design and culture, give a new voice to the history of graphic design. Endeavouring to establish "design culture as a distinct discipline" (back cover), it manages to do much more. Few other texts are as explicit in, or as determined to, exploring the relationship of object design and graphic design as those of Julier, where he picks out key moments in advertising (which is quite fitting, if one agrees with Steven Heller's cleverly elaborated theory of advertising as mother of graphic design[119]) as sidelines and catalysts to the work of other designers in various fields. Furthermore, building on the intrinsic need to study design from a consumption perspective while also appreciating the indispensable designer as primary creative force, as Julier establishes in his first three chapters, he arrives to a series of case studies and enables his survey to carry greater significance. In Julier's study of the production, mediation, and consumption of the Dyson vacuum cleaner, he incorporates an analysis of the engineering innovations, the product design semantics, and the history and meaning of the typography used for branding[120]. He later describes the evolution of the product design itself[121],

---

[119] Heller 1997

[120] Julier 2000, pp.90-93

[121] Julier 2000, pp.93-95

following that up with a thorough assessment of the campaign used to promote the DC-01 by advertisers[122]. Examples like this pepper the book, with diversions from the history of the products themselves to the technologies that bred them and the typography and branding that promoted them, affirming the significance of graphic design and advertising to the evolution of the process and history of the culture and design combination, as opposed to the more commonly marginalised role they have been given so far. When Julier tells the story of both the industrial and the graphical in parallel, describing connections and comparing similarities, he breathes new life into the distinct disciplines, giving the design process a unified and more wholesome history – enhancing our understanding of the how and why that has occurred over the decades. This aspect of the text alone makes it of critical importance to the development of graphic design history.

Rick Poynor's *No More Rules: Graphic Design and Postmodernism* is one of two monographs in this list, and is included because of the relevance of postmodernism to contemporary design. Rick Poynor is a design critic and cultural educator of the highest order, one of the few commentators on graphic design that have crossed the Atlantic and one of the more controversial of his generation. With several published books, and countless articles in magazines and scholarly journals, his most resonant feat and possibly his most consistently held stance on graphic design is in emphasising its postmodernity, and the value this postmodernity brings to understanding the trends and inclinations within graphic design history. His views on postmodernism and postmodernity, however, are not entirely representative of their applications in graphic design practice, with his book having been criticised for exactly that reason by several prominent postmodernists, especially Lorraine Wild[123]. The introduction to his six chapter book, describing contemporary graphic design as declaring numerous "symptoms of postmodernism"[124], sets the tone for the rest of the book. If anything, his preface is riddled with enough references to people rejecting his work to also express the precariousness of his position. Memphis, Cranbrook Academy (and the many designers associated with it), Gert Dumbar, Neville Brody, and April Greiman are a few of the names and institutions that are scrutinised by the critical eye of Poynor, giving credence to Christopher Brawn's description of Poynor's writing as "gliding from one piece of work to the next, Poynor

---

[122] Julier 2000, pp.110-112

[123] Bierut et al. 2006, p.155

[124] Poynor 2003, p.10

connects the development of postmodern design while gently including some academic opinions in a tone that is inclusive rather than alienating."[125] At the very least, this book explains to all those who have not had the time to study it exactly what postmodernism is, how appropriation and issues of authorship are such an inspirational part of the movement, and in what ways contemporary Modernism is actually a symptom of postmodernity. The text, however, focuses its energies on what Wild refers to as defining postmodernism as "theory illustrated", which, in her capacity as one of the active members of postmodernism, she finds to be a misrepresentation.[126] Jumping from David Carson to Paula Scher and Tibor Kalman, he displays the ways postmodern deconstruction and vernacular and historical appropriation in graphic design became part of the wider visual language; he discussed J. Abbott Miller and Ellen Lupton's struggles with authorship; he showed the numerous digital experimentations of computer graphics that *Wired* magazine spearheaded and Jeffery Keedy played with. While his overall survey might not have been comprehensive, and it falsely presented a postmodernism that was not about rebellion, seriousness, and fun – a postmodernism that was not a reaction to the plainness of the minimal modernism so common in the 1970s and 1980s. It was called ugly, but it opened the space for experimentation and expanded the lexicon of visual language. This book is arguably[127] one of the most generically useful light reads of design theory (with Lorraine Wild's 'Castles Made of Sand' as companion reading) in that it gives its audience a window into a period of questioning, exploration, and the widening of a field that was very quickly contracting because it was afraid to look past the four fonts its designers favoured.

Another book that stands out as remarkably different is also a book that had a very limited print run and seems to be impossible to find. *The World Must Change: Graphic Design and Idealism* is a three act project published by De Balie in collaboration with the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam. Beginning as a research project that later led to a minimal publication, it is similar to Poynor's *No More Rules* in that it, too, is not a general survey but rather quite specific: it pays tribute to the

---

[125] Brown 2004

[126] Bierut et al. 2006, p.156

[127] Critics have found many areas where this book has failed to be representative or effective, and while their statements are accurately critical, they do not discredit the success of this text in offering a salient image of postmodernism's impact on contemporary culture and visual production

numerous Dutch designers and artists who had a particular tendency to the idealistic socio-political influences that design could exert on its audience and its practitioners. Preceding said Annelies Haase and Leonie ten Duis's tribute with a history of the philosophical basis of these works and succeeding it with an essay on Designer as Editor, which quite convincingly declares a new role for the designer, in line with Designer as Author[128], Producer, Entrepreneur, and Programmer alongside the less ubiquitous as Harvester, as Timekeeper, as Pathfinder, as Tailor[129] – although many of these are much newer than the designer as editor. The three essays combine to produce a history of philosophy, of Dutch-inspired graphic design, and of designer activity. Max Bruinsma's concluding essay and Henk Oosterling's history of idealism, or the philosophy thereof, are incredibly well written and thought-provoking texts that supplement the clever and astute observations made in the bulk of the text with the historical overview of Dutch graphic design playing a key part in the evolution of the discipline across Europe. These three essays combine to form *The World Must Change*, a text that will teach students of graphic design and graphic design history the value of asking the right questions while providing them with yet another viewpoint on the real history of graphic design.

In more recent years, two particularly notable books were penned (or collected) by equally notable design observers and critics. The first, earlier, text is *100 Ideas that Changed Graphic Design*, a book that re-envisions the history of graphic design not from a chronological, heroes-based, timeline, but rather from a more conceptual, theoretical perspective. Putting together ideas or processes that came about over the years that progressively created shifts within the profession that lead to the field being as we know it today. While Steven Heller and Veronique Vienne's book is not an exhaustive attempt at chronicling the actual works and individuals or groups that caused these changes, it does produce a uniquely representative image of what had actually happened over the years. A book too new and not popular in academic journals for it to be considered by serious academics, the blurbs that end up summarising the activities within graphic design that assisted the discipline in its evolution are meticulously highlighted, with James Thorne of

---

[128] The debate of Designer as Author, and the many other entitlements given to designers over the ten years at least, has been ongoing and continues to evolve, with its latest manifestation being Designer as Publisher. Ellen Lupton, Steven Heller, Michael Rock, and a host of other educators based in the US have written copiously about it.

[129] Heller 2012a

CoolHunting.com describing the content's scope as "broad but intelligently refined, connecting all aspects of graphic design"[130]. And its broadness is unmistakable: with the first great idea being 'The Book', it is clear this history begins before Gutenberg, carrying through 'Ornamentation', 'Naive Mascots', 'Visual Puns', 'The Object Poster', and to idea number 25, 'Manifestoes', bringing us to the beginnings of the twentieth century. What follows is a detailed analysis of the various activities that helped graphic design evolve, from the massive 'Corporate Identity' to the seemingly insignificant 'Ransom Notes' and 'Film Title Sequences', peppered between the obvious but unnoticeable 'Forced Obsolescence', 'Layering and Overprinting', and 'Designers' Websites'. The Creative Review and RedBubble both praise the book[131], although their attention is more towards the value of the text to designers than to historians. Ultimately, its 100 ideas are genuinely inspiring and delightful in their refreshing view of graphic design if only because there's a list to remind the reader of what changes did occur.

The other book is technically an accompanying catalogue for an exhibition at the Walker Art Center, alongside the Cooper Hewitt and the National Design Museum, edited by Andrew Blauvelt and Ellen Lupton, entitled *Graphic Design: Now in Production* (2012) – the name of the exhibition it complements. Both editors being high profile members of the organising committee, they are also matched with what *Eye Magazine* called a "dream team"[132], creating an exhibition catalogue that Poynor declared "a lasting work of reference"[133] in *Design Observer*. A book that collects twenty articles (introduction included) alongside cleverly juxtapositioned graphic samples with engrossing captions (Eye Magazine's review's "[o]ne criticism is that the caption type is too small, which is unfortunate, as it is all worth reading"[134]), its articles combine a series of writings that define the state of graphic design thinking cohesively as it stands today. In a sense, it is a history currently being written, unlike the other texts in this list. Michael Rock's 'Fuck Content', Heller's 'Design Entrepreneur 3.0', Lupton's 'Reading and Writing' (attacked by Poynor in *Design*

---

[130] Thorne 2012

[131] Sinclair 2012; RedBubble 2012

[132] McCarthy 2012

[133] Poynor 2012a

[134] McCarthy 2012

Observer[135]), and Armin Vit and Bryony Gomez-Palacio's 'Brand Matrix' are some of the more engaging and valuable reads within this volume, with Rock's article presenting itself as a takedown of meaningless filler, Heller setting the stage for yet a new trend, Lupton decrying the gradual death of long-form writing, and Vit and Gomez-Palacio describing the evolution of branding.

"What we are missing are good scholarly surveys that are written for lay audiences. That is what I hope to do in the World History of Design which I am now planning."[136] This is the statement that defines the work that is expected to be as ground-breaking as Meggs's initial contribution to the field from 1983. Expected in 2014, *The World History of Design* attempts to present a genuinely comprehensive compendium of (graphic) design history through the ages, and act as Margolin's own answer to his 'Narrative Problems of Graphic Design History' from 1994. Two decades after he criticised the state of history writing in the field, this text is expected to be an accurate re-representation of design history on a wider scale. Unfortunately, it is too early to get a copy and therefore not possible to evaluate as part of this paper. Still, it is one of the more seminal works that are expected to be published in the coming years that are set to redetermine the landscape of graphic design history.

Lastly, for all other books that should have made it into this list, and some that maybe should not, Jason Godfrey's *Bibliographic: 100 Classic Graphic Design Books* is the perfect recourse: a book that attempts to be a collection of titles, a visual bibliography of graphic design and its histories, while itself being a history of publication within graphic design. This history book of books acts as one other way to look at graphic design, giving us further outlets for study and expanding the scope of the discipline in other directions.[137] Widely praised as one of the more iconic book lists due to the uniqueness of the books: Maria Popova from *Brain Pickings* enthusiastically declares it as a collection of collector's books, giving reference to a series of titles that preceded the titles that gave birth to

---

[135] Poynor 2012a

[136] Margolin 2000, p.4

[137] Another text of similar methodology is Armin Vit and Bryony Gomez-Palacio's *Graphic Design, Referenced: A Visual Guide to the Language, Applications, and History of Graphic Design*, which was displaced by Godfrey's text due to its more diverse interest and its small emphasis on graphic design history

books we know today,[138] while Dominic Flask of *The Designer's Review of Books* gently reminds us of Godfrey's admission that many of the books found in this list are out of print[139]; Godfrey still offers just the right amount of information to make you sufficiently aware of the text[140] in a sense that is strikingly reminiscent of the librarian from Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* described in Pierre Bayard's 'Ways of Reading: Books You Don't Know'[141]. Its value is twofold: it is a collection of books that presents us with a history of graphic design books instead of simply the history of graphic design, and it assists us in our search for the appropriate book for the right kind of knowledge by positioning itself as a starting point for book hunting[142].

The combined 'other' histories, texts that are neither centrally nor generally historical, books that sometimes veer away from the essential category of the histories of graphic design, are unique in that they show the direction in which graphic design history writing is going, or could be headed. The checklist developed in the previous chapter, defined by Blauvelt, Margolin, Heller, and Poynor, is appropriately fulfilled by the texts described in this section. Kinross provides a traditionally critical vision of what the past events in typography have to say about the discipline, unearthing insights and new material; Poynor and the Sandberg Institute produce targeted, intelligent, and distinctive histories of specific subjects; Julier and Godfrey, separately and from different sides of the spectrum create texts that fill the gaps in the margins of graphic histories; Heller & Vienne show us that there are clever ways to approach the same material that gives it new life; Blauvelt & Lupton showcase a new kind of current and happening history; and Margolin promises to generate a history that would completely displace Meggs's work by doing more – much more. The combined efforts of all of these writers act as a beacon for what graphic design history writing can be about.

---

[138] Popova 2011

[139] Flask 2011

[140] Flask 2011

[141] Bayard 2007

[142] Popova 2011

Graphic Design History, Written

Ellen Lupton and J. Abbot Miller's *Design Writing Research* (1999)[143], being the initial book on theory one should recommend to students, begins this section. The first essay in this book, *Deconstruction and Graphic Design*, is a landmark moment in graphic design writing that every designer and historian should read – not only does it belong to the Blauvelt edited series of *Visible Language* issues that spurred the persistent evaluation of the study of the history of graphic design, but it also elaborates on the most recognisable postmodern movement of thought in graphic design, and one that the students and faculty at the Cranbrook Academy most subversively violated, or applied. The remaining theory all broach imminent subjects, bringing many elements of design thinking into the forefront, with the following chapters on media and history continuing to elaborate on the numerous elements of design, giving vital examples of top-form design writing, in Lupton and Miller's thought-provoking style, nurtured through the research studio they created that led to the publication of this book. Their efforts have inspired and motivated countless others, and possibly all the names mentioned in this thesis. AIGA's 2007 medal was presented to Lupton, with Katherine Feo declaring her as having wrote, thought, or spoke everything that gave graphic design a theoretical foundation and a sense of its own history[144], while Abbott Miller is credited more for his work as a designer and his partner's status at Pentagram[145]. Together, they help define the direction of theory and research in graphic design, and their most representative publication on the subject is this book. Miller's 'McLuhan/Fiore' takes the ever-inspiring *The Medium is the Massage* and offers it to the reader from a unique point of view by elaborating on the immense contribution of Quentin Fiore to the meaning and success of the text, and comparing it to his future and previous work, such as Jerome Agel and Buckminster Fuller's most lucrative book *I Seem To Be a Verb*. Lupton's 'Low and High' is a declaration of vernacular design and the shredding of power structures that reminds the reader of the socio-political impact of designers, while hinting at Foucauldian worldliness and the practices of Michel de Certeau. Miller's 'Subliminal Seduction' delves into the subliminal in advertising, the sexual, and the persuasive, to remind us that even

---

[143] Lupton & Miller 2008

[144] Feo 2007

[145] Walters 2002

when we think we are aware of the trickery of advertising, it is still as effective. Lupton's 'Disciplines of Design' is a short, open-ended comment on the Foucauldian theories of power enforcement that displays the power of design to manipulate an environment, and its ability to incorporate various thought spectrums. The closing, 'Graphic Design in America', rounds off the book as a combination of theoretical founding, critical analysis of media, and a historical overview of graphic design. If this text does nothing more, it gives the young designer the necessary and basic first step into critical theory without overwhelming him or her with too much jargon.

One of the most famous collection of books, immediately recognisable by anybody who goes looking for writing on graphic design, is a compilation of articles that encompass the entire discipline collected over five volumes by some of the most prominent and influence American graphic design luminaries: Michael Bierut, Steven Heller, DK Holland, Jessica Helfand, and William Drenttel. The *Looking Closer* series covers almost every writer in graphic design and its history, touching on all the subjects that have been discussed in the past fifteen years. With classic pieces like 'Discovery by Design', 'The Politics of Style', 'Advertising: Mother of Graphic Design', 'What Makes a Magazine "Modern"?', 'Towards a Universal Type', 'First Things First', 'Good Design is Good Business', 'Call for Criticism', 'Truth in Advertising', 'Fuck Committees (I Believe in Lunatics)', 'Theory is a Good Idea', 'The Critical "Languages" of Graphic Design', 'The Designer as Author', 'The Birth of the User', 'Style is Not a Four Letter Word', 'The Citizen Designer', 'Castles Made of Sand', and 'Why Designers Can Think', this collection is a must read for designers and historians alike. It acts as a history of discourse within graphic design, as a compendium of thinkers within the discipline of graphic design theory, and as a reference for intelligent, critically informed design and creative production. Although the series ended with the publication of its fifth volume, many readers and designers have come to rely on the *Looking Closer* series as the backbone of what has been and is being written within the field. Although, like many of the texts in this section, it is fundamentally a set of readers, it exists in the upper echelon of such volumes. Philip Nobel's review of *Looking Closer 2* in 1998 for *MetropolisMag* described this book, along with two others[146]

[146] These other two books are both noteworthy additions to any historian's library, and were part of the research done for this paper, although they do not appear in the main list of books: *Design Literacy* and *Design Culture,* both by Steven Heller, the former in collaboration with Marie Finamore.

published by Allworth Press in the same year, as a "compact self-study course on the practice and appreciation of graphic design"[147], while the latter half of the books received less acclaim, with the fifth volume being largely considered weak. Denise Gonzales Crisp's review of the third volume summarised the attentions and themes upon which the previous two volumes were produced – argumentations in critical design writing from 1983 until 1994 and academic and controversial concerns up until 1997 – and the directions the third text attempted: a historical review of relevant articles prior to and including 1983[148]. Crisp goes on to conclude that this volume "adds to evidence that graphic design is maturing into a full-fledged metropolis"[149]. Ultimately, she was right: the five volumes defined and consolidated critical writing as a primary criteria of graphic design, with Nobel calling it Allworth's message to designers to "look with [their] brain first"[150].

Michael Beirut, towards the end of the lifespan of *Looking Closer*, put together another design reader that in many ways can be considered his definitive answer to his own article from 1989 decrying the persistence of graphic designers to only read within their field. *Seventy-Nine Short Essays on Design* is a commendable publication in that it brings, much like Robin Kinross's *Unjustified Texts*, many disparate threads within the world of general design and cultural studies to the attention of the reluctant graphic design student. It is also assembled in a similar fashion to *Unjustified Texts* and Richard Hollis's *About Graphic Design* (2012): a collection of articles that have been previously published, most of which are still freely available online[151]. Popularly recognised for its different font for every essay design by Abbott Miller (of Pentagram, where Bierut is a partner too), the book is its author's example of what good reading for graphic designers is. With some genuinely iconic pieces republished in print (listed below), the book reads like a commentary on the various concerns and issues that have been the attention on graphic designers and their

---

147 Nobel 1998

148 Crisp 2000, p.40

149 Crisp 2000, p.172

150 Nobel 1998

151 According to Bierut's own posting 'Why a Book?' on *Design Observer*, on the day of publication, there are 68 out of the 79 articles that can be found on the *Design Observer* site. With the republication of the book this year as a paperback, one other essay (1989's Designers Can't Think) can be found at Fast Company's Co.Design blog.

educators over the years, from the over-commercialisation of design[152] to the challenges designers face when creating genuinely creative work. With his more recent flood of articles, initially published on *Design Observer*, he talks to his readers in the witty style that Bierut is known for, a style begun with what Bierut remembers as his first time trying to write about design, 'Why Designers Can't Think', the second essay in the collection[153]. Preceded by 'Warning: May Contain Non-Design Content' and succeeded by 'How to Become Famous', 'In Search of the Perfect Client', 'Ten Footnotes to a Manifesto', 'Vladimir Nabokov: Father of Hypertext', 'On (Design) Bullshit', 'I am a Plagiarist', and 'I Hate ITC Garamond', the collection is of a highly personal, ego-centric tone common to most of Bierut's writing. This, however, instead of being its failing is its success. Getting into the mind of the highly acclaimed Pentagram designer and one of the more recognisable names in graphic design internationally is exactly what makes this book both useful and entertaining. One of his oldest colleagues and friends, Paula Scher, sums it up:

> "Michael has a brain that is a giant compendium," Scher says. "He absorbs and retains everything and pulls it out at the appropriate moment and uses it to its maximal effect. Mention a movie and he quotes from it, maybe he enacts a little scene. Mention a book and he recites a passage and relates it to three other books that have the same spirit, that you haven't read, but you will now. Mention a designer or architect and he knows the most recent project they've completed and their first project, how they've changed, how they haven't, who influenced them, who they influence, and he sometimes will make a little sketch or diagram of their work. There isn't a day that goes by when I haven't asked Michael what he knows about anything and what he thinks about everything. If knowledge is power, then Michael Bierut is the most powerful person in the entire design community."[154]

Another set of readers, these last two books were published eleven years apart, on opposite sides of the Atlantic, but they both hoped to achieve similar aims: codify and standardise the canon of graphic design history and critique its evolution. Catherine de Smet and Sara de Bondt collected the most important writings in the history of the field in their book, published in May 2012, *Graphic*

---

[152] Bierut 2007, pp.52-61

[153] Bierut 2007

[154] Walker 2006

Design: History in the Writing (1983–2011)[155], a journey that begins with Massimo Vignelli and ends with Rick Poynor's *Out of the Studio*. The chronology applied in this book resembles that applied in this paper, and most of the articles considered within it served as the basis for the research performed by this author prior to this book's publication in his search for the published discourses of graphic design history. In essence, they served as confirmation of the validity of this author's initial review, and are now available to provide reader with an appropriate and much needed anthology of written works. The second book is the much older *Graphic Design History* by Georgette Ballance and Steven Heller[156], the introduction of which served as one of the four cornerstones of this research's methodology and has made it into de Smet and de Bondt's book under the title 'The Beginning of History'. The text itself, however, is a little dated in its approach to the field and therefore acts less as a cornerstone but more of a pioneer and a milestone in graphic design history publishing. With almost all the articles in the book being focused on particular 'heroes' in graphic design's past, this book is not ground-breaking in its approach to the histories. Unlike most readers, however, it collects a series of essay that are rarely reproduced in other readers, by the best writers in the field, and presents them in a framework that makes appropriately contextualises them and informs the reader. *History in the Writing* and *Graphic Design History*'s greatest virtue is that is presents us some highly exciting essays that can occasionally prove hard to find. In *Graphic Design History* these include 'A History of Design, a History of Concerns' by Jorge Frascara, Heller's 'Esquire and Its Art Directors: A Survivor's Tale' and 'Alvin Lustig: Born Modern', 'A Retrospective: Herbert Matter' by Armin Hoffman, 'The Advertising of Magritte/The Magritte in Advertising' by Georges Roque, and Philip B. Meggs's 'The Rise and Fall of Design at a Great Corporation'. *History in the Writing* offers many other gems as well, most notably Vignelli's 'Keynote Address', the very hard to find opening speech he gave at the Rochester Institute of Technology in 1983, Robin Kinross's 'Conversation with Richard Hollis on Graphic Design History', and Teal Triggs's 'Designing Graphic Design History', alongside great feminist graphic design criticism such as 'Alms for Oblivion: The History of Women in Early American Graphic Design' by Ellen Mazur Thompson and 'Messy History vs. Neat History: Toward an Expanded View of Women in Graphic Design' by Martha Scotford, and articles about graphic design in often ignored places such as Canada, Taiwan, and South Africa.

---

[155] Smet & Bondt 2012

[156] Heller & Ballance 2001

The combined readers in this section all show one essential element that is perpetually repeating itself in graphic design writing: they are all short form essays, put together under a vague thematic umbrella that finds connections between them even when those connections are not particularly valid or accurate. The problem with this is the word 'short'. Unfortunately, and in agreement with Ellen Lupton's 'Reading and Writing'[157], designers and their writers tend to eschew longer pieces to cater to the designer's short attention span and disinterest in dense reading material. While Poynor takes offence to her argument, and is himself exonerated from it in that the one book that does bear his name in this list is not sparsely compounded short essays, he is unfortunately one of the few who do. And it makes sense: in this day and age, most people are more accustomed to reading snippets that more or less resemble blog posts, with the rare situations that would require them to read a more sophisticated academic study or scholarly article.

How These Books Fail

The tone of the quick review of the books mentioned above is highly positive, since this author regards these as the top of the pile. That does not, however, exempt them from fault, and there are numerous ways in which each of these books is unsuccessful. While some of what is said in this section has been mentioned before, it is re-iterated here so that the disadvantages of all the books are available in one easy to find place.

The traditional histories of graphic design have been thoroughly discussed in their own separate section. Briefly:

- Meggs has become similar to a bloated conglomerate: with age, the volume has accumulated a reasonably large information base that now weighs it down, while the language and solemnness of its tone relegates it as yet another art history book.
- Hollis's work seems to be, frankly, only lacking in what it intentionally chooses to not aspire for: it is not exhaustive, although rather thorough for its size.

[157] Albinson et al. 2012

- Eskilson has been criticised for being factually inaccurate in many parts of his original publication; the second edition released earlier this year attempts to remedy this.
- Drucker and McVarish have been most notably put down due to their implied but largely inconsistent attempt to be critical of the works they declare as their canon,[158] while also being disappointing in that their canon is not as significantly different from that of Meggs's text, despite their useful perspective.
- Cramsie offers a weak, or at least non-consequential, addition to the above reviews of the last century of graphic design, although his work is justified by his attention to the centuries prior to the Industrial Age.

The series of 'other' histories are essentially books that focus on the history of graphic design, not exclusively as a general timeline but also with particular attention to some limited aspect of it, acting as a guide to how general histories could evolve:

- Kinross's *Modern Typography* and *Unjustified Texts* are impeccable histories and commentaries (concurrently and respectively) on the field of typography and type design, but offer little more to the larger discipline.
- Julier's text is sufficiently mild in tone and at times shallow for it to not be within what Heller describes as engaging storytelling, and attempts to draw on a vast history of too many disciplines for it to be nearly as wholesome as it could have been, considering its size.
- Poynor's publication works to the advantage of the less theoretically informed at the expense of developing a vivid and deep reference to postmodernism in graphic design. Despite this, he also manages to miss the playfulness, seriousness, and resistance to blind conformity that characterised the movement; he gives no cause and therefore shows no effect,[159] making it seem as if postmodernism was limited to its own devices. The closing chapter, Opposition, attempts to redeem this and succeeds only if the reader is curious enough to follow through.
- *The World Must Change* offered a narrow, Dutch centric view of graphic design and its idealistic counterparts. In many way, this book – a bi-lingual text with a very impressive double language spread design with clever use of paper and typography – was a unique visual accomplishment, with beautifully designed content that was also engaging, timely, and sophisticated. The one

[158] Crisp & Poynor 2008

[159] Bierut et al. 2006, p.155

drawback of this book is its very limited print run and more limited distribution: copies were sent to particular individuals, with only a fraction of the already minimal amount sold to the public.

- Heller and Vienne's *100 Ideas* is an enjoyable, light, and original text in its approach, but lacking content and context in its implementation. A volume that suggests an alternative historical approach to the artefacts of graphic design should have given each idea a few more pages to express itself. That said, the conciseness of text and contextualisation for each idea still allows the reader a brief enough insight into how it could further evolve.
- Ellen Lupton's writing in *Graphic Design: Now in Production* is provocatively attacked by Poynor in his *Design Observer* piece 'Read All That? You Must be Kidding Me' for its disillusionment in the continued presence of the long-form essay. The greatest downside, one that persists in other publications in this list, is their continued reliance on, or acceptance of, pre-published work that has been repeated recycled.

The two other books mentioned in this section, Margolin's and Godfrey's, are not viable texts for criticism, at least in that their content is, respectively, not available and only a list of names. Godfrey's choice of books, however commendable, is (as any list would be) debatable. Some texts that one would imagine to find are not there, while others would be. This, in a list of 100 books, is to be expected and appreciated, not criticised.

The graphic design history books that follow are of a different breed: readers that have been milestones in the publication of graphic design theory and criticism, with a distinctive approach. While being primarily focused on representing discourse on the various topics designers, critics, and historians dealt with in their time, most are guilty of recycling the same texts too often. However, this selection has avoided that, consistently providing readers with fresh content (although, naturally, some articles do overlap between texts, it is rare). This list points out what these books could have done better:

- The *Looking Closer* series's greatest shortcoming can be said to be in its design. When compared to the eloquent and clever simplicity of Bierut's *Seventy-Nine Short Essays*, it feels haphazard and accidentally compiled. While the division of chapters into intriguingly titled themes is handy, it goes almost unnoticed everywhere but the table of contents (where it seems to have been created simply as markers, with no further justification as to their sometimes confusing titles and

no description as to what the divided sections entail), a list which is in itself hard to read due to a poor hierarchal ordering of titles.

- One reviewer on Amazon.com criticised *Seventy-Nine Short Essays* for being "smug, self-congratulatory pap dressed up as profound insight"[160]. He went on to praise the design, the appendix, and the paper. While some people might find Bierut's writing a bit too personal, or otherwise unprofessional, there is a purpose behind it that is ultimately what makes it relevant. If there's something he could have done differently it would have been by selecting writings from a wider range of sources (other than *Design Observer*).
- Heller's *Graphic Design History* does a very good job of just the same. Its biggest drawback is its attention to heroic names without the consideration of other, lesser known, brands, artefacts, and their producers.
- *Graphic Design: History in the Making* is mostly lacking in that it is merely an anthology, without any contextualisation, commentary, or further notes besides the short preface. A potentially ground-breaking text, had the numerous articles been critically assessed, has limited itself to the (not unimpressive) position of re-publishing of others' work. It's greatest redeeming factor is that[161] the editors must have struggled to select certain texts and struggled even further to locate copies of them.

The Verdict

There are a total of nine history of graphic design books and nine graphic design history books (divided into five items) in this paper's list. As footnotes, we encounter a number of other books that could have made it onto this list as well. The sections before this presented a generalist review of the material covered and the relative importance of each text, without the systematic comparison to the criteria enumerated in the previous chapter.

---

[160] Amazon review http://www.amazon.com/review/R3CZ2ZNET5S0HP/ref=cm_cr_pr_viewpnt#R3CZ2ZNET5S0HP

[161] This is mentioned in the initial review of the book, on pp.38-39

Let us consider the above criteria briefly and simplify their presentation: Victor Margolin's list of narrative problems considers two key elements, trajectories and canonisation, both of which are essential to defining the narrative applied to the facts. Andrew Blauvelt tackles the issues of hero worship and the limits of the discipline, much in the same ways as Rick Poynor does, although with slightly differing perspectives: Blauvelt feels a need to eradicate hero worship, or reduce it to the least necessary factor, and to define graphic design history as a descendant of graphic design irrevocably bound to its parent for survival. Poynor finds that hero worship is necessary but should be coupled with a more objective view of graphic design history's relationship with designers. He agrees with Blauvelt in the need for more than just heroes and the importance of the appreciation of the transient nature of graphic design and the nameless designs that litter the urban sprawls. In a sense, we define Blauvelt's issues as hero worship, with its obvious exclusive reference to icons of design, and origin dependence, where he insists that graphic design history's existence depends on its unbroken bond with graphic design practice. Poynor's concerns are seemingly opposing, with his advocacy of anonymous (or nameless, uncelebrated) design, despite his persistent desire to include bylines to every artefact, and objectivity (the hallowed need to write without prejudice towards the designer community) and criticism in writing.

The above three key critics define six different criteria, all attentive to the structure of the work and its material content. Steven Heller's direct importance is more in line with the designer perspective: he pays particular tribute to especially beautiful writing, words that tell melodic, rhythmic stories. As such, each of the books in our list will now be classified according to whether they fulfil seven different criteria. In line with the structuralist activity described in the previous chapter, and with the purpose of this section of this chapter being that of quick arbitrator, the seven criteria defined by the four writers above will be applied in parallel according to the methodology of structural man. To simply the process, more accurate definitions of each of these criteria would help better explain their contribution to an assessment of the books:

- **trajectories** are defined as the various histories that fall under the history of graphic design, as elucidated by Margolin;
- **canonisation** is a reflection of whether there is a canon and how this canon is defined, as per Margolin's assessment of the canon as any body of standardised and accepted content that serves

as a benchmark – it is expected that all history of graphic design book would adhere to a canon of some sort;

- the dominance of **heroes** in any book reflects a continued return to the original, unexpanded canon defined prior to the understanding that vernacular design and ephemera, as well as non-Western design and design that is not hugely profitable, is of equal importance to the understanding of the history of graphic design;
- Blauvelt advocated the continued **dependence** and attachment of graphic design history to graphic design practice and espoused a writing that was directed exclusively, or primarily, to a designer audience;
- **anonymity**, or anonymous design history, is the opposing factor to heroic design history: it champions the invisible, unrecognised, but still valuable in graphic design's history, from government pamphlets with no named designers and street flyers for lost cats to named works by designers in cities and locales that are not known for designers or for their influence on design as a whole;
- **objectivity** is also in opposition to another criteria in this list: it works to be inclusive of non-designers and considers graphic design history to not be dependent on graphic design practice and not the exclusive domain of graphic designers – it refers to writing that considers a lay audience and speaks to the curious from outside of the profession;
- **rhythm** in writing, flair in sentence structure, lyrical choice of language, or any skilful storytelling and narrative style is a consideration that is rarely taken into account outside of fictional writing, but Heller has pushed for it regularly, and has found support from peers such as Alice Twemlow,[162] co-founder of the MFA Design Criticism program at the SVA, where they both discuss the virtues of writing that engages the reader and encourages continued, sustained reading.

To begin with, the general histories are the texts that least successfully meet these seven:

- Meggs's history considers trajectories through an intentional canonisation that pays tribute to heroes almost exclusively with little rhythm and objectivity.

---

[162] Heller 2012b

- Hollis's history is very similar in its canonisation and trajectories, even though heroes are not the primary focus of his work and his objectivity and rhythm are more present, although the concise nature of the book might be the real catalyst for that.
- Eskilson's work enhances the canon, attempts to avoid heroes, builds on trajectories somewhat successfully, but maintains his art historical non-objective and hero-centric approach, keeping in line with the trend in general surveys.
- Cramsie's history is definitively objective, approaches the canon and it's heroes with an independent critical eye, and maintains a rhythm that blends smoothly between the few trajectories involved in the story.
- Drucker and McVarish's objectivity is their most valuable asset, alongside the numerous trajectories put together with skilful rhythm and a comfortable balance between heroes and anonymity.

The other histories of graphic design tend to have a more wholesome appreciation for the criteria predefined by Margolin, Blauvelt, Heller, and Poynor:

- Robin Kinross, in both books, is a model of the seven criteria, managing to incorporate the stories of other trajectories even though his focus is only one of the thread of graphic design, in an objective (although passionate), rhythmic, non-traditional canon.
- The virtues of Julier's work are limited in that this is a text that is not precisely written with the history of graphic design in mind, but rather with the culture of design. As such, its freshness, objectivity, and originality do allow it to produce new interesting trajectories in ways other texts do not, while also producing a wholly different canon in a tone that is, unfortunately, not as rhythmic or engaging as any of the other books in this list.
- Poynor, the Sandberg Institute, and Heller and Vienne all offer texts with similar achievements to each other: interesting de-canonisation, new heroes, attention to old heroes in a vivid new detailed light that is at once objective and dependant, in a tone and style that is enjoyable and engaging.
- Blauvelt and Lupton's collaboration conceived a tome that merged graphics with essays in a way that fulfilled both Blauvelt and Margolin's criteria while also adhering to Heller's sense of engagement, except that Poynor disapproved of the arguments that some of their articles were trying to make. It is also the only text on this list that belongs to both the history of graphic design

and its history, but features in the former because it showcases new visual work alongside new writing.

- Godfrey and Margolin, once again, cannot be considered according to this criteria, although *Bibliographic* was notable for its original approach to telling the history and its blending of the many trajectories involved in the story of graphic design.

The work of the graphic design historians that followed, from Lupton and Miller to de Smet and de Bondt, has been stuck somewhere in between. By book names, let us consider a quick checklist of criteria covered before we delve into the way these shortcomings and achievements have led to these books being the positive sample of their peers:

- *Design Writing Research*: multiple trajectories, objective, non-canonical, rhythmic, and balanced somewhere between anonymous and heroic design.
- *Looking Closer* series: more trajectories than any other text, while remaining within the limitations of graphic design, in a writing style that is at times independent and at others subjective, content that is canonical but not exclusively heroic, written by educators, historians, critics, and designers in a tone that is engaging if not lyrical.
- *Seventy-Nine Short Essays on Design*: at least rhythmic, definitely not objective, with close attention to the infinite number of trajectories (in fact, Bierut's thesis is that you never have enough sources of information and history to draw upon), completely dependant, subjective, and personal, with no regard for whether the designer is a canonised hero or an unheard of rookie.
- *Graphic Design History*: the first reader to focus exclusively on histories, it failed in its persistence to pay tribute to heroes in every article printed, but succeeded in making each story an exciting adventure, even if it was not necessarily a purely graphic history.
- *Graphic Design: History in the Making*: the merits of the writing in this anthology are not essential to the work; the content is, however, trajectorial, non-exclusively-heroic, and piously objective – lastly, despite the language not being essential to the book, it is still colourful and carries a specific vitality about it that makes each article more captivating than the last.

The combined efforts of these books pronounce an image of criticism and discourse in the history of graphic design and its history that has repeatedly benefited from design thinking and the creativity of its writers. Although Teal Triggs was right in criticising the effects of a history written

by its participants, an academic activity dominated by non-academic creatives,[163] it has proven especially helpful in energising and motivating the dynamism present in the field today. This dynamism gives us a positive outlook for the discipline, even if the next stages should include a more involved, divergent, and creative approach to future writing. This creativity, however, is already showing itself in such works as Blauvelt and Lupton's *Graphic Design: Now in Production*, a book that very intentionally blurs the line between graphic design history and the history of graphic design with its merging of type and image as a true linking of content (within the context of Michael Rock's 'Fuck Content'), so as to offer the reader both a historical survey of artefacts and a theoretical commentary on these artefacts and the contexts in which they were produced or are consumed.

In conclusion, a final dissection of the eighteen books on this list shows that, with new publications in the last year, the maturity of graphic design history as a discipline that has shed its training wheels is finally here, since Rick Poynor's *Out of the Studio* from a year ago. There has been quality work published in the last few months alone (some of which was not included in this list, but can be found in the bibliography), with books that had set the stage in the years before, giving the discipline new hope apart from Poynor's visual studies merger.

[163] Triggs 2009

There is More to be Done

This thesis had many ambitions at the start, which led to a vast array of background research, a look into most of the published texts of the last three decades in the field, and consideration of the many discourses and their implications on the development of the discipline and the effects as such.

To recap: the first decade of graphic design history began in 1983[164] and led to a final consolidation of discourses and a critical review of the history of the discipline that produced three *Visible Language* issues published between 1994 and 1995 starring, among others, Andrew Blauvelt and Victor Margolin[165]. In the fourteen years that followed, new discourse[166] unearthed those same conclusions and repositioned them in light of changes in the discipline with a view to establish a new order in the study of graphic design history, after Steven Heller, starting in 2001[167], advocated a fresher, more dynamic writing style. Rick Poynor was at the head of this new critical realignment of issues, alongside Heller and Ellen Lupton[168]. Meanwhile, books published in that period evolved in the direction of the criteria established by these writers, most prominently books by Richard Hollis, Robin Kinross, Michael Bierut, and Ellen Lupton[169]. A detailed selection of published works led to this paper's review – a comparative review of reviews – of most of the easily available books that cover the subject, and a few of the harder to procure. There was clear evidence of an improved quality of writing and a better selection of content as historians learned from their peers' and their own mistakes. The list was divided into three primary categories, the general history of

---

[164] Vignelli 1983

[165] Blauvelt 1994; Margolin 1994

[166] Caplan 2006; Crisp & Poynor 2008; Helfand 2004; Triggs 2009

[167] Heller 2001

[168] Poynor 2011a; Albinson et al. 2012; The endless publications of books, articles, and essays by Steven Heller since 2001, leading by example

[169] Previous chapter of this thesis

graphic design, the other, more specific, histories of graphic design, and graphic design history writings. Ultimately, evidence of a healthy publication cycle of sophisticated, measured texts reflected a maturing discipline within the bounds of what had been defined.

Today, as this paper has shown, we stand at the verge of a boom in a nascent discipline that has struggled to self-identify for almost three decades. It has been aligned with various other disciplines, and continues to be driven towards other fields, while being genetically attached to the larger, arguably less scholarly, discipline of graphic design. The story of graphic design history can be played out dramatically, like a child of divorce where the parents never get along, the stepparents interfere all the time, and nobody likes the kid but everyone wants to make sure the others do not get the privilege of nurturing it. Except, following that analogy, it has now just gone through adolescence and is looking into going to college: finally able to stand on its own body of knowledge, with enough recent batches of graduate students ready to improve its published information, it looks set to define its own future.

While the accomplishments of previous pioneers have gotten it this far, it is important to look back on the things they have not done correctly – the ways the discipline cannot evolve if nobody else takes the reigns. Sure, Poynor, Crisp, Lupton, Helfand, Heller, and their contemporaries and apprentices are doing great in correcting past errors[170], and highlighting previous accomplishments, but it is the host of up and coming writers from *Design Observer*, *Eye Magazine*, the endless combination of blogs, and academic journals ready to publish the youth in their ivory towers that makes the future look bright. There are, however, a few more steps that are necessary for the final push towards a stronger foundation.

This author has a personal passion for graphic design history. I have spent my years as an undergraduate in graphic design working towards attempting to express objectivity in explaining design, of opening up the closed shop of graphic design much in the same manner Poynor declared the closed shop of academia[171] needing a push. It bothered me that my peers, design students and designers alike, found it easier to just not explain a design to a client or a non-design student simply

---

[170] Crisp & Poynor 2008; Marianek 2012; Helfand 2004; Triggs 2011; Twemlow & Wild 2007

[171] Poynor 2012b

because they did not need to understand it. However, that is not the problem; whether a designer wants to share her thoughts with non-designers is her choice. The issue was the inability for those who choose to open up, to share, through channels and in a language that is both accessible and accurate. Historiography as well as criticism are both essential elements to a valid story and narrative: no evaluation is of any value without authenticity and verification. Since then, my research has helped me discover that, should the designer go looking for it, he can find a language that is adequate and available, although not highly accessible. It is also not faultless, and the reality of this research has shown that there is more to be done. While the pages of this thesis have been largely positive in their observations, I am not unaware of the other side of the coin, I have simply chosen to focus this research on exposing the advantageous elements of graphic design history's discourse and publishing. Here, I turn my attentions to the many things that should have been done differently, albeit better.

Most notably, there needs to be more: the articles discussing key issues and shortcomings continue to recycle themselves, giving only a small increase each time; the readers that put the various themes of graphic design theory together every few months tend to be relentless reiterations of the same articles. There are many young promising writers coming out of graduate programs in many countries: their opinions matter, and if more platforms would offer incentives for them to create more content for the dissolution of new ideas and for the consistent streams of informative critical and historical writing, the limited pool of readings would expand reasonably fast. Michael Bierut, in an interview by Steven Heller from 1997, summarises the direction that critical writing in graphic design should take, or rather what he imagines it should be:

> "I would distinguish between criticism and academic writing. My favourite kind of criticism takes what we do and puts it into a larger cultural context in terms that an intelligent, interested layperson could understand. I also like it when it's tough and even mean."[172]

This is the kind of graphic design writing that Rick Poynor has advocated repeatedly over the past year, more frequently than he had done in the years before. It is an ideal that has yet to be realised, and one that is over fifteen years old. In one short sentence, this deficiency in graphic design writing can be said to be a lack of coherence, sophistication, and foundation to most of the thoughts that

---

[172] Heller 1997

writers continue to present to readers. Except, the most active discourse today that has yet to be widely addressed is one that Matt Soar accuses Rick Poynor to be hiding from[173]: the supposed discord between design academics and design critics and writers across the field. Soar's article brazenly challenges Poynor to provide supporting evidence of the validity of the accusations he made in his *Design Observer* article 'The Closed Shop of Design Academia', insisting that this shop is not closed at all, and is not much of a shop either[174], but what this author understood to be a marketplace more than a storefront. The article picks out the errors of Poynor's previous accusations of design academics' work, while reminding Poynor and his readers that he is also a design academic. The premise of Soar's argument was appropriately summarised by Crisp, as she wrote in the comments section of Soar's article: "the alleged divide [...] between the processes of journalism and academic scholarship" is exactly that – alleged. The discussion between Soar and Poynor aside, this is a point that has to be considered, and how it has not been given its due course in any of the writings about the misgivings of graphic design history's discourses.

The relevance of Soar's criticisms, Bierut's ideals, and the evidenced redundancy of content combine to produce a reasonable sphere of future research. The basis of this research can be seen in the flaws found between the pages of the eighteen texts surveyed above and the numerous discourses involved in their development: many of these texts were not widely recognisable, even by those within the wider community of design practice and theory; several of them retain alternatingly dependant or non-objective approaches; most of the material covered is not as thoroughly critical or well-written as it should, or could, be. The field would be much better served if writers (scholarly or journalistic) would create content that is more widely accessible (in terms of language and publication channels), if they would develop and devise strategies to expose themselves to a more diverse array of material and artefacts, and when they begin to challenge the limitations of their field so as to go beyond what they feel comfortable in. Graphic design writing, be it critical, historical, or theoretical, has created a comfort zone out of which most of its writing is published. Those who challenge those comfort zones suffer from reduced exposure due to the common litany of names that have become synonymous with graphic design writing and have thus monopolised it.

---

[173] Soar 2012

[174] Soar 2012

The story of publishing in graphic design and in graphic design history seems more or less representative of a wider problem. Graphic design did not consider itself old enough to have a history until the 1980s, while most scholars and critics were uncertain of what would entail a history of graphic design. This led to debates and redefinitions of graphic design. Schools in the US had only just begun to teach graphic design (or visual communication, and sometimes even vaguer applied arts programs were on offer), while even in Europe the profession was rarely an academically motivated one, having been a craft more than a career, an artist would progress into graphic design, or a printmaker would become more intrigued by it and begin to design for clients on a wider scale. These non-academic origins made the debate of bringing graphic design history into a theoretical, historical, institutionalised sphere of influence brought about several questions: what is graphic design? what is graphic design history? Is graphic design history a discipline? Can it be? What is the content and substance of graphic design history? What is excluded? Can there be a history of graphic design? Where would it begin? Is it not a history of various other activities? Should the consumption of graphic design, historically, be considered? How about the other creator of graphic design, the client? When and how would it be appropriate to study the client's effect on design work? Is graphic design history the realm of historians or designers? How do we define the canon of graphic design, the greatest works? Do we need a canon? Is the history a series of accomplishments represented by artefacts, or a series of processes developed over time?

These questions are only a fraction of the potential issues to be discussed. The schism between the writers from the academic world and this from the professional environments is still struggling to maintain itself; scholars consistently step over out of the campus while designers are frequently active within the schools, as full-time educators and temporary lecturers. The dynamism of the state of graphic design education and graphic design theory is the springboard for the growth of graphic design history. However, today, the problem is no longer a shortage of debates and the non-existence of a knowledge-base from which to begin a thorough survey of issues that could be resolved. This thesis presented the fullness of this knowledge-base in comparison to what is agreed upon as quality writing that helps the young discipline grow. Going back to the analogy of a child born in 1983, we now find graphic design history is ready to learn more about itself and is still

young enough for it to be unpredictable, but old enough to be secure. It seems fitting that, only nineteen years ago, there was no discipline, and that a nineteen year old young adult would be in the same place: unsure, but confident, and ready to engage with everyone and everything, given the opportunity. It is now up to graphic design history's curators and the new generation of up and coming critics and writers to ensure that the issues are tackled, and that the discipline branches out and cements itself.

Bibliography

Articles

Baker, Steve, 'A Poetics of Graphic Design?', *Visible Language*, 28 (1994) 3, pp.245-259.

Baldwin, Jonathan, 'My teaching philosophy', *Jonathan Baldwin Website*, 2006. <http://www.jonathanbaldwin .co.uk/teaching-philosophy/>

Barthes, Roland, 'The Structuralist Activity', in: *Critical Essays*, Illinois (Northwestern University Press) 1972 (translated by Richard Howard).

Bayard, Pierre, 'Ways of Reading: Books You Don't Know' in: *How To Talk About Books You Haven't Read*, New York (Bloomsbury) 2007, pp.3-13. <http://www.bookbrowse.com/excerpts/index.cfm?fuseaction=printable&book_number=2058> [17.08.2012]

Blauvelt, Andrew, 'An Opening: Graphic Design's Discursive Spaces', *Visible Language*, 28 (1994) 3, pp.205-216.

Blauvelt, Andrew, 'Designer Finds History, Published Book', *Design Observer*, 21.10.2010. <http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=18938> [18.06.2012]

Bolger, Mary Ann, 'Shock of the not so new', *Eye Magazine*, 66 (2007). <http://www.eyemagazine.com/review.php?id=152&rid=752&set=821> [12.06.2012]

Brown, Christopher, 'Understanding the P-word', *Eye Magazine*, 52 (2004). <http://www.eyemagazine.com/review.php?id=110&rid=519> [17.04.2012]

Caplan, Ralph, 'Why Designers Can Think' in: Bierut, Michael, William Drenttel, and Steven Heller (eds.), *Looking Closer 5*, New York (Allworth Press) 2006, pp.234-236.

Carter, Matthew, 'Reflections of a typographer', *Eye Magazine*, 7 (1992). <http://www.eyemagazine.com/review.php?id=36&rid=309> [18.04.2012]

Cleveland, Bart, 'This Is the Golden Age of Advertising', *AdAge Agency News*, 20.05.2011. <http://adage.com/article/small-agency-diary/golden-age-advertising/227681/> [07.07.2012]

Crisp, Denise Gonzales, 'Looking Closer 3: Classic Writings on Graphic Design', *Print* 54 (2000) 1, pp.40,170,172. <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/book-reviews/2910908/looking-closer-3-book-review> [06.08.2012]

Crisp, Denise Gonzales, and Rick Poynor, 'A Critical View of Graphic Design History' *Design Observer*, 06.02.2008. <http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=6827> [17.04.2012]

Crowley, David, 'Review of Visible Language: New Perspectives: Critical History of Graphic Design', *Journal of Design History* 9 (1996) 3, pp.227-229. <http://jdh.oxfordjournals.org/content/9/3/227.full.pdf> [9.06.2012]

Drucker, Johanna, 'Review of The Story of Graphic Design' *Journal of Design History* 24 (2011) 2, pp.199-201. <http://jdh.oxfordjournals.org/content/24/2/199.full.pdf> [29.04.2012]

Feo, Katherine, 'Ellen Lupton', *AIGA 2007 Medalist*. <http://www.aiga.org/medalist-ellenlupton/> [28.07.2012]

Flask, Dominic, 'Bibliographic', *The Designer's Review of Books*, 04.03.2011. <http://www.designersreviewofbooks.com/2011/03/bibliographic/> [28.07.2012]

Forty, Adrian, 'A Reply to Victor Margolin' *Journal of Design History* 6 (1993) 2, pp.131-132.

Harland, Robert, 'The Dimensions of Graphic Design and Its Spheres of Influence', *Design Issues* 27 (2011) 1, pp.21-34. <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/DESI_a_00054> [29.04.2012]

Helfand, Jessica, 'Annals of Academia, Part II: Graphic Design and The New Optimism', *Design Observer*, 20.05.2004. <http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=2237> [11.06.2012]

Heller, Steven, 'Advertising: Mother of Graphic Design' in: Bierut, Michael et al, *Looking Closer 2: Critical Writings on Graphic Design*, New York (Allworth Press) 1997, pp.112-119.

Heller, Steven, 'The Beginning of History', first published 2001 in: de Smet, Catherine, and Sara de Bondt (eds.), *Graphic Design: History in the Writing (1983–2011)*, London (Occasional Papers) 2012, pp.181-183.

Heller, Steven, 'A New Batch of Design Entrepreneurs', *The Daily Heller*, 10.04.2012a. <http://imprint.printmag.com/daily-heller/a-new-batch-of-design-entrepreneurs/> [29.07.2012]

Heller, Steven, 'Writing Is Design, Too', *The Atlantic*, 26.07.2012b. <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/07/writing-is-design-too/260342/> [29.07.2012]

Hoffman, Bob, 'The Golden Age of Advertising', *The Ad Contrarian*, 28.03.2012. <http://adcontrarian.blogspot.nl/2012/03/golden-age-of-advertising.html> [07.07.2012]

Jobling, Paul, 'Graphic Design: A New History (review)', *Journal of Design History*, 21 (2008) 3, pp.296-298. <http://jdh.oxfordjournals.org/content/21/3/296.full.pdf> [12.06.2012]

Julier, Guy, 'From Visual Culture to Design Culture', *Design Issues* 22 (2006) 1, pp.64-76. <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/07479360677524781 7> [01.03.2012]

Julier, Guy, and Viviana Narotzky, 'The Redundancy of Design History', a paper presented to the conference Practically Speaking. Wolverhampton University, 1998. <http://www.designculture.info/reviews/ArticleStash/GJVNRedundancy1996.pdf> [19.01.2012]

Katz, Barry M., 'Graphic Design: A New History (review)', *Technology and Culture* 50 (2009) 1, pp.258-260. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/technology_and_culture/v050/50.1.katz.pdf> [12.06.2012]

Margolin, Victor, 'Design History or Design Studies: Subject Matter and Methods', *Design Studies* 13 (1993) 2, pp.104-116.

Margolin, Victor, 'Narrative Problems of Graphic Design History', *Visible Language*, 28 (1994) 3, pp.233-243.

Margolin, Victor, 'A World History of Design and the History of the World', *Journal of Design History* 18 (2005) 3, pp.235-243. <http://jdh.oxfordjournals.org/content/18/3/235.full.pdf+html> [19.01.2012]

Marianek, Joe, 'Why Designers Still Can't Think', *PrintMag.com*, 2012. <http://www.printmag.com/Article/Why-Designers-Still-Cant-Think> [13.04.2012]

McCarthy, Steven, 'Always in Flux', *Eye Magazine* 82 (2012). <http://www.eyemagazine.co.uk/review.php?id=199&rid=990&set=1065> [28.07.2012]

Meggs, Philip, 'Design History: Discipline or Anarchy?', *AIGA Journal of Graphic Design*, 3 (1985) 2.

Nelson, Matt, 'Forget "Mad Men"--Now Is The Golden Era For Advertising', *Fast Company*, 21.03.2012. <http://www.fastcompany.com/1825591/forget-mad-men-now-is-the-golden-era-for-advertising> [25.03.2012]

Nobel, Philip, 'Graphic Language', *Metropolis in Review*, April 1998. <http://www.metropolismag.com /html/content_0498/ap98dbk.htm> [28.07.2012]

OBlog, 'Graphic Design: History in the Making', *Design Observer*, 24.05.2012. < http://oblog.designobserver.com/post/post/34418/> [12.06.2012]

Popova, Maria, '100 Ideas That Changed Graphic Design', *Brain Pickings*, 08.05.2012. <http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2012/05/08/100-ideas-that-changed-graphic-design/> [28.07.2012]

Poster, Mark, 'Foucault, the Present, and History', in: *Critical Theory and Poststructuralism*, New York (Cornell University Press) 1989.

Poynor, Rick, 'Out of the Studio: Graphic Design History and Visual Studies', *Design Observer*, 10.01.2011a. <http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=24048> [19.01.2012]

Poynor, Rick, 'The House That Design Journalism Built', *Design Observer*, 13.07.2011b. <http://observatory.designobserver.com/feature/the-house-that-design-journalism-built/28858/> [19.01.2012]

Poynor, Rick, 'Read All That? You Must be Kidding Me', *Design Observer*, 09.01.2012a. <http://observatory.designobserver.com/feature/read-all-that-you-must-be-kidding-me/32128/> [28.07.2012]

Poynor, Rick, 'The Closed Shop of Design Academia', *Design Observer*, 13.04.2012b. <http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=33658> [12.06.2012]

Scotford, Martha, 'Is There a Canon of Graphic Design History' in: de Smet, Catherine, and Sara de Bondt (eds.), *Graphic Design: History in the Writing (1983–2011)*, London (Occasional Papers) 2012, pp.60-65. [First published 1991]

Sinclair, Mark, '100 Ideas That Changes Graphic Design #92', *The Creative Review- CR Blog*, 23.04.2012. <http://www.creativereview.co.uk/cr-blog/2012/april/100-ideas-extract-the-vernacular> [06.08.2012]

Soar, Matthew, 'Theory is a Good Idea: Some thoughts on the resistance to theory in graphic design criticism, history and practice', *Looking Closer: AIGA Conference on Design History and Criticism* (2001). <http://chapters.aiga.org/resources/content/1/2/9/8/documents/soar_lecture.pdf> [15.04.2012]

Soar, Matthew, 'Rick Poynor on Design Academics: Having His Cake and Eating It Too', *MattSoar.org*, 19.04.2012. <http://www.mattsoar.org/archives/549> [29.07.2012]

The Editors, 'Unusual Suspects: A New Series', *Design Observer*, 09.05.2012. <http://oblog.designobserver.com/post/post/34108/> [29.06.2012]

Thorne, James, '100 Ideas That Changed Graphic Design', *CoolHunting.com*, 20.03.2012. <http://www.coolhunting.com/design/100-ideas-that-changed-graphic-design.php> [29.07.2012]

Triggs, Teal, 'Designing Graphic Design History', *Journal of Design History* 22 (2009) 4, pp.325-340. <http://jdh.oxfordjournals.org/content/22/4/325.full.pdf+html> [19.01.2012]

Triggs, Teal, 'Graphic Design History: Past, Present, and Future', *Design Issues* 27 (2011) 1, pp.3-6. <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/DESI_a_00051> [19.01.2012]

Twemlow, Alice, and Lorraine Wild, 'A New Graphic Design History?' *Design Observer*, 12.06.2007. <http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=7017> [17.04.2012]

Vignelli, Massimo, 'Call for Criticism', *SVA D-Crit Reading Room*, 6.10.2011. <http://dcrit.sva.edu/ view/ readingroom/1983-call-for-criticism/> [17.08.2012] [First published in: *Graphis Annual 83/84*, Zurich (1983)]

Walters, John L., 'J. Abbott Miller', *Eye Magazine* 45 (2002). <http://www.eyemagazine.com/ feature/ article/j-abbott-miller> [06.08.2012]

Walker, Alissa, 'Michael Bierut', *AIGA 2006 Medalist*. <http://www.aiga.org/medalist-michaelbierut/>

Books

Albinson, Ian, Rob Giampietro, Andrew Blauvelt, and Ellen Lupton, *Graphic Design: Now in Production*, Minneapolis (Walker Art Center) 2012.

Armstrong, Helen, *Graphic Design Theory: Readings From The Field (Design Briefs)*, New York (Princeton Architectural Press) 2009.

Barthes, Roland, *Mythologies*, New York (Noonday Press) 1991 (translated by Jonathan Cape).

Barthes, Roland, *A Roland Barthes Reader*, London (Vintage Classics) 2000 (edited by Susan Sontag).

Bierut, Michael, William Drenttel, Steven Heller, and DK Holland, *Looking Closer: Critical Writings on Graphic Design*, New York (Allworth Press) 1994.

Bierut, Michael, William Drenttel, Steven Heller, and DK Holland, *Looking Closer 2: Critical Writings on Graphic Design*, New York (Allworth Press) 1997.

Bierut, Michael, Jessica Helfand, Steven Heller, and Rick Poynor, *Looking Closer 3: Classic Writings on Graphic Design*, New York (Allworth Press) 1999.

Bierut, Michael, William Drenttel, and Steven Heller, *Looking Closer 4: Critical Writings on Graphic Design*, New York (Allworth Press) 2002.

Bierut, Michael, William Drenttel, and Steven Heller, *Looking Closer 5: Critical Writings on Graphic Design*, New York (Allworth Press) 2006.

Bierut, Michael, *Seventy-Nine Short Essays on Design*, New York (Princeton Architectural Press) 2007.

Cramsie, Patrick, *The Story of Graphic Design*, New York (Abrams) 2010.

de Smet, Catherine, and Sara de Bondt (eds.), *Graphic Design: History in the Writing (1983 – 2011)*, London (Occasional Papers) 2012.

Drucker, Johanna, and Emily McVarish, *Graphic Design History: A Critical Guide*, New Jersey (Pearson Prentice Hall) 2009.

Leoni ten Duis/Annelies Haase (eds.), *De wereld moe(s)t anders. Grafisch ontwerpen en idealisme / The World must Change. Graphic Design and Idealism*, Amsterdam (De Balie) 1999.

Levi-Strauss, Claude, *Structural Anthropology*, New York (Basic Books) 1963 (translated by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Schoepf).

Eskilson, Stephen J., *Graphic Design: A New History*, London (Laurence King) 2007.

Godfrey, Jason, *Bibliographic: 100 Classic Graphic Design Books*, London (Laurence King) 2009.

Heller, Steven, *Design Literacy: Understanding Graphic Design*, New York (Allworth Press) 1997.

Heller, Steven, and Georgette Ballance, *Graphic Design History*, New York (Allworth Press) 2001.

Heller, Steven, *Teaching Graphic Design: course offerings and class projects from the leading undergraduate and graduate programs*, New York (Allworth Press) 2003.

Heller, Steven, and Marie Finamore, *Design Culture: an anthology of writing from the AIGA Journal of Graphic Design*, New York (Allworth Press) 1997.

Heller, Steven, and Veronique Vienne, *100 Ideas That Changed Graphic Design*, London (Laurence King) 2012.

Hofmann, Armin, *Graphic Design Manual: Principles and Practice*, Switzerland (Arthur Niggli) 2001.

Hollis, Richard, *Graphic Design: A Concise History*, London (Thames & Hudson) 2001.

Julier, Guy, *The Culture of Design*, London (Sage Publications) 2008 (2nd revised edition).

Kinross, Robin, *Modern Typography: An Essay in Critical History*, London (Hyphen Press) 2004.

Kinross, Robin, *Unjustified texts: perspectives on typography*, London (Hyphen Press) 2002.

Lupton, Ellen and J. Abbott Miller, *Design Writing Research: Writing on Graphic Design*, London (Phaidon Press) 2008.

Meggs, Philip B., and Alston W. Purvis, *Meggs' History of Graphic Design*, New Jersey (John Wiley & Sons) 2012 (Fifth revised edition).

McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media*, London (Routledge) 2001.

Poynor, Rick, *No More Rules: Graphic Design and Postmodernism*, London (Laurence King Publishing) 2003.

Rand, Paul, *Thoughts on Design*, New York (Van Nostrand Reinhold) 1970.

Vit, Armin, and Bryony Gomez-Palacio, *Graphic Design, Referenced: A Visual Guide to the Language, Applications, and History of Graphic Design*, Massachusetts (Rockport Publishers) 2009.

Walker, John A., 'Design History and the History of Design' in: Design History and the History of Design, London (Pluto Press) 1989, pp.1-21.